

Strategies for Building Positive Student-Instructor Interactions in Large Classes

Authors: Oscar J. Solis¹ and Windi D. Turner
Presented by Brianna Chen

Discussion: What are your perceptions/experiences with large classrooms.

Large for this paper is anywhere from 50-150 students

Large Classrooms

- Pragmatic for Universities
- Provide many opportunities for students to become disengaged from learning

Strategies for positive student-instructor interactions

- Self-disclosure
- Caring leadership
- Making the class feel smaller

Self Disclosure

- Appropriate self-disclosure expresses to students a likeness between the instructor and students
- When students view the instructor's self-disclosure as being relevant, they are more apt to actively participate in class and ask questions that relate to the course material
- Stories enhance memory skills and build bridges to prior knowledge

“An instructor’s behavior dictates the type of learning environment that is constructed, the type of relationships that bloom, and the academic outcomes that students achieve”

Caring Leadership

- Student learning is affected by negative student attitudes and disruptive behavior
- An instructor who demonstrates caring leadership will nurture a positive learning environment that promotes student engagement and reduces negativity and disruptions

Caring Leadership

- Researchers have noted key traits among the most effective teachers:
 - the delivery of clear expectations and captivating instruction
 - the use of evidence-based teaching and classroom management tactics
 - the effort to build solid relationships with students

Caring Leadership

- Students report higher levels of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and confidence in their scholastic capabilities when they believe that their instructors are respectful and available

Making the Class Feel Smaller

- Interaction between students and instructors outside the classroom setting might lessen obstacles to communication and subsequently nurture overall participation
- Instructors can show their interest in and support for students by making eye contact and smiling to engage students.
- These tactics will help build a supportive classroom climate, which repeatedly has been shown to increase participation.

Making the Class Feel Smaller

- Students who perceived faculty as using more verbal-approach relational strategies were also more motivated to communicate with faculty for relational, participatory, excuse-making, and sycophantic reasons.
- Twelve categories were considered as verbal-approach relational strategies: personal recognition, humor, ritualistic, close-ness/inclusiveness, self-disclosure, character, willingness to communicate, language appropriateness, honesty, complimentary, responsiveness, and caring/appreciation.

Making the Class Feel Smaller

- The quality of interaction between a faculty member and a student takes into account the instructor's compassion, understanding, approachability, helpfulness, responsiveness, and concern, as well as how these traits are perceived by the student.
- Researchers have found that students are more likely to be academically successful and to engage with instructors who demonstrate leadership skills and are sociable, supportive, intelligent, and objective

Discussion: Can you think of a large classroom where a professor demonstrated any of these strategies?

The Study - Spring 2015

- Qualitative & Quantitative data collected from 2 online surveys
- Participants: Undergraduate students enrolled in two large consumer studies courses, 222
- Authors each taught one of the two classes, referred to as *instructor-researchers*

Survey 1 - Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT) Survey

- Standard University end of term survey, emailed out to all students
- 98 students (44.1%) anonymously responded
- No demographic data given
- 8 Likert-type questions: 7 q's strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6) and 1 q very bad (1) to vary good (6)

Survey 1 - Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT) Survey

- Four open ended questions:
 - What did the instructor do that most helped in your learning?
 - What could you have done to be a better learner?
 - Please add any additional comments regarding the course and/or instructor.
 - Please add any comments about the physical environment.

Survey 2 - Building Positive Student-Instructor Interactions in Large Classes (BPSILC) Survey

- Served two purposes
 - Examine presence of positive student-instructor interactions
 - Explore additional strategies instructors could use to build positive student-instructor interactions

Survey 2 - Building Positive Student-Instructor Interactions in Large Classes (BPSILC) Survey

- Sixty-five undergraduate students anonymously participated in this survey of five Likert-type questions and two open ended questions, yielding a response rate of 29.3%.
- Of the 65 participants, a total of five questionnaires were removed due to incompleteness, thus, making the final sample for this study 60 (27%).

Data Analysis - SPOT survey

- used open coding strategy
- Lists of unique words or phrases were maintained during the coding sessions to allow for category development and to identify quotes for inclusion within the second level of analysis.

Data Analysis - SPOT survey

- As the categories were compared to form concepts and eventually develop themes, the instructor-researchers identified three strategies that promote positive student-instructor interactions in large classes:
 - self-disclosure
 - caring leadership
 - making the class feel smaller.

Data Analysis - SPOT survey

Self Disclosure

- “The instructor explained things very well. The instructor also emphasized and gave us advice that were (sic) very helpful. The instructor even had speakers come in to talk about their financial experiences. In addition, the instructor gave us examples and stories that made me want to take care of my finances. In addition, the instructor’s assignments were very applicable to real life.”
- “The instructor told some stories to help solidify the importance of what we were learning and that it was important for us to understand.”
- “The instructor explained things very well and used life experience examples that would happen to everybody. The instructor also related things to the real world and talked about important things that are happening in the news today.”

Data Analysis - SPOT survey

Caring Leadership

- “The instructor genuinely cares about how the material is going to be useful in the students' everyday life and future.”
- “The instructor is passionate about the subject and clearly wants to see students succeed. The instructor presented class material clearly and made the course challenging enough to truly help students learn and understand the material.”
- “The instructor is an amazing, knowledgeable professor.”

Data Analysis - SPOT survey

Making the Classroom feel smaller

- “The instructor did a great job. I feel that everything I have learned will help me in the future and is all useful information. The instructor did their best to interact with the student in a large lecture and make a one-on-one connection.”
- “I liked how the instructor really tried to engage the students in conversation and get their input.”
- “The instructor was personable, remembered names, told stories, open for feedback from the class.”

Data Analysis - BPSILC survey

- The instructor-researchers purposefully crafted the *BPSILC online survey* to target the feedback received from the SPOT survey.
- Student responses to the *BPSILC online survey's* open ended questions were independently coded by each instructor-researcher in the same manner as the SPOT survey

Data Analysis - BPSILC survey

- Demographics
 - Sixty undergraduate students completed the online survey; however, demographic data were only provided by 58 students.
 - Eleven (18.9 %) of the 58 participants were male and 47 (81.03%) were female
 - Undergraduate students were mostly juniors (46.6%) followed by sophomores (37.9%), freshman (8.6%) and the smallest group were seniors (6.9%)

Data Analysis - BPSILC survey

Table 1. Question 1: “How many classes with over 50 students have you been enrolled in, including this class?”

Response	<i>N</i>
1	0
2	1
3	0
4	5
5	9
6	9
7	4
8	4
9	6
10 or more	22

Data Analysis - BPSILC survey

Table 2. Question 2: “Did your instructor do the following activity in your class?”

Activity	Yes	No	%
treated students with respect and as individuals	59	1	98.3
used storytelling/personal experiences	58	2	96.7
was passionate about teaching the content	58	2	96.7
made an effort to learn students’ names	55	5	91.7
encouraged students to actively participate in class	53	7	88.3
provided timely feedback and comments on graded assessments and activities	53	7	88.3
used student’s personal information from activities	45	15	75
consistently took attendance	42	18	70

Data Analysis - BPSILC survey

Table 3. Question 3: “How effective was the following activity in creating positive student-instructor interactions in this large class? ($N = 60$)

Activity	Mean	Std. Deviation
treated students with respect and as individuals	4.77	.46
was passionate about teaching the content	4.73	.45
used storytelling/personal experiences	4.62	.58
made an effort to learn students' names	4.57	.83
provided timely feedback and comments on graded assessments and activities	4.57	.77
encouraged students to actively participate in class	4.45	.79
consistently took attendance	4.22	.94
used student's personal information from activities	4.08	.89

Note: The scale ranged from very ineffective (1) to very effective (5)

Data Analysis - BPSILC survey

- Q4 “What additional comments do you have pertaining to strategies and/or activities that the instructor used in order to create positive student-instructor interactions in this large class?”
- The results relating to the identified theme of self-disclosure captured the following categories:
 - (a) storytelling to relate to course material
 - (b) disclosing instructor’s personal stories
 - (c) sharing peer stories

- “The instructor would ask us about our life experiences so we would engage and participate more in the content.”
- “Sharing personal stories that related to the course material and allowing us to share our own stories helped to obtain a better understanding of the material.”
- “Encouraging students to share their own experiences and stories about the subject.”

Data Analysis - BPSILC survey

- A common thread in the *BPSILC online survey* responses was caring leadership which encompassed the following categories:
 - (a) fostering mutual respect
 - (b) valuing students' opinions
 - (c) connecting the course material to students on a personal level.

- “I always find that a professor knowing my name helps me feel welcome and cared for!
- The instructor often asked about people's own experiences dealing with the content of the material, which applied it to real life.
- The instructor made the content very relatable. The instructor asked when the instructor could share information with the class about a classmate that could help the others.
- The instructor would actively engage with students during class, and have conversation rather than just typical student teacher transaction.”

Data Analysis - BPSILC survey

- The instructor-researchers' identified third salient theme of making the class feel smaller indicated the following categories:
 - (a) knowing students' names
 - (b) utilizing general in-formation about students as it applies to course material
 - (c) encouraging student participation

- “I think learning students’ name was a great strategy because it makes the class seem smaller.
- I believe that all instructors teaching relatively large classes should try to learn all of the students’ names to show the students that they are in-fact, more than a number.
- I like that the instructor knew my name. It definitely made the class feel smaller and like the instructor cared for us and wanted us to achieve success. I also like the instructor’s passion to teach the class. It made the class much more enjoyable and relatable.”

Data Analysis - BPSILC survey

- The fifth question was “What additional strategies and/or activities do you feel instructors could use in order to create positive student-instructor interactions in large classes?”

- “I think the differences I have seen in the classes is that some teachers aren’t personable. If that is the case, why would anyone want to listen to some one speak about a topic that they aren’t passionate about? Professors should be able to relate to the content they are teaching; that way, even if it is a large class, one is more apt to listening.
- Anytime you offer the class options it makes the class feel “powerful.” It could be as simple as when to turn in a homework assignment (Monday vs. Friday).
- I think maybe making it clear to students that an instructor is available during office hours and wants students to show up to office hours and ask questions/get clarification on course topics is important. It really helped students and is noticed by the students when instructors take time during office hours to help address students’ issues.”

Conclusions

- Three strategies to promote positive student-instructor interactions in large classes at a research institution.
- Students participating in this study emphasized the following strategies in their responses to the SPOT & BPSILC: self-disclosure, caring leadership, and making the class feel smaller

Conclusions

- The proven value of positive interactions suggests that instructors must strive to add to their subject-matter expertise and curriculum a layer of connectedness with students

Benefits for Faculty

- (a) students are attentive and engaged in class;
- (b) students are more comfortable talking to them;
- (c) the course is more interactive and engaging;
and
- (d) the positive student feedback offers the instructor further opportunities for professional development

Limitations

- The student participants came from a large public university. It is unknown how these perceptions might compare to students at other institutions.
- The e-mail solicitation of survey participants typically leads to low response rates and could have been easily dismissed by students in the summer time.

Thoughts/Questions?

Discussion

- Have any of you taught a large classroom before? What were your struggles and successes?
- Are there any other ways you can think of to build positive student-instructor relationships in large classrooms?