

MAKING EXPECTATIONS CLEAR

The success of a class can depend on the transparency of its expectations and outcomes. When expectations and outcomes of a course are unclear, both students and teachers can become frustrated and struggle with the course. Making the expectations and outcomes of the course clear from the first day can help to overcome these challenges. One common way to make course expectations transparent is for the teacher to create a syllabus explaining the requirements and then review the syllabus with students at the beginning of the course. However, although using a syllabus does make expectations and outcomes clear, it doesn't support the creation of a strong classroom community. A more effective strategy would be to involve students in the process of defining the expectations and requirements of the course. When students are asked to explain their own expectations for the course, the teacher, and their own learning, they are given a responsibility in the course from its beginning. This week's Teacher's Corner presents an activity that involves both the teacher and the students in defining the expectations and rules of a course.

LEVEL

Any level

MATERIALS

- Pencil and paper
- Chalk and chalkboard, or markers and whiteboard

PROCEDURE

1. Explain that today everyone is going to work together to make the rules of the class. Everyone will first work in small groups to develop rules for both the teacher and students. Once each group shares the rules they've come up with, the class will vote on the rules and make a final list of rules that will be used for the duration of the class.

2. Put students into groups of three. If it is the first or second day of class, simply group students according to where they are sitting.
3. Tell students that for 5-7 minutes they will discuss what rules are important for a student to be successful. For example, when should students arrive in this class in order to be successful? What should we do if a student is late to our class? How much time is late—5 minutes, 10 minutes? Encourage students to have a rule and explain the consequences if the rule is broken.
 - a. Have one person in the group write the rules on a piece of paper to eventually share with the class.
 - b. Once each group completes their list of rules, send one member of the group to the board to write the rules they developed.
4. Once each group has posted their set of rules on the board, tell all of the groups to look at the rules posted by their classmates and write down any rules that they like that were not on their original list.
5. As the students work in their groups to review the lists of rules on the board, you can work to make a master list of all of the rules—a single list of all the rules without any overlap. For example, several groups might write that students should only speak English in class; therefore, repeated rules can be erased. If there are any variations on the same rule, include each variation.
6. Once the students have reviewed all of the rules, bring the class back together and ask if there is anything they would like to add to the master list of rules. Remind them that this is their chance to help define the classroom rules.
 - a. As the teacher, you may add some rules you think are necessary or not included on the lists from the students. For example, you might feel it's important that students ask to go to the bathroom and would want to add that to the list.
7. As a class, go through each rule with the students and ask them to vote on the rules.

- a. If there is a rule with a couple of variations, ask the students to vote on the variation to come up with a final rule.
 - b. For any rules that are voted out, cross them out on the board. Circle the rules that students vote for.
8. Once the voting is finished, explain that you will turn this into a master list to be presented at the next class. Each student will sign a copy, and a copy will be posted in the classroom to remind students of the expectations.
9. Once the rules for students are created, repeat the activity so that students can make a set of rules and expectations for the teacher.
 - a. Tell students to work in their groups to devise a set of rules and expectations for the teacher. Begin by asking them, what have past teachers done that they find helpful? What have past teachers done that is unhelpful to their learning? For example, how important is it for you to get feedback on assignments? How much time should the teacher have before returning a grade?
 - b. Go through the same steps as before: students come up with a set of rules that they share with the class; take time to review and adjust the rules as necessary; vote on the final set of rules; share and post this final set.
10. Use the rules throughout the term and make sure to reinforce them so that they retain their value. Students will appreciate having a say in how their class operates and will be more likely to abide by rules that they devised.

VARIATIONS

Some schools and teachers have rules in place that cannot be altered. For example, some departments have an attendance policy that serves the whole department. Students do not have a say in changing the

policy and must abide by the policy. If this is the case, explain what the rules are and that they are not in the power of the class to change. Make sure that these rules are included on the final list of rules and expectations. Still, give students a chance to make rules in areas that are up for debate. Even if students only have a say in a few rules, they will be more likely to participate when the reasons behind rules are transparent or when they have created the rules themselves.

Another variation to consider is a teacher veto (or, rejection of a rule). You may explain at the beginning of the activity that you have the power to veto (or, reject) a rule that you deem unfair or excessive. If there is a rule that you simply cannot enforce, or that you refuse to enforce, then make that clear to students. For example, the students vote that the teacher should bring candy to class every Friday. You might think this is impossible or too expensive. Explain to the students why you will veto the rule.