

Session Handout - Co-Creating a Learner Agreement: Improving Learner Accountability in your Course

Presenters:

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Background

Instructors demonstrate and promote an attitude of respect, dignity, and equity to create safe, supportive, and accessible learning environments for all students. Classroom incivility encompasses classroom, online, and even out-of-class behaviours that are inappropriate. They may distract, disturb, annoy, show disrespect or hostility towards instructors and other students, or waste class time. Creating a Learner Agreement is one example of a preventive measure that can be used to mitigate classroom incivility and promote an orderly environment that is conducive to learning. The literature on classroom management supports setting ground rules to establish classroom expectations for students and instructors.

Creating Learner Agreements

Learner agreements, or classroom conduct contracts, are a set of rules for behaviour to which students will agree. Creating learner agreements collectively as a class is an effective means to reduce classroom incivility. Many approaches may be used to create a learner agreement. A few options are presented here.

Time:

30-45 minutes

Resources:

In person: White boards or flip charts, markers

Online: shared document or virtual workspace, breakout rooms

Procedure

Option 1 (small group discussion):

Break students into groups of 4-6. Each group should have access to a white board or flip chart and pens. They should identify a scribe to capture notes. They should also identify a presenter to speak in debrief.

Each white board/flip chart should be divided with two vertical lines and three horizontal lines (evenly spaced across the page). The columns should be labeled “best experience” and “worst experience”. The rows should be labeled “instructor”, “students”, and “learning environment”.

Instruct learners to brainstorm in their groups, recording on the sheet:

Think of your best learning experience. What was the instructor like? What were the students like? What was the learning environment like?

After they've finished:

Now, think of your worst learning experience. What was the instructor like? What were the students like? What was the learning environment like?

After they've finished, lead debrief discussion.

- *Was there a connection between how the instructor behaved and how the students behaved?*
- *Who created that dynamic?*
 - Students tend to blame instructors for bad learning experiences whereas instructors tend to blame students. Discussion should show that students and instructors feed off of each other's energy.
 - The dynamic between the classmates and instructor create the learning environment.

Now, I'd like us to discuss what kind of experience we want to have in this class. If I agree to try to be/do the things on the "good" instructor list and avoid the things on the "bad" instructor list, can you all be/do the things on the "good" student list and avoid the things on the "bad" student list?

- Discuss if there's anything on the list that you/they cannot be expected to uphold and cross them out

We need to hold each other accountable to this. If I am not living up to my end of the bargain, please let me know! I want to be a good instructor. If you see others not living up to their end of the bargain, let them know. We all want to make this one of your best learning experiences.

Take pictures of the sheets and post in LMS or type out and send to students.

Option 2 (carousel):

In a smaller class (works best with 40 or fewer students), put 6 white boards/flip charts around the room. Divide the class into four groups. Each group receives a different coloured marker. Each group should identify a scribe to capture notes. They should also identify a presenter to speak in debrief.

Each group should move to one of the flipboard stations, taking their marker with them. Each white board/flip chart should have ones of the following headers: "Instructor – Good Experience", "Instructor – Bad Experience", "Students-Good Experience", "Students – Bad Experience", "Learning Environment – Good Experience", or "Learning Environment – Bad Experience".

Ask students to think about their past learning experiences.

We're going to decide what makes a great learning experience. On the flipchart/whiteboard in front of you, brainstorm what, for example, [move/point to the "Instructor – Good Experience" board] the instructor should be like to create a good educational experience. [Give another example if necessary]. We all have good and bad learning experiences, and it may help to reflect on your past experiences to identify was good or bad.

Give them 5 minutes to brainstorm and record their thoughts.

Now, taking your marker with you, your group is going to move clockwise to the next station. Here, look what the previous group has written. Is there anything that you don't agree with that, for example, the instructor should do to make a good learning experience? What can you add that's missing?

Give them 4 minutes to brainstorm, and then continue to have the groups move around through all of the stations, taking their marker with them. [The reason they keep their marker with them is so that we can identify which group wrote what by the colour of the writing in order to ask for clarification if necessary.] When the groups get back to their original position, ask them to have one person read out what's on the sheet. Discuss any crossed out options to see why they were/were not appropriate.

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References

1. Nilson, Linda B.. Teaching at Its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors, John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central.