Building Community in the Online Classroom

Magical words from R. Baughman, EdS

First Thought When Approached (with this lovely topic!)

I have a *_few years_* of experience building community in the online environment!

Figure 1

Note: Horror Clown. (2020, September 30). Nong V. https://unsplash.com/photos/PbspBt8DOyY

Snapshot:

-Build it (community, cool restaurant, etc.) and they will come – also 'they' may keep following you if you've built something worthwhile.

-To build community, you must establish connection. It's as "simple" as that. Thanks for coming to my presentation!

Building Community: In the Beginning

"Seek out the best in people and when you find it, say something about it."

-Brenda Nathan, *The One-Minute Gratitude Journal*

"And when you do this – be yourself, your true, authentic self."

- Rhonda

Building Community:
Step One – Be Wise, Take Others into Account 1/2

- *"Students need to feel individually valued and respected, connected to both people and the process involved in their education" (Eberhardt, 2019. p. 211)*

It's not about showing everyone how smart you are, nor that you must have an opinion on *everything*.

- *According to Eberhardt (2019), "wise feedback" doesn't just involve blunt yet truthful criticism, but also expressing assurance in a student's potential.*

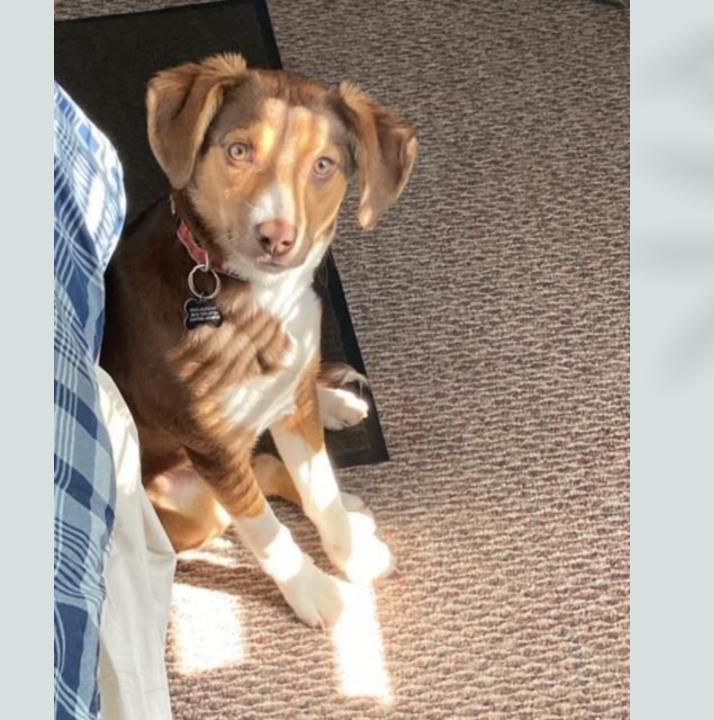# Step One: Be Wise, Take Others into Account 2/(pretend 2)

building community means taking others into account as well as yourself. Sounds obvious – except it's difficult. Life is all about *being human* – and we only understand I, feel it from within our own subjective experience. We talk about objectivity; we love quantifiable data; we love idioms we treat as facts, like the Golden Rule – do unto others as ... well, you know; we love truths that come from the experiments using the scientific method; and we love talking about empathy as if everyone has the capability or knows how to access it. For all these things just mentioned – people must be considered: readers expect 3rd POV for objectivity in essays; when gathering data, conducting experiments if there are humans involved, we need to communicate to them their rights as subjects; and certainly Golden Rule and empathy are about people but at their core – it's all about you. If we're Golden Rule'ing, by gum we expect others to be Golden Rule'ing too. Now, I'm not saying people are inherently selfish, but we do most often lean in the ideas of following our id, self-preservation, and avoiding anything that could bruise our egos. Now in the midst of all this people'ing and trying to BUILD community, you have to build for others and not just build for yourself.

(For Real Now)
Step One: Be Wise, Take Others into Account 2/(almost for real 2)

You mean:

I have to take YOU, as the audience into account when creating slides about taking others into account? Can I be selfish about nothing in my presence while establishing online community?

Step One – Be Wise, Take Others into Account 2/2

- To build community, you don't have to be completely altruistic BUT you do have to take others into account (as well as yourself). Sounds obvious – except it's not, and it's difficult.

Now, I'm not saying people are inherently selfish, but:

- We mostly follow our id

- We lean self-preservation, and

- We avoid things that could bruise our egos

Building Community: Step 2
The Best of Intentions 1/4

- We believe we have ONLY the BEST interests and learning and experience of others in mind – I can guarantee there are people you have not taken into consideration. Do not beat yourself up. Simply try again to focus on inclusivity.

- Be vulnerable, Be you: There's only *one* YOU: So, go in as you, not a persona

- Provide lots of feedback and ongoing dialogue (including providing lots of feedback and establishing ongoing dialogue (in the discussions, Course Q&A, gradebook and rubric boxes, and email. Portal email/SMS/other activities)

Note: My routine:

Check PMI email, log in to BB and check for email in BB, review Course Q&A, respond in discussions <begin to save gradebook feedback with the first poster>, thoroughly grade assignments, enter past due 0s leave feedback in comment box/send portal reminder), final pass in gradebook for anything needing re-graded or the little flag tweaked.)

Building Community: The Best of Intentions 2/4

<u>EXAMPLE of response to student in discussion re: MindTap (Context: Student felt behind and that she was doing poorly – she was not.)</u>

Hey L----!

I appreciate your response to my post! I'll be totally honest and let you in on a few secrets I had to pay a couple grand for in a few degree program: On MindTap scores for instance - and I'll use contractions as an example. Ask yourself questions like this: When is the last time you *heard* of the word contraction? When's the last time you *read* about contractions? When's the last time you *thought* about contractions? When's the last time you *cared* about contractions? When's the last time someone *talked* to you about the riveting idea of contractions? And finally, when's the last time you *practiced* contractions?

If your answers to these questions were like: I have no idea; I don't know and really don't care; and it's been a very long time - you're not alone! My experience and those degrees taught me that just because you heard of something, say, in 3rd grade - one time and maybe mastered it or maybe didn't; that you might not recall it AT ALL 20 years later. Why? Well, it's not because we're dumb. No, we don't recall it simply because we've not heard of the word in a long time if we've heard of it all; we haven't read about out it until maybe this class; we have other pressing matters on our minds; I don't actually care about it; I haven't thought about it at all; no one has ever talked about it with me; and I only practice this one time here for points.

Now there are lots of fancy words for all of this - what would degrees and books be without fancy words (like *subjective value* and *efficacy expectancies* ... just for fun starts) but what I found MOST IMPORTANT is this: THOSE questions above (and your answers!) apply to a LOT of things in life. I tell myself this when I forget things (like random grammar rules OR a friend recalls something from 25 years ago an I draw a blank). If I haven't thought about this *rule* or *memory* nor used it in ANY way (ever or not for a very long time), then *why* would I expect to recall it? That's not how **memory works. IT's the same for students. How could I expect a class of 20 DIFFERENT kinds of people (and different in so many ways) to remember something they may or may not have seen 20 years ago. That's why some of those MindTap exercises are worth 3 points and not 30 ;-p It's just a refresh. You can leisurely go through the exercises and ask me questions or you can simply boogie through the exercises and zip onto the next thing.**

Best, Rhonda

Building Community: The Best of Intentions 3/4

• Two surefire ways to *not build* community online?

--Leave NO feedback at all or

--Copy/paste vague sentences like "Good job." "Nice paper." "Neato" and "Way to go!" That's as unhelpful as everyone gets an A (100)! Boo boo bonus: Students don't want to see in a discussion that you spent 7 seconds on each post and all between 11pm-12am on the day after the discussion closes.

--Be presumptuous, close-minded, judgmental, and overly critical about everything *especially* re: things you don't like, don't agree with, or don't understand

Building Community: The Best of Intentions 4/4

"… a belief in one's own abilities in either direction – strong or weak – can seriously impede one's metacognitive processes and hence learning and development" (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 201).

- Address students' beliefs about learning directly
- Broaden students' understanding of learning
- Help students set realistic expectations

Climate

Helpful Notes Toward Positivity and Inclusivity

Remember my "take others into consideration?"

… Well, forget for a moment we're in Year 3-ish of a pandemic and we're all completely traumatized, and note:

"Students are not only intellectual but also social and emotional beings" (Ambrose et al., 2010, p.156).

And so are instructors.

E-Z: Climate can be good (inclusive, productive) or bad (chilly, marginalizing; Climate can be blatant or subtle (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 170-171, 180)

Strategies that Promote Student Development and Product Climate (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 180-186)

- Make uncertainty safe

- Resist a singe right answer

- Incorporate evidence into performance and grading criteria

- Examine your assumptions about students

- Be mindful of low-ability cue

- Do not ask individuals to speak for an entire group

- Reduce anonymity

- Model inclusive language, behavior, and attitudes

- Use multiple and diverse examples

- Establish and reinforce ground rules for interaction

- Make sure course content does not marginalize students

- Use syllabus, first day of class materials to establish climate

- Set up processes to procure feedback on climate

- Anticipate, prepare for potentially sensitive issues

- Address tensions early

- Turn discord and tension into a learning opportunity

- Facilitate active listening

Strategies for Building Online Community

Strategies to Establish Value

Strategies to Help Students Build Positive Expectancies

Strategies that Address Value *and* Expectancies

(Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 83-87)

Establishing Value

- Connect material to student interests

- Provide authentic, real world tasks

- Show relevance to students' current academic lives

- Demonstrate relevance of higher-level skills to students' future professional lives

- Identify and reward what you value

- Show your own passions and enthusiasm for discipline

Build Positive Expectancies

- Ensure alignment of objectives, assessments, and instructional strategies
- Identify appropriate level of challenge
- Create assignments that provide appropriate level of challenge
- Provide early success opportunities
- Articulate your expectations
- Provide rubrics
- **Provide targeted feedback (deep dive)**
- Be fair
- Educate students about the ways we explain *success* and *failure*
- Describe effective study strategies

Value and Expectancies

- Provide flexibility and control
- Give students the opportunity to reflect

Deep Dive:
"Addressing the Need for Targeted Feedback" (Class and WC) (Ambrose et al., 2010, p. 148-152)

- Look for patterns of errors in student work
- Prioritize
- Balance strengths and weaknesses
- Design frequent opportunities
- Group level
- Real-time at the group level
- Peer feedback
- Require students to address *how* they used feedback in subsequent work

Top 3 Items to Nurture
(in an online environment)

Obvious items research will tell us:

-COMMUNICATION

-SAFETY

-INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION

Top 3 Items to Nurture (in an online environment)

A *little less obvious* but I'm sure research is in there somewhere:

1. *sense of humor; 2. unconditional support; 3. dedication (be the ball)*

Figure 2

Note: Caddyshack gopher. (1980, July 25). Warner Bros. Pictures via YouTube. https://www.thecurrent.org/feature/2015/04/03/930-coffee-break-all-right-songs

Ooooo, wait. Actually, there's more …

- No fear
- Be a great storyteller
- Show humility
- Demonstrate that you're human

(back to that whole vulnerable, and I feel old, but I still don't know everything even though I think I should some days …)

And Still More!
Weird Writer Rhonda Kicks in!

Listen to feedback from a trusted mentor – no mentor? Find one. You're never too young and you're never too old. You're never too perfect and never too famous – it's one of the easiest ways to network, grow, evolve in your field.

Really listen to feedback, the good, the bad, the 'I have no idea what you're saying right now' as from mentors, colleagues, supervisors, AND students. Are you going to use it all? No. Might there be some valuable, advantageous, worthwhile gems in there? Oh, yes. (And if the weird writer in me is to be honest, much of the time a lot of my writing inspiration comes from down time and feedback.

Weird Writer Still Here! So, I'm Not Stopping Yet!

Fiction Novels and Teaching are similar to me:

"… we don't wait. We begin imagining right out of the gate, immediately upon beginning a book" (Mendelsund, 2014, p.52)

When teaching students, they unveil themselves little by little over the term(s) you work with them.

What's Some Research Say?

Two of My Favorite Links for Later Reading

Debunking the "preferred learning style myth"

[The Stubborn Myth of "Learning Styles" - Education Next](#)

Because whatever you tell you yourself is true … so what stories are you telling yourself?

What Stories Are You Telling Yourself? (hbr.org)

Final References and Suggested Readings

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