

What Do I Expect From You? What Do You Expect From Me? What Do We Expect From Each Other?: Involving Students in Expectation Setting

The Importance of Setting Expectations

Any good relationship requires that all parties involved have clear explanations and understandings of what they can expect from one another. The teacher-student relationship is one in which it is extremely important to set clear expectations from the beginning. Teachers and students come into the classroom at the beginning of the semester with ideas about what they expect from each other as a part of the learning experience. Without clearly discussing exactly what their expectations are for each other, though, teachers and students will likely fail to live up to each other's expectations.

Nine years ago, when I began teaching courses at the community college level, I assumed that all of my students would know how I expected them to act and interact in a college classroom. I also assumed that disruptive behaviors would never occur. What I did not know, but have since learned, is that some students come to college still holding onto bad behaviors they displayed in high school (e.g., talking or making inappropriate comments during instruction). As a developmental reading instructor, I find that some of my students develop a negative view of reading and reading instructors during their K-12 years. As a result, those students tend to be immediately disruptive in class because that's how they acted in their high school classes—disruption was a tool that kept them safe from having to like their teacher or enjoy the class. Several of my students admitted to being disruptive in hopes of being kicked out of class so they could avoid reading, a task they admitted hating.

Unfortunately, many disruptive students are inadvertently taught that someone else (namely, the teacher) will manage, monitor, and, if necessary, punish them for misbehavior. These students come to college with the expectation that I, their new teacher, will take on the responsibility for managing, monitoring, and punishing their behavior. With this information in mind, I realized I had to help my students take accountability for their behavior in class and help them see that each of them is major part of keeping a classroom managed. I set out to instruct my students to do both of these things by involving them in the process of setting classroom expectations.

Involving Students in Setting Classroom Expectations

Students can learn accountability for their behavior by being involved in the process of helping to set the classroom expectations. Though there are some rules and expectations that have to be set without student input (e.g., the grading policy), there are other class expectations students can help create.

Setting Expectations—First Class Meeting

So, what's the value of intentionally approaching a I begin involving students in setting class expectations on the first day of class and throughout the first week of the semester. I discuss my expectations for students during the first class meeting, which are also stated in the syllabus. An excerpt from that section of my syllabus is below:

When establishing a new relationship, it is good to have a set of agreed-upon expectations that guide the relationship. Many failed relationships and partnerships are the result of having NO or LOW expectations. In this class I have HIGH expectations for your performance because I want you all to succeed.

What I expect from students:

- * Regular class attendance
- * Submit assignments on time
- * Timely arrival to class
- * Respect for self, respect for classmates, and respect for the instructor
- * Present a positive attitude
- * Be engaged
- * Participate in class activities
- * Be attentive in class
- * Follow the course electronics device policy
- * Have fun

Next, I invite students to tell me what their expectations are for me as their instructor and tell them that this goes both ways. If I want my students to be open to embracing my expectations for them, I have to be willing to consider their expectations for me. I also ask students to set expectations for their classmates. I have students write down their expectations for me and their classmates and turn them in at the end of our first class meeting.

Setting Expectations—Second Class Meeting

During the second class meeting, I provide the class with a summary of their list of instructor and classmate expectations. Some examples of the instructor expectations that students submit include “non-boring” teaching, responding to student emails in a timely manner, and being concerned about students. Examples of some of the classmate expectations student submit include working together as a team, no disruptive behavior, and assisting one another.

After the class has a chance to read over the full list of expectations, I lead a discussion to review each expectation on the list. We also work together as a class to clarify what the individual expectations mean. For example, “be respectful” is common to the teacher and classmate expectations, but respect can mean different things to different people. As a class, we discuss the specific behaviors associated with respect in a college classroom setting. We complete this clarification exercise for every expectation on the list to ensure we are all in agreement on the desired behaviors associated with each expectation.

Setting Expectations—Third Class Meeting and Beyond

During the third class meeting, I provide students with a class agreement to sign that includes my expectations for students, students’ expectations for me, and students’ expectations for each other. Additionally, I inform students that if they fail to meet the expectations in the class agreement, they will be responsible for contacting me to set up a meeting to discuss their plan for preventing disruptive behavior from occurring in the future. At various times during the semester, I revisit the class agreement with students to remind them of the expectations we all agreed on as a class, and I use the expectations to guide conversations or meetings with students who do not meet the expectations they have agreed to.

Sample Class Agreement

How to interact with classmates

- Be friendly
- Be respectful, treat people with respect
- Communicate
- Don’t bring your problems to school
- Have respect, respect belongings of others, respect others feelings, respect others’ privacy
- Have fun

How to help others be successful in class

- Be quiet when working on individual assignments
- Don’t be rude and/or nasty
- Don’t interrupt others from learning
- Don’t interrupt the class
- Do not distract the class when it’s time to work
- Work together
- During group work give an equal contribution
- Understand that we all learn differently and that’s okay.

I agree to the best of my ability to work hard to meet these expectations during our time together this semester.

(Print Name Here) _____

(Sign Name Here) _____

Conclusion

Involving students in setting classroom expectations has been beneficial to my teaching and it has significantly reduced disruptive behavior in the classes I teach. Since I began implementing this strategy a few years ago, I have only had to meet with three students to develop a plan for preventing future disruptive behavior. If you are not already doing something similar, I highly encourage you to begin involving students in the process of setting classroom expectations.

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