

Online Student Engagement: Creating a Virtual Environment That Promotes Inclusion & Inspiration



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Objectives: We will discuss the following:

- Best practices in Distance Learning
- Communication skills for student motivation
- Respecting cultural diversity
- Maintaining healthy boundaries

A question to ponder...

...how can I adapt my best lessons
to a distance learning format?

Quality Matters (www.qualitymatters.org): Roadmap to a Quality DL Class

8 General Standards

Course Overview & Introduction	Course Activities & Learner Interaction
Learning Objectives (Competencies)	Course Technology
Assessment & Measurement	Learner Support
Instructional Materials	Accessibility & Usability

What conditions are necessary
for humans to grow? According
to Rogers, we need:

Genuineness

Empathy

Unconditional Positive Regard

Building Rapport with Online Learners: Genuineness

- Our goal is to genuinely engage our online learners as we would in a face-to-face classroom.
- As instructors, we must also attend to our own self care. This can include defining healthy boundaries with technology and students.
- Being genuine sometimes leads to confrontation. This can be an opportunity to teach your student communication skills.
- Human interaction is changing along with technology.
 - Suggested Video: “Connected, but Alone” by Sherry Turkle (Available on YouTube)

Building Rapport with Online Learners: Empathy

- “The state of empathy, or being empathetic, is to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto **as if** one were the person, **but without ever losing the ‘as if’ condition.**” – Carl Rogers, 1959
- Empathy is NOT the same as sympathy. According to Webster, sympathy is “the feeling that **you care about and are sorry** about someone else's trouble, grief, misfortune, etc. : a sympathetic feeling.”

Building Rapport with Online Learners: Unconditional Positive Regard

- It is possible to have unconditional positive regard and still be genuine...you can still confront a student when appropriate. Make sure your criticisms are always constructive; it may be helpful to remind a student that you're only providing feedback in order to make them a better reader, writer, etc...
- Criticize the student's work or performance, but not the student as a person. Always try to encourage the student. Even if a student is going to fail or be dropped, you can still encourage the student as a person.
- *Encouragement thrives when focus is on what we already possess in order to obtain what we don't quite possess yet; if one loses motivation then focus on determination!*

Building Rapport with Online Learners: Communicating a sense of Unconditional Positive Regard in the classroom

- Encourage students to tell you about their goals and dreams.
- Get to know your students on a personal level (while still respecting healthy boundaries).
- Don't shame students for asking questions. Avoid labeling "stupid questions."
- *Acknowledge and reward positive traits your students demonstrate; these traits are the catalyst to their academic success.*

Tips for Engaging Distance Learners

- Require regular communication with you and other students.
- Address students by preferred first name in messages and discussions.
- In video sessions, look into the camera for a sense of eye contact. You should not, however, expect eye contact back since most students look at the screen. (Note, eye contact is not common across all cultures).
- Be direct. When in doubt, say to the student “Tell me what you need.”
- Ask students to discuss their goals or inspirations.

Building Rapport with Online Learners: Humanize Yourself within Professional Boundaries

- You want the student to feel like there is a human being teaching this class, not just a computer program.
 - Welcome podcast
 - Video chat during office hours - Google Hangouts is an excellent resource
 - Telephone conversations
- Make the student feel remembered: Notate at least one thing about each individual student to incorporate in a later class discussion.
- Admit if you make a mistake (within the appropriate context). As hard as we try to be perfect, we're still human.

Building Rapport with Online Learners: Maintain Healthy Boundaries

- Ethics are our roadmap for healthy boundaries.
- Share personal information, but only what's appropriate & what you are comfortable with as an educator. If in doubt, ask yourself "Am I sharing this for my benefit or the student's benefit?" If it's not for the student, keep it to yourself. Your family, friends, and colleagues are your support system.
- Be flexible, but maintain professional ethics & boundaries.
- Define response times. Students sometimes have unrealistic expectations when technology is involved.

Conflict with Students

Think about a “defiant” student.

Was the student’s goal to disrespect your class, or was there something else happening?

Often, conflict between faculty and students results from a student resisting change.

Try thinking about defiance as Resistance to Change...

Student Resistance to Engaging in an Adult Basic Education (ABE) Program

- When students feel important to the class, the class becomes important to them.
- Remember, making personal changes can be scary! Students sometimes need encouragement in the process of changing. Some reasons for student resistance to change:
 - Students believe they can't change
 - Students don't want to change
 - Students don't know what to change
 - Student don't know how to change

What types of change do we encourage in ABE?

- Improved study habits
- Following through on commitments
 - Arriving on time
 - Thinking about the future
- Changes that support the student's personal goals

Does change happen at once? No!

Change Happens in Stages: The Transtheoretical Model

- Pre-contemplation: A student is not ready to change.
- Contemplation: A student is getting ready to change.
 - Preparation: A student is ready to change.
 - Action: A student is taking action to change.
 - Maintenance: A student is preserving change.
- Termination: A student's change has become habit.

Tips for Communication: “Watch your Language!”

- When offering a student feedback, look for opportunities to give a “pep talk.”
- Begin statements with “I,” not “You.” *If possible avoid “you” altogether*
 - “You need to get to work” implies blame and is more likely to elicit resistance.
 - “I need you to get to work” gives a command without blaming and is less likely to elicit resistance.
 - *“I have to see more work here to consider a passing grade” allows control to be placed on the student and a sense of partnership that eases resistance.*
- Avoid beginning questions with “Why?”
 - “Why weren’t you here yesterday” is more likely to elicit resistance.
 - “Tell me why you missed yesterday” is less likely to elicit resistance.
 - *“Is there anything I can do to help you get to class” creates a partnership.*

Motivating Students to Change

- Does the student have access to resources necessary for class? Maslow's Hierarchy!
 - Knowledge of Community Resources: Food & Housing Assistance, Medicaid, etc.
 - Many schools keep a list of resources. The United Way is a good place to start.
- Don't "overwhelm" with questions. A statement can elicit the same information.
 - "Why are you in ABE?" implies the student needs to defend ABE placement. This is more likely to elicit resistance to change.
 - "Tell me about your placement in ABE" implies the teacher wants to know something about the student. This is less likely to elicit resistance to change.
 - A good rule thumb is to ask no more than 1 question for every 3 statements.
- Make course instructions simple and easily accessible. When writing instructions, avoid "ten dollar words." *(maybe some examples here)*
- Always communicate high expectations: "Creating a self-fulfilling prophecy."

Motivating Students to Change: Focus on Intrinsic Motivation

- Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation
- Motivational Interviewing: “Motivational Interviewing is a collaborative, person-centered, evidence-based, guiding method of communication for enhancing and strengthening intrinsic motivation for change.” (Andrew, 2009)
- Introductory video: <http://motivationalinterviewing.org/>

If you want to know more about Motivational Interviewing...

Read the original Motivational Interviewing book: Miller, William R., and Stephen Rollnick. *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People for Change*. New York: Guilford, 2002.

Visit www.motivationalinterviewing.org

Look for explanatory videos on www.youtube.com

Discussion Questions for Student Engagement

Structuring Discussion Questions (Cornell University)

- Consider the learning outcomes for using online discussions in your course.
- Connect online discussions with your overall course learning outcomes and course activities.
- Design effective questions or discussion prompts to incorporate Bloom's Taxonomy.
- Create and stagger mini deadlines.
- Communicate assignment expectations.
Use a rubric if you will grade online discussions.
- Break students into groups.
- Assign roles.

Discussion Questions for Student Engagement

Tips for Managing the Discussion

(Cornell University)

- Allow students to do the talking.
- Ask probing questions (keep the conversation going).
- Address any incivilities as soon as they happen: NETIQUETTE
- Watch out for orphaned comments and silent students.
 - Ensure closure through synthesis and summary.

Resources for Discussion Question Prompts

[Key Questions \(Brown.edu\)](#)

[Designing for Learning](#)

[Teacher Stream \(Edutopia\)](#)

[Connect with the Edutopia Community](#)

Sample Discussion Questions

- “Ice Breaker” - Share why you are here and at least 1 thing that makes you unique or individual.
- “Check In” - What is at least 1 thing that is going well for you in this class? What is at least 1 thing that needs improvement?
- “Normalizing” - What are the top 5 stressors facing an ABE student?
- “Study skills” - What are 3 study skills that help you succeed in school?
- “Research” - PLATO requires a high degree of accuracy and precision. Identify at least 2 things in the real world that require precision & accuracy.
- Sometimes, a student will say “I don’t know” or “I can’t.” This is an opportunity to teach internet research skills!

Teaching Perseverance



Discussion Question:
“Grit” - Watch Angela Lee Duckworth’s Ted Talk about Grit and then identify at least 2 ways you can be gritty in this course. Encouraging peer-to-peer pep talks

Identity-Safe Classrooms

According to www.identitysafeclassrooms.org,

“Identity safe classrooms are those in which teachers strive to ensure students that their social identities are an asset rather than a barrier to success in the classroom. And, through strong positive relationships and opportunities to learn, they feel they are welcomed, supported, and valued as members of the learning community.”

Creating an “Identity-Safe Classroom”

- All individuals have a unique Worldview.
- What is a Worldview? It refers to one’s individual experiences and social, moral, religious, educational, economic, or political inputs shared with other members of one’s reference group, such as culture group, racial or ethnic group, family, state, or country.
- Instructors should be aware of their own personal beliefs and values. Respect diversity while respecting your own beliefs and values.
- Assimilation vs. Acculturation: What is the student’s goal?
 - Assimilation: Blending into the majority culture.
 - Acculturation: Succeeding in the majority culture while respecting & maintaining your own culture.

Creating an Identity-Safe Classroom: Respecting Culture

According to Baruth & Manning, the term culture includes:

- Race
- Ethnicity
- World View
- Social Class
- Generational Differences (Age)
 - Gender
 - Sexual Orientation
 - Disability

Challenges to an Identity-Safe Classroom

Cultural Misunderstandings in Education

- Lack of communication resulting from verbal communication difficulties
- Differing perception of nonverbal communication cues.
- Teacher misunderstanding of the culture and its effects on the process and outcome of education
- Erroneous assumptions about cultural assimilation
- Differing social class values & orientations
- Stereotypical generalizations toward other cultures
- Assumptions of racism or cultural bias on either the part of the teacher or student
- Lack of understanding of the student's worldview

Cultural Sensitivity for an Identity-Safe Classroom

- Make an effort to understand your students' experiences, both in their cultural subgroup and mainstream culture.
- Demonstrate active listening, both in written and spoken word.
- Don't assume you are an expert on another culture. When in doubt, ask the student to teach you about their own culture.
- Utilize the Internet for resources about cultural sensitivity. The [University of Michigan Center on Research for Learning & Teaching](#) (CRLT) offers a great resource on multicultural classrooms.

Cultural Sensitivity

- Include minority populations in your discussion or message groups.
- Allow students to share about their own culture.
- Be willing to advocate for students with special needs!
- Communicate curiosity and eagerness towards new or minority cultures.
- Incorporate a wide variety of career choices into your lesson.
 - “From juggling to rocket science.”

Feeling Overwhelmed by a Student Disclosure?

- If you're not sure how to help, consider a referral to counseling. Don't be pushy or try to force a student into seeing a professional; try making a gentle suggestion. "Did you know the college offers free counseling to students? Sometimes it's helpful to have an ally in the journey of life." If a student is not interested, drop the subject unless you believe there is danger.
- Consult with your colleagues or supervisor.
- We are teachers, not clinicians! When a student expresses thoughts about harming self or others, seek support as soon as possible. Notify security or the Police if there is imminent danger. When in doubt, ask for help from your supervisor.

New Mexico DELT

Distance Education & Learning Technology



Questions? Comments?
Want to know more about NM DELT?

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