

THE FIRST DAY & WEEK OF CLASS: INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

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The beginning stage of a course includes the all-important first day and first week of class. During this formative period, it may be useful to view the process of building class community as the first "topic" that needs to be addressed in class. Allowing students early opportunity to interact with each other and with the instructor, is a fundamental or foundational experience that should be "covered" before any other topic is introduced. Not only does such early interpersonal bonding enhance student retention by promoting social integration, it may also address a primary need of new students at the very beginning of their first semester--a time at which research indicates that freshmen are most concerned about "fitting in" and establishing social ties (Simpson, Baker & Mellinger, 1980; Brower, 1997). Thus, it may be helpful to view the needs of first-semester freshmen in terms of Abraham Maslow's classic "need hierarchy" model, in which human needs for social acceptance and self-esteem are more basic and must be met before higher needs for personal growth and self-actualization can be realized (Maslow, 1954).

The first week of class may also be the time to provide students with a *preview* of some of the more exciting and interesting issues to be covered in the course. In particular, use the first day of class to create a "positive first impression" of the course, which can establish motivational momentum and a foundation of enthusiasm upon which the course can build or "take off." This practice should differentiate the inauguration of the course from many other college courses in which professors often use the first day of class to deliver a drab review of the syllabus that often includes a "laundry list" of course requirements and policies--which is enough to induce "syllabus anxiety" in some students. Adding insult to injury, this cursory review is sometimes followed by early class dismissal, which sends students the tacit message that the first day of class is not important (or, worse yet, that class time is not important and can be readily sacrificed).

Instructors who conduct the first day of class in the foregoing fashion may underestimate the important influence of the first class in shaping students' initial impression of the course. The first impression can be an influential force that has long-lasting impact, and if it is not a positive one, as the old saying goes, "you never get a second chance to make a first impression." This suggests that the first class should be one that is deliberately designed to generate student interest and student involvement. As Friday (1989) illustrates, "Opening the first session with a lecture on course goals delivered to students seated in rows is likely to establish the expectation that the teacher is in charge of doing the work and that the students are responsible for observing" (p. 59). Similarly, Erickson and Strommer argue that students come to the first class with a "hidden agenda" which includes determining "what the professor is like, who the other students are, how instructors and students will behave, and what climate will prevail. In addition to distributing the syllabus, then, our agenda for the first class would include . . . getting students to talk [and] to be actively involved. If they sit passively during the first day, they will do the same in the next" (1991, 87).

Another timely practice that could be introduced during the first week of class is to provide students with an *overview* of the overarching topics and a preview of key strategies for succeeding in the course. An effective overview has the *cognitive* advantage of giving students a sense of the "big picture" (total context), as well as providing them with an "advance organizer" that can enhance the later learning of specific information related to it (Ausubel, 1978). Also, taking some time during the first week of class to provide a preview of course-success strategies can have *affective* advantages for students, serving to increase their awareness of adjustments they may need to make during the course, so that they are better anticipated and implemented more proactively (Whitman, Spendlove, & Clark, 1984). Such anticipatory discussion of potential stressors has been found to function like a "stress inoculation," serving to strengthen an individual's coping response to the stressor when it is subsequently experienced (Meichenbaum, 1985).

Lastly, use the first week of class to make an intentional effort to *learn your students' names*. No one more poignantly captures the significance of remembering an individual's name than does Dale Carnegie in, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*: "We should be aware of the *magic* contained in a name and realize that this single item is wholly and completely owned by the person with whom we are dealing and nobody else. Remember that a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language" (1936, p. 83).

College research indicates that "addressing students by name" is a classroom teaching behavior that correlates positively and significantly with students' overall evaluation of the instructor (Murray, 1985). In contrast, research on "uncomfortable courses" (i.e., courses most likely to cause "classroom communication apprehension" among students) reveals that such courses are more likely to be taught by instructors who are perceived by their students as being unfriendly and who did not address students by their first name (Bowers, 1986).

It is my personal experience that learning the names of students as quickly as possible is the most effective way to create a positive first impression among students and establish early rapport with your class, thereby laying the foundation for a classroom environment in which students feel comfortable interacting with the instructor and becoming actively involved in the course.

Listed below is my "top ten" list of strategies for the effective and expeditious learning of student names.

1. Ask the office of Students Services or Student Affairs if you could review *identification photos* of students in your class.

This could be done before the course begins, or whenever class rosters are first available from the registrar. Learning to associate or pair faces and names is expedited if the names are learned prior to making associations with their respective faces. Also, you can use student-identification photos to selectively review the names and faces of particular students who you are having difficulty remembering.

2. Make *short-hand comments* next to student names *when calling roll on the first day of class* (e.g., record memory-triggering comments referring to the student's distinctive physical characteristics or seating location).

Remaining after class for a few minutes to review these comments made by each

student's name is an effective memory-enhancement practice because it capitalizes on the fact that you may still have visual memory for students' facial features and for the spatial (seating) position they occupied in class. Your visual-spatial memory can be improved further if you request some information from students on the first day (e.g., personal information cards) and collect their responses *in the same order in which they are seating* in class. Moreover, this quick post-class review tends to combat the “forgetting curve” at a time when most memory loss tends to occur—during the first 20-30 minutes after new information has been learned.

3. On the first or second day of class, consider using short *ice-breaker* activities designed to help students and the instructor to get to know each other.

For example, “paired interviews” may be used in which two students interview each other and then report the other's autobiographical information to the whole class. Another effective icebreaker is the “name game” strategy whereby students sit in a circle or horseshoe arrangement and say their name preceded by an adjective that begins with the first letter of their name and describes something about their personality (e.g., “jittery Joe” or “gregarious Gertrude”); or, students may say their names accompanied by some nonverbal behavior that reflects their personality. After each student introduces himself, ask the next student to recall the name of the previous student before introducing herself.

4. On the first day of class, take a *photograph* of the class and have individual students sign their names by (or on) their respective faces. Use this as a record to review or rehearse student names until you have mastered them.
5. On the first day of class, have individual students introduce themselves, and have this class session *videotaped* so you may review or rehearse students' names and faces outside of class time.
6. During the first week of class, have students submit to you a *photocopy* of the picture on their student identification card or driver's license and use these pictures to help you associate names with faces.
7. *Rehearse* student names during periods of “dead time” (e.g., as students enter class and take their seats, or as you circulate among students during small-group discussions and exams).

Early in the term, make an attempt to come to class early and to remain after class while students file out. This will provide you with opportunities to rehearse names, one by one, as students enter and leave the classroom.

8. Consider assigning some short *reaction papers* or *minute papers* at the end of class during the first weeks of the term.

This practice will enable you to learn the names of students as they come up (one by one) to turn in their papers at the end of class, as well at the beginning of the following class session when students come up individually to the front of class to pick up their papers.

9. Schedule *brief, out-of-class conferences* with individual students during the first few weeks of class so you can meet them one at a time.

This should enhance your ability to learn and remember their names because it allows for “distributed” practice, i.e., learning small amounts of information in a series of short separate sessions. For instance, it is easier to associate 21 faces with 21 names if they are learned three per day on seven different days, rather than learning all 21 of them on one day.

10. *Continually refer to students by name* after initially learning their names (e.g., always address them by name when you respond to them in class or when you see them on campus).

This practice serves not only to reinforce your memory of the student's name, it also repeatedly signals to the student that you know him as a person and are responding to him as a unique individual.

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PROMOTING RAPPORT WITH STUDENTS: SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL FOUNDATIONS FOR STUDENT INVOLVEMENT/ENGAGEMENT IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

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DEFINITION OF INSTRUCTOR-STUDENT RAPPORT

Rapport is defined herein as a form of interpersonal interaction distinguished by its degree of social or emotional "closeness" between the persons involved. It is social interaction that is neither superficial nor perfunctory, but which is marked by interpersonal warmth, caring, and acceptance. In this type of interpersonal interaction, the student feels personally valued as a human being and recognized as a unique individual. For instance, in a personal instructor-student relationship, the instructor knows the student by name and remembers personal information about the student, such as the student's educational plans or personal interests; and the student relates easily and openly to the instructor, feeling comfortable asking questions of the instructor and seeking advice or assistance from the instructor on personal issues relating to the college experience.

RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP SUPPORTING THE VALUE OF PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Research on college teaching has consistently revealed that instructor-student rapport or the quality of student-instructor relations ranks among the top three characteristics of effective college teachers (Cohen, 1981; Lowman, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Rapport with students may be viewed as a precondition for optimal active student involvement and student-teacher interaction in the classroom. If students feel comfortable relating to you, they will be more likely to respond positively to your attempts to involve them in the learning process. As Tom Angelo (1993) states it, "Most students have to believe teachers know and care about them before they can benefit from interactions--or even interact" (p. 13). Also, if students feel emotionally comfortable with you, they should respond less defensively to constructive criticism or corrective feedback provided by you.

Instructor rapport with students in class may also increase students' willingness to interact with you outside of class. This assertion is supported by research indicating that faculty identified as "outstanding" by students, faculty colleagues and administrators are those who interacted frequently with students outside the classroom; moreover, it was the behavior of these instructors inside the classroom that served to signal their out-of-class approachability and accessibility to students. Reflecting on these findings, the principal author of this research report drew the following conclusion: "A major part of teaching and learning may involve successful modeling or identification; likeable, interesting, and available teachers are undoubtedly more powerful and acceptable models" (Wilson, 1975, p. 108).

The importance of personal relationships for promoting student learning and academic achievement is suggested brain research which indicates that the impact of cognitive and social-

emotional experiences cannot be separated. As Caine and Caine argue forcefully in their book, Making Connections: Teaching and the Human Brain, "The brain does not separate emotions from cognition, either anatomically or perceptually. Such artificial categorization may be helpful in designing research projects, but it can actually distort our understanding of learning" (1991, p. vii).

Positive emotions such as those associated with optimism and excitement, have been found to facilitate learning by enhancing the brain's ability to process, store, and retrieve information (Rosenfield, 1988). In contrast, negative emotions such as feelings of anxiety and personal threat, have been found to interfere with the brain's ability to (a) store new information (Jacobs and Nadel, 1985), (b) retrieve already-stored memories (O'Keefe & Nadel, 1985), and (c) engage in higher level thought processes (Caine & Caine, 1991). In addition to these experimental research findings, applied research involving nearly 4,000 college freshmen has revealed that the level of students' optimism or hope for success during their first semester on campus is a more accurate predictor of their college grades than are their SAT scores or high school grade-point average (Snyder, et al., 1991).

Taken together these findings lend strong support to an argument made by the Committee on the Student in Higher Education, "Cognitive growth which is separated from the development of other aspects of the human personality is illusory and distorted" (cited in Barefoot & Fidler, 1992, p. 63).

The importance of this human element for student retention is highlighted by Beal and Noel's (1980) national survey of 947 colleges and universities, both two-year and four-year, in which retention officials on these campuses were asked: "What makes students stay?" Ranking first in response to this question was "a caring faculty and staff." Lee Noel concludes that, among the "critical factors" associated with student retention,

First, enrollment is dependent upon satisfied students and alumni; they are, after all, an institution's best recruiters. This satisfaction is manufactured in classrooms by competent, caring faculty who believe that their mission is to reach individual students and have a positive impact on their lives (1985, p. 15).

College students' need for such caring relationships with faculty is well articulated by John Gardner:

Students need mentors and facilitators. If not heroes, students need more realistic models; they need, in the words of Carl Rogers, authentic professional human beings who are worthy of emulation. Students cannot be told how to do this; authenticity cannot be transmitted through lectures. Student growth must be fostered and shaped by deliberate faculty mentoring and facilitating (1981, p. 70).

Faculty concern and commitment to student welfare appears to be especially important for at-risk or "withdrawal-prone" students. Vincent Tinto (1987) conducted interviews conducted with

withdrawal-prone students who persisted to graduation, these students were asked if there was any one thing about their college experience which accounted for their staying and completing their degree. The most common response, by far, was that some member of the faculty or staff at the institution took a personal interest in him/her, i.e., someone was genuinely concerned about the individual student's welfare and progress. Vincent Tinto eloquently expresses the upshot of this finding in his book, Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition,

Students are more likely to become committed to the institution and, therefore stay, when they come to understand that the institution is committed to them. There is no ready programmatic substitute for this sort of commitment. Programs cannot replace the absence of high quality, caring and concerned faculty and staff (1987, p.176).

Lastly, the causal influence of faculty rapport on student satisfaction with the overall college experience is underscored by research indicating that student satisfaction with faculty-student relations is less dependent on entering student characteristics than any other measure of college satisfaction (Astin, 1977).

All the findings cited in this section that point to the important influence of close faculty-student relationships become even more significant when viewed light of national survey research conducted by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. These national surveys reveal a substantial decline in the number of undergraduate students who agree with the statement, "There are professors at my college whom I feel free to turn to for advice on personal matters" (only 39%) and almost half (48%) of the students surveyed agreed with the statement that, "Most college students are treated like numbers in a book" (Boyer, 1987).

The need to combat these student feelings of anonymity and depersonalization is further supported by the fact that more than 80% of college-bound high school seniors graduate from schools with enrollments of less than 500 (The College Board, 1988), yet the overwhelming majority of them begin their college experience at universities with enrollments of over 10,000 students (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). The feelings of insignificance and personal distance that can result from this transitional "culture shock" could be substantially reduced if professors would make an effort to know who their students are and learn something about them. As Benjamin DeMott, Professor Emeritus at Amherst College, pointedly asks, "Is not knowing who you're talking to as bad as not knowing what you're talking about?" (1988, p. 54).

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The following practices are recommended to college instructors as specific strategies for establishing rapport and clearly conveying a caring attitude toward students. These strategies represent concrete behaviors which explicitly communicate to students that the instructor is genuinely concerned about their educational and personal welfare. Many of these recommendations may be perceived as simplistic, or as blatantly obvious "human relations" skills. However intuitively obvious these strategies may appear to be, their actual

implementation and consistent practice by college faculty is the real issue. As the nationally recognized student-retention scholar, Lee Noel warns:

Many of the suggestions to improve [student] satisfaction appear very elementary--and I suppose they are. They represent common-sense avenues to achieving important results.

But

their simplicity doesn't change the fact that they are effective and they are too often neglected--in part because of their simplicity (1989, p. 6).

With this caveat in mind, the following recommendations are offered as explicit strategies which deserve careful consideration and consistent implementation. These recommendations are intended to be more than "touchy-feely vibrations"; instead, they represent concrete actions which not only enhance the quality of your relationships with students, but also promote student retention in college and student retention and academic achievement in college.

*** Learn your students' names and refer to students by name.**

Remembering a student's name communicates in a very concrete way that you know the student as a unique individual--not as just another face in the crowd, and that you are interested in relating to the student as a person--not as an anonymous "student number." Perhaps no one has more poignantly captured the impact of remembering an individual's name than Dale Carnegie in his widely read book, How to Win Friends and Influence People:

We should be aware of the magic contained in a name and realize that this single item is wholly and completely owned by the person with whom we are dealing. . . and nobody else. The name sets the individual apart; it make him or her unique among all others. The information we are imparting or the request we are making takes on a special importance when we approach the situation with the name of the individual Remember that a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language (1936, p. 83).

Educational research supporting Carnegie's assertion is provided by Berliner and Tekunoff (1976, 1977) who found that precollegiate teachers who are more effective in promoting higher levels of student achievement are more likely to call their students by name. Research on the college level by Murray (1985) indicates that "addressing students by name" is a classroom teaching behavior that correlates positively and significantly with students' overall evaluation of the instructor. In contrast,, Bowers (1986) found that "uncomfortable courses" (i.e., courses most likely to cause "classroom communication apprehension" among students) were more likely to be courses taught by instructors who were perceived by their students as being unfriendly and who did not address students by their first name. More recently, Bonwell and Eison reviewed the research literature in higher education, and reached the following conclusion:

Perhaps the single most important act that faculty can do to improve the climate in the

classroom is to learn students' names. Among many other benefits, doing so acknowledges the decentralization of authority in the classroom and recognizes the increased responsibility of students for their learning and the learning of others (1991, pp. 22-23).

It is my personal experience that learning the names of students as quickly as possible is the most effective way to establish early rapport with your class and to lay the foundation for a classroom environment in which students feel comfortable sharing their ideas and getting involved in the course.

For these reasons, making a vigorous attempt to learn students' names is strongly recommended. This recommendation holds true even for those instructors who claim, "I don't have a good memory for names," as a rationale (or rationalization) for being unable to remember their students' names. There is absolutely no evidence to indicate that the capacity to remember names is an immutable trait determined by one's genetic make-up or early childhood experiences; rather, it is an acquired skill that requires an expenditure of effort and the deployment of effective memory strategies. Listed below are twelve habit-forming strategies recommended to promote effective and expeditious learning of student names.

1. Ask the office of Students Services or Student Affairs if you could review identification photos of students in your class.

This could be done before the course begins, or whenever class rosters are first available from the registrar. Like any paired- association memory task, learning to associate or pair faces and names is expedited if the names are learned prior to making associations with their respective faces (Kintsch, 1970). Also, you can use student-identification photos to selectively review the names and faces of particular students who you are having difficulty remembering.

2. Make short-hand comments next to student names when calling roll on the first day of class (e.g., record memory-triggering comments referring to the student's distinctive physical characteristics or seating location).

Remaining after class for a few minutes to review these comments made by each student's name is an effective memory-enhancement practice because it capitalizes on the fact that you may still have visual memory for students' facial features and for the spatial (seating) position they occupied in class. Your visual-spatial memory can be improved further if you request some information from students on the first day (e.g., personal information cards) and collect their responses in the same order in which they are seating in class. Moreover, this quick post-class review tends to combat the "forgetting curve" at a time when most memory loss tends to occur-- during the first 20-30 minutes after new information has been processed (Ebbinghaus in Gordon, 1989).

3. On the first or second day of class, consider using short ice-breaker activities designed to help students and the instructor to get to know each other.

For example, "paired interviews" or "team interviews" may be used in which two students interview each other and then report the other's autobiographical information to the

whole class. Another effective icebreaker is the "name game" strategy whereby students sit in a circle or horseshoe arrangement and say their name preceded by an adjective that begins with the first letter of their name and describes something about their personality (e.g., "jittery Joe" or "gregarious Gertrude"); or, students may say their names accompanied by some nonverbal behavior that reflects their personality. After each student introduces himself, ask the next student to recall the name of the previous student before introducing herself. (This practice also helps students learn their classmates' names which may increase the likelihood that they will get to know each other and interact with each other, thus promoting their social integration and retention.)

4. On the first day of class, take a photograph of the class and have individual students sign their names by (or on) their respective faces. Use this as a record to review or rehearse student names until you have mastered them.
5. On the first day of class, have individual students introduce themselves, and have this class session videotaped so you may review or rehearse students' names and faces outside of class time.
6. During the first week of class, have students submit to you a photocopy of the picture on their student identification card or driver's license and use these pictures to help you associate names with faces.
7. Rehearse student names during periods of "dead time" (e.g., as students enter class and take their seats, or as you circulate among students during small-group discussions and exams).

During the first few weeks of the semester, make an attempt to come to class early and to remain after class while students file out. This will provide you with opportunities to rehearse names, one by one, as students enter and leave the classroom. One instructor, identified as "outstanding" by both students and faculty, claims that his most effective strategy for remembering student names is by walking around the classroom and practicing face-name associations while students work on problems or quizzes (Davis, Wood, & Wilson, 1983).

8. Consider assigning some short "reaction papers" or "minute papers" at the end of class during the first weeks of the term.

This practice will enable you to learn the names of students as they come up (one by one) to turn in their papers at the end of class, as well at the beginning of the following class session when students come up individually to the front of class to pick up their papers. (After you have learned your students' names, you can turn this task over to different students so they may begin to learn the names of their classmates.)

9. Schedule brief, out-of-class conferences with individual students during the first few weeks of class so you can meet them one at a time.

This should enhance your ability to learn and remember their names because it allows for

"distributive" practice, i.e., learning small amounts of information in a series of short learning sessions. Such spaced-out practice tends to result in greater retention of information than "massed" practice, i.e., learning large amounts of information in one long session (Underwood, 1961). For instance, it is easier to associate 21 faces with 21 names if they are learned three per day on seven different days, rather than learning all 21 of them on one day.

10. If you happen to meet one of your students outside the classroom, but cannot recall the student's name, take advantage of this fortuitous situation and ask for his name.

Though admitting your memory failure may be a bit embarrassing, your recognition of him and your effort to learn his name will be appreciated by the student. Furthermore, you will very likely retain the student's name because you are learning a small amount of information at one time (distributed practice), plus you are learning the name in an environmental setting that differs from the usual classroom context. This different setting provides a distinctive contextual cue, and such cues are known to facilitate memory storage and retrieval (Eysenck, 1979).

11. Learn your students' last names along with their first names.

Research on human memory indicates that recalling a list of items or a series of small bits of information is facilitated when items comprising the series are dissimilar or distinctive (Johnson & Runquist, 1968). Students' last names are much more distinctive than their first names. Rarely will you have students in class with the same last name, yet you may have several students in class with exactly the same first name, or with first names that are very similar (e.g., Mary Ellen and Mary Ann). Furthermore, you may have had students in previous classes with the same first names as those in your present class. All this overlapping information tends to produce mental "interference" which militates against effective memory storage and retrieval.

By learning students' last names in conjunction with their first names, you reduce this interference and improve memory by making the to-be-remembered information more dissimilar or distinctive, thus enhancing your ability to retrieve it. Once you retrieve the student's last name, this serves as a memory tag or cue for recalling the first name which has been associated with it. This strategy of learning last and first names together has worked well for me, sometimes enabling me to recall the names of alumni who I have not seen for months or years. What typically happens is that I will recognize the face of the former student, not be able to immediately recall her first name, but I will be able to recall her last name which, in turn, triggers my memory for her first name.

12. Continually refer to students by name after initially learning their names (e.g., always address them by name when you respond to them in class or when you see them on campus).

This practice serves not only to reinforce your memory of the student's name, it also repeatedly signals to the student that you know him as a person and are responding to him as a unique individual. (Referring to individual students by name in class has the further advantage of helping students learn their classmate's names.)

*** Personalize the classroom experience by learning and remembering information about individual students.**

One specific strategy for implementing this recommendation is to request from students, on the first day of class, a sheet of paper or index card listing their names and some information about themselves. (See the addendum at the end of this manuscript for a “student information card” that may be used to gather personal information about your students.)

Whenever possible, use the information you have gathered about individual students in subsequent class sessions to actively involve them in the course. For instance, if a student had expressed interest in a particular career during this exercise on the first day of class, attempt to solicit that student's involvement in class when covering a course topic that relates to the student's career pursuits. Such attempts to connect course concepts to student interests serve to personalize your course, enabling students to see its content as relating directly to their personal lives.

One strategy that has worked well for me is to review the topical preferences which individual students record on their information cards during the first day of class and then record the student's name in my class notes--next to the topic or subtopic which the student had expressed an interest in. When that particular topic is covered later in the semester, I introduce it by mentioning the names of students who had expressed interest in that topic on the first day of class. It has been my experience that students are exceedingly appreciative of this attention to their personal interests, and they are often amazed by my apparent ability to remember the interests they expressed on the very first day of class. (I prefer not to reveal my "crib sheet" strategy to the class; instead, I prefer to let students conclude that I have extraordinary social memory and social sensitivity.)

Instructors who make a genuine effort to know their students and learn something about each of them, demonstrates in a very visible way that they care about students as unique human beings. Carl Rogers, renowned humanistic psychologist, artfully expresses the value of knowing your students:

I think of it as prizing the learner, prizing his feelings, his opinions, his person. It is a caring for the learner . . . It is an acceptance of this other individual as a separate person, a respect for him as having worth in his own right (Rogers, 1975, p. 107).

A very proactive strategy for personalizing the learning experience of first-year students is practiced by an instructor at the University of San Francisco. He sends personal letters to all students before the course begins, in which he welcomes them to the class and shares some of the exciting things they will be experiencing in the course (Paul Lorton, personal communication, January 1996).

*** Be personable and empathic when interacting with students.**

Reflecting on his forty years of successful college teaching, William Van Love, succinctly summarizes the educational value of being personable: "Understanding, charity, goodwill . . . are

the lubricants on which the subject matter slides more easily into student minds" (1983, p. 7).

Empirical support for the educational value of instructor empathy is provided by the research of Berliner and Tekunoff (1976, 1977) who found that teachers at the precollegiate level who attended carefully to students' stated feelings, and acknowledged them, were more likely to have classes that displayed higher levels of academic achievement. At the college level, research has revealed that teaching assistants' level of empathy is positively related to students' academic performance on both multiple choice and written exams (Chang, Berger, & Chang, 1981). Also, McKeachie, Lin, Moffett, and Daugherty (1978) found that college students who scored high on achievement tests of critical thinking had instructors who tended to be described in the following fashion: "He listened attentively to what class members had to say." "He was friendly." "He was skillful in observing student reactions."

Specific recommendations for behaving personably and empathically toward students include the following practices.

- Greet students when you enter class and when you see them on campus.
- Welcome back students back after a weekend or semester break.
- Acknowledge the return of an absent student (e.g., "Glad to see you're back, we missed you last class").
- Wish students good luck on a forthcoming exam.
- Acknowledge emotions expressed by students in class (e.g., "You seem excited about this topic." "I sense that you're feeling tired, so let's take a short break.").

This recommendation is supported by an observational study of 25 professors who were identified as "superb" classroom instructors. These instructors were found to have (a) strong interest in students as individuals, (b) display high sensitivity to subtle messages from students about the way they feel, (c) acknowledge student feelings about matters of class assignments or policy, and (d) encourage students to express such feelings (Lowman, 1984).

- Express concern to students who are not doing well or to those students who have been excessively absent (e.g., "Everything okay?" "Anything I can do to help?").

Empirical support for expressing concern for students is provided by Weber (1981) who found that freshman-to-sophomore retention rates increased significantly when faculty members made a personal telephone call to students who missed consecutive classes--not for the purpose of playing "truant officer", but to express concern about the student's welfare and course progress. I have employed this telephone-contact strategy with students who have missed more than two consecutive classes and it has worked well. Students who have been contacted are very appreciative and they often convey this in writing on their course evaluations. Several contacted students have said to me directly that they never missed class again after the call because they knew it really mattered to me that they be there.

Phone contact with students can be facilitated by asking for their phone numbers as part of the personal information you request from them on the first day of class. This is a reasonable request, especially if you preface it by saying that you will not bother them at home unless it is something urgent. Also, if you give your home phone number to students, then it seems reasonable and equitable for students to do the same for you.

*** Be personal: Engage in some self-disclosure by sharing your interests, feelings, or experiences.**

Use of personal anecdotes to illustrate an academic point is one instructional practice which not only serves to clarify an abstract concept with a concrete, real-life experience, but it also shows students that the illustrious instructor is human--a person with whom they can identify. Kenneth Eble (1976) trenchantly expresses the instructional value of teacher self-disclosure through the use of personal anecdotes:

The personal anecdote that illuminates an idea or clarifies a concept is neither ego-indulgence nor mere wandering from truth. The personal is a way of gaining the kind of interest absolutely necessary to learning. Moreover, an anecdotal account of how some aspect of the subject matter itself came to have value for the teacher exerts a powerful force upon the student to grant that subject matter personal worth (p. 13).

Empirical support for this assertion is provided by Wilson (1975) who conducted a four-year longitudinal study involving eight different types of higher educational institutions, 4815 students and 1472 faculty. One classroom behavior typical of "outstanding" teachers (as nominated by both students and faculty colleagues) was that they were more likely to share examples from their own experience than teachers who were not so highly rated.

If you are uncomfortable about sharing personal information verbally, you can share it in print. For instance, even listing some personal information on the course syllabus (e.g., place of birth, educational background, professional and avocational interests), may serve to send an early message to students that you are a "real person" who is approachable. Also, if you request students to complete a personal information card on the first day of class, then you could, at the same time, share the same personal information which you are requesting from your students (e.g., by writing your responses on the board as students write their responses on index cards).

Such self-disclosure shows students that you trust them well enough to reveal something personal. If students perceive you as someone who is open and who relates course concepts to your own life, then students are more likely to do the same. This may increase the likelihood that they will emulate you as a model and follow your example by also reflecting on, and applying course concepts to their own lives, as well as sharing their own personal thoughts or experiences in class. This, in turn, should serve to increase the likelihood that students will perceive the course content as relevant to their personal lives.

Empirical support for this argument is provided by McKeachie, Lin, Moffett, & Daugherty (1978) who found that instructors whose teaching style in the classroom could be categorized as "facilitator-person" were more effective than instructors categorized as "expert" or "authority" in

terms of promoting student motivation--as measured by students' willingness to take additional courses in the field. The architects of this study concluded from their findings that the role of teacher as "model" is enhanced if the instructor is perceived as a person, rather than as someone who is only a content-matter expert or academic authority.

I have also found that sharing my course evaluations from the previous semester during the first week of class is an effective form of self-disclosure that conveys the message to my students that we can work together to improve the teaching-learning process. In particular, I share any written comments made by last semester's students that suggest ways in which the course could be improved. I tell the class that I take student feedback seriously and that I will attempt to use the feedback provided by last semester's students to improve the quality of their present experience. I also encourage them to provide me with feedback during the semester so that I may respond to their suggestions while the course is still in progress.

*** Share your home phone number with students.**

This sends a strong signal to students that you are genuinely interested in being available and accessible to them. It also conveys the message that you are willing to share something personal with your students. It has been my experience, and the experience of virtually all other instructors I have spoken with who share their home phone number, that students do not abuse this privilege. To further minimize the risk of student abuse or overuse of this privilege, you can suggest specific parameters or boundaries (e.g., "No calls after 11 PM, please.").

I have found that less than 10% of students in class will actually call me at home, yet 100% of them know that I have offered them the opportunity to do so. Thus, this appears to be a strategy that has a low cost/high benefit ratio; it does not cost you much time, yet its benefits are offered to all students.

*** Consider holding student conferences or a class session in your home.**

It has been my experience that sharing my home with students, even if it is one on just one occasion, has an extraordinarily positive impact on them and their subsequent relations with me. It is often the one event they remember long after the course is completed.

As a freshman, the noted author, E.B. White, was once invited to an instructor's home and eloquently recalls the personal impact it had on him:

When I was an undergraduate, there were a few professors who went out of their way to befriend students. At the house of one of these men I felt more at home than I did in my own home with my own father and mother. I felt excited, instructed, accepted, [and] influential (Bailey, 1973, p.72).

*** Do not be afraid to incorporate humor into the classroom (e.g., a humorous story or joke relating to a course topic; a humorous cartoon projected on an overhead projector; or a cartoon or humorous question on exams).**

Research has revealed that course-relevant humor (a) increases positive student attitudes

toward the subject matter of the course (Andersen & Andersen, 1982), (b) increases retention of course concepts (Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977), (c) facilitates creative problem solving (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987), (d) reduces test anxiety (Smith, 1971), and (e) correlates significantly with higher student ratings of college-teaching effectiveness (Murray, 1985).

One instructor encourages his students to bring him course-related jokes that he can use in class, contending that this practice fosters active student involvement in class and protects his ego in case the illustration proves not to be particularly humorous. As he puts it: "'Bad' jokes are their 'bad' jokes as well" (Davis, Wood, & Wilson, 1983, p. 113).

Fear of being perceived as "unprofessional" or "losing control" of the class may inhibit some instructors from incorporating content-relevant and socially appropriate humor in the classroom. However, the wealth of research evidence supporting the positive effects of humor suggests that its multiple benefits clearly outweigh its possible risks.

*** Enhance students' self-esteem by praising the positive aspects of their performance.**

Try to avoid the "criticism trap" of focusing exclusively on, and responding only to, student mistakes or errors. There may be a natural tendency for instructors to focus only on student shortcomings because they are often very concerned with justifying to students (and themselves) why they have deducted points or why they did not award a higher grade--perhaps to guard against the possibility of student complaints or grievances. Such preoccupation with grade justification may result in our forgetting to acknowledge and reinforce the positive aspects of students' work (e.g., ways in which the student has improved during the semester). The dire need for such student acknowledgment and reinforcement is strongly supported by a research-literature review on the social and emotional aspects of instruction in higher education conducted by Dunkin and Barnes (1986), who report: "The most consistent finding was that instructor praise, encouragement, and acceptance accounted for less than 5% of total class time" (p. 766).

At the precollege level, Rosenshine and Stevens (1986) conducted a comprehensive review of the research literature and found that specific teacher praise of student performance correlated positively with student achievement. Brophy and Good (1986) also conducted a large-scale literature review at the precollege level and reported that teacher encouragement and praise were associated with student success, especially for students of low socioeconomic status. At the college level, Murray (1985) found that instructors who received higher ratings on teaching effectiveness--as measured by end-of-course student evaluations, were more likely to praise students for good ideas--as measured by in-class observations of their teaching behavior.

All these findings lend empirical support to the long-held belief that positive feedback or positive reinforcement enhance students' self-esteem and achievement motivation. Self-esteem and achievement motivation are patently important contributors to academic persistence, thus faculty attention to and acknowledgment of the positive aspects of student performance should serve to promote student retention. This claim jibes well with the recommendation offered by Terenzini & Associates, stemming from their national research on students' transition to college: "The formal and informal mechanisms by which an institution sends subtle signals to students about how valued they are should be reviewed and revised . . . to provide more early feedback and early validation for students" (1993, p. 9).

Listed below is a series of recommendations for providing early validation and positive feedback to students which should serve to promote their learning and their expectations for future success.

1. Create positive expectations on the first day of class.

For example, report the successes of previous students in the course, and share specific strategies for success with students that will enhance their chances of doing well in the your course.

2. Positively reinforce students' in-class contributions.

For example, express appreciation for the questions they ask and the contributions they make during class discussions.

3. Provide students with some opportunity to experience early success in the course (e.g., an early exam covering a limited amount of material).

4. Utilize testing and grading procedures that minimize invidious comparisons and unhealthy competition among students (e.g., grading "on a curve").

5. Personalize the feedback you provide to students. Feedback is more likely to be received constructively by students if it is individualized and delivered with a "personal touch." The following practices are recommended for this purpose.

- Write a personal note to students, referring to them by name when you deliver feedback to them on returned exams and assignments.

Though it may be may be too time-consuming to write a personal note to all students on every returned assignment or exam, you can write personal notes to a smaller subset of students when you return a particular exam or assignment. On the next exam or assignment, select a different subgroup of students to receive personal notes and continue to employ this strategy throughout the semester, so by the end of the term, each student in class will have received at least one returned test or assignment with a personal note from you.

- Point out to students their overall "standing" in the course while the course is in progress (e.g., "John, your cumulative grade at this point in the course is . . .").

Students not only need cognitive feedback (e.g., what the correct answers were on a test), they also need affective or emotional feedback, i.e., they need to be reassured that they are "okay" or competent and that they are making satisfactory progress in a college-level course.

*** Deliver negative feedback (criticism) to students in a sensitive, non-threatening manner.**

The implication of this recommendation for students' self-esteem is well articulated by

Thomas Malone in his review of the literature on student motivation:

Performance feedback should be presented in a way that minimizes the possibility of self-esteem damage. There is a tension here between the need to provide clear performance feedback to enhance challenge and learning, and the need not to reduce self-esteem to the point where the challenge becomes discouraging rather than inviting (1981, p. 360).

The following practices, drawn from the field of human relations, are offered as strategies for delivering negative feedback in a way that minimizes the risk of damage to students' self-esteem and to the instructor-student relationship.

- Avoid making a long list of student mistakes; instead, focus on no more than two or three things the student could do that would have the most impact on improving subsequent performance.
- When responding to a student whose performance is generally poor, try to identify at least one answer or section of the student's work that was strong and acknowledge this strength.
- Focus negative criticism on the student's work product or performance, not on the student's personal qualities or characteristics (e.g., "Your answer to this question lacks organization" rather than "you lack organization").

Focusing criticism on observable behavior rather than on personal characteristics or dispositions serves to de-personalize the criticism. It also directs the student to a specific action that is likely to be seen as readily modifiable. In contrast, criticism directed at a general characteristic is more likely to be perceived as an enduring personality "trait" that is immutable and not easily changed. The importance of attending to such nuances in the wording of feedback delivered to students is well articulated by C.R. Carlson in his article, "Feedback for Learning": "Small differences in approach can help a student on the defensive. Instead of "What you did wrong," or "What you should have done," the performance can be separated from the student by saying what might have been done to make (it) better (in Milton & Associates, 1978, p. 148).

When providing feedback to students on their writing, Knoblauch and Brannon suggest using a variant of the "I message," which they call "facilitative commentary," whereby the instructor says: "Here's what your writing has caused me to think you're saying--if my response differs from your intent, how can you help me to see what you mean." In contrast, "directive commentary" says or implies: "Don't do it your way; do it this way," which is much more threatening to the student's self esteem (1984, p. 129).

- Use "I" messages when delivering criticism (e.g., "I could not follow" rather than, "You did not make it clear").
- Avoid absolute or extreme statements when delivering criticism (e.g., "Your answer needs

more organization" rather than, "Your answer is totally disorganized").

- End the critical message on a warm, optimistic note that expresses confidence in the student's ability to improve. (For example, "I'm confident that, if you follow my suggestions for improvement and maintain your motivation, you will learn from these mistakes and do much better on future assignments".)

There is research evidence indicating that if instructors describe mistakes to students as part of a larger learning experience from which the student will improve, this feedback can increase "self-efficacy," i.e., the degree to which students perceive themselves as being able to influence or control their future success (Ames & Ames, 1984).

- Consider refraining from the ritualistic use of red ink to correct student errors on exams and assignments.

I can offer no scholarly support for this suggestion, other than my vague intuition that humans seem to associate this color with fear and apprehension (e.g., "red flag," "red alert") or embarrassment and humiliation (e.g., "red-faced"). These are feelings we do not want students to be experiencing while processing feedback because they may cause inexperienced learners to react emotionally rather than rationally, and defensively rather than constructively, to our specific suggestions for improvement. Perhaps providing written feedback to students in a color that has a less inflammatory history than the corrective color, red, may reduce the risk that it will be perceived as self-threatening.

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Some Possible Suggestions for Establishing a Positive Classroom Climate

compiled by Linda Hilsen, Instructional Development Center, University of Minnesota, Duluth

Tips for the First Day and All Those to Come

1. Get to class early and chat with students as you set up.
2. Put the class name and number on the board in bold letters so those who are not in your class can leave before you begin.
3. According to Joyce Powlacs, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, research shows that students typically decide what kind of teacher you are and what kind of experience they will have being in your class in the first fifteen minutes. Also, research shows that the instructors who make the most lasting impressions on students are those who possess and generate enthusiasm states McKeachie in *Teaching Tips: A Guidebook for the Beginning College Teacher*, 8th edition.
 - a. So be prepared. Carefully structure how you will begin your class. Provide the information about you and your course that the students need.
 - b. Let the excitement you feel for your field flow to your students. Reek enthusiasm. Use a little humor.
4. If you take roll, ask a few questions of students as you go or ask them to share why they are taking the course. This will help them become individuals in your eyes. Moreover, self-disclose when you discover appropriate opportunities. You, too, can become a person in their eyes without losing any “status;” as a matter of fact, your personal disclosure will increase your credibility and contribute to a better learning environment by the modeling of openness that is occurring. Let them ask you questions about yourself. This can be an eye-opening experience for you.
5. Stress your availability to students.
 - a. If you want students to come to your office, sincerely state this.
 - b. Give your office hours and telephone numbers at which you are comfortable being reached by students. If there are time limits on when you will accept calls, state them clearly. If you will not accept calls off-campus, state this.
 - c. If there are other occasions when you plan to make yourself available to students, tell them.
 - i. Some professors have difficulty attracting students to their offices. One professor makes contact with students in the Kirby Center at UMD on a casual basis. The first day of class he states, “I go for coffee at 9:30 every day in the cafeteria. If you want to talk, come sit with me.” Not only is this guy never without students at his table, but he now has more students than he can handle finding their way through a formidable department into his office.
 - ii. Try a voluntary “Think and Drink” session to discuss course content in the cafeteria or a restaurant near campus. Students sincerely appreciate personal contact, look forward to it, and become more motivated by it (Lewis, 1987).
 - d. Explain professional commitments you have which make you unavailable at certain periods of time.

6. Directly state your goals for the course and your expectations of the students. Describe what skills a student would need to possess to do well in your course. Give an overview of the entire course that is student-centered: “When you have completed this course, you will be able to...” Write your syllabus so the students can understand what your course is about, not to impress your colleagues with jargon.
7. Establish procedures from day one.
 - a. Write major topics to be covered on the board, overhead, or a handout.
 - b. Always give an overview of the class today that includes what (the material to be covered), why (its relevance to the course), where (this material’s importance and placement in the “big picture”), and how (the methods, exercises, assignments that will be employed).
 - c. Consistently introduce, cover, and wrap-up each new segment of material.
 - d. Always have a summary of the day’s events.
 - i. You may do this, but why not ask a student or two to mention the main points that were covered today? This is not shirking your job; it is helping students internalize information by verbalizing it. The more opportunities you provide for your students to verbalize, the more quickly they will comprehend your process and content.
 - ii. Your summary can cleverly be slid into the last three-quarters of your presentation to avoid the tune-out that many students do when they hear a concluding signal. If you or a student summarizes what has happened before the last major point on your “Topics to be Covered Today” list is covered, the students benefit, frequently without even realizing it.
 - e. Establish strict rules on “packing behavior” on the first day. Tell them how long they are expected to participate before getting ready to leave. The following is a short list of techniques I have observed instructors use to signal closure to students:
 - i. “When the cartoon appears on the overhead, you may go.”
 - ii. “After you have posed three good questions about the material covered, you will be dismissed.” (This works much better than, “Are there any questions?” Instead of students hating those who ask, students appreciate others who will pose good questions!)
 - iii. “We will end each class with a short piece representative of the music we are studying.”
 - iv. “You belong to me until 10:50!”
 - f. End each and every class with a “hook” for the next class period. Give them a good reason to come back.
8. **THIS IS IMPERATIVE:** Learn students’ names as quickly as possible. One or more of the following could assist you in this task:
 - a. Create an icebreaker appropriate for your class so each student will have the opportunity to speak to other students in the class as you circulate. I prefer icebreakers that cause the students to talk about their own experiences with course content. In my developmental writing class, for example, having students share their trepidations about the course can alleviate much anxiety and you can learn a great deal about them as you eavesdrop.
 - b. Take Polaroid™ snaps of six students at a time. Have the students write their own names under their picture. This is a great icebreaking technique for the class, too, because six people who may have never seen each other before are getting ready to pose for a family portrait together. Clipping this picture to information sheets you have

- collected on each student really speeds up your connecting of names and faces.
- c. If you have students hand in a schedule, have a place for them to add, “What I want you to know about me.”
 - d. Use an information sheet upon which you can collect data on prerequisite courses, hobbies, interests—the possibilities are infinite.
 - e. Have each student write his/her name and concerns about the course on 3” x 5” note cards. Deal with these concerns during the next class period.
9. Ask students what they want to, need to, expect to learn in this class. This can be accomplished via discussion, paper and pencil, take-home assignment, etc. Be certain to take time to address their anxieties.
 10. Stick around to answer their questions after class. Talk to students personally. Ask them if your presentation was clear, helpful, and/or met their needs. That you are willing to ask your students how you did tells them you respect their opinions. Also, you will be amazed at what you can learn about your own teaching. Listen to what they say: “Out of the mouth of babes...”

Tips for Sustaining a Positive Learning Environment

1. Be concerned about the physical setting.
 - a. Check the lighting in the room. Make certain all can see to read the texts or overhead. On the other hand, there is no good reason why every light has to be on at eight in the morning.
 - b. Encourage students to inform you about any discomforts or to handle them themselves. For example, if an open window is causing a chilling draft, tell them to feel free to make needed adjustments.
2. Make the examples you use relevant to your students’ lives: “How would you feel if somebody dropped a whole load of oil in Lake Superior?” “How will this current drought affect your food budget?”
3. Don’t be so rigidly tied to your syllabus that you do not take the time to capitalize on real life situations. If Jesse Jackson visits your campus, find a way to connect this event, what is going on in your class, and your students’ lives.
4. Address students by name. Use a seating chart, name tags, the Polaroid™ technique, or whatever to cement their names in your head. Don’t you appreciate being addressed by your name?
5. All reasons for not having work complete by the due dates are not excuses. Yes, we must establish rules, but there are occasions where the rules need not be broken. Be compassionate, not cynical. Grandmothers really do die.
6. Constantly read your audience’s responses.
 - a. If it is clear from the expressions on their faces they have no idea what you are talking about, be willing to take the time to present the concept in different words, with different illustrations. Expecting their confusion to disappear with time is not good enough.
 - b. If students are bored or you have just covered an in-depth topic intensively, there is nothing wrong with stopping, allowing them to talk or stretch for a minute or two and then continuing.

- c. In long classes, provide a short break to address human comforts. Students have difficult time following you if they have pressing needs.
7. Provide nonverbal encouragement.
 - a. Maintain eye contact.
 - b. Move about the room. Come out from behind that podium. Display your willingness to be a person; sit on a sturdy desk or table. (Disaster can occur if you try to balance yourself on one of those one-arm desks; I know.) Move into their space.
 - c. Be animated and expressive facially and bodily. Let them see and feel the enthusiasm you have for your field.
8. Model the thinking process in your field for your students. Don't just tell them; show them, and then let them practice. "Professing ain't enough; you gotta learn to teach." If you aren't talking, it doesn't mean you aren't teaching.
9. Use positive reinforcement.
 - a. Give students recognition for contributing to in-class discussion or answering questions. Use positive reinforcement when possible, but if the answer is incorrect, try to lead the student through continued questioning to reach an acceptable position.
 - b. Use student test answers to review material after a test. Keep track of good answers as you correct the test and let the students "star" a bit. This is a lot less boring than you reading all the right answers.
 - c. Share good student work, after getting the permission of the student, with the rest of the class.
 - d. Validate student opinions by referring to points students made previously, not always using "as I said last Thursday." Say, "To follow up on John's point Tuesday..."
10. Keep constant tabs on how your students are progressing.
 - a. Use conferencing outside of class to discuss problems and areas where students are doing well.
 - b. Be willing to provide review, catch-up, or further explanation sessions.
 - c. If students are not going to make it, honestly counsel them out before you are forced to fail them.
11. When asking questions, pause. Students need time to process the questions and their answers. Count to 15 before moving on. If you do not, the message you are giving is, "I really don't want to take away from my time to listen to a student." This is not the message you should be sending out if you want your students to learn. Verbalizing information helps students internalize it. We should provide as many occasions as feasible for them to verbalize. Invite responses by pausing for a good length of time. If you wait long enough, you will get an answer if you have not worded the question in an alien language or manner.
12. Do not talk down to students.
 - a. Avoid judging behaviors that cause students to feel inadequate.
 - b. Avoid stereotyping. Do not think that females have a certain set of interests and males have another. Do not think that all older students like to talk in class. Do not target examples and questions towards certain groups in your class.
13. Use up-to-date examples, illustrations, etc., which touch your students' lives.

14. In discussions be a facilitator, not the emcee. You do not have to do all the talking in your classroom. Let the students help each other learn as you guide them. A marvelous peak experience occurs when the students forget you are there, pass you right by in the discussion. It is then you know you are doing your job.
15. Use peer pressure to your advantage on assignments and classroom decorum. Students can motivate and reprimand each other.
16. Provide your students with feedback vehicles during the course. You might want to try one or two of the following:
 - a. At the end of the first week, ask students to take out a piece of paper and anonymously comment on “things I like about this class,” “things I dislike,” “how I would like to see things change.”
 - b. Have a suggestion box outside of your classroom or office.
 - c. Establish a Lecturer’s Feedback Group. Any student who wants to can attend to bring up anything about the course. Usually these groups meet in the instructor’s office or the cafeteria.
 - d. Use a formative evaluation instrument to get a reading early in the course. My favorite happens to be “Teaching Analysis by Students” (TABS).
 - e. Have a consultant from your instructional development service discuss the course with the students during part of a class hour.
 - f. Have a random sampling of students interviewed by a consultant to answer questions you have composed.
17. The classroom climate is enhanced by out-of-class contact. Recognize students in the halls and malls.
18. Read the Deans’ Lists, the school paper, the sports section of the local paper, etc. to learn about the accomplishments of your students. Mention them in class.
 - a. Let students know where your office is, how to find it.
 - b. Make conscious choices about how you arrange your office. When going over papers, have the student sit beside you so you can both see the product being discussed.
 - c. If you are located in an inner complex, inform your students that the secretary doesn’t bite.
 - d. If you are working when a student appears, don’t ignore the student. Take time to set a meeting time that is mutually agreeable.
 - e. Personalize your office. Family photos, rugs, plants help.
 - f. If you make appointments with students, keep them. If you are detained, call someone to post a note for the student.

Tips from Angela Provitera McGlynn:

Creating a positive classroom environment:

- Discuss the types of study habits and strategies students need to succeed in your course
- Provide tips from previous students on how to succeed in your course
- Discuss “academic citizenship”: buy the book, do the reading, show up for class, do the homework, meet deadlines

- Make your attendance policy clear, but be flexible. Say, “May result in X points deduction” instead of “will result...”
- Find out about your students:
 - What is their major and minor fields of study
 - What year of college are they in
 - What other courses in your discipline they have taken
 - What their Math and English backgrounds are
 - What other courses they’re currently taking
 - Why they are taking this course
 - What learning strategies they use (they may not be able to articulate this)
 - What teaching strategies they prefer
- At the beginning of each class, ask a student to voluntarily summarize the content of the previous class
- Give tests often enough that they cover a reasonable amount of material. This means more than a mid-term and final exam.
- Return any graded material as quickly as possible: the closer feedback is to the event, the greater impact it has on student learning.
- Offer constructive criticism of students’ work. Do not comment on the students themselves.
- Provide an academic integrity document to the students.
- Socialize students in appropriate classroom behavior. Do not let infractions go.
- Help students bond with their classmates. A sense of belonging is one of the single most important factors for student persistence to graduate.
- Make your classroom a place that feels safe to students. This means it is OK to make a mistake.

What it means to be "approachable":

- Know your students' names
- Let students know you care and are invested in their learning and doing well in your course
- Let students know you as a person, beyond your role as teacher
- Respect your students and their opinions
- Show enthusiasm about teaching and about your discipline (p. 64)

Student success and perseverance are more dependent upon the relationships students develop in class than what we tell them about the course. (p. 69)

"Social psychology research has shown that morale is highest in any group in which participants are engaged in discussion." (p. 69)

Promoting student self-regulation: Teaching students *how* to learn

"It is never too late to teach students *how* to learn." (p. 71)

To help students become self-regulators, teachers should:

- Set clear objectives for their courses.
- Make regular assignments.
- Emphasize outlines.

- Suggest mnemonic devices and other memory strategies that will help students retain material. (pp. 71-72)

Zimmerman (1998) divides self-regulation into three processes:

- *Forethought*: Help your students set short-term, challenging, but attainable goals so they can estimate their abilities. This *self-efficacy* approach helps students achieve their goals.
- *Performance*: Help your students develop learning strategies, such as scheduling study time, using memorization techniques, and outlining course content.
- *Self-reflection*: Help your students evaluate how effectively their learning strategies allow them to meet their academic goals, and teach them to adjust their strategies as necessary. (p. 72)

Highly effective teachers share quite a few characteristics with the research on teaching students how to regulate their own learners, particularly in these four categories:

- Planning, organization, and cues.
- Positive regard for students.
- Student participation.
- Feedback, correctives, and reinforcement. (p. 73)

Ask students to give examples of the content/concepts you have just covered. (p. 76)

Lecture for a short period (15 minutes or less), then pair students to compare and rework their notes. (p. 78)

Although lecturing may be the most efficient way to transmit information, it's usually not the most effective way for students to learn and retain material. ... The more students are active learners—that is, the more involved they are in the learning process—the more they'll learn and remember. (p. 79)

Hints to stimulate discussion:

- Ask students to work in pairs before opening up the discussion to the whole class. Students seem to be more comfortable talking in the large group after having spoken to another student one on one. (p. 86)
- One way to ensure that more students will be ready to join in the conversation is to ask the students to write down their responses to your questions. Not only does this tactic pull many more students into the discussion, it also gets everyone engaged with the material, and even improves the quality of the responses. (p. 86)
- The temptation is often strong for *you* to respond to students' questions and comments, but that's a surefire way to limit student participation. Students are often more persuaded by their classmates' perceptions and opinions than by ours. (p. 86)

Rules of discourse (Bartlett, 1999) (p. 87):

- No hogging the floor.
- No blaming or shaming.
- No personal attacks.

- Always respect the confidentiality of the classroom.

When the open, non-threatening atmosphere of a classroom discussion breaks down, [Bartlett] stops talking about the topic and instead discusses process. (p. 87)

"The challenge in college teaching is not simply covering the material but uncovering it." (Sandler, Silverberg, and Hall, 1996, p. 41)

If students in a group project assume particular roles or assign roles to each other-such as recorder, synthesizer, and presenter-we as teachers need to ensure that women are not always chosen as recorders and men as presenters. In other words, we must ensure that roles within groups do not play out gender-based and race-based stereotypes. (p. 95)

Maintaining a civil classroom

Incivility includes:

- Being consistently late for class.
- Talking while the instructor is speaking.
- Drawing pictures in a notebook or doing crossword puzzles during class.
- Wearing headphones in class to listen to music.
- Allowing cell phones to ring during class.
- Talking on cell phones while class is in session.
- Walking in and out of the room while class is in session.
- Walking in late and passing in front of the teacher.
- Reading newspapers or magazines in class.
- Doing work from another course during class.
- Passing notes or playing games.
- Engaging in other behaviors that most people consider insolent, challenging, and intimidating. (p. 101)

Five ways that incivility might develop in your classroom:

- You fail to communicate your expectations to your students.
- Your students ignore or disagree with the expectations you've set.
- Your students fail to communicate their expectations to you.
- You ignore or disagree with the expectations your students have set.
- Your students disagree with or are unaware of each other's expectations. (p. 105)

Guidelines for modeling classroom decorum:

- Make behavioral expectations clear in your syllabus. Use positive, constructive language, not threats of reprisal.
- Talk about yourself. Let your students hear what you value.
- Learn about your students. Ask about their hopes and dreams.
- Earn trust by being trustworthy. Live up to your own expectations, and be consistent in applying them to students.
- Prepare students for active learning by encouraging them to see learning as a process, not a product.

- Use collaborative projects and group dialogue as an opportunity for students to set and meet expectations for themselves.
- Model adult behavior. Remember that "apprentice" adults take many of their cues from respected mentors.
- Be alert for symptoms of mismatched expectations. Even minor incivility should not be ignored, but treated as a sign that re-alignment of expectations is needed.
- Be prepared to adjust your own behavior, if necessary, and to let students learn from your example.
- Take time to discuss your expectations with other teachers. The faculty development center on your campus may sponsor seminars or informal opportunities to learn how other teachers approach incivility issues in their classrooms. (pp. 105-106)

Keeping the ball rolling at mid-semester:

- Have "mini pep-rallies" to tell the students where they are in the course and how much they've accomplished. (p. 115)
- The relationship between the amount of writing for a course and a student's level of engagement with that course is stronger than the relationship between student engagement and any other course characteristic. (p. 117)
- Language and writing not only reflect thinking, but also help to shape and influence thinking as well. (p. 117)
- Language and writing not only reflect thinking, but also help shape and influence thinking as well. (p. 117)

Teachers assign writing tasks to help their students "summarize, paraphrase, comment, focus, think through, clarify, analyze, solve, synthesize, speculate, infer, and abstract." Students write to "improve their intellectual skills, to remember, to review, to outline, to take notes, to translate ideas into their own language, to understand, to reflect, to create word pictures, to clarify, to ask questions, to organize thoughts and material, to classify, to differentiate, to document, to think analytically, to interpret, to integrate, to synthesize, to test themselves, and to take examinations." (p. 117)

"Writing represents a personal search for meaning." (p. 118)

Rules of thumb for building some *brief* writing exercises:

- Identify and clarify a writing task for your students.
- Make the task concrete and challenging.
- Add a persona or an audience for the assigned task. (Example: "Pretend you were a woman activist in 1919, and write a treatise on the right of women to vote for a male Congress.")
- Review cue words and phrases (see below) and define terms for your students.
- Produce, in writing, a clear, concise statement of the task you're assigning." (p. 118)

In your directions for the writing assignment, use cue words and phrases and define what they mean (pp 118-119):

- Analyze: Examine parts of...
- Compare and contrast: Discuss the similarities and differences...

- Illustrate: Give examples
- Paraphrase: State in your own words...
- Explain: Give reasons for...; account for...
- Describe: Give details using visual words...
- List: Give a series of...
- Identify: Point out...
- Define: State the meaning of..."

Writing projects (pp. 119-121):

- Journals
- Note taking
- Reaction papers
- Reading reaction papers
- Define a concept
- Write an opinion
- Summarize
- Write a description
- Write questions
- Relate a topic
- Interpret a concept
- Peer critiquing"

Active Learning Exercises

- Role playing
- "Fish Bowl"
- "The Power of Two"
- Panel discussions
- Debates
- Problem-solving groups and blackboard work (pp. 122-123)

Closing the semester on a positive note

"Many faculty attempt to teach new material right to the very end of their courses, believing they have so much material to cover that they can't possibly spend any time reviewing and wrapping up. Silberman (1996, p. 123) suggests that students will understand and retain more information, however, if we give them time to consolidate what they've learned."

Reviewing strategies

- Put an outline of the topics covered in your course on the blackboard or on an overhead transparency and ask students a series of questions related to each topic, or use some other discussion technique.
- As a class, agree on the key concepts, names, and events covered in the course. Create a call-out list. Have teams create crossword puzzles and give students copies of each team's crossword puzzle.
- Conduct a game of "Jeopardy" or "College Bowl."
- Have active review sessions. Have students work in teams to generate and/or answer review questions.

Student self-assessment

- Near the beginning of the course, have students write what skills/knowledge they expect to gain from the course. What questions do they have? What are their hopes and concerns?
- Collect their responses and save them.
- Near the end of the course, return the students' statements to them and ask them to assess their progress toward their goals.

Course summary

- Ask students to write about what they've learned from the course. In groups, have students record what they have learned on large sheets of paper. Then each group can tape their sheet to the wall and the entire class can review the recorded knowledge of the class. (pp. 124-125)
- Have students write responses to stems:
- What I liked most about this course was...
- I learned that...
- I re-learned that...
- What I most appreciated was...
- What I learned that will be most useful to me in my life is...
- What I will miss most about this class is...
- The classmate I most appreciate is _____ because...

Future planning

- In groups, have students brainstorm what they can do to remember what they've learn and continue on to learn more. (p. 125)

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