



## **From Entitlement to Engagement: Affirming Millennial Students' Egos in the Higher Education Classroom (New Directions for Teaching and Learning, Number 135)**

Knowlton, Dave S.; and Hagopian, Kevin Jack, eds.  
Wiley, 2013

Book Review

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“How bad has it gotten in your class?” the first article’s author asks. “Students eating steaming plate lunches, kissing passionately, conducting loud phone conversations, playing video poker? . . . Asking to be excused from class to barbecue chicken at the go-kart track for a radio station where the student interned last summer?” (7). If these examples sound even remotely familiar, you may find this issue of *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* helpful. This volume addresses the challenge of teaching millennial students, born between 1982 and 2001, who are often labeled as coming to higher education with an attitude of entitlement that can frustrate professors.

The first three chapters explore the theory behind this volume. The first two chapters reframe the concept of entitlement by reflecting on the structure of higher education classrooms (chapter 1) and seeing the psychological vulnerability of students (chapter 2) as an opportunity for ego engagement - a process that the editors describe as “productively affirming student’s egos” to offer “new opportunities for deep learning and ever-strengthening intellectual rigor” (2). The third chapter is an empirical study that explores how students feel they deserve entitled treatment in higher education.

The second cluster of articles explore practice and application of reframing entitlement into ego engagement in specific areas. Chapter 4 explores ways to construct a syllabus that invite student engagement proactively, and chapter 5 lays out several practical suggestions professors can utilize to conceptualize their pedagogies. Chapters 6 and 7 provide case studies

of actual classroom assignments that engage millennial students' egos successfully: chapter 6 describes an assignment that immersed millennial students in discipline-based political activities to foster positive ego engagement and chapter 7 describes an assignment that engaged students in narrative pedagogy through digital storytelling. Chapters 8 and 9 explore ways to engage students through already existing classroom practices. For example, chapter 8 provides specific insights about engaging students through technological gadgets and provides practical suggestions for teaching. Chapter 9 explores ways to engage students before and after class periods to affirm their egos. The rest of the three chapters explore ways to engage the moral sense of millennial students by involving them in social justice issues and student-directed goal setting. The author invites faculty to consider their own reactions to student incivility as possibly a response to a professor's bruised ego ? an over-dependence on official authority based on position rather than on their ability to help students learn effectively.

While graduate level professors may experience students' sense of entitlement less bluntly than is described in some of the articles, I have sensed in my own teaching that the vocation of religious leadership tends to attract people with a sense of self-importance that poses challenges similar to those described in this volume. What the authors conceptualize as ego engagement is a model for empowering students who appear to be aloof to the subject matter but who are seeking meaningful engagement that leads them to deeper growth. *From Entitlement to Engagement* offers practical advice for fostering creative teaching that meets students' psychological needs and motivates them to find growth through their own learning tasks.

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