

# Norms

*Sense of Belonging*  
*Breakout Groups*

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✓ **Be fully present.**

Be fully present.

✓ **Step up, step back.**

Participants should be aware of how much they are speaking. If they feel they are speaking a lot, they should let others speak, and if they find themselves not talking, they should try to contribute some comments, ideas or suggestions.

✓ **Be aware of intent and impact.**

Our intent is how we would like our messages and actions to be received. However, other factors influence the way our messages and actions effect others. Therefore, we must take responsibility for the impact that we have on others, regardless of our intent.

✓ **"Try on" other perspectives.**

Just as we have to try on clothes to see how they fit us before we make a judgement about them, we have to "try on" new ideas.

✓ **Keep things moving.**

Let us work together to keep the workshop moving efficiently and to meet the goals set forth in our agenda.

**Others?**

Personal Values Affirmation Exercise\*

Wisdom	Power	Initiative	Curiosity
Winning	Personal	Independence	Creativity
Well-being	Growth	Humor	Courtesy
Wealth	Perseverance	Humility	Courage
Volunteering	Patriotism	Hope	Cooperation
Truth	Patience	Honesty	Conflict Resolution
Trust	Orderliness	Heritage	Confidence
Tradition	Optimism	Health	Competitiveness
Teamwork	Openness	Harmony	Competence
Success	Open	Generosity	Compassion
Spirituality	Communication	Fun	Community
Simplicity	Nature	Friendship	Commitment
Service	Mercy	Freedom	Collaboration
Self-reliance	Making a	Forgiveness	Civility
Self-esteem	Difference	Flexibility	Caring
Self-discipline	Loyalty	Fitness	Boldness
Safety	Love	Financial Stability	Beauty
Sacrifice	Listening	Family	Ambition
Romance	Learning	Fame	Adaptability
Risk-taking	Leadership	Faith	Achievement
Responsibility	Kindness	Fairness	Accountability
Respect	Justice	Excellence	
Resilience	Joy	Ethical Behavior	
Reputation	Job security	Enthusiasm	
Religion	Intuition	Efficiency	
Reliability	Integrity	Dignity	
Productivity	Inspiration	Dependence	

*\*Bandwidth Recovery: Helping Students Reclaim Cognitive Resources Lost to Poverty, Racism, and Social Marginalization* Cia Verscheldon, 2017, page 81

## **Bandwidth Recovery Activity and Gallery Walk**

**Total Time: 40 minutes**

**Materials: Bandwidth Chapter Excerpts, highlighters and pens, Large Post-its, small Post-its, Easel markers**

**5 minutes:** Each group is assigned a chapter section with one of the 6 Belonging Strategies:

1. Values Affirmation (Page 79-82)
2. Connecting the Known to the Unknown (Page 82-84)
3. Identification with Academic Self (Page 84-86)
4. Pecha Kucha Life Reports (Page 86-90)
5. Relationship-Building in Classes (Page 87-92)
6. Helping Relationships: Mattering (Page 93-95)

**5 minutes:** Participants read their chapter excerpts individually

**10 minutes:** Table groups discuss the reading and create a poster addressing the questions “How would I describe this activity/idea to someone who has never heard of it?” and “How could this activity/idea be adapted for our work with students?”

**10 minutes:** Gallery walk. All participants circulate the room, reading the other team’s posters and responding with small Post-its. They can ask questions, respond directly to the poster, respond to someone else’s comments on the poster, etc. This activity is silent—participants are only responding in writing. When participants have finished, they may return to their posters to read their responses.

**10 minutes:** Whole group debrief: What stood out to you? What resonates with you?

**Figure 11.1. (Continued)**

1. From the list, circle the 10 values that you consider to be the most important in your life.
2. Think for a bit about each of those 10 values. Put a second circle around the 3 that are the most important of all of them.
3. Write a letter explaining to another student in your class why these values are important to you and what difference they have made in your life. Give some examples of things you have done or choices you have made in your life based on these 3 values.

Although this affirmation exercise is fairly straightforward, a few cautions are in order. The list of values needs to include those to which students can relate. A good practice is to instruct students during the intervention that if there is something that they value that's not on the list, then they may add it. The point is to affirm each student's perspective, so the specific list of values is not material to the exercise. The person doing the exercise must be sincere; if not, students will realize it. For example, an instructor who has shown hostility to students in a certain group who then asks them to write about their values may be seen as insincere, and students might not take the exercise seriously. If the exercise is done in an effort to remedy a negative situation in a class or group, it might be a good idea to have an outside person work through it with the students. In addition, Yeager and Walton (2011) suggested that a values-affirmation exercise given by an instructor who has been told to do it, with little understanding or commitment to the purpose, could become a farce, possibly doing more harm than good.

**Connecting the Known to the Unknown**

There may be many reasons to explain the powerful effect of asking students to write about their values. One might be acknowledging that all students bring something valuable to the learning environment. Both Gonzales, Moll, and Amanti (1995) and Glisczinski (2011) told us that students learn better when their own experiences are linked to what goes on in the classroom. When we have students who come from disadvantaged educational environments or who grew up in economic insecurity, we often focus on their deficits, what they *don't* bring to the classroom. Sugarman (2010) suggested that we reframe our view of these students and try to see their strengths. She cited the explanation from Gonzales and colleagues (1995) to describe what educators call *funds of knowledge*:

The understanding that students, families, and communities are comprised not only of struggles, but also of strength. In other words, students and families possess funds of knowledge, or bodies of knowledge and skills derived from household and community life, that when incorporated into the classroom may support and enhance students' educational experiences. (Sugarman, 2010, p. 97)

Glisczinski (2011), in mapping how learning happens, related what Medina (2008) told us, that our "brains favor and retain the lessons learned through concrete experiences with emotionally cogent and relevant stimuli" (para. 1). That means the subject needs to be connected somehow to past experience and that there has to be meaning to the connection. When we start with students' funds of knowledge, their brain will light up, as Glisczinski (2011) said, and grow in response to the stimuli of new information. When students give Life Reports (described on p. 86 in "Pecha Kucha Life Reports"), students learn about themselves and others through "emotionally cogent" content. Another way that I connect experience and students' funds of knowledge with sociology course content is in the discussion questions from the reading for which students come prepared every week. The following is from my syllabus:

For each class session, read the assigned chapter and come prepared with one or more of the following:

- An example from your life or from the life of someone you know that illustrates a concept (or the opposite) from the reading.
- Questions you have about something in the reading that you'd like to have addressed by the class.
- Something from news or other media that relates to the reading.
- Sharing of a book, article, film, experience, etc. that might help others in the class understand a concept in the reading.
- Related to the readings, something that you don't yet understand or that you need help with and about which others in the class might have some wisdom to share with you.

Because the students represent diversity in age, gender, race/ethnicity, life experience, and socioeconomic status, the variety of the offerings enriches the entire class. More important, students feel that their ideas and their views about what they're reading are valued and contribute positively to the learning of everyone in the class. (There is time for only a few people to actually share their question or example during a class meeting—I draw their names randomly each session—but I collect their notes and read them, following up in the next class on student questions or insights that I want to share with the class.)

G. L. Cohen and Garcia (2014) cited a study by Hulleman and Harackiewicz (2009) in which high school science students were encouraged to connect what they were learning to their everyday life. In this way, students saw the content as personally relevant, not something academic and removed. The intervention resulted in higher grades for students for whom there had been low expectations for success.

When we see students' values and life experiences as funds of knowledge that contribute to their learning, we affirm each of the students, and by connecting new material to what they already know, we cooperate with the way their brain prefers to function. In this way, we increase the likelihood that students will feel a sense of belonging and that their learning will be enhanced. J. Carlson (2015–2016) described the ideal interaction with students as whole beings in the following:

So as a teacher, I'm not just teaching "the material." I'm teaching "the students," which means that I'm inviting them, each of them, with their particular present blends of connectedness to past realities, to interact with the "stuff" of our course and with each other. (p. 61)

Given that the system of public primary and secondary education in the United States operates in the same sociocultural environment as does higher education, many students arrive at college unprepared academically for college work. No amount of psychological or social intervention can create knowledge and skill that is not there. However, with a growth mind-set, persistence, and our help and support, students can build on their nonacademic funds of knowledge to catch up on the basics. Once they have built their self-efficacy from small learning achievements, they can apply those funds of knowledge to college-level work.

Yeager and Walton (2011) cautioned that seemingly valid interventions can be derailed when they are delivered in such a way that a different message reaches the students. They referenced the Hulleman and Harackiewicz (2009) study about high school science students who had low expectations for success. Those students' grades improved when they generated and wrote about ways in which the lessons were relevant to their life. When the instructor *told* students why the lessons were important, the intervention actually had a negative effect on grades for low-expectation students.

### **Identification With Academic Self**

In light of the values-affirmation exercises and thinking back to the discussion of disidentification with academics, we can now effectively use

a class session about course content, relationships would begin to form. Students might begin to be accountable to one another—someone would notice if one of the three were not in class. This could make a significant difference for a beginning student—the fact that someone cared if he or she showed up. If a student had five classes and formed the beginnings of a relationship with two people in each, she would have 10 students she could contact if she felt the need. We know that active learning techniques increase learning, and they can also create situations in which students could feel a sense of belonging by forging new relationships with fellow students and the instructor, therefore increasing the likelihood of persistence.

### Helping Relationships: Mattering

Straumanis (2012) advocated that instructors provide plenty of social interaction and the use of active learning approaches to ensure engagement. She suggested that the following techniques are much better than passive listening and are best used alternately or in combination:

- short writing breaks during lectures, labs, or other activities;
- peer explanation and self-explanation (requiring *all* learners to repeat what they have learned in their own words);
- discussion or problem solving with others in teams or pairs (“buddy system”); [and]
- “guided inquiry”—structured lesson delivery in which the material to be learned is divided into graduated increments and presented by means of carefully designed problems to be solved collectively by small groups of students. (p. 10)

Eric Mazur, a Harvard physics professor and a strong advocate and model of teaching to help students learn, has found that peer instruction is often a more effective way for students to learn a new concept than a lecture about it. In an interview (Lambert, 2012), he explained how it works:

Here’s what happened. . . . First, when one student has the right answer and the other doesn’t, the first one is more likely to convince the second—it’s hard to talk someone into the wrong answer when they have the right one. More important, a fellow student is *more likely* to reach them than Professor Mazur—and this is the crux of the method. You’re a student and you’ve only recently learned this, so you still know where you got hung up, because it’s not that long ago that *you* were hung up on that very same thing. Whereas Professor Mazur got hung up on this point when he was

17, and he no longer remembers how difficult it was back then. He has lost the ability to understand what a beginning learner faces. (para. 7)

Mazur has observed that this kind of instruction has tripled students' gains in knowledge and eliminated the gender gap between male and female undergraduates. Both males and females gain, but females gain disproportionately more, and the gap closes.

Within groups that are intentionally formed to maximize diversity, everyone has something about which he or she is an expert; everyone brings something to the table. With guidance, students see that diversity of knowledge, background, and perspective is a strength in a group learning situation.

Outside of the classroom, students can be trained as peer advisers and, for reasons much like those given by Mazur for the success of peers in explaining physics concepts, can introduce first-year students to what they really need to know to succeed. As pointed out by Heidi Koring (2005) at NACADA (The Global Community for Academic Advising), students advise students every day, in the library, on the bus, in the Union, in the pub, and elsewhere: "Formal peer advising programs direct and channel peer advising to ensure that students are given advice by peers trained to impart accurate information and to make appropriate referrals" (para. 1). According to Koring,

Peer advising offers several advantages, including versatility, compatibility with pre-existing academic advising programs, sensitivity to student needs, and the ability to extend the range and scope of advising to times and venues when advising is not usually available. Additionally, those serving as peer advisors benefit from the leadership development included in such programs. (para. 3)

At American University, peer advisers offered socioemotional support and information about support services by providing a friendly ear for the expression of concerns and requests for help. The first outreach was through e-mail, and researchers found that when the adviser was a male, male students were 26.5 percentage points more likely to engage with the adviser than if the adviser was female (Ellis & Gershenson, 2016). At American University, the majority of students are female, so that might explain why male students might want to connect with another male. This finding reminds us to pay attention to identity contingencies that might affect a student's comfort with a peer adviser.



Duke University gives this explanation about its peer advising program:

Each year, experienced students volunteer to serve as peer advisors to first- and second-year students, offering the perspective of someone who has been where you are now. Peer advisors can share with you how they formed meaningful mentoring relationships with faculty, assist you in navigating online registration and help you learn to distinguish what is merely popular from what is individually meaningful to you. ([advising.duke.edu/peer](http://advising.duke.edu/peer))

This description highlights one of the strongest assets of a peer adviser, which is that he has, very recently, been in the shoes of a first-year student. He can still remember what it was like to be new on campus and the questions that he wished someone would have answered for him. With training, peer advisers can combine their empathy and natural connectedness to an age-mate with accurate information about resources on campus to lend beginning students the support they need and, it is hoped, also help them feel that essential sense of belonging.

### Academic and Social Counter-Spaces

In 1997, Beverly Tatum wrote the book *“Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?” and Other Conversations About Race*. With the title, she was making the point that the reason we don’t know why the Black kids are sitting together is that we can’t even ask the question. When I recently read about academic and social counter-spaces, I immediately thought of the kids in the cafeteria. They, along with groups of Hispanic students, Asian students, Native American students, skateboarders, gamers, and others, were trying to establish what Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) called “counter-spaces,” places where they can feel safe and relax in their own skin.

In their study of racial climate on college campuses, Solórzano and colleagues (2000) held focus groups with 38 Black male and female students who were attending three elite, predominantly White, Research I institutions:

In response to the daily barrage of racial microaggressions that they endure both in and outside of their classes . . . students . . . indicated that they are creating academic and social “counter-spaces” on and off their campuses. These counter-spaces serve as sites where deficit notions of people of

milestones. As a way to introduce myself, I give my own Life Report on the first day of class, demonstrating the presentation method and, more important, role-modeling openness about my life and willingness to take risk. Students discover that some of their classmates have very different backgrounds than they do, and in the process, everyone's experiences are affirmed and respected. The students show great empathy toward one another and realize that, in spite of their backgrounds, they are all now together in this class with the same goal of getting a college education.

For first-year students, the Life Report can be focused on a brief reflection of family and high school, plans for college major, and plans and hopes for career and life after college. The process helps students with the development (or creation) of their self-identification as college students. They can see that some students come from relative privilege and others from relative disadvantage but that they are all together in this classroom at this moment, all with the potential of belonging. As in the other class, if the instructor gives her own Life Report, students get a sense of safety and are encouraged to be open and honest.

During the last several semesters, I asked students to reflect on what they learned from the Life Report process, both giving and listening. The major themes and some illustrative responses are shown in Table 11.1.

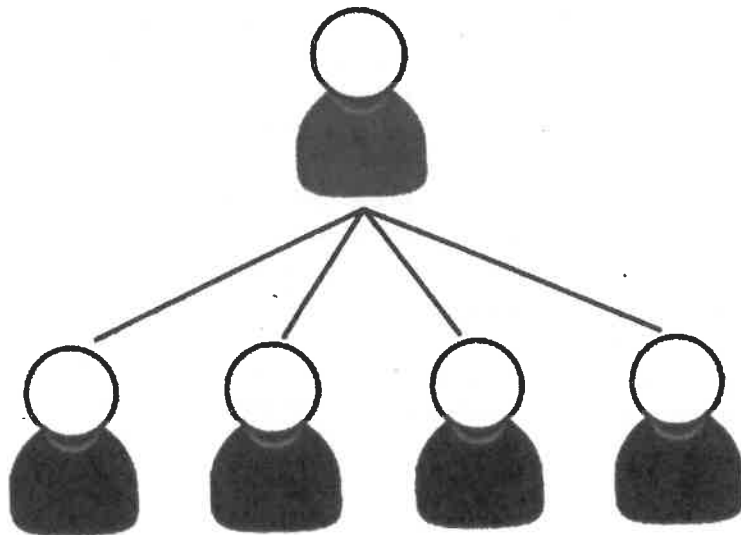
### **Relationship-Building in Classes**

In 1972, Donald Bligh wrote a comprehensive book about teaching in higher education called *What's the Use of Lectures?* in which he suggested strongly that an instructor who only lectures is using a teaching method that, by itself, is a very ineffective way for students to learn. We have known for several decades that lecture alone is not ideal, especially for getting students to think critically or to change perspectives. But, apparently, it is a method still in frequent use. D. J. Smith and Valentine (2012) looked at the practices of 744 instructors at 8 technical colleges and found that almost all of them (93%) reported lecturing for more than half of the class sessions, and 53% reported lecturing in all of the sessions. A study by S. Freeman and colleagues (2014) in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) disciplines showed that students in lecture-only classes were 1.5 times more likely to fail than students in classes where active learning strategies were used. They found that in classes in which students were active participants instead of passive learners, failure rates were reduced, and scores on exams increased by almost half a standard deviation.

Even given the evidence that lectures do not produce desirable student learning, there is another reason that lecture alone is not a helpful teaching strategy, especially in the first year and especially for nonmajority and first-generation students. If the instructor is just talking to a group of students, no relationships are being formed. If the lecturer has an engaging speaking style and presents interesting information, individual students might feel a relationship with the instructor, but the instructor may or may not feel a reciprocal relationship. More important, however, if all that happens in a class period is that the instructor lectures and the students listen and take notes, no relationships are being formed between and among students in the class. For students, it's an experience of what early-learning educators call *parallel play*. This is when, at around two years old, children are in the same space and playing, but they're not playing with each other; there's no interaction and no relationship. College students may come to the same lecture twice a week for 15 weeks, and even though they are "sharing" the same experience, no relationships are formed. The classroom may look like the one shown in Figure 11.2, with the possibility of a relationship between individual students and the instructor but little chance for connections between students.

Given that a sense of belonging seems to be a critical factor in student success, it makes sense to use the opportunity in every class to connect students with each other. There are many methods to accomplish this, such as

Figure 11.2. Student relates to lecturer only.



personally and in their families.

having students work out a problem as a group, "teach" each other a concept, take quizzes in groups, and exchange ideas in pairs or triads. In large class sections, facilitating this kind of interactive learning environment often results in an enhanced relationship between students and instructor as well. Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, and Salomone (2002), in a study of first-year college students found that a

"sense of belonging" to the institution stems from perceptions of "valued involvement" in the collegiate environment. . . . This perception of "valued involvement" appears predicated on: 1) establishing functionally supportive peer relationships—"functional," in terms of the ability of the relationship(s) to directly aid students in meeting the challenges and changes of their new environment; and 2) the belief that faculty are compassionate and that the student is more than just another face in the crowd. (pp. 249, 251)

From surveys of 238 university first-year students, T. M. Freeman, Anderman, and Jensen (2007) found that certain instructor actions and characteristics were associated with students' sense of belonging. The most important was encouraging student participation and interaction. This, along with instructor warmth and organization, was associated with student motivation and achievement.

First-year general education classes could be excellent settings in which to help students get connected to other students and form relationships with faculty. In my classes, I encourage students to appreciate both the diversity among them and the ways in which they have shared experiences. In sociology, I have students stand in groups in different parts of the room based on the size of the town where they grew up, how many siblings they have, whether they have children or grandchildren, or whether they have traveled outside of the United States. Then we divide into groups of five with the goal of maximizing diversity. Those are the groups they will be in for the semester. I distribute papers on which they record their names, e-mail addresses, and phone numbers; they make six copies, one for each of them and one for me. Each class period, they take a quiz over the assigned reading, first individually and then as a group; the scores on the individual quiz and the group quiz contribute equally to the final grade. The group members are the students' contacts for the class and often become important support systems for each other.

In large lecture sections, especially in first-year courses, an instructor could form students into triads on the first day and have the students exchange contact information. If that triad talked together even once during

a class session about course content, relationships would begin to form. Students might begin to be accountable to one another—someone would notice if one of the three were not in class. This could make a significant difference for a beginning student—the fact that someone cared if he or she showed up. If a student had five classes and formed the beginnings of a relationship with two people in each, she would have 10 students she could contact if she felt the need. We know that active learning techniques increase learning, and they can also create situations in which students could feel a sense of belonging by forging new relationships with fellow students and the instructor, therefore increasing the likelihood of persistence.

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### Identification With Academic Self

In light of the values-affirmation exercises and thinking back to the discussion of disidentification with academics, we can now effectively use

these concepts to support students in taking on academic success as part of their self-concept. If a Black male student chooses, for instance, *competitive*, *loyal*, and *reliable* as his top values and then writes an essay in which he describes his reasoning, those values are affirmed in this new, academic setting. Maybe he will begin adding academics as a domain in which his self-concept could survive and even flourish. Other interventions might also help students add an academic aspect to their existing self-concept.

It's not exactly an intervention like the others, but having the faculty of an institution more closely reflect the racial/ethnic population of students could contribute to students' ability to see themselves as "college material." One of the downsides of the racial mismatch between students and teachers is that non-Black teachers may have much lower expectations of Black students than do Black teachers (Gershenson, 2015). Analyzing data from a national study of U.S. 10th graders, Gershenson (2015) found significant differences in teachers' estimates of whether a student would, in the future, earn a four-year college degree. In the case of Black students, non-Black teachers were about 30% less likely to predict college graduation than were Black teachers. We know that students are very sensitive to teachers' expectations and that low expectations can result in a self-fulfilling prophecy of actual low performance. Instructors must communicate high expectations of all students and offer them the support they need to meet them.

Steele (1997) emphasized the importance of "potential-affirming adult relationships" (p. 624). This relates back to Dweck's "not yet" feedback. G. L. Cohen, Steele, and Ross (1999) found that Black students were strongly motivated by critical feedback when it was given with messages of optimism about the students' potential. Some researchers have pointed out the potential damage of placing students in remedial classes, as they can be perceived through the "lens of an ability-demeaning stereotype" (Steele, 1997, p. 625), whereas high academic challenge conveys respect for students' potential to learn. Remedial placement can, by increasing stereotype threat, undermine performance, thus causing the opposite of the intended effect.

Oyserman, Bybee, and Terry (2006) took on the task of helping eighth-grade low-income Black (72% of group), Hispanic (17%), and White (11%) students imagine their future self as academically successful. In 10 workshop sessions, students completed exercises to bring out the funds of knowledge each of them would be taking to high school with them, to make their future academic self seem more attainable, and to see that "difficulties are normative and not self-defining" (p. 191). Two years later, these students, compared to those in the control group, had higher grades, better attendance, less disruptive behavior, and less depression and were less likely to have repeated eighth grade. A Black male college senior said in an interview (study described in

chapter 12), "Being smart was not cool in high school. People want to be cool. I suppressed my gifted and talented mentality." He had not developed what Oyserman, Bybee, and Terry (2006) called his "academic possible self" (p. 189); maybe he couldn't imagine himself as a successful student and a young man with a strong Black identity.

This next bit could as easily fit under growth mind-set, but I put it here because it seems relevant to helping students shift their expectations of themselves and to encourage self-identification based on academic ability. Yeager and colleagues (2014) worked with seventh graders from a middle-class, racially diverse middle school. They asked each student to write an essay about a personal hero, and the teachers marked the essays, typically with feedback such as "unclear," "give examples," and "wrong word." Then they randomly attached one of two sticky notes to each essay. Half the students received a bland message such as "I'm giving you these comments so that you'll have feedback on your paper." For the other half of the students, the note said, "I'm giving you these comments because I have very high expectations and I know you can reach them." The teachers then gave the students an opportunity to revise their essay. Eighty-seven percent of White students who received the encouraging message turned in revised essays, compared to 62% who got the bland note. Among Black students, the rates were 72% compared to 17%, a much greater effect. Yeager and colleagues (2014) concluded that the Black students were more motivated to try to improve their work when the teacher both reminded them of high performance expectations and assured them that the teacher believed the students could meet the high standards. I suspect that these students, most of whom decided to revise their essay, at least in this situation, felt the message that it was safe to connect with their academic self.

### **Pecha Kucha Life Reports**

In classes at first-year and senior/graduate levels, I ask students to give a Life Report. They use a presentation style called Pecha Kucha (Klein Dytham Architecture, 2003), in which they create 20 PowerPoint slides (primarily pictures), and each slide is shown for 20 seconds. I started using this presentation method because it's a way to share an idea or tell a story that's not completely focused on the written word and, thus, respects cultural norms that value the spoken word. Students in my senior/graduate sociology course (human behavior over the lifespan) share with the class a brief story of their life in which they tell about the circumstances of their birth, their parents and siblings, where they lived and went to school, and positive and negative



## II

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# BELONGING

### Values Affirmation

First-generation students, students from negatively stereotyped groups, and students who grew up in economic insecurity often feel like they don't belong in college and that their input is not needed or even noticed. Recognition that they do have personal values and that those values matter has been shown to have significant positive effects on grades and persistence. Such values-affirming activities are especially effective when they are done at strategic times, such as during transitions (e.g., high school to college), shortly before a major exam, or before a student gives her first speech in a communication class. Values-affirmation interventions, although often lasting for only half an hour or so, have resulted in increased grades in a semester, higher retention to the next semester, and positive feelings of health and well-being up to three years later. G. L. Cohen and Garcia (2014) asserted, "Changing how students think and feel about the classroom can improve their performance and long-term trajectory" (p. 13).

When students in stereotyped groups were asked to choose from a list of values the ones that were most important to them and then to write about why they are important, they attained significantly higher grades than students in a control group over the next two years, resulting in a significant reduction (40%) of the achievement gap between Black and White students (G. L. Cohen, Garcia, Purdie-Vaughns, Apfel, & Brzustoski, 2009).

In two studies with middle school students, Sherman and his colleagues (2013) had groups of students do writing exercises at various intervals that were focused on the values of individual students. In one study, students in the treatment group wrote the exercises four or five times over the period of the study, whereas the control group did not write. The achievement gap, measured by grades, between Latino and White students widened in the control group (as had been the consistent pattern in the past) but not in the experimental group. The positive effects persisted for three years, improving

the outlook for these Latino students; the intervention had no effect on the grades of White students. In another study, one group of students wrote daily affirmations, whereas the control group wrote only twice over the school year. As in the first study, the achievement gap for students in the experimental group did not widen, whereas it did for the control group. For the treatment group, the historical downward trend in GPA was eliminated. Sherman and colleagues (2013) explained that the affirmation "prompts students to tell a different story to themselves about their experience and to take a broader view of events in their lives . . . the experience of threat is less likely to set the tone for the rest of their academic tenure" (p. 614).

The effects of these seemingly small interventions have been shown to last up to three years. According to G. L. Cohen, Garcia, Apful, and Master (2006), this is because such interventions can interrupt and potentially reverse what they called the "negative recursive cycle" that occurs when psychological threat, such as stereotype threat, and poor performance act together to create a downward spiral of worsening performance. Interventions such as the values-affirmation writing can stop the cycle and, often, set off a positive recursive cycle when a slight improvement in performance lessens identity threat, freeing up cognitive resources to support future improvements. The results of Cohen and colleagues' (2006) studies have shown that the interventions do interrupt the negative cycle, reversing, for instance, a downward trend in grades. In addition, in their intervention group, an experience of failure did not worsen performance afterward, indicating that the upward cycle was still active in spite of a setback. The researchers pointed out that even if the intervention was small and even if the result is simply minor improvements on several assignments, the cumulative positive effect on the final grade can still be significant.

In addition to the psychological effect of a broadened self-concept and more resiliency in the face of stereotype threat, there is evidence that values-affirmation processes can affect the sympathetic nervous system response to stress. Undergraduate students provided urine samples 14 days before their most stressful exam, to establish a baseline, and on the morning of the exam. Students in the treatment condition wrote two essays on important values during the two weeks preceding the exam, whereas students in a control group did not write. Students in the control condition showed an increase in epinephrine levels, an indicator of sympathetic nervous system activation, from baseline to exam day. Epinephrine levels in the students who had done the affirmation writings did not change from baseline to exam day (Sherman, Bunyan, Creswell, & Jaremka, 2009). Creswell and colleagues (2005) conducted a similar study in a laboratory setting. Participants completed either a values-affirmation task or a control task before encountering a laboratory

stress challenge. Compared with the control group, those who had completed the values-affirmation task had significantly lower cortisol responses to stress.

Figure 11.1 is the list of values and instructions I use when I do the affirmation exercise in my classes and in other settings with students. I want students to write about how their top values have influenced their life and choices so the values seem real in a concrete way. Of course, the specifics of the instructions and the list of values can be revised to fit the situation. When I first put together the list, I started with lists that I found on the Internet and distributed a draft list to 10 or so of my colleagues. I asked them to add or subtract any items to fit the context of our university and community; I incorporated their suggestions, resulting in the list for the exercise shown in Figure 11.1.

**Figure 11.1.** Personal values affirmation exercise.

Wisdom	Reliability	Integrity	Enthusiasm
Winning	Productivity	Inspiration	Efficiency
Well-being	Power	Initiative	Dignity
Wealth	Personal growth	Independence	Dependence
Volunteering	Perseverance	Humor	Curiosity
Truth	Peace	Humility	Creativity
Trust	Patriotism	Hope	Courtesy
Tradition	Patience	Honesty	Courage
Teamwork	Orderliness	Heritage	Cooperation
Success	Optimism	Health	Conflict resolution
Spirituality	Openness	Harmony	Confidence
Simplicity	Open communication	Generosity	Competitiveness
Service	Nature	Fun	Competence
Self-reliance	Mercy	Friendship	Compassion
Self-esteem	Making a difference	Freedom	Community
Self-discipline	Loyalty	Forgiveness	Commitment
Safety	Love	Flexibility	Collaboration
Sacrifice	Listening	Fitness	Civility
Romance	Learning	Financial stability	Caring
Risk-taking	Leadership	Family	Boldness
Responsibility	Kindness	Fame	Beauty
Respect	Justice	Faith	Ambition
Resilience	Joy	Fairness	Adaptability
Reputation	Job security	Excellence	Achievement
Religion	Intuition	Ethical behavior	Accountability

(Continues)

**Figure 11.1.** (Continued)

1. From the list, circle the 10 values that you consider to be the most important in your life.
2. Think for a bit about each of those 10 values. Put a second circle around the 3 that are the most important of all of them.
3. Write a letter explaining to another student in your class why these values are important to you and what difference they have made in your life. Give some examples of things you have done or choices you have made in your life based on these 3 values.

Although this affirmation exercise is fairly straightforward, a few cautions are in order. The list of values needs to include those to which students can relate. A good practice is to instruct students during the intervention that if there is something that they value that's not on the list, then they may add it. The point is to affirm each student's perspective, so the specific list of values is not material to the exercise. The person doing the exercise must be sincere; if not, students will realize it. For example, an instructor who has shown hostility to students in a certain group who then asks them to write about their values may be seen as insincere, and students might not take the exercise seriously. If the exercise is done in an effort to remedy a negative situation in a class or group, it might be a good idea to have an outside person work through it with the students. In addition, Yeager and Walton (2011) suggested that a values-affirmation exercise given by an instructor who has been told to do it, with little understanding or commitment to the purpose, could become a farce, possibly doing more harm than good.

### Connecting the Known to the Unknown

There may be many reasons to explain the powerful effect of asking students to write about their values. One might be acknowledging that all students bring something valuable to the learning environment. Both Gonzales, Moll, and Amanti (1995) and Glisczinski (2011) told us that students learn better when their own experiences are linked to what goes on in the classroom. When we have students who come from disadvantaged educational environments or who grew up in economic insecurity, we often focus on their deficits, what they *don't* bring to the classroom. Sugarman (2010) suggested that we reframe our view of these students and try to see their strengths. She cited the explanation from Gonzales and colleagues (1995) to describe what educators call *funds of knowledge*.

chapter 12), "Being smart was not cool in high school. People want to be cool. I suppressed my gifted and talented mentality." He had not developed what Oyserman, Bybee, and Terry (2006) called his "academic possible self" (p. 189); maybe he couldn't imagine himself as a successful student and a young man with a strong Black identity.

This next bit could as easily fit under growth mind-set, but I put it here because it seems relevant to helping students shift their expectations of themselves and to encourage self-identification based on academic ability. Yeager and colleagues (2014) worked with seventh graders from a middle-class, racially diverse middle school. They asked each student to write an essay about a personal hero, and the teachers marked the essays, typically with feedback such as "unclear," "give examples," and "wrong word." Then they randomly attached one of two sticky notes to each essay. Half the students received a bland message such as "I'm giving you these comments so that you'll have feedback on your paper." For the other half of the students, the note said, "I'm giving you these comments because I have very high expectations and I know you can reach them." The teachers then gave the students an opportunity to revise their essay. Eighty-seven percent of White students who received the encouraging message turned in revised essays, compared to 62% who got the bland note. Among Black students, the rates were 72% compared to 17%, a much greater effect. Yeager and colleagues (2014) concluded that the Black students were more motivated to try to improve their work when the teacher both reminded them of high performance expectations and assured them that the teacher believed the students could meet the high standards. I suspect that these students, most of whom decided to revise their essay, at least in this situation, felt the message that it was safe to connect with their academic self.

### **Pecha Kucha Life Reports**

In classes at first-year and senior/graduate levels, I ask students to give a Life Report. They use a presentation style called Pecha Kucha (Klein Dytham Architecture, 2003), in which they create 20 PowerPoint slides (primarily pictures), and each slide is shown for 20 seconds. I started using this presentation method because it's a way to share an idea or tell a story that's not completely focused on the written word and, thus, respects cultural norms that value the spoken word. Students in my senior/graduate sociology course (human behavior over the lifespan) share with the class a brief story of their life in which they tell about the circumstances of their birth, their parents and siblings, where they lived and went to school, and positive and negative

milestones. As a way to introduce myself, I give my own Life Report on the first day of class, demonstrating the presentation method and, more important, role-modeling openness about my life and willingness to take risk. Students discover that some of their classmates have very different backgrounds than they do, and in the process, everyone's experiences are affirmed and respected. The students show great empathy toward one another and realize that, in spite of their backgrounds, they are all now together in this class with the same goal of getting a college education.

For first-year students, the Life Report can be focused on a brief reflection of family and high school, plans for college major, and plans and hopes for career and life after college. The process helps students with the development (or creation) of their self-identification as college students. They can see that some students come from relative privilege and others from relative disadvantage but that they are all together in this classroom at this moment, all with the potential of belonging. As in the other class, if the instructor gives her own Life Report, students get a sense of safety and are encouraged to be open and honest.

During the last several semesters, I asked students to reflect on what they learned from the Life Report process, both giving and listening. The major themes and some illustrative responses are shown in Table 11.1.

### Relationship-Building in Classes

In 1972, Donald Bligh wrote a comprehensive book about teaching in higher education called *What's the Use of Lectures?* in which he suggested strongly that an instructor who only lectures is using a teaching method that, by itself, is a very ineffective way for students to learn. We have known for several decades that lecture alone is not ideal, especially for getting students to think critically or to change perspectives. But, apparently, it is a method still in frequent use. D. J. Smith and Valentine (2012) looked at the practices of 744 instructors at 8 technical colleges and found that almost all of them (93%) reported lecturing for more than half of the class sessions, and 53% reported lecturing in all of the sessions. A study by S. Freeman and colleagues (2014) in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) disciplines showed that students in lecture-only classes were 1.5 times more likely to fail than students in classes where active learning strategies were used. They found that in classes in which students were active participants instead of passive learners, failure rates were reduced, and scores on exams increased by almost half a standard deviation.

TABLE 11.1  
Learning From Life Reports in Two Classes

Themes	Student Statements
Success Central (First-Year Experience Class), <i>n</i> = 25 Classmates, differences, and commonalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some people have had things happen in their lives that have also happened in my life.</li> <li>• So many of us came from different backgrounds, yet we're so similar and all ended up at the same university, in the same class.</li> <li>• I've learned that each of us is here to contribute something important to the world.</li> <li>• Really never judge a book by its cover—we all have so many layers.</li> <li>• I learned about some of the hardships that many of my classmates have faced. I also learned a lot about their background and families.</li> </ul>
Insights about self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I learned that where you come from and where you've been can shape who you are, but it doesn't have to.</li> <li>• It seemed to make it more concrete for myself why I am here and what I am working toward and goals that I definitely plan on achieving before I die.</li> <li>• I had to really think about what I want in my future, which I've never thought about too deeply.</li> <li>• People do care what I have to say.</li> <li>• I realized how much I have accomplished in high school, how much my friends and family have impacted my life, and my drive toward my life goals.</li> <li>• It makes me and my classmates closer when we share important stuff about ourselves.</li> </ul>
Self-concept as college student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone is starting out at the bottom, and everyone is struggling to make friends, find certain places, and people are scared to ask questions. This understanding helped me because I know not to be scared about things.</li> <li>• As much as I love my friends and enjoy spending time with them, I can survive and thrive on my own.</li> <li>• High school was too easy. I need to study harder in college.</li> <li>• It helped me to better understand that all of these people in my class are freshmen just like me, and that they are new here and working toward a career as well.</li> </ul>

Everyone is from a different background. Learn to make new friends and learn about them and their life and drive because it will help me grow as an individual.

- Everything that has happened in my life has gotten me where I am, so I'm glad everything happened.
- I need to take advantage of the position I'm in and work to the best of my ability every day.

**Human Behavior and the Social Environment, n = 59**

Different backgrounds but all fundamentally the same

- All of my classmates have hopes, dreams, failures, disappointments, and successes in their lives.
- There is something empowering about verbally owning your life's events. It kinda kills the shame.
- I learned how diverse a classroom can be. People have experienced very different lives yet we all ended up in the same classroom.
- Family comes in many forms.
- The huge disparity between students on campus. Some students come from families who could give them anything. They are so humble when you meet them.
- In the classroom we are equal.
- As distant as I sometimes feel from other's actual experiences, the emotions and empathy we share makes *[sic]* us a lot more similar than we are different.
- How we handle a situation has almost everything to do with what happens next.
- People's stories are important, and I believe it's good to let each person have the authority to say it for herself or himself
- The most important thing that I thought was useful in life is that all of us have problems and that it is not just me. This was crucial for me to understand, which made me feel not alone in my quest for being a better human being.
- Knowing that each of us is human and has problems is what unites us all.
- I realized the struggles in my family are universal and that made me feel less alone.

Insights about self

- My view of the world is very much through my lens based on my own life experience.
- I am proud of myself. It wasn't easy getting here, and I should give myself credit for doing the best I can despite everything telling me to give up.
- I should thank my parents more.

(Continues)



TABLE 11.1 (Continued)

Themes	Student Statements
Insights about self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After walking through everything that has happened in my life—even the minor things—and then laying out my goals in what I want to accomplish next, I am encouraged to work hard to achieve those goals.</li> <li>• I realized how young I am, and it's okay to not have it all together.</li> <li>• I know I continue to grow through my life experiences and learn every day something from those around me.</li> <li>• My adversities have been what have made me and influenced who I will become after college.</li> <li>• People come from all walks of life, and it does not matter where you come from, only where you end up.</li> <li>• No matter what, I can learn from my past and make better decisions in the future.</li> </ul>
We're resilient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each person in our class has experienced great adversity and come through it stronger.</li> <li>• Many classmates had a very rough life and some big obstacles to get to where they are now.</li> <li>• People, given time and a little help, can overcome major setbacks.</li> <li>• No matter the %^\$@ I had been through, my pain was not without growth.</li> <li>• Listening to my classmates' life reports makes me realize that I am sitting around strong people.</li> </ul>
Don't judge a book by its cover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People contain so much more substance than I could ever imagine just from looking at them.</li> <li>• All of us (my classmates and all humans) have universal themes that connect our lives (i.e., we all have families or long to have families, we all crave a sense of belonging, we all want to be successful, and we all share a uniquely human experience).</li> <li>• Not one of us is alike, and therefore we should not compare ourselves. No family is completely normal.</li> <li>• I also learned that everyone has stories you don't know about so don't be so quick to judge.</li> <li>• Every person is doing their best, no matter the circumstances.</li> <li>• It helps me with my career by looking at the whole picture of a person and not just their problem.</li> <li>• I need to learn to understand people's history and story before I jump to conclusions.</li> <li>• People are not what they appear to be on the outside. We all have a unique, deep, and rich experience that makes us who we are.</li> <li>• I learned that people may look good and happy on the outside but may be going through adversity both personally and in their families.</li> </ul>