



**Year Two of the Pandemic:
Connecting and Celebrating
to Fortify Students**



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Lessons from the Pandemic

"Two out of three students had academic challenges and concerns learning online during the pandemic."

(Schnieders and Moore)

Overview

1. Lessons from the pandemic
2. Classroom community
3. Institutional scope
4. Conclusion



Classroom Community

Belonging, Mindfulness,
and Celebration





Belonging

Growth Mindset intervention:

“...intended to debunk the myth that only certain students (e.g. first-generation students, students from disadvantaged backgrounds) struggle to feel like they belong during their first year of college and to emphasize that all students worry about fitting in at first” and “designed to illustrate that feelings of belonging grow over time” (Bunting 60-61).

My accelerated learning course begins by introducing Dweck’s concept of growth vs. fixed mindset to students with videos and other visual texts. Then students write a brief narrative about a time they struggled to fit in, where students describe how they responded to and overcame the situation. At the end of the semester, they write a similar short narrative about their experiences in the course that demonstrates to future students of the course how they succeeded in learning and belonging despite their initial fears.

Scholarship Essay (or “big picture” essay):

This assignment asks students to envision themselves as capable of succeeding, and encourages them to see their dreams and desires for the future as possible and foreseeable. It also encourages them to focus on their previous achievements and to see themselves as knowledgeable and their experiences as valuable.

Belonging in the Classroom

Culture of Care	Assignment / Activity
Build trust, belonging, and act with empathy	Take ten minutes to ask meaningful questions, “check-in” with class
Encourage students to pursue their dreams	Big Picture Essay Scholarship Essay
Validate students as colleagues in learning	Collaborative assessment
Invite students to share growth experiences	Narrative of growth and belonging
Promote healthy coping strategies	Mindfulness & Meditation activity
Create community among peers	Cooperative gaming activities

Classroom Community

Meeting “Check-ins”:

Felicia Rose Chavez has advocated a ten-minute period (or longer) at the start of class in which the instructor takes time to “check-in” with students about how school (and life in general) is going. This is meant to provide students with an opportunity to share their concerns with their peers. This not only creates belonging but provides an environment in which peers may be able to support one another regarding shared challenges and obstacles. (It is important that the instructor is also open about their own experiences, as a way of demonstrating to the students that they are not alone.)

Collaborative Assessment:

Students may also develop a sense of belonging by working in groups to determine rubrics for grading or designing assignments collaboratively. This serves the purpose of allowing students to observe other students’ concerns about grading and success, and removes some of the mystique around grading that leads some students to think they are in over their head and cannot succeed in college.



Mindfulness

Guided Meditation:

Anxiety is a major factor for students struggling to succeed in college courses. Often, this stems not only from a fixed mindset, but a tendency to fixate on past failures and/or future possibilities instead of the present moment. A brief meditation activity can help students with ongoing tension by helping them focus on the present, so they can take the next right step. There are numerous videos available, and often campus counselors are also willing to lead this activity.

Though I introduce this concept at midterm, it may be helpful to bring in this tool sooner in the semester. There are a number of other exercises (aside from meditation) that can be found online, many of which are fun and don't require any kind of expertise on the subject.

Gaming Activities:

Cooperative and other gaming activities, besides building bonds between students to create community, can also “decompress” overwhelmed students and help them remain in the present moment. Party games, bluffing games, games that involve solving a collective riddle or mystery, provide students with a sense of achievement and relief of ongoing stress. Gaming can also be incorporated into the goals of the course.

Self-Regulated Learning (SRL)

Students who set goals, plan, self-evaluate, change strategies and behaviors, and self-motivate to reach their goals can also achieve a growth mindset.

SRL model from Zimmerman, Boekaert, Winnie and Hadwin, Pintrich, Efklies, and Jarvela and Hadwin



SRL in the ALP Classroom

SRL (Nilson)	Assignment / Activity
Validate students as colleagues in learning	Class collaboration on grading contract or rubric
Set goals for learning and pursue them	Big Picture Essay* Scholarship Essay*
Plan and set goals for assignments	Recursive Writing Process handout
Revise work that incorporates instructor, peer, and self-feedback	
Reflect on how attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors have changed as a result of assignment or course	Assignment reflection* End-of-semester reflection*
Let go of strategies that aren't working	Letter or video for in-coming students

A Campus Pilot

Composition I
(ENG 150)

Strategies for Comp.
(ENG 145, ALP co-req)

Student



Student Orientation
(SDV 108)

Support Services
Academic, financial, and
emotional

Creating Learning Cohorts

...to support students around the following obstacles:

College completion



- Encouragement from cohort and support services, using SRL

Financial constraints

- Faculty mentor guides student to appropriate campus experts

Procedural hurdles





- Guidance from ENG & SDV classroom colleagues and faculty mentor

Lack of academic preparation

- Learn strategies from ENG & SDV

Psychological and social challenges

- Connections with community/campus resources



How are you creating belonging
and finding ways to celebrate with
your students?

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