

A Vision of First Year Students Today: Encouraging Persistence Through Relationship

Abstract : Building relationships between faculty and students is essential for student success. A video produced by Michael Wesch attests to the importance of knowing students, how they learn, what they need to learn, their goals, hopes and dreams. We will show the short video to start the session and explore ways to develop appropriate, but meaningful relationships with students. As summarized by Vincent Tinto in The Review of Higher Education, we find “The more academically and socially involved individuals are--that is, the more they interact with other student and faculty--the more likely they are to persist.”

Building relationships between faculty and students (and students with other students) is critical for student success. This session focuses on what faculty can do to establish meaningful, appropriate relationships with students. No one is surprised that people thrive in environments where they feel valued, respected and can form deeper relationships.

Philosopher Martin Buber in his seminal work, *I and Thou* (1970), indicated that the “relation is the cradle of life.” Buber further describes the disconnect human beings feel when they are treated as “its” rather than genuine, unique human beings, he called “thou.” This session works to share ways faculty can create a climate around each classroom, indeed each interaction with students where genuine relationships can be formed.

In this session we explore research and theory supporting fostering relationships, learn techniques that encourage relational building, and share with the group ideas and exercises they have been using in their own classes.

This is THE primary issue for assisting students as they work through college. Indeed relationship building is THE primary issue for all human beings. We say this is simple, easy and that we all can do it. We say building relationships is readily accomplished. But, in fact, most of us are uncomfortable when we initiate interactions with students. Simple greetings in the hallway can be difficult, and genuine verbal greetings coupled with pleasant facial expressions, eye contact, are glossed over as too simplistic to really discuss. Not only greetings are difficult, but

conversations with students can be more so. This session leads us to what it takes to develop something real and genuine, something we say we do all the time, but rarely do. This session again reinforces the need for people to connect with people in real and deep, but appropriate, ways.

The research is clear. Developing rich relationships is a key issue in understanding student persistence.

The table below, found in an article by Ellen Smyth in *Philosophy of Teaching* (2011), is based on research undertaken at the Memorial University of Newfoundland. Researchers asked students about the kind of communication students want from their instructors:

ONLINE	FACE-TO-FACE
1. Respect	1. Respect
2. Responsive	2. Knowledgeable
3. Knowledgeable	3. Approachable
4. Approachable	4. Engaging
5. Communicative	5. Communicative
6. Organized	6. Organized
7. Engaging	7. Responsive
8. Professional	8. Professional
9. Humorous	9. Humorous

Source:

http://www.uwex.edu/disted/conference/Resource_library/handouts/28251_10H.pdf

Almost all of the attributes on the chart, above, are rooted in communication. In this session we start with the assertion instructors and students “co-construct their own social realities and are simultaneously shaped by the world they create” (Griffin, 2011). Thus, researchers like Pearce and Cronen ask, “What are we making together?” (Pearce, 1994).

I and Thou
 Greeting Behavior
 Respecting the Other
 Listening
 Supportive Climates (confirming/disconfirming)
 Basic Civility
 Conversing

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