

How do I help students feel more at ease?

Topic focus

- helping students feel secure in your classes

Topic outcomes

- you will be able to identify strategies for generating a positive learning environment in your classroom

My students seem cautious in class. There seems to be a sense of “is this right?” or “I don’t want to get it wrong or I might lose marks”.

Take a moment to reflect on this issue.

What challenges does this pose for *your* teaching?

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Possible solutions

1. In your first class, stress that it is OK to make mistakes, it is OK to not know the answer.
2. If a student struggles with an answer to one of your questions, reinforce that your classroom environment is designed to be non-threatening, and thank the student for attempting an answer.
3. For some students, they may be returning to study after a break from formal education. They will often feel insecure, so they need encouragement and support whilst they renew confidence.
4. Promoting classroom discussion can encourage students to offer positive comments to their peers. Adult learners generally respect the views of other students.
5. Giving positive feedback on assessments helps support students.
6. Understanding what motivates adult learners helps teachers to support them.

More help

Here are some resources from which you may seek some advice. They are all annotated so as to assist you in making judgements about what might be useful advice for your particular teaching context. By exploring some or all of these resources, you may well be able to generate strategies to suit your particular circumstances.

1. <http://www.uiowa.edu/%7Ecenteach/resources/ideas/greatbegin.html> - different approach from the University of Iowa which takes a new student’s perspective and helps you to understand what it is that students worry about when starting a new unit or course.
2. <http://www.ou.edu/pii/tips/ideas/design4.html> - contains some good ideas for the first class, which is where many students will be a little uncertain and be looking for direction.
3. http://www.snm.utas.edu.au/preceptor/adult_learning.html - discusses the ‘smartie’ approach to nursing education, but can be applied to many disciplines.
4. <http://www.aare.edu.au/04pap/zha04171.pdf> - a paper which reports on research into interpersonal relationships between teachers and students, with an intercultural perspective.

Related topics

How do I know how adults learn?