



Why Students Resist Learning: A Practical Model for Understanding and Helping Students

Tolman, Anton O. and Kremling, Janine, eds.
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Book Review

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If you ask faculty members across various institutions of higher education what common topics of discussion with other faculty are, one recurring response will inevitably pertain to difficult students. These students regularly display behaviors that resist classroom teaching and learning strategies. Tolman and Kremling argue that the recurrence of this particular topic points to the critical need for institutions to understand and grapple with the complexity and interaction of factors that cause such behaviors. These behaviors, which they identify as student resistance, can be reduced when institutions develop strategies that benefit both students and instructors through defining and addressing the underlying causes.

To this end, they propose an integrated model of student resistance (IMSR). IMSR utilizes Dewey's three modes of inquiry (self-action, interaction, and transaction) as a framework and synthesizes research from diverse disciplines to comprehensively analyze the factors for student resistance. Five interactive elements are present in IMSR - namely environmental forces, institutional culture, negative classroom experiences, cognitive development, and metacognition. While these elements can be grouped into external and internal forces, Tolman and Kremling assert that they are transactional and work together as a system to either increase or reduce student resistance.

Between Chapters 2 and 9, Tolman and Kremling unpack these elements - analyzing the salient characteristics, highlighting the impact of student resistance (such as personal, social, and national costs), and providing suggestions to reduce resistance. These chapters also incorporate the personal experiences of students. Tolman and Kremling's inclusion of these experiences provides a glimpse into the daily realities experienced by students and hopefully

generates compassion and understanding among faculty. In the concluding sections, they recommend specific strategies and provide a variety of instruments institutions can use to implement the IMSR.

This text can serve as an invaluable tool to identify and overcome student resistance in the following ways. First, it encourages institutions to review their strategies to reduce student resistance in totality – for example, going beyond “single-field explanations” (211). Everyone matters – leadership, faculty, staff, and students – and must collaborate such that the decisions on institutional learning systems and practices meet students’ needs and address their challenges. Second, it is replete with engaging examples (drawn from research and student voices), approaches, and instruments that give institutions fresh perspectives and practical resources to move forward in strengthening motivation and reducing resistance. Furthermore, by welcoming institutions to field-test IMSR, Tolman and Kremling provide an impetus for institutions to improve their current practices in addressing student resistance.

Its limitation is the absence of examples and voices drawn from institutions that may have been successful in reducing student resistance. What strategies did they employ? How do these strategies corroborate with and shed further insights into IMSR? While the voices of the students who learnt from their resistance are important, the learning of institutions that have reduced student resistance needs to be incorporated into this evolving model.

Nevertheless, IMSR is of value for institutions that desire to address the myriad factors contributing to student resistance. It can serve as the focus of institutional and faculty conversations, such that these revolve around possibilities of transformation instead of endless complaints.

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