Learning Your Students' Names – Simple yet Powerful

"Names have power." - Rick Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*

Knowing our students' names seems "nice to do" but we might not make this a priority. Perhaps we say that "we're bad with names" or teach large classes. Consider this – developing positive rapport with students supports their engagement and motivation in class. This rapport helps to establish a positive course climate as well as classroom civility [7]. Knowing your students' names, using them, and encouraging students to do the same all help to create community and reduce anonymity, which in part can help address cheating (see [1 and 3]). Finally, building rapport with students humanizes you.

How might you go about the process of learning names? Tips to learn your students' names are widely available (for example, see [2-6, 8]). Here are some of my favorite strategies. It's best to start on the first day of class, but it's never too late to learn your students' names. As a first day activity, I give each student a blank sheet of paper, provide markers, and ask them to each to make a tent card with their preferred name to place in front of them. I collect these tent cards at the end of one class and hand out them out at the beginning of next class until I've learned everyone's names. Handing out papers (including tent cards and graded work) helps me to learn my students' names.   At the beginning, I ask my students for their forgiveness if I misidentify their names and ask for their help. I also use my institution's student database system to view student photos and challenge myself to correctly identify their names, working with a subset at a time.

In addition, I model the behavior that I want to see. I introduce myself to my students and let them know the name(s) I would like to them to call me. I practice using my students' names at every opportunity. I arrive to class a few minutes early and greet students by name (and ask them their name if I haven't learned it yet). In class, I call on students by name rather than only those who raise their hands. I also refer to students by name and ask them to learn and use each other's names during class activities and discussions (this strategy also can be used online). Outside of class, I ask students to remind me of their names (if I don't know them) and use their names to greet them or thank them for coming by when they come to my office or if I see them elsewhere.

References

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