

The Importance of Learning Students' Names

Tamara Glenz

Knowing and using a students' name during and outside of class recognizes that a student exists and is important. In an article by Professor Kent Syverud (1993), he challenges educators to "ask yourself: who is the one teacher in your entire life who made the biggest difference for you--who taught you so well that you still think about him or her as your best teacher. I bet that for almost all of us, that best teacher was someone who knew you by name" (p. 247). Many successful educators agree that learning students' names is fundamental to developing a sense of community in the classroom. A teacher that doesn't take the time to learn their students' names is often perceived as disinterested and unapproachable. By calling on a student by name, it gives the impression that the teacher cares about their success and develops a sense of trust. It also has an effect on student interactions. Knowing the names of peers by either activities in which they learn each other's names or by hearing the teacher address them promotes interaction between students. "When the professor engages the student in personal conversation, recognizes her by name, and seems to include her in the domain of attention, the subject matter seems more accessible. The nonverbal message goes out that the student is a part of the community of people who can do mathematics, statistics, chemistry, or whatever the subject is." (Willemsen, 1995, p. 15).

Getting Started. Learning your students' names is the first step in knowing who they are. Calling students by name communicates respect, helps them feel recognized as individuals, and helps to

draw out and include shy students in class discussions. There is a variety of useful techniques to assist you with learning your students' names.

Check your roster. Read through your class roster several times before the first day of class so they sound familiar when you meet them in person.

Take a visual approach. Create name tents to set on the desks or tables. This approach assists both the teacher and the classmates with remembering names. Collect the tents after each class to keep track of attendance. (Kees, 2008, p. 22)

Use a seating chart. This can be temporary until you are able to match names with faces.

Passport for class. Have the students create a passport for class. Provide them with a notecard and ask them to attach a small photograph of themselves as well as some specific information about themselves (i.e. a brief biography, interests, something they know a lot about). Collect these cards and review them to help memorize names and learn more about your students. (Hardy, 2008, p. 27)

Student introductions. Have a few students introduce themselves. Then stop the introductions and ask another student to name all the classmates who have been introduced. Once the first few names have been recalled move on to a few more, until everyone has been introduced.

Student interviews. Have each student pair up and introduce themselves using questions such as unique traits, unusual hobbies, future goals, etc. After a few minutes, students introduce their partner to the class.

Don't be afraid to ask. Ask students to say their name before asking or answering a question. This gives both you and their classmates a change to learn names and can be continued until everyone feels they know the people in the room.

Use association techniques. If a student has the same name as someone you know, or has any characteristic that you can distinguish, they can be associated together. For example: a thin student named Jim can be remembered as "Slim Jim".

Use students' names often. Greet your students by name when they enter the classroom or use their names as you pass back homework.

Most importantly, keep a positive attitude! Set a goal to learn a few names per day. Don't get discouraged or overwhelmed. Try different techniques until you find what works best for you.

References

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