

Developing and Maintaining Trust to Support Intellectual Risk-Taking in Higher Education

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Abstract

Trust is a necessary component in developing respectful, mutually reinforcing “communion” (Marcel, 1962) in engaged pedagogy, however, research on how to develop it in higher education settings where professors are asking their students to step outside their comfort zone is sparse. The unique constellation of circumstances present in higher education (e.g., short semesters, large and culturally diverse classrooms, high stakes, high stress) make the quick and meaningful development of trust a necessary but challenging condition for university students to take intellectual risks in the classroom. In this session, the audience will be asked to consider and engage with the questions 1) How do you create a trusting learning environment between students and professors in high risk learning situations?, 2) How does the learning environment need to be modified for students at varying levels of perceived power to develop trust? and 3) how do the “stakes” involved influence students’ and professors’ levels of trust. During this discussion, we will share the findings of our own grounded theory study including issues of power, ownership of learning, the “Vegas Rule”, modeling being curious/becoming curious and “being human” as key components to the development of trust in situations of intellectual risk taking as articulated by three focus groups with students and professors who were engaged in the intellectually risky process of curiosity and inquiry-focused learning in higher education locally, nationally, and internationally.