

*CHANGING APATHY AND  
INABILITY TO PRODUCTIVITY:  
PRACTICAL STRATEGIES TO  
CONNECT WITH YOUR  
STUDENTS*

Donna Pawlowski, PhD  
Professor of Communication Studies  
Bemidji State University  
[donna.pawlowski@bemidjistate.edu](mailto:donna.pawlowski@bemidjistate.edu)

Center for Professional  
Development 1-9-19

# QUESTIONS for Discussion

1. What was your best student or classroom interaction last semester?
2. What situation caused you the most concern? Or something that happened that made you say “hmm”?
3. What worked well for you teaching-wise?
4. What didn't go as well as you had planned?

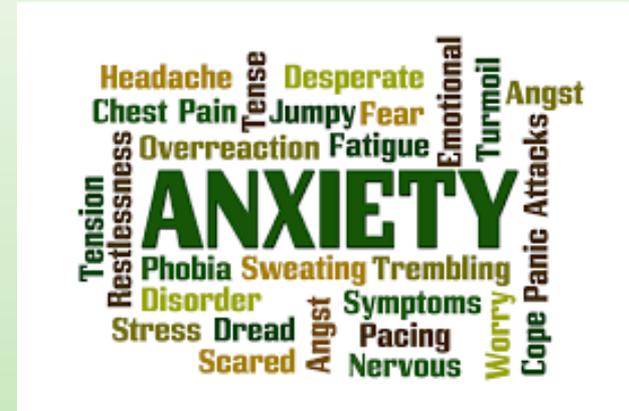
# Goals/Outcomes

- Examine why it is difficult to connect with students
- Identify ways to be more immediate with our students
- Provide general and specific strategies to engage students in our classrooms

# Why do we need this conversation?

- Assumption that students come to college with critical thinking skills
- Incompetent or incomplete work may be perceived as apathy
  - *it may be a student's inability of task, or fear of failure*
- Students “either study too hard to prove their ability to themselves and others or become paralyzed by inadequacy, refusing to take risks” (McAllum, 2016 p. 364)
- Students have difficulty taking responsibility for their actions

- Results:
  - *Anxiousness*
  - *Lower grades*
  - *Depressive symptoms*
  - *Less participation*
  - *Greater test anxiety*



- Each student is different – we can see the outside of their bookbags but need to see the inside of their bookbags

(Bourke & Mechler, 2011; Buckner & Strawser, 2016; Goodboy, Booth-Buterfield, Bolkan, & Griffin, 2015; Houser & Baidridge Frymier, 2009, Pawlowski, 2018)

# Communication Immediacy and Teacher Behaviors

- Communication behaviors that enhance closeness to and nonverbal interaction with another
  - *Used to reduce distance between people*
    - Nonverbal behaviors
    - Verbal behaviors
- “Rapport established between teachers and students, in part, determines the interest and performance level of students” (Teven, 2001, p. 159)
- Students prefer rhetorically and relationally-oriented instructors (Goldman, et al, 2017)
  - *Top rhetorical preferences include content clarity, competence, and relevance*
  - *Top relational preferences include caring, immediacy, and responsiveness*

# Nonverbal Immediacy

- Nonverbal – reduces physical and psychological distance between instructor and student
  - *Enthusiasm*
  - *Expressiveness*

## Expressing NV:

- *Gestures*
- *Vocal variety*
- *Eye contact*
- *Relaxed body position*
- *Appropriate touch*
- *Moving around the classroom - physical proximity*
- *Professional or professional casual dress*
- *Speaking with outline (not reading notes)*
- *Remove barriers between self and students*



# Verbal Immediacy

- Verbal – stylistic expressions used by teachers that develop within students a degree of like or dislike toward teachers
- Structural
  - *Preview previous day*
  - *Preview current day/skeletal outline*
  - *Explains objectives for units*
  - *Transitions to new topics*
  - *Frequently stops for internal summaries*
  - *Reviews main ideas*
    - Do “top 10” and allow various people to respond and participate

# Verbal Immediacy

Simplicity

Clarity

Understanding



## ■ Clarity

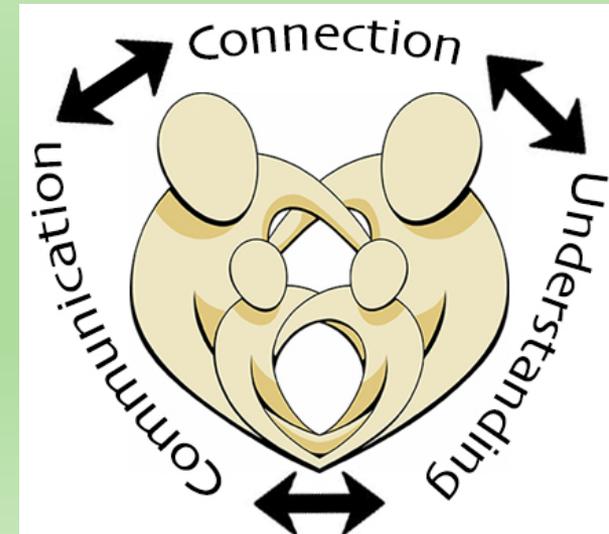
- *Limited filler words (uh, um, like)*
- *Explains in straight forward (common language)*
- *Pace instruction so students have time to comprehend point or topic before moving on*
  - *Use assessment strategies to identify comprehension*
- *Uses examples to which students can relate*
- *Provide samples as a guide*

## ■ General communication behaviors

- *Calling students by name*
- *Use of inclusive pronouns - us - we*
- *Unrelated small talk (outside class)*
- *Feedback to students*
- *Asking for student feedback*
- *Asking students how they feel about things*

# Results of Immediacy Research

- Direct correlation between teacher immediacy and student motivation and learning
- Cognitive learning
- Instructors are perceived as more competent, trustworthy, and caring
- Students have greater positive affect/emotion toward instructor
- Attendance and participation
- Increased out-of-class communication
- Increased assertiveness and responsiveness



# QUESTIONS for Discussion

- Assess your immediacy behaviors in the classroom?
  - *What do you use? What might you consider using in the classroom?*
  
- How could these be used in online classes?

# General Strategies

- Logistical
- Interactive
- Relational

# Logistical

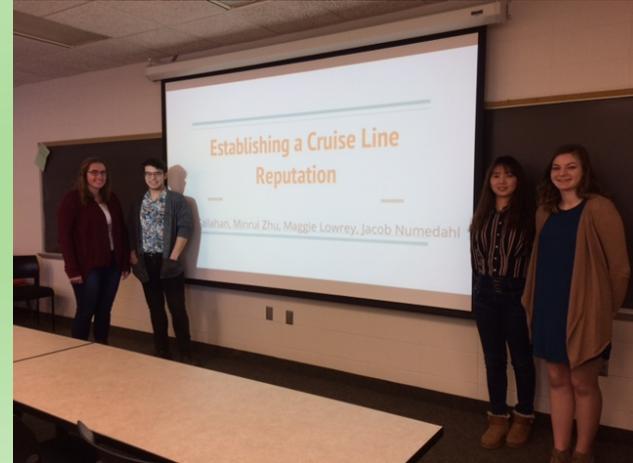
- Provide clear expectations and follow them
- Seek input from students
- Provide rationale and relevance of material

Make your  
expectations  
clear.



# Interactive

- Use variety of teaching strategies and incorporate technology
- Provide opportunities for engagement
- Appeal to attention spans
- Provide interactive and guided group work



# Relational

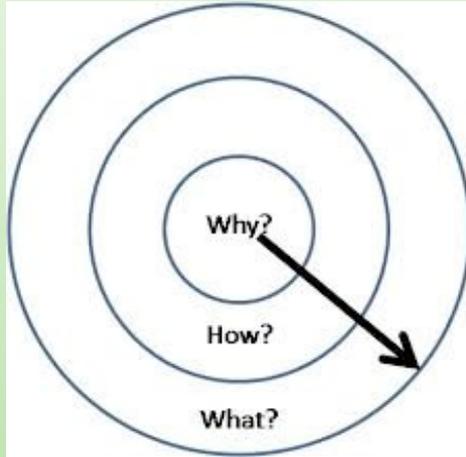
- Create an enjoyable environment
- Teach with compassion and understanding
- Connect on personal level and build rapport
- Give feedback often with sensitivity
- Be a role model and mentor

# QUESTIONS for Discussion

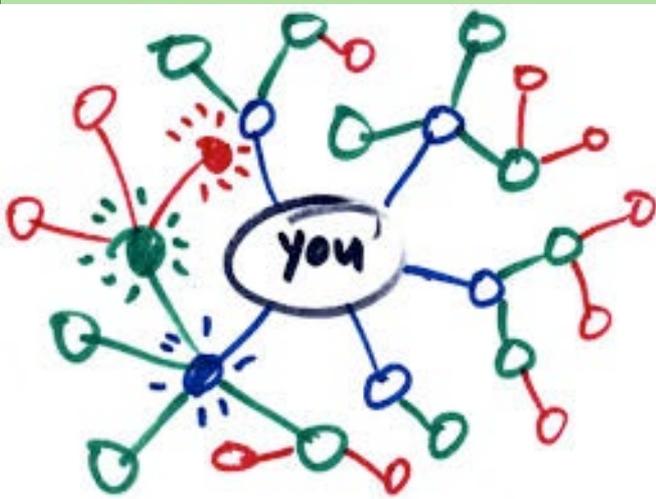
- What examples can you think of that you can use/or do use that reflect these strategies?

Key  
Elements  
to Keep  
in Mind

# Demonstrate Relevance and Rationale



- Help them to understand the why & how to improve
- Help them apply the information
- Connect content with life, academic & personal goals
- Ask questions to help them make connections



# Give Feedback

- Ongoing – not just end of semester
- Give supportive developmental comments
- Let them assess/grade themselves with your rubrics



# Be Clear and Stick with Policies

- If you know – let them know
  - *Timeframe for returning assignments*
  - *Expectations for papers or presentations*
  - *How they will be graded – rubrics*
- Uncertainty is worse for students who anticipate something and then nothing happens – heightens their anxiety
  - *If up to two weeks to return items, then just identify this for students (but try to uphold it as well)*
- Problems arise when there is no policy or policy is not enforced
- Making constant changes is more frustrating

# Specific Strategies and Activities

# Get To Know Your Students

- Ask students to complete Student Data (tell them confidential and only you read the information)
  - *Include general demographic information (include space to identify preferred name)*
  - *3 adjectives to describe self*
  - *Expectations of class*
  - *Concerns of class*
  - *Likes and dislikes*
  - *Topics they enjoy, read, discuss*
  - *Give opportunity for any other information the student may want to share*
- \* *Can sometimes help identify struggles they may be having*
- \* *Allows you to get to know them on a personal level*
- \* *Use items later to help students make links to their lives*

# Staged Assignments/Chunking

- Break up activities
- Smaller – staged projects with mini assignments

*Ex:*

- *Project proposal*
- *Sample research articles*
- *Practice with APA*
- *Workshop*
- *Peer review of materials*
- *Draft of literature reviews (but grade them)*
- *Re-writes with application*

- Important to make/ask about links to life/career with each step so they see connections, and not just an assignment
  - *For the activity and the process*



# Communication Civility Code

- What is civility/respectful communication?
- What is incivility?
- Make a list of behaviors for students and instructor that promote positive communication toward others/civility?

Behaviors to consider when listening to speakers	General Classroom Behaviors (toward each other/me/working in groups)	Behaviors speakers should consider
	Students:  Instructor:	

- How do our communication behaviors affect others in the classroom? Affect us outside the classroom (jobs, hanging out on campus, in our personal lives)?
- How do our behaviors link to BSU code of conduct?
- How can we stay accountable for our behaviors in the classroom and toward each other?

# Asking Questions



- Ask questions that may have multiple “right” answers
  - *Reveal comprehension*
  - *Invite critical thinking*
    - What do you think is important for...
    - What concept did you consider as most important for...
    - Would you rather X or Y?
    - How do concepts relate to your life?
    - In what ways does X link to Y?
    - What did the readings make you think of?
    - What can you compare the readings to in your own lives?
    - What surprised you about the readings?
    - What are 3 supporting points for X?
  
- In groups, as individuals, assign in advance
- In class, give students 30 seconds to think about or jot down an answer
  - *Think-Pair-Share with a peer before responding to whole class*
  - *Write-Pair-Share with a peer before responding to whole class*

# Group Work



- Create groups to discuss and compare individual assignments for that day
  - *If students know they will be in groups; more likely to take accountability and have assignment completed*
- Mix up groups each day
- Ask someone from group to report out
- Have someone else report out each time groups meet
  - *Doesn't matter is not same groups – likely someone who has not spoken for a while in random groups*
- Designate specific groups to report out specific parts of activity
  
- IF you have same groups for some particular project, rotate facilitators of each group meeting so all are equally taking leadership roles
  - *Provide some guidance with this process*

# Making Groups

- Put items on index cards and have students match items:
  - *Holiday traditions*
  - *Candy brands – take a piece of candy and find partners or groups*
  - *Disney characters (find common movie with characters)*
  - *Activities/sports you do in different seasons (summer, winter...)*
  - *Colored index cards*
  - *Numbers from deck of cards*
  - *Puzzle pieces*
- Line students up in 2 even rows – have people who face each other be partners
- Line up by birthdays – group with those closest to Jan, etc.
- Complete group preference sheet – for more ongoing/semester project group work

# Critical

## Thinking...Writing...Communicating...

- Ask students (individually) to identify what it looks like/behaviors related to/what you do when you “think”
  - “write”
  - “communicate”
- Then ask students to be in class groups and compare responses
- Now ask groups what it looks like to CRITICALLY think, write, and communicate
- Discuss differences in responses – follow up with more discussion about critical thinking if needed
- This allows them to see and describe the difference in just being present or critically being present
  - *Not just accepting or doing, but being involved in questioning arguments and conclusions; communicating various points of view, identifying inconsistencies, approaching problems systematically, determining importance of ideas, understanding links between ideas, etc.*
- Remind them during the semester to critically think, write, and communicate

# Speed Dating

- Can be done with syllabus elements, getting to know each other in class, understanding concepts in class, review for exams
  - *With syllabus, ask students what questions they have about the class – have them write down their questions*
  - *Have them also write down questions they want to know about each other in class*
  - *Have students face each other and ask questions about syllabus and of each other – each pair asks one syllabus question and one “get to know you” question*
  - *Time each pair with buzzer – stop periodically to report out what was learned about class/each other*
    - Helps students understand syllabus
    - Find commonalities with each other
    - Identifies areas of syllabus that need more clarification
  
- Prepare questions in advance and/or ask students to create questions if you need additional questions
  - *How important is attendance?*
  - *Why is it important to put away phones in class?*
  - *What happens if you don't turn in a paper?*

# Chapter Reflections and/or Mind Maps

## 1-3-1

- 1 discussion question
  - *Something you want from classmates – something from chapter you found intriguing – something you didn't understand*
- 3 Golden Nuggets
  - *Interesting concepts from text – provide page number, and brief explanation and understanding of concept*
- 1 practical example – link to text and demonstrate how it relates to life-society-relationships

(Class group discussion with break out responses)

## Mind Maps

- Ask students to come with a 1-2 page map of the chapter

# Assessment of Knowledge and Application

- Classroom Assessment Techniques – CATS
- What do I already know?
  - *Ask students in class groups to identify what they know about the topic, where they have questions, and what confused them*
  - *Helps to better assess where to spend energies for the day*
- Fill in blanks
  - *Give skeletal outline and have students complete as you discuss materials in class*
- Minute Paper – (beginning or end) - most significant – most confusing – where they have questions – what they learned today...
- Crystal Clear/Muddiest point – what was most solidified/what do they still have questions about
- Concept Sorting – concepts and definitions from text – have students match them in groups

\*Some items taken from Angelo & Cross, 1993



# References

- Angelo, T. A., & Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Bart, M. (2011, November 16). The five R's of engaging millennial students. *Faculty Focus; Higher Ed Teaching Articles from Magna Publications*. Retrieved from <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/the-five-rs-of-engaging-millennial-students/>
- Bean, J. C. (2011). *Engaging ideas: The professor's guide to integrative writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Wiley & Sons, Inc
- Bolkan, S. & Goodboy, A. K. (2014). Communicating charisma in instructional settings: Indicators and effects of charismatic teaching. *College Teaching*, 62(4), 136-142.
- Boss, J. (2016, Feb 26). How millennials are disrupting the workforce – for the better. *Forbes* <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffboss/2016/02/26/how-millennials-are-disrupting-the-workforce-for-the-better/#3ef0d9e13ef0>
- Bourke, B., & Mechler, H. S. (2010). A new me generation? The increasing self-interest among millennial college students. *Journal of College & Character*, 11(2), 1-9.
- Buckner, M. M., & Strawser, M. G. (2016). “Me”llennials and the paralysis of choice: Reigniting the purpose of higher education, *Communication Education*, 65(3), 361-363. doi:10.1080/03634523.2016.1177845.
- Goodboy, A. K., Booth-Butterfield, M., Bolkan, S., & Griffin, D. J. (2015). The role of instructor humor and students' educational orientations in student learning, extra effort, participation, and out-of-class communication. *Communication Quarterly*, 63(1), 44-61. doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2014.965840.
- Goldman, Z. W., Cranmer, G. A., Sollitto, M., & Lancaster, A. L. (2017). What do college students want? A prioritization of instructional behaviors and characteristics. *Communication Education*, 66(3), 1-19. doi:10.1080/03634523.2016.1265135.

# References

- Houser, M. & Bainbridge Frymier, A. (2009). The role of student characteristics and teacher behaviors in students' learner empowerment. *Communication Education*, 58(1), 35-53.
- McAllum, K. (2016). Managing imposter syndrome among the "Trophy Kids": Creating teaching practices that develop independence in Millennial students. *Communication Education*, 65(3), 363-365. DOI: 10.1080/03634523.2016.1177848
- Pawlowski, D. R. (2018). Embracing millennials in higher education: Examining dialectics and creating pedagogical strategies for teaching millennials. In M. A. Ashlock & A. Atay (Eds.), *Examining millennials reshaping organizational cultures: From theory to practice* (pp. 155-174). Lanham, MA: Lexington Books.
- Rocca, K.A. (2004). College student attendance: Impact of instructor immediacy and verbal aggression. *Communication Education*, 53, 185-195.
- Rosa, N. M., & Hasting, S. O. (2016). Managers making sense of millennials: Perceptions of a generation cohort. *Qualitative Research Research Reports in Communication*, 17(1), 52-5.
- Teven, J. J. (2001) The relationships among teacher characteristics and perceived caring. *Communication Education*, 50(2), 159-169, DOI: 10.1080/03634520109379241
- The Teaching Professor (2009). *Building student engagement: 15 Strategies for the college classroom*. [www.FacultyFocus.com](http://www.FacultyFocus.com)
- Tredgold, G. (2017). 4 Simple things every team wants from their leader. [Inc.com](http://Inc.com)
- The Center for Educational Research and Development. (nd). Retrieved from [https://certi.mst.edu/media/administrative/certi/documents/Teaching\\_Millennials\\_chart.pdf](https://certi.mst.edu/media/administrative/certi/documents/Teaching_Millennials_chart.pdf)