

What My Students Taught Me

Karen Minty - July 2020

I teach international students at Lambton College. All my students had a university degree from their home country. Their ages ranged from mid-to-late 20's and most had significant work experience in their fields.

I admit, I went into the classroom with a certain amount of pre-conceived ideas about who my students were. In our leadership course, we learned about concepts such as trust, loyalty, conflict resolution, and emotional intelligence. I challenged both the conventional meaning of those concepts as well as my students' interpretation, and in turn, they unknowingly challenged my version of who they were.

Concept by concept, layer by layer, I challenged them on all the above topics. Week after week, I watched as they became more open to different versions of these concepts that they had never considered before. I listened as they started to ask more questions.

While they certainly weren't a group of "talkers," they wrote things in their assignments that were personal and painful. I could see the rethinking of concepts that were once solid hard-core beliefs, slowly but surely unravel. They were, for the first time, experiencing it differently than how they were taught.

For the longest time in class, we argued about the difference between trust and loyalty. Most thought they were the same thing, while I tried to show them that they were completely separate. I thought I had overwhelmingly lost the battle that day, but then I read an essay. It was candidly honest as he admitted to seeing the difference for the first time. He realized that he didn't actually trust some of the people he had been loyal to for years. It was a deal-breaking moment for him.

These lessons weren't about adopting my version of what these concepts meant. It was about teaching them that different versions exist, and it was up to them to discover them, learn about them and critically analyze their validity. It was about teaching them to be open-minded, accept new ideas and choose for themselves.

We, as humans are naturally 'evidence-gatherers'. We decide on a point, then we gather evidence to support our point, completely ignoring other points of view. I think it is what's wrong with the world today, we have become single-focused evidence gatherers, instead of understanding that there is a multitude of other versions just waiting to be discovered.

How different would the world be if we could apply this practice to our current real-world experience and stop gathering evidence and start exploring and learning instead.

I loved my students. They taught me so much about themselves, their culture, and helped me learn more about myself. Thank you!

