Chapter 2

Undergraduate Student Perception of Caring and Trust:
How Those May Relate to Student Engagement in Self-Directed Learning

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to provide information about the use of caring and trust within the undergraduate classroom as it may apply to self-directed learning. Some evidence of the relationship between caring and trust is provided through a recent study by the author. Malcolm S. Knowles’ Designs for Adult Learning demonstrates the use of both caring and trust within the self-directed learning framework. The method used by Knowles takes a caring approach to student learning that is based in trust between the educator and student.

INTRODUCTION

Learning takes place in many environments and under many circumstances. The one thing in common with most learning experiences is that they occur within a relationship between the facilitator and the learner. The relationship between facilitator and learner can determine how well the learning experience proceeds. Knowles (1970, 1980) suggested that andragogy was a comprehensive theoretical
umbrella concept for learning, growth, development, and the springboard for moving the nation as well as worldwide society effectively forward. Knowles (1970, 1980) asserted that self-directed learning is somewhat akin to andragogy. He perceived self-directed learning as the major way andragogy may be implemented. Later Mezirow (1981) would identify competencies that enhance learning capabilities to function as self-directed learners.

In a recent study, that investigated caring and trust among faculty and undergraduate students in classrooms evidence was found that supported a fairly strong linear relationship between caring and trust. Caring and trust were measured with two valid instruments that assessed caring and trust. A comparison between instruments found that each measured the assigned characteristic of caring or trust, with no similarities between the characteristics. Some qualitative data from the study included student statements indicating the need to have faculty that students could trust and faculty who care about them as being important (Grant, 2018).

BACKGROUND

March 7th, 2014 concluded a study conducted by Purdue University and Lumina Foundation; it was the inaugural Gallup-Purdue Index. The title of the study was Great Jobs, Great Lives, which had more than 30,000 college graduate participants (typically from their first job out of college) across the United States. There were two elements investigated by the study, workplace engagement and well-being. Workplace engagement had 12 elements that predict workgroup and employee performance. Based on the responses to the 12 elements, workers could be categorized as engaged, not engaged, or actively disengaged. Engagement involves employees being intellectually and emotionally connected to workplace. Well-being is about the interaction and interdependency of many aspects in life. There were five views of well-being considered and 10 questions that gauged well-being in those five elements. The five views or elements of well-being are: purpose, social, financial, community, and physical. The study provided insight to college graduates experience while they were in school. Where the student attended college hardly mattered compared to the actual experience. For instance, if the student had a professor who cared about them as a person, it more than doubled the odds of their being engaged at work (Gallup-Purdue Index Report, 2014). Ray and Kafka (2014) noted that just 3% of all the graduates studied had the types of experience while in college that Gallup found strongly related to great jobs and great lives after graduation.

Overall, the Gallup-Purdue Index noted that 39% of the college graduates who were employed full time were engaged in the workplace. However, 49% were not engaged and 12% were disengaged from the workplace (Gallup-Purdue Index Report,
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