

Creating Engaging Environments

Encourage Student-Student Interactions

vividness of the moment or event, including their feelings and sensory experiences. Students may also be invited to share those experiences with their peers. The instructor can then move into course discussion.

Use Humor Appropriately

Kaplan and Pascoe (1977) found that use of humor significantly improved retention of materials. Ziv (1988) and (Wanzer, Frymier, and Irwin, 2010) also found humor to have positive effects on cognitive abilities and learning within classroom environments.

Engage Through Routine and Ongoing Feedback

Introduce the role of feedback as a way of monitoring and exploring learning and engagement, which go hand in hand. The more students are engaged the likely they are to learn. One way to increase engagement is through routine and ongoing feedback. One way to do this is to say: "An important aspect of our class will be to have an ongoing conversation about two things. The first relates to the content itself. What is being learned? What specifically has come across for you that is either new or represents an evolution of something you already know? The second thing is our process in class. How is the process we are using to learn the content? What is working? What could we do differently that would help with deepening the connection to the course content? When it comes to feedback about engagement (process), keep in mind that students may be apprehensive out of fear of hurting the instructor's feelings or repercussions for speaking up. One way to address this by saying: "When it comes to us talking about the learning process is going please understand that I value feedback. It is an opportunity for me to change things up to better fit how you learn. It's part of my professional development. I'm not perfect and expect to learn along with you. Your feedback is part of my learning process."

During each class, periodically pause to gain feedback about those two things:

1. Content/Outcome: What specifically is coming across and being learned? What difference can the learning make for the student?
2. Engagement: How is the approach of the instructor and the process of learning?

It is then important that the instructor respond to the feedback and make adjustments accordingly. Because we are using routine and ongoing feedback adjustments may occur class to class.

Acknowledge First

When students contribute to discussions and perhaps have interpretations of course material that are inaccurate (e.g., a student provides a definition that is incorrect) or potentially inflammatory to others, acknowledge the student first before offering a correction or different view.

Acknowledgment involves attending to what students have communicated both verbally and nonverbally. It lets them know that their experience, points of view, and actions have been heard and noted. It also serves as a prompt by encouraging further communication. A basic way to acknowledge is to say, "Uh huh" or "I see." Another way is to reflect back, without interpretation, what was said. For example, one might say, "You feel strongly about that." Or, "I heard you say this issue makes you angry." Acknowledgment can also be conveyed by attending to nonverbal behaviors. For example, one might say, "I noticed your expression when you spoke about your experience with the topic." Acknowledgment increases the likelihood that the student will feel heard and subsequently be open to the modification of their answer or difference of opinion. An example of using acknowledgement before offering a different perspective might be, "This sounds like an important issue for you. And I wonder if there are other points of view that are different but also valid." Or, "Thank you for your answer. This is a tricky concept that students often find confusing. Let's see if I can clarify it a little better."

Some specific ways to acknowledge include paraphrasing and summarizing. Paraphrasing can be used as a way to confirm what has been said by using a condensed, nonjudgmental version of what the youth or other involved has said. Summarizing offers a way to check out what has been said by pulling together what a student or other has said over a period of time (i.e., a few minutes of conversation or different segments from different points of a conversation). Summarizing provides a brief synopsis to acknowledge, clarify, and gain.

Use Positive Language

Language is a vehicle for learning and change. Consider everyday language as it relates to interactions with students and colleagues. Although certain terms are an important part of various

Limitation	Possibility
Pathology	Health
Problem	Solution
Insist	Invite
Closed	Open
Shrink	Expand
Defense	Access
Expert	Partner
Contra	Nurture
Backward	Forward
Manipulate	Collaborate
Fear	Hope
Cure	Growth
Stuck	Change
Missing	Latent
Wrong	Utilize
Resist	Future
Past	Horizontal
Hierarchical	Appreciate
Treat	Facilitate
End	Beginning
Judge	Respect
Never	Not yet

Limit	Expand
Defect	Asset
Rule	Exception

References

Chickering, A. W., & Gamson, Z. F. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE Bulletin*, 39(7), 3-7.

Garcia, T., & Pintrich, P.R. (1996). The effects of autonomy on motivation and performance in the college classroom. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 21, 477-486.

Kaplan, R. M., and Pascoe, G. C. (1977). Humorous lectures and humorous examples: Some effects upon comprehension and retention. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 69, 61-65.

Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., Whitt, E. J. & Associates. (2006). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*

- ⌘ True or False: Ask your participants to introduce themselves and make three or four statements about themselves, one of which is false. Now get the rest of the group to vote on which fact is false.
- ⌘ Connecting Stories finding common experiences or themes between people.

¥ Hope, Fears and Expectations Best done when participants already have a good understanding of their challenge as a team. Group people into 2s or 3s, and ask people to discuss their expectations for the event or work ahead, then what they fears and their hopes. Gather the group's response by collecting hopes, fears and expectations for pairing or threesome.

For more information on this strategy www.gymbasedlearning.org.

!