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Student Engagement: A Study of the Relationship between Teacher Credibility and Student Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

Given the current economic and subsequent employment uncertainty, people are returning to college to update their skills and acquire the credentials they need to be competitive in today's workforce. As a result, faculty must be prepared to facilitate the learning process for an ever-changing and more diverse student body.

The purpose of this research is to further the extant body of research in the area of effective student engagement. The variables being used to represent credibility are competence, goodwill and trustworthiness. They were measured using McCroskey and Teven's (1999) Source Credibility Questionnaire. The data for this study were provided by students attending a community college located in the metropolitan area of a Midwestern city. Using competence, trustworthiness and goodwill as the antecedents to represent instructor credibility, this research tests the relationship between instructor credibility and student self-efficacy.

Conducting a study of this type will provide faculty and administrators looking for new approaches to teacher leadership with data to help them enhance student engagement and increase their rate of persistence to graduation.

Introduction

According to Palmer (2009), situational interest/student engagement, is a short-term form of motivation which occurs when a specific situation stimulates the focused attention of students. Learning, particularly that which takes place in the traditional classroom setting, is an interactional process. Although curricular decisions, materials development, the organization of lectures, and the like focus primarily on the teacher's transmission of content and student evaluation on comprehension and retention of that content, there is little disagreement that interpersonal perceptions and communicative relationships between teachers and students are crucial to the teaching-learning process (Richmond, Gorham & McCroskey, 1987).

Overview of the Academic Environment

Moore (2008) suggests the class of 2009 will probably have a tough time finding jobs, even if they have stellar credentials, as employers start to feel the full brunt of the economic crisis in the next few months. Recent graduates, though, are still finding work, despite the recent economic downturn. There is a consensus among college counselors that more seniors will turn to graduate school as jobs continue to dry up. Students hope to build their skills and improve their prospects.

Bonser (1992) tells us beginning in the 1960s, college students began to think strategically about the role, philosophy and leadership of their schools' administration. He goes on to say administrators can meet the demands of these more discriminating consumers, if they adopt a total quality management approach similar to the one that has been successful in other types of organizations.

Learning style refers to the way in which a student approaches the learning process, and learns and retains new and difficult information (Dunn & Dunn, 1993). It is a personal trait that develops from inherited characteristics, previous experience, and the demands of the present environment (Kolb, 1981).

Teaching style consists of a teacher's personal behaviors and the media used during interaction with learners (Kaplan & Kies, 1995). In other words, it is mostly related to how the teacher teaches or to the instructional methods used (Felder & Silverman, 1988).

More recently, a learner-centered approach to teaching design has evolved that views learners as active participants in their own learning experience. The learner-centered model refers to a "perspective that couples a focus on individual learners with a focus on learning" (McCombs & Whisler, 1997).

For Paris and Combs (2006), there are three main tenets of learner-centered education: 1) the student is the starting point for curriculum making; 2) the teacher and students are co-participants in the learning process; 3) the teacher strives toward intense student engagement with the curriculum.

As noted previously, student engagement occurs when a specific situation captures the attention of a student (Palmer, 2009).

Kellogg and Tomsho (2009) point out enrollment at two-year schools has been booming for more than a decade, due partly to increased demand for more college-educated workers and sharply higher costs of a four-year college degree. It is important to these students that they succeed.

Research Question

As noted previously, the makeup and expectations of students attending college is changing. Thus, this study seeks to add to the body of knowledge in this area by exploring the research question, 'What, if any, relationship exists between instructor credibility and self-efficacy in college students?'

Literature Review

Definition of Teacher Leadership

House & Aditya. (1997) define leadership as the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to do what they would not do otherwise. They tell us leaders matter because they create and sustain organization strategy, cultures, and practices.

Spreitzer (2007) suggests that organizational leaders who successfully use a participative approach can legitimize this style of leadership in the eyes of employees. Sirotnik and Kimball (1996) indicate leaders may change or blend their roles. They go on to say adding the term teacher to leadership does not change its fundamental meaning, as it is still the exercise of influence by a leader over a follower.

Definition of Credibility

The research on the effects of communicator credibility on persuasion dates back to the 1950s. Aristotle refers to credibility as ethos and suggestsd it consists of three dimensions: intelligence, character and goodwill (Thweatt & McCroskey, 1998).

Powell (1965) tells us, in the case of compliance with the position of a high credibility source, that source's credibility provides justification for having compliance; dissonance is not heightened, and attitude change is less than when compliance is induced by a low credibility source.

Finally, McCroskey and Young (1981) define credibility as the attitude toward a sender or source of communication held at a given time by a receiver. McCroskey and Teven (1999) identified competence, trustworthiness and goodwill as the three antecedents of credibility. These definitions were used to identify the aforementioned antecedents of credibility which served as the independent variables of this study.

Definition Self-Efficacy

The prediction of sporting performance is clearly important to athletes and coaches (Lee, 1982). She maintains one factor often seen as affecting performance is self-

confidence. In their research, Gould, Weiss, and Weinberg (1981) argue that successful wrestlers are markedly more self-confident than are unsuccessful wrestlers.

The idea that confidence affects performance is not unique to sports; however, Bandura (1977) suggests a causal relationship exists between confidence and performance in all activities. He offers a definition of self-efficacy as one's belief that one can perform a particular activity in a particular setting.

Methodology

Data Collection Instruments

The Source Credibility Questionnaire measures three dimensions of ethos or credibility: expertness, trustworthiness and goodwill, intent toward the receiver. The respondent offers his or her impression of the person being evaluated using a seven-point Likert scale to measure a group of adjectives used to identify each of the antecedents of source credibility (McCroskey & Teven, 1999).

The General Self-Efficacy Scale was created to assess a sense of perceived self-efficacy. The questionnaire uses a four-point Likert scale.

Statistical Hypotheses

This study tested following three hypotheses:
H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between competence and self-efficacy.

H2: There is a statistically significant relationship between goodwill and self-efficacy.

H3: There is a statistically significant relationship between trustworthiness and self-efficacy.

Presentation and Analysis of Findings

The sample proved to be predominately male. It included 27 men and 14 women. In addition, the majority of the respondents were African American. The breakdown was as follows: African American (24); White (14); Latino (1); and Asian (2); When asked about their job status, the results were Not Employed (14); Employed Part-time (13); Employed Full-time (14).

Data Analysis

The data in this study show a correlation coefficient of .046 for the relationship between instructor competence and self efficacy. This indicates the relationship between the two variables is not statistically significant. Thus, the null hypothesis should not be rejected.

The data in this study show a correlation coefficient of -.081 for the relationship between instructor goodwill and self efficacy. This indicates the relationship between the two variables is not statistically significant. Thus, the null hypothesis should not be rejected.

The data in this study show a correlation coefficient of -.048 for the relationship between instructor trustworthiness and self efficacy. This indicates the relationship between the two variables is not statistically significant. Thus, the null hypothesis should not be rejected.

Conclusions

Teacher credibility and self-efficacy have been identified as two factors impacting student performance. This study sought to investigate the relationship between these two variables.

Based on the results of this research, we see personal affect between student and his or her professor is not necessarily a determinant of self-efficacy and success. Rather, the findings may be consistent with, and lend support to, the assertions of Bonser (1992).

Recommendations for Future Research

After the data analysis of this study, there are some recommendations for future research derived from the results. Some possible future research directions include:

1. Conducting a similar study with students in distance courses to explore how class format influences the dimensions of credibility.
2. Conducting a study with a larger sample to see what effect sample size has on the results.
3. Conducting the study with undergraduate students to test the impact of grade level on the results.

Exploring the aforementioned topics would contribute to the existing body of research by providing additional insight into the factors associated with instructor credibility and student engagement.

Author Bio

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Dr. Gordon Haley holds a Doctorate Degree in Business Administration and has accumulated over 20 years of experience in consulting and training in business and information technology. After spending the last 10 years teaching microcomputer applications, web page development, and spreadsheet and database design at Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland, Ohio, he recently accepted a position with St. Thomas University, in Miami Gardens, Florida, where he will teach and advise students in the Organizational Leadership program. In addition to his work at St. Thomas, Dr. Haley also teaches distance courses in Human Resource Management for St. Leo University's MBA program. Dr. Gordon R. Haley can be reached at gordon.r.haley@roadrunner.com

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Dr. Phyllis Parise has over two decades of experience in the healthcare insurance industry, as well as experience with teaching both in the classroom and online at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Phyllis has published several articles on topics including student satisfaction, transformational leadership, work-family conflict, student motivation, and discrimination in the workplace. She has her undergraduate degree in Business Management and Administration from Lewis University, a Master's in Human Resources from Keller Graduate School of Management, and a Doctorate in Business Administration from Nova Southeastern University. In the classroom, Parise feels that it is not only her responsibility to explain the text material, but also to bring real-life examples into the classroom to enhance the learning experience. Dr. Phyllis Parise can be reached at pparise@sbcglobal.net

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