Chitter Chatter: Building Bridges for Connected Classrooms
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We recognize that teaching is changing. Students are now very diverse groups and include a wider range of ethnicities, educational backgrounds, ages, abilities and gender.
We also live in a world that is increasingly dependent on devices and screen time which leaves a need for “face time” as well as skill building and enrichment. Furthermore, with media and information acquisition being more democratic, our role is often more that of a facilitator; we cannot claim to ‘know all’.
Helping students build a sense of community with each other takes time. Below are some ideas that you can use in your classroom.

**Warming up and getting to know each other**

Providing short but meaningful segments of time at the beginning of class for students to introduce themselves to each other (at the beginning of term) and engage in general conversation on specified topics (throughout the term) creates a means to transition from the outside world to the class room space, and to build a sense of community in class.

Ideas for ‘small talk’ questions:

- What is your very favorite meal, and do you know how to make it?
- Tell us about a passion or a hobby you have
- If you have a completely free Saturday afternoon, how would you like to spend it?
- If I gave you $5,000 to spend on a trip, where would you go?

Later in the term

- What are you stressed about right now?

**Resources:**

http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-teaching-strategies/first-day-of-class-activity-the-interest-inventory/

**Topic discussions: going deeper**

There are many ways to provide opportunities for students to engage in meaningful dialogue that can deepen their understanding of the content and concept and allow the knowledge to be assimilated in ways that encourage further questions.

**5 minute (or more) conversations to incorporate content review**
(consider breaking it down into specific topic sections)

Ask students to share with a partner or small group what they learned from the previous class/lecture, a reading, or a particular subsection of content. This can occur at the beginning of class, or as a wrap-up review to provide closure.
Questions can include:

- Summarize what you know
- What stood out most for you, and why?
- What is a question you still have, or something you’ re curious to know more about?

When students are preparing for an assignment, give opportunities to discuss their progress and learning with partners or small groups. It may be beneficial to let them know ahead of time to prepare for these discussions.
• Tell about what you have found in your research
• How do you feel your project is going so far? Discuss your accomplishments.
• What are you still struggling with or wanting to know more about?

**Time for reflection**: Some students may prefer time to formulate their thoughts. Individual reflection also allows students to formulate their own thoughts and better prepare for sharing them. Consider allowing time for students to write a brief personal reflection and response to particular questions. There are many ways to then share what they write.

Snowball fight: students write down their thought, scrunch up the paper and throw it around the room. Everyone then unwraps a paper and reads out the comment in small groups or as a class. By reading a comment that is not their own, and having something definite to voice, students feel less self-conscious about speaking up.

Online Blog/Discussion page: students are invited to contribute to an online shared space

Gallery Walk: Students can write down their contributions on a sticky note or piece of paper and it gets posted on a blackboard/wall and everyone takes time to review and read what others have written. They can then choose 1 or 2 to discuss in a small group.

**Effective questions**

It is important to formulate questions that will help direct the conversation purposefully. Good discussion questions have clear parameters for the direction of the conversation, yet are open-ended enough to invite personal and open-ended contribution. They are specific and goal-oriented, yet invite individual interpretation. Examples:

Share one thing that comes to mind when we discuss ______________________

List three strategies that you can use for______________

**Assisting students to work well in groups/teams**

Group work can be challenging. Some ideas to promote teamwork include:

• Assessments: as an instructor you can provide a framework for students to provide feedback to each other and time to improve