

When Students Become Leaders: Building Confidence & Courage in the Classroom

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ABSTRACT

In this session we will explore how the partnerships created through a collaborative teaching model supports students in building a sense of confidence that translates into enhancing their lives beyond academia. We will first analyze what students perceive confidence to be within the context of their experiences. From there, we will look at student interviews and reflections regarding the development of their confidence and courage and identify how it has impacted their lives outside of the classroom. We will discuss and demonstrate several aspects of the teaching model, and participants will roleplay ways of working with students to enhance student presentations, feedback, and reflection. Finally, we will share outcomes from the teaching methodology and implementation issues.

KEY WORDS: Confidence, Leadership, Development, Efficacy, Self-Esteem

DESCRIPTION

This session falls within the conference theme of “Teaching Agents for Positive Change”. In this session we will present a collaborative strategy for working with students designed to offer the potential for transformational learning. Through partnering with students to “Co-Create” the classroom, we help them to identify their strengths, overcome their challenges and to have positive influence with their peers.

Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart and Sam’s Club, once stated: “Outstanding leaders go out of their way to boost the self-esteem of their personnel. If people believe in themselves, it’s amazing what they can accomplish.” Though he was speaking in the context of a corporation, the same premise can be applied to an academic environment; any teacher should focus on building the confidence of their students. One-on-one meetings and bursts of positive feedback in the form of high marks are all ways in which the student’s sense of self-esteem can be built, though extending past these basic methods by encouraging students to develop themselves through autonomy and group accountability have a greater impact than do surface-level compliments. This theory has been experimented with and developed in a collaborative teaching model called the “Co-Created Classroom,” in which students not only learn, but teach alongside professors (London and Van Buskirk, 2018). Evaluating students’ capacity for leadership is a large portion of this research and teaching model, however, the primary focus of this exercise is to examine how building confidence allows students to act on that capacity, both in the classroom and beyond.

In this session, we will specifically look at how students’ self-esteem is influenced by their peers and their role in the classroom as an organization. By using this information, we can build upon and apply the theories explored in Jon Pierce and Donald Gardner’s article from the

Journal of Management titled “Self-Esteem Within the Work and Organizational Context: A Review of the Organization-Based Self-Esteem Literature,” and Dean Tjosvold’s article “Interdependence and Power Between Managers and Employees: A Study of the Leader Relationship.” The first speaks about self-esteem in the workplace, specifically answering the question: “What are the determinants and consequences of self-esteem which is formed around work and organizational experiences?” (Pierce & Gardner, 593). Our research extrapolates on this and assesses this question within the context of student self-esteem by following their experiences over the course of the semester in a class dedicated to revealing and cultivating their leadership potential. The second article by Tsjovold revolves around the power dynamic and overall relationships between managers and employees at a hospital. This content can aptly be applied to the continued development of the “Co-Created Classroom” as interdependency exists between the professor and students, as well as among students and their peers. Tjosvold’s analysis sets the groundwork for our analysis of the relationship between the professor and student which allows us to directly apply this to the “TA Session,” a co-led class session students complete in the Co-Created Classroom model intended to engage their leadership abilities and develop their confidence in relation to the course and presenting.

Many teaching models include presentation, but they usually are shorter, rely heavily on PowerPoint lectures and are not interactive. The “TA (Teaching Apprentice) Session” differs first because it is not just a portion of the class the student takes on, but the entire period. They collaborate with the professor to ensure the session is as original, informative, interactive and intricate as they want it to be. This starts with a collaborative preparation period in which students meet several times with the professor to establish what they want to develop and practice in the class. This then leads to the class period itself during which the teacher and

student work together to ensure the other students gain as much value from the process as possible. The students then receive written feedback from their peers on their performance, which the professor and student then ruminate on in a post-session debrief. This model of a “presentation” adds more depth to the experience, and overall leads to developing a greater sense of confidence in the students.

This is not merely a sense of fleeting confidence, nor is it a delegated, task-based assignment; students take charge in collaboration with the professor during a class period they developed a plan for and receive grounded feedback from peers and the professor to understand how to improve, what they did well, and where they made an impact. By creating this sense of grounded-confidence the students are able to develop their intellectual capability, a sense of responsibility to others, and see themselves as leaders in various contexts. The detailed feedback they receive from classmates enhances their self-image and creates a sense of interdependence in the learning process. It also contributes toward their professional development, leading them to identify strengths and areas to consider for improvement. The facet that is arguably most important is their impact on others, as gaining the respect of peers or causing someone to think critically about a new topic is a true mark of a leader. After all, John Quincy Adams once said: “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.”

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

We hope that those who participate in the exercise will be able to adopt different perspectives and therefore be more cognizant of their relationships with students in the hopes of resulting in more positive, developmentally focused courses as opposed to simply teaching

material to be absorbed when it could be engaged with. Benefits of this process include having stronger student presentations, increased student engagement, and fostering a culture of respect and community within the classroom. Overall, the primary objective is to inspire teachers to lead their students in a manner that is more beneficial to the partnership than is often engaged.

Presenters for the session include Michael London (Muhlenberg College) and Michael Kirchner (Purdue University) and Emily Searles (Muhlenberg College), a student who has experienced the “Co-Created Classroom” in two courses and is now a Learning Assistant to the Leadership course. After London presented the methodology at the MOBTC EEI in 2018, Kirchner adapted it to his Human Resource Development course and experienced exciting outcomes.

EXERCISE OVERVIEW

This exercise will focus on the relationship between students and professors that exist through the Co-Created Classroom model. We will focus on collaboration and feedback, which are both parts of this larger process and can also be adapted by participants in other teaching models.

1. Presentation of principles of the TA session and examples of its implementation.
2. Discussion surrounding the principles and application of the TA session.
3. Demonstration of one-on-one meetings to prepare for a TA session.
4. Participant exercise of the creative process (They will be split into pairs and asked to develop a presentation on a topic they have taught in the past and would like to improve on. One participant will be leading the session and one will be assisting as respective “students” and “professors.”)
5. Discussion following the creative session.
6. Demonstration of the feedback process.
7. Feedback role play exercise. Participants will split into pairs. One will role play the faculty member and the other, the student. We will provide actual feedback sheets written by students to TA’s. Faculty will use the feedback sheets to role play a developmental discussion with the student. Participants in the student role will imagine

that they have recently delivered the session and that this is the feedback they are now seeing for the first time.

8. Discussion following the feedback session.

This roleplay will culminate with a discussion surrounding how this method of teaching can be implemented in other courses, what the possible challenges are for both professors and students, and how these challenges can be overcome to lead students towards being more confident. The final portion of the session will be a discussion of how this confidence can be and has been implemented by students cross-functionally from the direct experiences of the students interviewed and studied throughout the project, including the experiences of the student presenter.

SESSION DESCRIPTION

1. Discuss student courage and confidence as it relates to leadership.
2. Have participants discuss when they have seen confidence in the classroom (or a lack thereof).
3. Presentation of research and interviews with students regarding their initial feelings of confidence in the course.
4. Exercise (as described above).
5. Discuss the exercise and how it impacted the participants' views.
6. Presentation of student interviews and reflections
7. Final thoughts from participants.

90 minutes.

PowerPoint.

WORKS CITED

- London, Michael and Bill Van Buskirk. "The Co-Created Classroom: From Teacher/Student to Mentor/Apprentice." Neal, J. *Handbook of Personal and Organizational Transformation*. Springer International Publishing, 2017.
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