

Chapter 40

The Visualization of a Critical Element in K–20 Learning: Trust from the Learner’s Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses the necessity of a clearer understanding of the critical element of trust in all learning environments. Research on educational trust is limited, with research on trust from the learner’s perspective almost non-existent. Recent doctoral dissertation research provides a model of a trusting facilitator. This chapter presents result from that study, presenting results of a survey assessing the learners’ perspective of the facilitators’ trust and a new instrument to determine the presence of trust in the learning environment. The purpose in this chapter is to call attention to the elemental phenomenon of trust, to encourage individual reflection, to endorse trust from the learners’ perspective including continued research and implementation of trust into all educational environments.

INTRODUCTION

A current focus of andragogical research is the common and strongest element in education, learning, healthcare, relationships, organizations and entire civilizations; yet when absent will destroy the strongest governments, economies, business, leaders, friendships and even love. However, if developed and leveraged that same element has

the potential to create unprecedented success and prosperity in every dimension of life. Yet, this element is the least understood, most neglected, and most underestimated possibility of our time. That one strong element is trust. Trust has numerous dimensions, impacts, and implications.

This chapter focuses on how one adult education facilitator, an andragogue, utilizes elements of trust in learning environments from the learn-

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ers' perspective. Nonetheless, it is imperative to recognize trust as a critical element of all levels of teaching and learning; however, this chapter focuses on adult learners, thus, andragogy is the principle theory utilized.

If a facilitator enters the teaching relationship devoid of trust; self-trust or trust towards learners, the andragogical principles are likely to be rendered less important and less relevant to the facilitator and will impact teaching and learning. Overall, these elements are likely neither present nor to be utilized. Facilitators, who do not understand the role of trust in learning, are less likely to recognize the six assumptions of the adult learner and the important role they play in the learning experience. The basic concepts underlying Andragogy, according to Knowles (1970), is the relationship that exists between the facilitator and the learner. Trust or the lack of trust in learning is an important concern to both research and practice in adult education. Henschke (2011 and 2012) asserts that trust in learning makes all the difference. Thus, trust is a vital element in developing and sustaining adult learners. However, limited research is available on the learners' perspective of trust.

Trust between teacher and learner as evidenced by the Instructional Perspectives Inventory (IPI) continues to be the strongest positive element in learning contexts which includes the following seven elements- (1) Teacher trust of learners, (2) Teacher empathy with learners, (3). Planning and delivery of instruction, (4) Accommodating learner uniqueness, (5) Teachers insensitivity towards learners, (6) Experience based learning techniques, and (7) Teacher centered learning process (Henschke, 1989). Trust is a common theme in every relationship and adult education theories such as andragogy assert that it is the relationship that teaches, thus, trust is essential to learning. Adult educators must utilize the research available on trust within the adult learning environments (practice) to promote positive learning experiences and continue to advance the research

on trust and its effects on the learning experience. The learner's perspective on trust in the learning environment is essential to future research.

A recent doctoral dissertation study conducted by this author developed a new instrument to address visible elements of trust in a learning environment. The Visible Elements of Trust Inventory (VETI) is currently being used multi-disciplinarily in other doctoral studies and as an assessment tool. The inventory identifies eleven elements of trust that if visible in a learning experience can help establish a trusting relationship, thus, a trusting learning environment. Each of these items is either "visible" or "not visible". Either there is trust or there is not trust displayed by the teacher. In this chapter, the VETI is used to analyze the visible elements of trust in one adult educator's practice, providing an example of a trusting facilitator from the learner's perspective.

Trust in the learning environment from the learners' perspective will be discussed. This research addresses the necessity of establishing and "practicing" trust in the classroom. Asserting that trust becomes a portable skill student's take with them into the workplace, where the cycle of trust plays itself out, or the lack of trust repeats itself in a new venue. In order to develop a sustainable learning environment and promote adult learning at optimal levels trust is a primary requirement. This chapter demonstrates the reality of trust in the learning environment, providing examples from the learners' perspective.

THE CONCEPT OF TRUST

Trust is a central theme in many aspects of life, in adult education, andragogy in particular; the trusting relationship between facilitator and learner is a strong element in the learning process as evidenced by Henschke (1989, 2011, 2012). Still trust continues to be misunderstood and underestimated more than any other element of the decision making process.

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