
STRATEGY ONE: BUILDING A STRONG CLASSROOM COMMUNITY

Teachers help set the tone and culture of their classes. When teachers create an environment where students feel welcomed and included, students are more motivated and likely to engage (Shernoff, 2013). There are a number of techniques and strategies teachers can use to build a strong classroom community for any age or level of learner. One strategy is building stronger student to student relationships. In this week's Teacher's Corner, we offer three suggestions to promote student-student relationships. You can use these in your own classrooms as you work toward greater student engagement.

LEVEL

Any

MATERIALS

- List of possible questions for Question of the Day (Appendix A)

PREPARATION

- While lesson planning, ask yourself, "How will I support, develop, and enhance our classroom community today?"

STRATEGIES

Meet & Greet (Icebreakers)

Objective: Students will begin to develop relationships with fellow classmates and the teacher.

Meet & Greet activities are usually done on the first day of class as a way for the teacher and students to learn more about each other. Some teachers spend the whole class getting to know students on the first day with intricate icebreakers. These icebreakers and *Meet & Greet* activities get students talking and support both teacher-student relationships and student-student relationships. Supporting and developing strong teacher-student and student-student relationships are vital to creating and maintaining a strong

classroom community. The more students and teachers know about each other, the more accountable they feel to the classroom community. Here's an icebreaker that engages learners and prompts discussion.

1. Put students into groups of 3-4. On the first day of class, simply group them according to where they sit. For example, walk to three students sitting next to one another and tell them they are now a group.
2. Ask each student to write down a number between 1 and 10.
3. Tell students to share the number they wrote with their group.
4. Explain that first, students should introduce themselves by name. Then, students will use their numbers as a guide for how many things they will share about themselves with the group. For example, a student who wrote 7 will have to tell the group 7 things about himself.
5. Give groups time to talk beyond what they share. This might mean using almost 10 minutes to complete this activity. Remember, you want students to spend time talking with one another.
 - a. As the teacher, circulate and listen as a way to silently meet students. Make notes about students' names and what they share in order to get to know them.
6. At the end of the activity, tell the groups to exchange contact information. They can share phone numbers, email, social media names, or additional contact information.
 - a. Explain that they should reach out to their classmates if they have a question about homework, want to study together, etc. This way, students support one another's success in the classroom.
7. After students have exchanged information, ask them to write down their name and the things they shared with their group. Students then submit this to you, so you have information about each student.
 - a. Collect the information sheets.

- b. If you choose, ask each student to introduce someone in his/her group to the rest of the class. As students introduce classmates, make notes on the student information sheets so that you can use the information to learn more about your students.

Question of the Day (QOD)

Objective: Students will get to know most/all of their classmates so that they feel more comfortable working on class activities and lessons.

At the beginning of the school year, plan to use 2-3 minutes at the beginning of every class for a QOD activity. QOD activities are designed for students to get to know one another. These activities are simple and take very little time, but they support student engagement throughout the whole school term.

1. Before class, write a question on the board that will serve as the QOD. The QOD can be funny, personal, or fun, but it should be something that generates discussion. It is best to choose something that is unrelated to class as it gives students a chance to develop personal relationships. For example, you could write a *Would you rather* question on the board such as:
Would you rather be able to speak all human languages or speak all animal languages?
See Appendix A for more suggestions.
2. Once students arrive, ask them to find a person they have not met and discuss the QOD.
 - a. As the teacher, you might need to facilitate partners. Encourage students to stand and walk to the other side of the room to find someone new.
 - b. Students introduce themselves to each other and then answer the QOD.
3. After a few minutes, ask students to return to their seats.
4. Check in with students and ask if anyone wants to share a response.
 - a. Try to encourage but not force answers. The purpose is for students to meet each other.

Depending on how often you meet with students, you could do this short activity every day for one to four weeks. For example, if your class meets daily and is small, you may want to consider doing this activity each day for one week. Bigger classes that meet once a week might want to do this activity for one month.

Review Mingle

Objective: Students will collaborate to review and explain the content of a lesson.

The Review Mingle occurs at the end of a lesson or at the end of class and gives students an opportunity to review what they've learned with classmates. This activity is fairly open and often starts with a question that asks students to contemplate what they learned.

1. Tell students that it is time to mingle. Ask everyone to stand.
2. Ask students to walk around the room discussing the lesson just learned.
 - a. Offer one open-ended question that prompts discussion such as: *What was difficult about today's lesson? What did you learn today? What is one question you still have?*
 - b. Encourage students to talk to one or multiple classmates.
 - c. Remind students to introduce themselves if they don't know their classmate.
 - d. Explain that they must walk around the room to find someone. This encourages relationship building between students. It also gets them away from solely communicating with the classmates that sit close to them.
3. After a few minutes, feel free to bring the group back together to share. An alternative is to allow students to review this way until class ends.

The activities presented this week are two ways to build relationships among students. Strong student-student relationships help foster a more inclusive classroom and engage all students.

REFERENCES

Shernoff, David J. (2013). Optimal Learning Environments to Promote Student Engagement. Retrieved from <http://www.eplib.com>

APPENDIX A

Possible questions for Question of the Day

- What do you want to be when you grow up?
- What is your favorite thing to eat for breakfast?
- If you could have any superpower, what superpower would you choose?
- Would you rather live in a world without lies or live in a world where you have all the power?
- Would you rather taste color or smell sound?
- Which animal best describes you?
- If you could choose to be any animal, what would you choose?
- Would you rather have your grandmother sing at your high school graduation or have your grandfather rap at your wedding?
- Tell me about one of the most important people in your life.
- Would you rather watch your favorite sport or play your favorite sport?
- Where would you most like to travel?
- If you had to eat one food for the rest of your life, which would you choose?
- If you could meet anyone, whom would you want to meet?
- What is your favorite part of everyday? What do you do during that time?
- What is a song that makes you happy?
- What is your favorite holiday?
- Tell me about your best friend.
- Would you rather spend the day inside while it rains or outside in the sunshine?