

Launching the School Year Successfully

Scholars in fields as diverse as social work, youth development, business marketing, innovation diffusion and group process have discovered five universal challenges (“Targets”) facing people who are working together to achieve their goals. All five are relevant from the beginning of their work together, but one tends to be peaking in importance at any given time – in other words, there are “stages.” In the classroom, prospects for year-long success can be enhanced by letting students know during the very first days of class (“Stage One”) that you intend for things to go well all year with respect to all five Targets. (Please detach and keep the grid on the last page of this handout.)

Please take the next few minutes to jot down some responses to the prompts on the next few pages. Try to answer one from each page. Your responses will be collected and used in a summary for the whole school that will be the basis for future discussions. Please do not be concerned if you don’t have time to finish.

Include your name ONLY if you wish to receive your paper back.

Thanks for your cooperation.

FIVE TARGETS OF SOCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL ENGAGEMENT

Target One. *Trust and Interest versus Mistrust and Disinterest*

Ideal: Teacher and students feel safe together, interested in their work and supportive of one another’s success.

Target Two. *Balanced versus Imbalanced Teacher Control and Student Autonomy*

Ideal: Teacher and students seek and find an appropriate balance of teacher control and student autonomy.

Target Three. *Ambitiousness versus Ambivalence*

Ideal: Each student collaborates with the teacher to commit to ambitious learning goals and to overcome ambivalence by either party.

Target Four. *Industriousness versus Disengagement or Discouragement*

Teacher and students work industriously to achieve goals for learning and to recover from any disengagement or discouragement due to setbacks.

Target Five. *Mastery & Consolidation versus Confusion & Irresolution*

Teacher helps students to master and consolidate what they learn and to connect goals and understandings forward in positive anticipation of future classes and life experiences where what they have learned will be applicable.

Stage I, Target I: Signal to students that your classroom will be a place where people can feel safe together and will support one another's success.

1) STUDENTS' QUERY: WHO ARE YOU AS A PERSON? CAN YOU RELATE TO ME? **Question/Prompt: What student questions about you as a person would you consider answering? What (creative) format(s) might you use to disclose things about yourself (and to solicit related information from students about themselves)?**

2) STUDENTS' QUERY: DO YOU CARE ABOUT US (YOUR STUDENTS)? **Question/Prompt: Cite one or two activities that you have/might use to foster a positive sense of caring and expectancy in your classroom.**

Stage I, Target II: Express an expectation that the classroom will be well controlled while also welcoming student input.

3) STUDENTS' QUERY: ARE YOU GOING TO BE OVERLY STRICT?

Question/Prompt: "Mr(s)/Ms. _____ is definitely going to be in control, but he/she seems to care about our preferences too." What "strategies" or practices could you use that would have your students make the above statement about you?

4) STUDENTS' QUERY: HOW EFFECTIVE WILL YOU BE AT MANAGING US SO THAT WE TREAT YOU AND OUR CLASSMATES WITH ENOUGH RESPECT THAT WE CAN FOCUS ON LEARNING?

Question/Prompt: "Mr(s)/Ms. _____ clearly means business in this class and doesn't let us get away with things. But s/he definitely is fair and respectful in how s/he treats us." Briefly but vividly, describe the powerful "evidence" this student could cite to support this statement about you.

Stage I, Target III: Express commitment to high goals for students and the desire that students should have high goals too.

5. STUDENTS' QUERY: WHAT ARE WE GOING TO LEARN IN THIS CLASS?
WILL IT BE INTERESTING AND USEFUL?

Question/Prompt: What would you say to a student who asks this question on the second or third day of class: "How does what I learn in this course relate to me TODAY (or at least soon). Why should I set high goals for trying to learn it?"

Stage I, Target IV: Express anticipation that there may be setbacks, but promise to be supportive in helping students succeed.

6. STUDENTS' QUERY: WILL THIS CLASS BE HARD TO UNDERSTAND?

Question/Prompt: What words will you use to convey to students both the exciting challenges that lay ahead in the course and the fact that you will be there to support them in any struggles they have?

Stage I, Target V (Mastery & Consolidation vs. Confusion & Irresolution): Inspire initial interest in class content and help students begin believing in their prospects for mastery.

7. STUDENTS' QUERY: HOW AM I GOING TO FEEL BY THE END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR IN THIS CLASS? WILL THE THINGS WE LEARN HELP ME IN MY LIFE? WILL EVERYTHING SORT OF FIT TOGETHER SO THAT I CAN REMEMBER IT?

Question/Prompt: What types of things will you say or do as the school year begins, to help students anticipate a positive outcome to the school year?

8. What additional questions, issues or concerns do you think might be on the minds of your students as they enter their first class with you? How do you plan to address them?