Fostering Belonging with AI

Practical Tips for Creating Community

AI Summarization of instructor iClicker responses

Creating an inclusive and welcoming classroom doesn't require massive changes—small, intentional efforts can make a big impact! Try integrating a few of these strategies and see how your students respond.

Suggestions from Fellow Instructors

Building a sense of belonging improves student engagement and success. Here are classroom-tested strategies to foster a welcoming and inclusive learning environment:

- **Personal Connection & Name Recognition:** Learn and use students' names in discussions, ask for preferred names and pronouns, engage in casual conversations before or after class, and check in with absent students via email or chat.
- **Icebreakers & Introductions:** Use icebreakers at the start of the semester and throughout, host introduction forums on LMS platforms like Blackboard or Canvas, and assign creative introductions such as "I Am" poems, snapshot photo assignments, shared Google Slide bios, or fun discussion questions.
- **Small Group & Collaborative Learning:** Implement paired and group activities, encourage peer-to-peer interactions through Think-Pair-Share, student-led discussions, group presentations, debates, case study collaboration, and team-based learning using tools like iClicker.
- **Engaging & Inclusive Discussions:** Offer multiple ways for students to participate, including small group discussions, anonymous polls, interactive slides, @ mentions in discussion forums, "Question of the Day" exercises, and peer responses to amplify student contributions.
- **Personalized Engagement & Feedback:** Customize feedback to acknowledge student perspectives, use AI to personalize case studies, incorporate student-generated content such as playlists or real-world examples, and check in through surveys or informal chats.
- **Culturally Responsive & Inclusive Practices:** Encourage storytelling about students' backgrounds and experiences, use diverse examples and case studies, infuse humor and playfulness in interactions, and set group norms like "Listen with attention, respond with intention."
- **Technology & Virtual Engagement:** Use Teams, Zoom, or discussion boards for check-ins, create digital name tags or virtual meet-and-greet assignments, and encourage students to embed photos, links, or creative intros in online forums.
- **Flexible Participation & Student Autonomy:** Allow students to choose roles in group work, use ungrading or labor-based grading to reduce stress, and offer "emergency tokens" for deadline flexibility.
- **Classroom Environment & Movement-Based Activities:** Encourage movement with interactive icebreakers, rotate seating arrangements to help students meet new peers, and start each class with a game or quick community-building exercise.

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Instructor Guide: AI-Powered Peer Collaboration Activity

This guide helps you turn a solo activity into an AI-supported peer collaboration experience, fostering belonging through meaningful interaction, teamwork, and constructive feedback.

Step 1: Identifying a Solo Activity to Transform

Select an existing assignment that students currently complete individually (e.g., writing reflections, case studies, problem-solving exercises, concept mapping).

- Consider how collaboration could enhance the activity:
  - 🔄 Group Work: Working together toward a shared goal.
  - 💬 **Peer Feedback:** Reviewing and responding to each other's work.

Instructor Reflection Questions

- Would students benefit from discussing different approaches?
- Can they work together to solve a problem?
- Could they share perspectives in a meaningful way?
- Would co-creating a final product enhance engagement?

Step 2: Choose a Collaboration Model

🔄 **When to Choose Group Work:**

- Best for multi-perspective tasks (e.g., debates, brainstorming, case studies).
- Works well for collaborative creation (e.g., co-writing, group presentations).
- Helps students build on each other's ideas.

💬 **When to Choose Peer Feedback:**

- Ideal for individual work that benefits from refinement (e.g., essays, lab reports).
- Useful for assignments where reviewing different approaches improves learning.
- Helps students apply constructive feedback before final submission.

Step 3: AI-Powered Activity Transformation

✨**Use the following AI prompt to tailor your activity**✨

"I am a [course] instructor, and I currently have my students complete the following activity: [describe the activity].
I would like to transform this into an opportunity for [Choose: group work/peer feedback].
The new activity should take [duration of time]. My learning goals for the activity are [goals].

Considering my course and the nature of this activity, how can I best adapt it to foster a sense of community, encourage meaningful collaboration, and ensure that all students engage constructively? Please suggest specific strategies, discussion structures, or interactive elements that will enhance learning while making students feel valued and included."

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Step 4: Implementation & Logistics

1️⃣ Generate AI-driven discussion prompts or structured peer feedback questions.
2️⃣ Customize the AI response for your specific discipline.
3️⃣ Adjust complexity, examples, and interaction format based on student level.

- **Choose a Format:** In-class discussion, online forums, flipped assignments.
- **Select Tools:** Google Docs, collaborative whiteboards, concept-mapping software.
- **Assign Roles:** Ensure all students have active participation.
- **Set Clear Instructions:** Provide guidelines on how students should interact and contribute.

Step 5: Assessing the Collaborative Activity

Choose an assessment style that fits your learning goals:

- ✅ **Ungraded (Low-Stakes Participation)** → Great for early exploration and brainstorming.
- ✅ **Participation-Based** → Encourages engagement without high-pressure grading.
- ✅ **Rubric-Based Grading** → Best for structured assignments with clear expectations.

✨**Use this prompt to design an assessment method**✨

- "I would like to create an assessment for this assignment that is [ungraded/participation-based/rubric-based]."

Step 6: Guiding Student Reflection

After the activity, guide students through structured reflection using reflection questions. You might consider:

- What key insights did you gain from this collaboration?
- How did working with peers shape your understanding of the topic?
- What challenges did you encounter, and how did you navigate them?
- How can you apply these collaboration skills to future coursework or real-world scenarios?

Want to customize? ✨**Use this prompt to generate discussion questions**✨

- "Generate a set of reflection questions for my activity to help students analyze their learning, consider how collaboration shaped their understanding, identify challenges, and connect the experience to real-world applications."

📌 Wrap-Up: Encourage students to connect their experience to future assignments and real-world applications.

This **AI-powered peer collaboration activity** enhances **engagement, belonging, and learning outcomes**. By using structured AI prompts and intentional design, you can ensure that all students feel **valued, included, and actively involved** in their academic journey.

This content piece was created using generative AI to summarize the responses shared by fellow instructors during the “Fostering Belonging with AI” Zoom conversation.

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