



# A STAKEHOLDER APPROACH TO RETENTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: USING EMERGENETICS IN THE CLASSROOM

by Mitch Mitchell

Colleges and universities have done little to adapt to the way individuals with different learning styles absorb information. While students' abilities have evolved alongside innovative new technologies, the education system has remained stagnant, thus creating a need for research that focuses on integrating learning styles into the framework of the instructor's delivery method. Communication and student/instructor interaction are known to play important roles in the classroom. This is particularly true at mortuary colleges where the real-world experience of instructors is such an integral part of the education. Emergenetics is an assessment tool that may facilitate such interaction based on a combination of inborn traits and behavioral experiences covering seven attributes, four of which relate to thinking and three which relate to behavior (Browning, 2006). The Emergenetics assessment tool produces a profile that enables instructors to better understand how students think and behave in a classroom environment. Using Emergenetics can achieve positive results on student retention and individual success in the classroom.

Individuals learn according to different learning styles (Kolb, 1984). To better understand the different ways that individuals learn, David Kolb developed the Kolb Learning Style Inventory, which identified four learning modes: learning by experience, learning by reflecting, learning by thinking, and learning by doing; all of these modes are based on how learners receive information (Kolb, 1984). The Emergenetics profile delineates the individual's thinking attributes and behavioral traits. The four thinking attribute preferences are: analytical, structural, conceptual, and social, while the behavioral traits are defined by three categories: expressiveness, assertiveness, and flexibility (Browning, 2006).

In addition to research that has indicated that learning style preference can be advantageous in the classroom for both teachers and students, research has indicated similar results for business organizations. In 1992, Honey and Mumford developed the Learning Styles Questionnaire (LSQ), based on Kolb's research, to identify management trainees' learning style preferences (Honey & Mumford, 1992). More recently, the LSQ has been administered to managers in organizations to bring attention to and strengthen the styles they did not use as often. The use of the LSQ found its way into several industries, including higher education (Duff & Duffy, 2002).

As the Y/Millennial generation entered post-secondary education, several issues arose related to how educational institutions prepare students; subsequently, research addressed the challenges that instructors encounter when transmitting subject matter knowledge to their students. Instructors using traditional curriculum are having a difficult time transferring knowledge to students (Green, 2006). Green suggested that effective instructors (who must also retain students) act as transmitters or facilitators of knowledge who have exposed the fundamental issue that scholarship and pedagogy must interact.

Norton (2012) suggested that today's students present different challenges to instructors when it comes to engagement in the material being presented. To address such a challenge, instructors need to more effectively deliver the subject matter and interact with students. Further, Norton (2012) stated that the instructor's ability to increase student engagement is critical. Therefore, it is important to know if an instructor's leadership style in the classroom affects the students' willingness to engage in cognitive tasks proposed by the instructor and whether that willingness can be affected by an instructor's leadership styles in the classroom.

Generally, better student engagement leads to better learning outcomes and better preparation for success in the business world. In the funeral services industry where funeral professionals with well-rounded skill sets are in demand, mortuary colleges need to understand and apply teaching and interactive styles that better engage the students who will become those valued employees.

Student learning is also the key to student retention, and the involvement of faculty in the classroom is critical to institutional efforts to increase student retention (Tinto, 1993). While obviously important to the educational system, retention success or failure ultimately impacts the business world as well. Too many times, students have registered for a class to find that the instruction was difficult to comprehend. After weeks of frustration, these students may withdraw from the course, thus delaying the completion of their studies. This continual frustration can lead students to believe they cannot succeed at college and to withdraw from the college altogether. This is not good for the student, the college, or arguably the death care industry which needs innovative talent who can better connect with today's and



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tomorrow's consumers. The ability to compete and contend in today's world is contingent on cultivating future leaders in the educational arena (Webster and Showers, 2011).

With a paradigm shift of instructors adapting to students' needs, instructors are able to see the differences in their leadership styles and understand how to adapt to the students' Emergenetics profiles. Findings by Bennett (2011) suggest that charismatic leadership of the instructor is a significant predictor of student performance outcomes in the classroom.

Also pertinent to higher education best practice is Total Quality Management (TQM), a theory that has been implemented in a number of industries and service professions, including Funeral Service. TQM focuses on 14 points, including customer satisfaction and continuous improvement (Deming, 1979). The higher education sector has used this theory in the administrative, leadership side and the classroom of the industry (Lawrence & McCollough, 2004; Thalner, 2005).

**The Emergenetics Study:** This author built on TQM theory in the classroom to study the difference between the traditional instruction method and the Emergenetics profile method, suggesting the enhancement with the interaction between the instructor and student that created student engagement. TQM, Total Quality Learning (TQL), and Total Quality (TQ) theories are grounded in the research of quality, customer satisfaction, and continuous improvement. TQM is a philosophy of management that focuses on 14 elements used to enhance quality and productivity by statistically controlling processes within the organization (Powell, 1995). TQL examines TQM from a contingency standpoint, separating control and learning for times of uncertainty (Sitkin, Sutcliffe, & Schroeder 1994). TQM uses characterizations of principles, practices, and techniques on different levels of customer focus, continuous improvement, and teamwork to improve organizational effectiveness.

The research study followed a quasi-experimental, pre-test and post-test design. According to Murnane and

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Willett (2011), this type of design has three components: the control group, which in this study was comprised of the students enrolled in courses that did not use Emergenetics, and the experimental group, consisting of courses that used Emergenetics as part of the delivery method. The final component is the treatment; in this study it was the instructor training and Emergenetics profile.

The participants in this study were 363 students who were enrolled in college courses at a small-sized, private, for-profit college in Kentucky. Demographics of the participants mirrored the demographics of the school's student population in general. The college uses 11-week quarters, with four quarters a year consisting of Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall.

The model used the Emergenetics group as the reference group and the non-Emergenetics group as the location group to be compared with the Emergenetics group. The beta coefficient for the location group was  $-.956$ , with a significance level of  $.000$ . Since the coefficient was a negative output of less than zero, the results of the parameter estimates suggested that the students in the location group were more likely to receive lower course grades than were the students in the reference group. The logit regression beta coefficient was not a predictor of the overall grade for a course since the grade was not a numeric value, but it still had an ordinal progression in value.

Another question focused on the perception of the value of Emergenetics from the student perspective. Did the students feel that using Emergenetics in the classroom enhanced mathematics courses? Was there a difference in the student evaluations of the courses? An independent sample test led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The variances of the two groups were the same, calculated at a level of  $.219$ . The Pearson correlation between the SET score and the use of Emergenetics was  $.975$ , suggesting that the two variables were strongly correlated. Because the test was only taken in certain courses, it could have posed a special major effect, leading to the high correlation. As the study continued through the quarter, those who did have the profile might have thought of the profile as an advantage. The following test verified the strength of the connection between the independent and the dependent variable; the adjusted R squared value for the model was  $.956$ , with a Durbin-Watson value of  $1.68$ . These results indicated a strong relationship between the two variables. The ANOVA looked at the goodness of fit for the model. This level was measured as  $.000$ , suggesting that the model was a good predictor of the variables. The least square linear regression demonstrated the Emergenetics group

would score higher on the SET evaluation. The predictor value of  $\beta=.224$  and significant at  $P=.000$ .

The study also looked at the dependent variables from a professional development course. Evaluating the case processing percentage for grades, it was shown that A's represented the largest population percentage, with almost half of the population. This test suggested that the model was a better fit than the intercept model. Another test conducted was the goodness-of-fit test. This test uses the Pearson correlation and deviance method. In this measure, a low P value would suggest that the model was not a good fit. The Pearson value for the mathematics population was  $.465$ , and the deviance test result was  $.438$ . On the basis of these results, the null hypothesis was rejected, suggesting that the model was a good fit for the population. The last test for the model measured the slope coefficients across the location parameters, the control group and the experimental group.

**Conclusions:** The higher education industry must ensure that it provides a service that its customers (students) perceive as valuable and worthwhile. By responding to the need for effective knowledge transfer, institutions of higher education will be more likely to retain students through graduation. Multiple stakeholders would benefit from institutions delivering on this value proposition. Students benefit by receiving degrees and embarking upon careers. Those who employ the graduates benefit by having knowledgeable and productive employees. Financial institutions and regulatory bodies benefit by repayment of student loans. The higher education institutions benefit by the revenue created when more students persist and complete a degree. Furthermore, society would have more tax-paying citizens within the United States, providing value to the government. This study provided evidence that the use of Emergenetics in the classroom can improve the productivity and perception of the student.

There is a strong link between education and business, and higher education is charged with responsibility to the business community. The application of Emergenetics in the classroom can better facilitate that critical transfer of knowledge to future Funeral Professionals, thus providing them with the expertise that will help them make better decisions in the workplace (Browning, 2006). Managers who understand their strengths and have the ability to recognize their weaknesses will be able to ensure that their organizations are more productive. The Funeral Service business is being constantly challenged to adapt to evolving trends and business conditions, and those organizations who employ well-educated and well-rounded professionals will be better positioned to survive and thrive. **FBA**



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