



Mental Health

Pedagogical Suggestions, Resources and Practices to Support Students' Mental Health

Teaching & Classroom Climate



Learning Design Team

Concept



“Mental health and inclusive pedagogy should not be seen as separate domains. It is critical to assess students' levels and design experiences and environments supportive of diverse needs (Jarvis, 2011).”



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Readiness. Be mindful of the student's readiness in the subject matter when possible. Educators may also consider incorporating strategies to address readiness, such as scaffolding.

Strategies and Suggestions

Scaffold. If possible, consider scaffolding the learning experience. Educators are encouraged to provide their learners with knowledge checklists related to their subject matter (e.g., before you master skill B, it is important to master skill A). They may also consider designing learning experiences specifically targeted to build the necessary knowledge and skills.

Sources and resources.

Educators may also consider discussing with their learners some sources and resources for extra support to master pre-required skills. For example, students that need to improve writing skills before being able to engage fully with the subject matter may benefit from support from the writing center and/or peer tutoring if available.

Various approaches. Educators may use various approaches in order to be mindful and proactive about the readiness of their learners and promote well-being. Upon selecting the best approaches to support students' well-being educators should consider ensuring their students that all learners may be at different levels and that they can support their development and learning. When educators attend to their learner's readiness and support their students, they may contribute to the classroom climate, well-being, and performance. As Crow (2017) pointed out, when educators "think through the conditions needed to fully support learning and create the conditions where their learners "can learn anything," all learners can "reach their potential."



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Interpersonal & Intra-team conflict. When addressing conflict, it is critical to respond to "... classroom conflict promptly, consistently, and respectfully "(Goldman & Eiduson, 2021).

Strategies and Suggestions

Assume a facilitator role.

Interpersonal and intra-team conflict can and may occur in the classroom. While its causes vary, research indicates that interpersonal conflicts are often rooted in, "...lack of communication, personal interests, previous conflicts, issues of power, or political and ideological differences" (Valente et al., 2020, p. 4). In the occurrence of conflicts, act as a facilitator. As a facilitator, be mindful of power dynamics and consider implementing the following strategies:

- 1) clarify with curiosity,
- 2) separate people from the problem, and
- 3) assess the process together.

(CSU Channel Islands, 2022).

Intra-team conflict and team

charters. Be proactive, consistent, and respectful regardless of the type of conflict. It is also a good practice to attend to intra-teams conflicts as they can escalate to the interpersonal level. When assigning group work, consider assigning a completion of a team charter as part of the assignment.



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Empathy & Connection. "... Empathy and care are much needed for students with mental illnesses because there would be little connection or effective learning as a result if the professor did not empathize or care to understand why a student acted in a particular way" (Hasio, 2016, p. 29).

Strategies and Suggestions

Empathy and connection.

Educators should consider building trust through empathy and connection. It is a good practice to send a welcoming video or email prior to the start of the class. This strategy may relieve anxiety and promote well-being. The concept of a [Liquid Syllabus](#) has been gaining momentum in Higher Education and may be a good starting point to promote well-being in the classroom. A Liquid Syllabus is "a humanizing element that ensures students start a course feeling supported by their instructor" (Pacansky-Brock, 2021).

Empathy. Educators should also consider making efforts to be [empathetic](#). To build empathy and connection, educators should consider reinforcing to their learners that they are not alone.

Connection. In order to be empathetic in the classroom, educators may also consider slowing down, pausing, and softening the tone of their voice to build connection. Slowing down and pausing gives the educator time to process emotions and connect with previous experiences. When possible, educators should also imagine themselves in the learner's situation. This strategy shows a kind of attentiveness that conveys empathy and understanding. To build connection, educators should be willing, whenever possible, to shift their perspective and focus on feelings and situations that they experienced in the past that may be similar to what the student may be currently experiencing (Hasio, 2016; Brown, 2013). Implementing and/or being mindful of empathy and connection as part of the classroom experience and dynamics may contribute to the well-being of all learners.



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Preventive and Proactive Measures. "Mental and behavioral health problems are also learning problems" (Douce & Keeling, 2014, p. 1).

Strategies and Suggestions

Healthy connections as a preventive measure. Be mindful of recurring themes that may signify struggles, such as absenteeism, disinterest, and performance behaviors. Educators should consider including in their syllabus a list of student organizations, sources of mental health support, and support communities that students may partner with to feel a sense of belonging and well-being (Goldman & Eiduson, 2021; Wiest, Treacy, 2019).

Mindful Minutes. Educators who do not feel comfortable discussing or engaging in conversations related to mental health resources during class should consider incorporating Mindful Minutes before, during, and or after instructional time. During these mindful minutes, educators should provide students with space and time to review health and supportive services available on and off campus.

Mindful Minutes & reflection.

Mindful Minutes can also be used to reflect, take a mental break, or practice being present (Joy et al., 2019). These types of available support should be normalized rather than stigmatized in higher education.

Active learning and transitions.

We may all have heard about the benefits and value of active learning in higher education. However, such an approach may need modifications to support all learners' well-being. Some learners may feel anxious during transitions and/or active learning activities and fear being called to spot. Hsu and Goldsmith (2021) caution that "some active-learning strategies (e.g., cold-calling) that can increase stress" and recommend that educators "take steps to decrease anxiety when using active-learning techniques, such as structuring groups carefully or allowing students to form their own groups" (Hsu & Goldsmith, 2021, p.3).



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Signals. Educators should also consider giving signals during classroom transitions. Signals during active learning and transitions are preventive and proactive measures that may reduce classroom anxiety and stress. To minimize anxiety and stress during transitions, educators may consider using a responsive classroom chime as a tool for clues and reminders during transitions.



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