Syracuse University

Classroom as Community

Teaching Assistant Orientation 2023

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Think back to when you were a student…

Reflect on your best and worst classroom experience:

1. *What made it a good or challenging space for learning?*

2. *How did the instructor facilitate a better learning environment, or how could they have altered their mode of instruction in order to do so?*

3. *What could you learn from this experience and use to shape your own teaching?*

Examples - Best classroom experience

What made this a rewarding classroom experience?

- Engaged classroom

- Students who hadn't spoken before suddenly were doing so

- Took in and understood content better than ever

Examples - Best classroom experience

What aspects of this experience I can integrate my own teaching?

- How to facilitate classroom discussions while still guiding them towards learning outcomes

- How to make lecture content more relatable to students' experiences

Examples - Worst classroom experience

What made this a challenging classroom experience?

- No good explanation of the subject

- Professor reading the material

- Little to no engagement w/students

- Students had varied background knowledge on the subject

- Little to no feedback on work

Examples - Worst classroom experience

Things I learned from this experience that shape my teaching

To build a community:

- Interactive teaching – asking questions, hearing questions
- Getting feedback to students, and getting feedback from them early on in the semester

  Are crucial

We would like to hear from you

- Your best classroom experience

- Your worst classroom experience

Learning Objectives for Today

1. What is classroom community and why would we want it?

1. Rapport and Trust: Keys to community

1. Building Community on Day One

1. Ensuring Consistent Community

What is "Community" in the Classroom?

"Classroom community is **strong** when learners feel:

- **connected** both to each other and the instructor (reduced social and psychological distance between people)

- share **interests** & values, **trust each other**, actively engage in two-way communications, & pursue common learning objectives" (Kay and Summers 2011, 231).

What is "Community" in the Classroom?

What words do you associate with a strong classroom community?

Results

Why do we want classroom community?

Strong classroom community can create a sense of belonging, which in turn leads to….

- Better academic outcomes and improved retention (Freeman et al. 2007 & Kay and Summers 2011)

- More academic motivation (Kay and Summers 2011)

- More time spent in class on "on-task" (Bowen 2021)

- Reduction in disparities between groups (Walton and Cohen 2011)

Rapport and Trust: Keys to Community

Why rapport?

Rapport ( ) has been shown to (arning, and cognitive

HOW DO YOU DO, FELLOW KIDS?

Rapport and Trust: Keys to Community

*What it is **actually** is:*

How do we build it?

"Rapport is defined as an overall feeling between two people encompassing a mutual, trusting, and prosocial bond." (Frisby and Martin 2010, 147)

Bidirectional relationships are key – i.e. relationship's must go both ways, between students and professor, and when possible, between students as well.

Our challenge is to turn that into an interpersonal **classroom** dynamic

Building classroom community

Strategies for day one

Introducing yourself

Think about going beyond a simple introduction…

Consider explaining:

- How you got to SU
- Why this topic/course matters to you/why it's useful

How I do it…

How I got here

Getting to know them *as they get to know each other*

Everyone should have a chance to speak… but there's an opportunity for **rapport.**

Consider asking students to *introduce each other*.
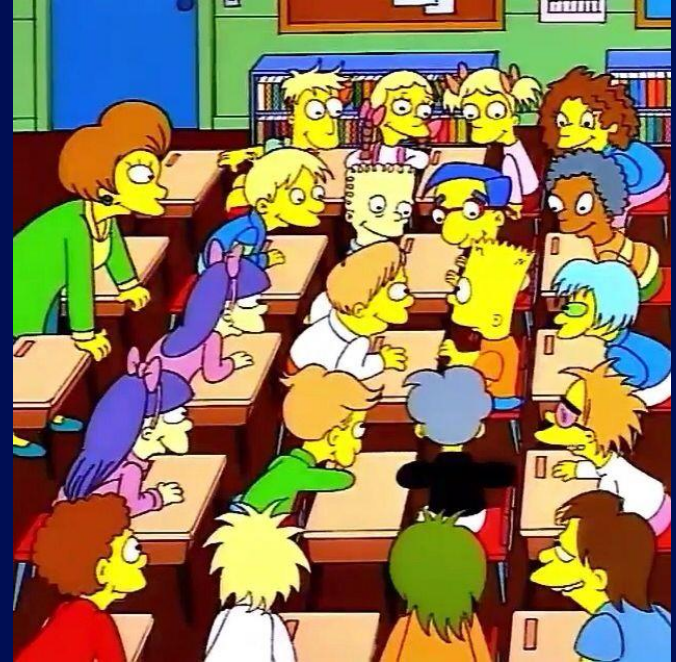
Getting to know them *as they get to know each other*

Beyond th[...]ve ice-
breaker q[...]

- What's[...]

- What i[...]nterested
  in lear[...]e)

- If you [...]
  (Some[...]

WHEN SOMEONE SAYS
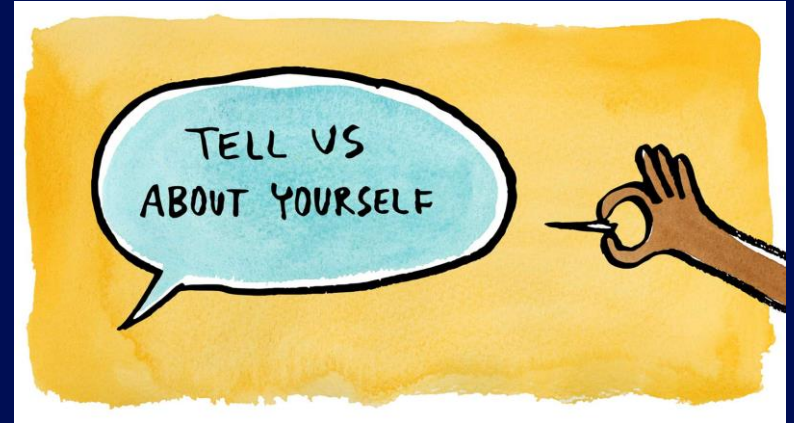
IT'S TIME FOR AN ICE BREAKER

makeameme.org

Getting to know them *using a student survey*

You should ask:
- Preferred name
- Pronouns
- Classroom accommodations

And could consider asking:
- If there's anything they might need you to know to improve their classroom experience
- If there is anything related to the class they are particularly nervous about

Setting expectations

Using a section syllabus

- Clarifies your role
- Includes information about office hours, email, grading, behavior, technology use, and absences

Other strategies for setting ground rules

- Interactive Option - crowd source from students
- But be careful! Maintain your authority – "it's not a democracy"

Ensuring consistent community

Strategies for *after* day one

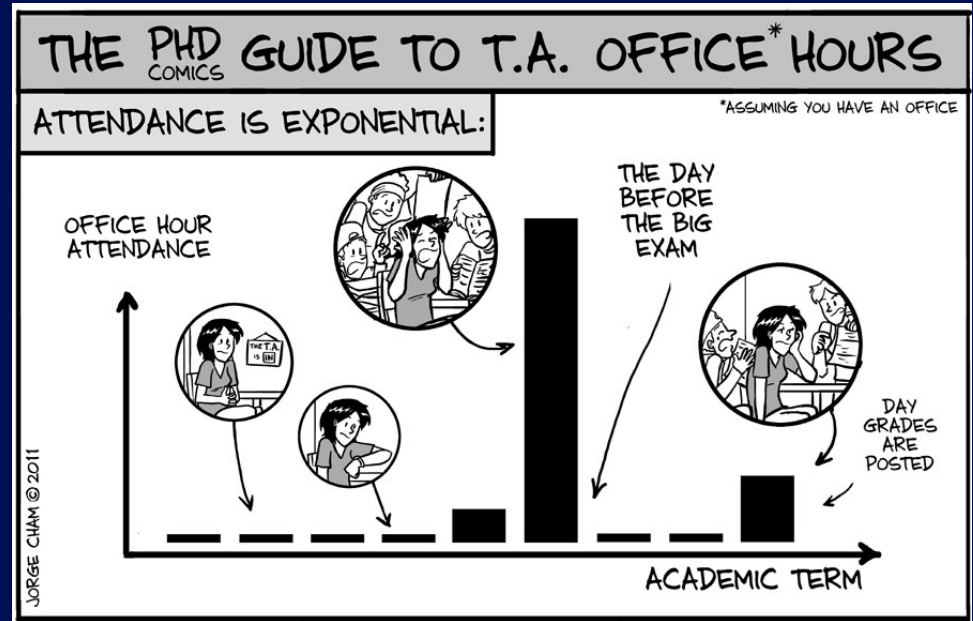# Strategies after the first day - *Communication*

In the classroom

- Call students by name, and don't be afraid to ask again
- Ask probing questions and don't be afraid of the silence!
- Engage in positive nonverbal behaviors such as smiling and nodding
- Be willing to learn with them
- Check-in on student needs throughout the semester (e.g mid semester evaluation)

Strategies after the first day - *Communication*

Outside the classroom

- Email your students and/or use Blackboard announcements
- Schedule meetings to be in-person when possible
- Encourage students to come to office hours

Strategies after the first day - *Ensuring interaction*

Consider integrating the following into your lessons:

- Active learning strategies (e.g. collaborative group work)

- Elements of choice and connection to lived experience

- References to students' past comments

- Responses that show students' their participation is valued, even if you need to correct them

Strategies after the first day - *Ensuring interaction*

Consider integrating the following into your lessons:

- Active learning strategies: debates, small group tasks, presentations

- Making room for introverted students

- Starting lessons with talking about recent events on the campus, or news from the world

- "What did you read or saw this week that you found interesting?"

- Don't let poor participation in a week to discourage you from trying!

Challenges to building community

- Technology use

- Tensions between your relationship with your supervisor and the students (can't be your students)

- Quiet classes or disruptive classes

- Difficult students and hot moments…

Some final thoughts

Don't be hard on yourself, especially sin

 Every class is different and some of your hands.

Take some time to reflect on what's goir

 Then use the **available resources** - co-TAs, professors etc.

Most of your students want you to succeed!

 While it's critical to keep your **authority**, be **honest** and **open** with them.

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Thank you!

Questions?

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