



## Class Dynamics and Valuing All Voices

Classroom dynamics are influenced by

- the environment we set for the class through our words, interactions and expectations
- our response to incivilities and marginalization
- by how we cultivate equity.

Inclusive teaching

- engages a variety of students
- encourages and supports the participation and contribution of ideas from all
- is responsive to students' individual and contextual needs.



## **Class Dynamics and Valuing All Voices**

### **Today's session:**

- Discussion of classroom scenario
- Strategies to promote student engagement and cultivate classroom equity
- Classroom dynamics
- Looking ahead

- **Professor:** In my environmental geology class, I ask questions every couple minutes. I think it makes me seem friendly and open to hearing the students' ideas. I try to call on students randomly to make sure everyone is engaged, but often I end up asking the bright students because they set the standard for the rest of the class.
- **Student #1:** I love environmental geology. The professor is so engaging! I really connect with him. I want to come prepared to class every lecture so I can answer the questions. Sometimes the professor and I have a great dialogue guiding class about something way more advanced than what is in the syllabus. I am learning so much!
- **Student #2:** This class is terrifying. The professor asks questions every few minutes. I have to sit in front because my hearing is poor. I am so afraid he will call on me to answer something I don't understand. I can't wait until the semester is over so my anxiety can decrease.
- **Student #3:** I have no clue what is happening in environmental geology. The prof constantly asks questions, but I have no idea what the answer is. I must be really stupid because the students in front seem to know all this already. He calls on them over and over. I hid in the back so he won't call on me. I wish he would just tell us what he wants us to know.
- **Student #4:** I tried once to respond to a question, but I got shut down. My face flushed and I felt awful. I think I'll drop the class.



## Discussion Prompts

- What issues might be contributing to the differing opinions about the classroom experience?
- Who is not included or excluded from this type of teaching?
- What assumptions or biases do you have about the professor or the students?



**NAGT**

**InTeGrate**

*Interdisciplinary Teaching about Earth  
for a Sustainable Future*

Tanner, K. (2013) Structure Matters: Twenty-One Teaching Strategies to Promote Student Engagement and Cultivate Classroom Equity  
CBE Life Science Education; 12(3): 322–331.

# Thinking about the structure of a class

Will students...

- see a **clear framework**?
- use & be assessed on **prior knowledge**?
- investigate/explore/practice through a class **discussion** or **activity**?
- **interact** with each other?
- **reflect** on their learning?
- **be listened to** and **responded to**?



## **Classroom dynamics: setting the tone and making expectations explicit**

- Think of your last few lectures. What issues did you observe with regards to class dynamics? In what ways might the modes of interaction, teaching and learning in the classroom have excluded some students?
- How do you set tone in your classroom? On the first day, and how do you sustain the dynamics throughout the term.

# Managing Classroom Dynamics

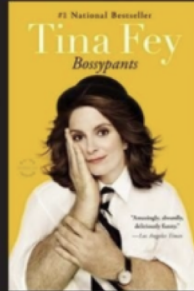
Intentionally designing learning goals, assessments, syllabi & learning activities

Create or co-create course agreements/principles for discussion and civil discourse

Practice the rules of improvisation



# Tina Fey



# on Improvisation

(or collaboration, or life...)

The first rule of improvisation is AGREE.

**Always agree and SAY YES...**

“Respect what your partner created” and...

at least start from an open-minded place.

The second rule of improvisation is not only to say yes, but

**YES, AND.**

You are supposed to agree

and then

**add something of your own.**

The next rule is **MAKE STATEMENTS.**

This is a positive way of saying **“Don’t ask questions all the time” ...**

In other words: Whatever the problem,

**be part of the solution.**

**THERE ARE NO MISTAKES,**

only opportunities.

# Validation Theory: Affirming Students



Validation is an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that fosters academic and personal development (Rendón, 1994)

There are two forms of validation:

- Academic -- when in- and out-of-class agents take action to assist students to trust their innate capacity to learn and to acquire confidence in being a college student
- Interpersonal -- when in- and out-of-class agents take action to foster students' personal development and social adjustment

# When things get heated, what could you do?

- Turn into a discussion or learning moment.
- Explicitly and directly stop the behavior.
- Remind students of class agreements, expectations, guidelines for discourse.
- (Begin to) recover if you didn't address the uncivil or "Uh Oh/Sigh/Say What Now" moment immediately or you made the problematic statement.
- Other ?



## Looking ahead

- Which strategies from today's workshop might you apply to your teaching? How will you know if the strategy is successful?
- List 2 colleagues that might help you design strategies for a more inclusive classroom or who might observe your class to offer their observations of class dynamics.