Transformative Learning: The Importance of Self-Reflection and Faculty Trust [1]

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Learning is maximized through a trusting relationship where the student believes he/she has the competence to master the material (i.e., self-efficacy) and that effort, rather than innate ability, is necessary for success (Bandura, 1997; Dewey, 1968; Dweck, 2007; Noddings, 2003). The purpose of this proposal is to build upon our recent findings (Benight, Clinton, & Taylor, under review) that demonstrated the importance of the student/teacher relationship in transformative learning. Based on the learning theory by Illeris (2009) that describes learning as an external interaction between student and teacher within a cultural, social, and material context combined with an internal psychological process this study demonstrated a connection between the strength of trust in the relationship with self-efficacy perceptions, motivation, and depth of learning. Evidence in our sample of senior undergraduates who were enrolled in a senior seminar in trauma psychology showed how self-efficacy perceptions, motivation, and trust fluctuated in tandem across the semester. The same pattern was observed for transformative learning as determined by two independent raters. A key component to fostering these three vital components (efficacy, motivation, and trust) is the opportunity for the faculty member to promote these through communication exchanges with the student. Personal reflection prompted by the faculty may enhance these effects. The purpose of this project will be to evaluate the importance of self-reflection in promoting transformative learning through the learning triad (self-efficacy, motivation, and trust). As with the previous study, I will utilize qualitative methodology to generate rich learning process information and summative interview data to answer the following research questions:

1. How critical is self-reflection in transformative learning?
2. Does promotion of self-reflection enhance self-efficacy perceptions, motivation, and relational trust.

Based on the literature and our previous findings, I hypothesize that teaching strategies that create opportunities for relational caring responsive feedback AND self-reflection that reach the students on an emotional and intellectual level while promoting mastery and effort (e.g., small writing assignments, socratic classroom discussions, journals, etc.) will enhance transformative learning more than strategies without promotion of self-reflection.

Method

Approximately 20 students from a senior psychology seminar will serve as participants in this study. All students will be asked to journal each week about their learning experience with particular emphasis on the student-teacher relationship, perceptions of capability for

mastering the material, motivation to work hard in the class, and what they have learned as part of the class itself. Half of the class will be randomly selected to receive extra self-reflective prompts through each feedback opportunity, whereas the other half will only receive feedback that promotes self-efficacy, motivation, and caring. Students will provide information each week relative to their perceptions of trust, motivation, and self-efficacy for the material in their journals. At the end of the class, all students will be prompted to share about the following:

- "Tell me about your experience in this class particularly in terms of your experience with the student/teacher relationship" ;
- "Tell me about how the class did or did not influence your sense of competence to master the material";
- "Tell me about how motivated you were in this class overall"; and
- "Tell me about whether you think this class has changed you as a person".

These open ended questions will provide rich detail concerning the two groups in the class to evaluate the effect of self-reflection on relationship trust, self-efficacy, individual motivation, and transformative learning. If the hypothesis is correct, results should demonstrate an increasing sense of trust and caring in the student-teacher relationship, enhanced perceived efficacy, elevated effort, and higher levels of transformative themes for those prompted to self-reflect.

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