

- Watzlawick, P., Beavin, J. H., and Jackson, D. D. *Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes*. New York: Norton, 1967.
- Wing, K. T. "Implications of Feedback Research for Group Facilitation and the Design of Experiential Learning." *Small Group Research*, 1990, 21, 113-127.

*Myriad social arrangements can be created that work toward rather than against cooperation, effective communication, and security in teaching and learning.*

## Effective Social Arrangements for Teaching and Learning

*Janet Mancini Billson, Richard G. Tiberius*

What social arrangements are best suited to facilitate teaching and learning? In the previous chapter, we concluded that a new ideal for the social context of teaching and learning is emerging from contemporary theory and research. We described this ideal as an alliance between teachers and students. We identified five key features underlying the alliance: mutual respect; shared responsibility for learning and mutual commitment to goals; effective communication and feedback; cooperation and willingness to negotiate conflicts; and a sense of security in the classroom. In this chapter, we concentrate on how such social arrangements can be promoted, and we offer specific guidelines for promoting the alliance in the context of the classroom.

Promotion of the alliance requires us to shift our perception of the teacher as an agent of change in students to the teacher as a partner in the process of change. Shifting from the production/transmission metaphor to the dialogue metaphor—from controlling or managing students and classroom interaction to forming an alliance with students—is the critical change.

### Guidelines for Strengthening the Alliance in the Classroom Group

Katz and Henry (1988) identify several basic learning principles that depend on the social context of the teaching-learning process. They conclude that teaching should be directed toward the transformation of students' passivity into active learning, through inquiry with others in a supportive atmosphere. We have argued that the alliance is central to the

*Richard G. Tiberius is associate professor and deputy director, Centre for Studies in Medical Education, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto.*

*Janet Mancini Billson is professor of sociology and women's studies at Rhode Island College, Providence.*

social context and have stressed the nature of the teacher-student relationship, but overcoming the sometimes impenetrable wall of students' passivity hinges on development of the student-student relationship and a commitment to collaborative inquiry. This leads us to a model for thinking of the class as a group and for using group activities in the classroom. In this section, we emphasize teaching as group facilitation and group leadership, rather than as one-way transmission of knowledge.

Keener awareness of group processes can enhance teaching effectiveness through improving participation levels, increasing individual and group motivation, stimulating enthusiasm, and facilitating communication in the classroom. Although the guidelines are presented here under the key features they are most readily associated with, all contribute to all features. The guidelines are applicable to our alliance with students as individuals and to our facilitative role in the classroom environment. They can be applied to any classroom, regardless of subject matter or, in some cases, size. They are explicated here in tandem with specific suggestions for course design and classroom management.

The principles of group interaction presented here are by no means exhaustive. Such issues as group emotion, transference (the tendency for students to relate to faculty in terms of feeling patterns developed toward their parents), social control, social status, or numerical propositions regarding group size are not directly addressed. An earlier version of several guidelines appears in Billson (1986); see also Billson (forthcoming).

### Mutual Respect

In the previous chapter, we discussed the theory that communication has both content and relational components, with the latter providing the interpretive framework for the former. One implication of this theory is very encouraging. If learning about one another enhances the relational context, and if a better relational context facilitates understanding, then communication should become easier.

**Guideline 1: Learn About Students.** Teachers who wish to learn more about students should "listen for feelings as well as for thoughts, search for underlying messages, explore thoughts in depth by asking questions, and encourage expression of feelings by showing acceptance of students' feelings" (DeVito, 1986, p. 57). Since most of the contact between teachers and students takes place in classrooms, methods of gathering information during class should not be ignored. The old adage "Start where the student is" bears repeating. At the beginning of the term, three simple devices can help you gain more knowledge about your students:

1. Review results of institutional surveys of incoming freshmen.
2. Ask students to fill out 3 × 5 cards the first week of class, including

name, major, age, career aspirations, current employment, residence, reasons for taking the course, other courses taken in the discipline, and other information of special interest.

3. Allow time for introductions at the term's beginning. Use name tags or desk cards to learn students' names. This is a minimum requirement for classes of thirty or fewer students.

**Guideline 2: Help Students Learn About the Teacher.** Scholl-Buchwald (1985, p. 17) recommends that teachers "share something about themselves that illuminates their values and styles and cuts through the stereotypes that students sometimes have of professors." He cites an example of a teacher who is bright, witty, and perhaps great fun at a party but who may intimidate students in the classroom. In order to dispel anxiety and improve attitudes toward learning, Scholl-Buchwald advises the teacher to disclose some of his or her own anxieties and shortcomings, or to playfully poke fun at offending characteristics in order to make light of them.

1. Begin the term by asking students to introduce each other in pairs. Participate in a pair yourself. Students can then introduce each other or themselves.
2. Open each class term with a brief introduction of yourself, your research and teaching interests, avocations, and approach to the course and to teaching.

**Guideline 3: Develop Sensitivity to Nonverbal Cues.** Another way teachers and students learn about each other is through nonverbal cues. Anderson (1986) reminds us of the importance of nonverbal communication, especially in learning about student preferences, values, beliefs, apprehensions, and interests. Nonverbal communication often provides the only data regarding attitudes of students in a large class.

Learning about students implies learning about their immediate reactions to the educational task at hand. Nonverbal cues can be misleading in this respect. Respectful silence can be mistaken for boredom or confusion. Attention to nonverbal cues is important for receiving and interpreting communication.

1. Attend to what students are doing—taking notes, looking at the handout, reading the newspaper. Frowning, fidgeting, sleeping, reading the college newspaper, slouching, and so on, may be as important feedback as that which students provide at the end of the term in a computerized questionnaire.
2. Have a class session videotaped and analyzed with a sympathetic colleague. An informal visit by a trusted colleague who attends to nonverbals may be equally instructive and less threatening.

Anderson supports the conclusion that nonverbal means of communication are well suited to disclosing teachers' attitudes toward their students. Eye contact, smiling, vocal expressiveness, physical proximity, gesturing, and body language can communicate feelings of warmth and support, or the opposite. Failure to attend to nonverbal cues hampers the teacher's ability to recognize incomprehension or dissatisfaction with course materials and procedures. Students complain that the teacher is losing the class or over their heads. Often, they vote with their feet.

**Guideline 4: Establish a Climate of Egalitarianism and Tolerance.** Diverse backgrounds and interests can add to the richness of classroom interaction. They can also contribute to misunderstanding conflict, and uneven participation. Students, as people, bring to class their personalities, assumptions about the learning process, physical and emotional problems, and what happened on the way to class. (The same can be said of professors.) Although individuals may coalesce into a group as the term proceeds, this diversity underscores the need for informal preclass interaction, reiteration of clear norms and goals, and mechanisms that foster open participation.

Further, it is the responsibility of teachers and students to ensure that factors of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual preference, lifestyle, and nationality are not allowed to exclude anyone directly or by implication. Inequality in classroom interaction has a poisonous effect on trust. Teachers should endeavor to establish egalitarian norms. The social context will be toxic if discriminatory comments are allowed to float unchallenged in the classroom. Students who feel excluded or slighted are likely to withdraw; both the victims and other students suffer from the loss of ideas. Invite each student to join the dialogue.

Egalitarian norms are as important in a chemistry or history class as they are in a sociology class on minority groups and race relations. Research on the classroom as a "chilly climate" for women indicates that teachers' behaviors that endanger security for women cover a wide range: recognizing and reinforcing comments from males more often than those from females, inviting males to solve math problems on the chalkboard more often than females, interrupting women's comments, making direct derogatory and sexist remarks, and offering more help outside the classroom to males (Constantinople, Cornelius, and Gray, 1988).

A safe climate for learning can be shattered by a remark such as "You girls won't understand this problem." We know of a math professor who taught calculation of the mean by asking females to give their bra sizes. Some withdrew in silent humiliation; others reported him to the affirmative action officer, in indignation. The problem with racist and sexist incidents is that all too many students withdraw rather than protest. Individualization and respect for differences in learning styles are also related to the development of tolerance for individual differences. As students are made more self-aware and respectful of their own strivings toward autonomy, they can

also be helped to develop greater tolerance toward other differences that separate them.

1. Do not allow racist or sexist comments or actions to pass unnoticed. Draw students' attention to them, and help students explore the sources of prejudice and discrimination and how these inhibit full participation of all class members and hence the learning capacity of the class as a group.
2. Acknowledge feelings about differences, and create a safe climate for discussion. This fosters individual development as well as group solidarity.
3. Do not insist on a "politically correct" position. Help students explore all sides of a position and understand how they come to their various perspectives.

**Guideline 5: Help Students Explore Differences and Find Commonalities on Key Issues.** Students who discover, in the process of interacting with others, that their opinions, fears, or problems are not unique are less likely to feel timid in the future to express themselves. For example, a student who feels stupid in not solving an equation may experience a renewal of self-confidence and optimism when others admit the same difficulty. Ask simple questions in response to students' comments, especially unconventional or controversial ones: "Does anyone else ever feel that way?" "Have any of you ever had that problem or experience?" "Do you know anyone who has had that problem or experience?" This last question is particularly useful in stimulating discussion of social issues or psychological phenomena. Students who hesitate to discuss their own experiences or attitudes may be quick to discuss those of family members, neighbors, or friends. This paves the way to open discussion of their own prejudices, fears, biases, or questions.

**Guideline 6: Remember That You Are a Role Model for Student Behavior.** The leader of any group serves as a role model for its members. The way in which you play your role—including how you present expectations of students, carry out responsibilities, and handle privileges implicit in the professional role—has a profound effect on how students enact their role.

1. Early in the semester, model behavior you want your students to exhibit, particularly regarding punctuality, keeping agreements, tolerating dissent, respecting diversity, encouraging discussion, and being a good listener.
2. Model standards for academic productivity. If your syllabus is full of typographical and spelling errors, admonishments to students about turning in carefully prepared work will fall on deaf ears.
3. Keep ahead of the agreed-upon reading. If you are barely a page ahead of your students in reading assignments, encouraging them to read on schedule will hold little significance.

4. Try to teach courses that genuinely interest you. Students take the lead from you in terms of enthusiasm, energy, and excitement about subject matter. Chances are that if you are mildly bored with the course materials, your students will also be bored.
5. If you expect students to think critically, you should listen to divergent opinions, ask questions, and model critical thinking yourself.
6. If you want students to provide examples from their own experience, begin by sharing an experience of your own.
7. By saying "I don't know" when that is true, you help students to accept the limits of their own knowledge and to admit when they do not know or understand something.
8. By saying "But I know where we can find it," you help students believe that knowledge is worth pursuing.

### Shared Responsibility and Mutual Commitment to Goals

As we argued in the previous chapter, an effective social context for teaching and learning is characterized by mutual commitment to the goals, methods, and evaluation of an educational experience. Every participant in a group is responsible for the outcome of the group interaction. A class consists of two roles, in complementary and reciprocal relationship—teacher and student. A teacher may suggest or assign readings; discussion will be vague and one-sided if students do not complete the reading on schedule. The class as a group will be held back from achieving its potential for meaningful and stimulating discussion.

Technically—because of contractual obligations, expertise, and power—the teacher has major responsibility for the outcome of a particular course. Yet college students, as adults (few are under eighteen), share a significant part of the responsibility for creating a successful learning experience. Making the shift from being a passive learner to an active one depends in large part on one's increasing willingness to accept shared responsibility for one's own educational experience.

This is a difficult concept for many students, who have been socialized into teacher-dependent learning relationships in elementary and secondary school. The task for young adults is in large part centered on establishing independence and autonomy from parents and other authority figures. For older adults, highly authoritarian classes can be an instant turnoff—they do not want to be treated "like children." The presumption of responsibility may make the difference between satisfaction with higher education and disgruntlement (see Kazmierski, 1989). Conducting the class as a cooperative learning group, which lessens the teacher's authority and strengthens peer relationships, can support that growth. Group interaction that stresses student responsibility, individuality, and diverse learning styles can reduce inhibition and foster growth.

Student discontent is often expressed outside the classroom and is never brought to the teacher's attention. Students may perceive themselves to be in a relatively powerless position as long as the teacher has the power of the final grade. A teacher who takes shared responsibility seriously and at the same time understands reluctance to ask questions or criticize a teacher's style or methods can try the following guidelines in order to promote student responsibility.

**Guideline 7: Share Responsibility with the Learner.** Flexibility in course organization and structure allows us to negotiate with each class as a particular constellation of individuals, with their special needs, interests, skills, and prior knowledge. This makes it more likely that students will be motivated to achieve those goals. They will be more willing to take responsibility not only for their own achievement but also for the success of the course. Frequent reference to the syllabus reinforces the relevance of commonly shared goals.

1. Explore at the beginning of each term the concept of joint responsibility, especially with regard to assignments and format.
2. Establish with students at the outset that their discontent, as well as yours, is "group business," and that you welcome their opinions and ideas. This sets the tone for openness and mutual responsibility toward course goals.
3. Prepare a few copies of a basic syllabus. Negotiate details of pacing, structure, and assignment weights during the first week of class. Distribute a revised syllabus the next week. Students feel more positive toward a course when they have had a meaningful role in planning it.
4. Give opportunities for students to plan certain segments of the course, to make class presentations under your guidance, or to suggest and arrange for discussion topics, debates, class speakers, and films.
5. Build in choices between papers and presentations, but invite those who write papers to share their work briefly with the class (or with a subgroup with similar interests).
6. Regardless of subject matter, students can contribute their ideas and information through formal and informal presentations. Simple techniques for facilitating such contributions include asking students to prepare definitions, find answers to directed questions, bring articles or research data for discussion in class, and work in small groups in class to generate questions (answers, policies, principles, theories, and so forth) for classwide deliberation.
7. Check out class sentiment early in the term, so that students' feedback can be incorporated, as appropriate, into the course format.
8. Encourage students to contribute course-structure ideas to a suggestion box, or set aside a few minutes for a periodic check on course progress.

**Guideline 8: Strive Toward Balance Between the Socioemotional and Task Areas.** As we pointed out in the previous chapter, the functions of any

group fall into two fundamental areas: task and socioemotional. Morale, cohesion, solidarity, and effective problem solving rest on achieving a balance between them.

1. Help keep the class on schedule, or renegotiate meaningful deadlines.
2. Help keep the class on task by reiterating agreed-upon goals and initiating periodic assessments of progress toward them.
3. Attend to morale and cohesion by including them in periodic assessments.
4. Maintain good humor in working on tasks. Return to tasks after the use of humor and letting off steam.

**Guideline 9: Encourage Emergent Student Leadership.** Natural leaders may emerge among students and may function positively or negatively in the socioemotional and task areas. Roles such as joker, clown, negativist, organizer, or class spokesperson will materialize from time to time. As Benjamin (1978, p. 7) observes, "This leadership will encourage or discourage member involvement, form coalitions and factions, or attempt to rule unilaterally. It will operate with, oppose, or act independently of the formal group leader."

Student leadership can help create a strong alliance and contribute to productivity and morale. Nonconstructive, belligerent behavior can be redirected or discussed as part of class business. The teacher who is able to recognize informal leadership and other roles among students is likely to cope better with the class.

1. Notice student seating patterns, and observe informal conversations before and after class. Opinion leaders may be among the dominant participators in class, but some leadership will be expressed outside the classroom.
2. Encourage students who appear to be forming subgroups to bring their ideas and issues to the class as a whole.
3. Invite students who are comfortable with a leadership role to serve as facilitators or discussion leaders in subgroups.

**Guideline 10: Build In Early Assessments.** End-of-course evaluations may help assess teaching performance, but they do not afford students the opportunity to take real responsibility for the outcome of the course. Administer a simple instrument a few weeks into the course: "What do you like most about this course? What do you like least about it? Do you have any suggestions for improving it?" Responses are written and returned anonymously for discussion and possible fine-tuning or restructuring of the course format.

**Guideline 11: Create Opportunities for Informal Interaction.** The social climate of the classroom is elevated considerably by allowing a period at the

beginning of each session for informal conversation. Coffee or stretch breaks and chatting before or after class are examples of informal interaction.

1. Each day, allow the class to warm up. Arrive a few minutes before class to afford a period of settling in. This is a time when students and teachers can learn more about each other.
2. Help students maintain contacts outside the classroom (this seems to be particularly important in commuter schools) by duplicating students' names and telephone numbers early in the term (with their permission, of course).
3. If logistically feasible, ask students to organize a refreshment pool for midclass breaks.

Students can hide more easily in larger classes, but because each individual is comparatively visible in classes of fewer than fifteen students, pressure to participate is greater on each individual and is also more likely to generate self-consciousness. The smaller the number of students, the more likely the student is to be called on or to be expected to participate. While this makes for a more personalized learning experience, it also may generate or tap into the self-consciousness that some students bring to the learning environment. For the most self-conscious students, building a safe climate is especially important.

### Effective Communication and Feedback

Teaching strategies that afford multiple opportunities for individual and group feedback, both between teacher and student and among students, will contribute to a positive learning environment. Such strategies rely on open, multichannel communication, timely feedback, and the open flow of ideas.

**Guideline 12: Break the Ice Early in the Group's Life.** Some teachers use structured "ice breakers," especially early in the term, to help students get to know one another and to establish each particular classroom cohort as a group. Students will participate more readily when they have been given an opportunity to get to know each other and interact in subgroups before they interact in the group as a whole.

Breaking the ice with simple exercises will have long-term payoffs. Students can get a sense of the communication styles of other students and of the teacher. Ice breakers can be designed to serve simultaneously as catalysts for motivating students to master the course content.

1. Learn each student's name, where feasible, and use it.
2. Invite students to chat for a few minutes with the nearest person on either side. Encourage them to share information, such as why they are taking the course, their major, how they see the course fitting into their

education, their concerns about the course, or other factors relevant to the course.

3. Serve as a model by sharing information about yourself, your interests, your educational and work background, why you teach the course.
4. Ask students to work in subgroups of three or four to define concepts central to the course: What is an atom? What is health? What is crime? What is literary criticism?
5. Ask students to pair off by numbers or by proximity. The topic they discuss is not particularly important. It may be biographical data on the first day of class, or an issue or problem relevant to course material. Give each pair ten minutes to talk. The dyadic form of interaction is less threatening and establishes at least one bond for each student. Then ask each pair to join another pair and share information with other groups of four, then eights with eights, until one large group is created for a class discussion of what was learned in the smaller groups. This technique can also be used effectively with a class of thirty or more, but the progression must move in larger steps until the class is fully merged.

Although even one session of ice breaking will reduce barriers to communication and raise participation levels, shared responsibility and broad participation will be reinforced if students are asked to work in subgroups occasionally during the term.

**Guideline 13: Emphasize Two-Way and Multichannel Communication.** Boyer and Bolton (1971) distinguish between two types of communication and feedback patterns. In one-way communication, the flow of information is from one person to another (or to a group). This is typical of televised courses and lecture courses (regardless of size), in which the teacher leaves little time for questions or debate. In two-way communication, the flow of information is between and among two or more persons. The sender of a message has greater opportunity to receive immediate reactions from listeners. This is typical of seminars, small-group discussions, lecture/discussion courses, and study groups. (We prefer the term *multichannel* because it implies communication among students that is not directed to or through the teacher.) One-way communication is more efficient—a greater amount of material can be transmitted in a shorter amount of time. However, it is less accurate than two-way communication—the listener's understanding of the information is less complete. The teacher who is geared to straight lecturing may fail to take advantage of the opportunity for two-way communication.

A circle is the seating arrangement most conducive to effective feedback and communication, particularly if the teacher occupies a different place in the circle each session. Other suggestions for creating multichannel communication include the following:

1. Resist the temptation to answer all questions yourself. Redirect and rephrase questions for the class as a whole.
2. Encourage students to comment directly to each other, rather than through you.
3. Remind yourself of two-way communication: "The best general advice to the professor who would lecture well is still 'Don't lecture.' That is, for most of teaching, to think in terms of discourse—talk, conversation—rather than lecture" (Eble, 1976, p. 42).
4. Pause frequently to make sure students are still with you. "Lecturing creates the temptation to set one's voice on 'play' and forget everything else" (Eble, 1976, p. 48).
5. Avoid lecturing from a written script or text. If you do, provide students with a brief outline of your lectures. This allows them to listen more carefully to the flesh on the skeleton and helps them organize their listening.
6. During a lecture or discussion, frequently ask whether students have questions, comments, or reactions. This gatekeeping role also maintains student involvement and responsibility.
7. Allow silence after extending such an invitation. Students in general do not feel comfortable with silence, any more than teachers do. Someone will break the silence and pave the way to further discussion. Goldman-Eisler (1958) found that pauses in speech serve to introduce new and less predictable information. Thus the incidence of silence in group interaction may indicate flexibility in adapting to new situations and elasticity of group processes.
8. Make it a rule never to lecture all the way to the last minute of class, no matter how brilliant your lecture or how much you feel you must cover that day (see Highet, 1976).
9. Ensure that ample time is reserved during each class for student interaction and discussion of lectures, films, speakers, and so forth. This breaks the "transmission" metaphor of information and ideas flowing in one direction only. Even a class of five hundred students sitting in a lecture hall can be given a few minutes (in groups of three or four) to debate and discuss, apply concepts to examples, or clarify terms.
10. As a check on comprehension, ask students to analyze a situation or problem by employing the concepts or principles under discussion. This technique carries the message that you expect students to be active rather than passive learners.
11. Reward constructive participation with affirming comments and follow-up questions.

**Guideline 14: Provide Multiple, Timely Opportunities for Feedback.** The effectiveness of any group depends on the quality of the feedback contained in the interaction. Research shows that both teaching and learning are enhanced by timely, descriptive feedback and by interaction between

teachers and students. This guideline reaches its logical conclusion in the recent trend toward mastery learning (Guskey, 1988), in which students are given scope to define issues, problems, and projects. Work and materials are broken into discrete blocks that can be targeted, attempted, and mastered, with many opportunities for immediate feedback, criticism, redirection, and consultation.

Other research (Egan, 1970, p. 247) shows that feeling-oriented, positive feedback results in the "greatest efficiency, least defensiveness, and greatest increase in participation." This is particularly important in discussing sensitive issues, stereotypical views, prejudices, and values.

1. Build in several points of evaluation, rather than one or two.
2. Return written work and exams in a timely fashion.
3. Remember that not all student work must be evaluated by the teacher. For example, written reactions to literary texts can receive feedback from other students working in small groups.
4. Ask students to give each other feedback on proposals for papers or projects before they are handed in to you. This gives them earlier feedback on their ideas, organization, and direction and helps students develop genuine interest in each other's work.
5. Build in a few minutes for students to work in pairs, giving each other feedback on draft papers or essays. Feedback can be structured in terms of what they found most interesting, what they would like to know more about, ideas for reorganization, further resources, and strengthening the introduction and conclusion.

**Guideline 15: Foster Heterogeneity of Ideas.** Teaching and learning profit from heterogeneity of ideas. Marton and Ramsden (1988) recommend several teaching strategies that will promote learning. One is to highlight inconsistencies in and consequences of learners' conceptions. Another is to offer new ways of seeing. By building on contradictions inherent in students' views of reality, you can lead them toward formulation of hypotheses, testing of myths, and reconceptualization. It is the tension created by competing or unusual views that makes the classroom intellectually fertile ground. Elbow (1986, p. 41) calls this "cooking." Ideas are channeled into the pool of information, opinions, concerns, and applications that is available for all in the classroom to work with. Elbow says that engaging the "competent, decent" student who is not particularly interested or involved requires this cross-fertilization of ideas and contrasting beliefs that can only come through group interaction.

Heterogeneity of ideas relies on and is a function of open communication. Even though students may be encouraged to feel more comfortable in the process of participating, they may still be reluctant regarding the content. Unconventional ideas and offbeat solutions to problems will emerge only if students feel

safe in the classroom. If we want students to share responsibility for the outcome of a class, then it is critical to help them discover their interests, queries, concerns, confusions, and creative ideas. Tiberius (1986) finds evidence that effective teaching rests on meaningful material. Helping students become more self-reflexive in a secure environment helps unlock meaningful material. Creative and critical thinking can be amplified by even participation.

1. Use group techniques, such as brainstorming, to help students uncover beliefs, myths, values, and ideas. This is empowering rather than squelching, if organized effectively. The broader the pool of ideas, the better.
2. Organize a "fishbowl" discussion format, in which eight students sit in a circle to discuss an issue or solve a problem. Other students who wish to contribute raise their hands and are admitted to the circle by those who are willing to give their seats up briefly. This seems to attract students who wish to make only one or two strong statements but are reluctant to participate.
3. Before discussing sensitive topics or solving complex problems, provide opportunities for students to express their ideas anonymously. For example, in teaching the concepts of prejudice, discrimination, and social distance, first ask students to fill out a brief questionnaire about their own ethnic identifications and attitudes.
4. For a science, mathematics, statistics, or research-design problem, ask students to write down their best attempts, even if they seem to be unorthodox solutions. Summarize the results, and present them anonymously at the next session. In this way, a wider range of ideas, values, and attitudes is available for discussion and problem solving.
5. For a history or literature question, ask students to write brief interpretations before the next class. These can be read in small groups, as a way of opening class discussion of a text or issue.
6. Reserve criticism or evaluation of contributions until they have become the property of the entire group and are less closely identified with any single contributor. Soliciting ideas individually or anonymously reduces the likelihood of receiving only conventional or conformist expressions and contributes to the heterogeneity of ideas available for discussion.

**Guideline 16: Bring Each Class and Term to Appropriate Closure.** All groups benefit from closure. Similarly, when a course ends, the termination process is important for continuity of the learning experience.

1. At the end of each class, summarize the main points of the day and suggest where they might lead in the next session.
2. At the end of each class, say goodbye and wish students a good day or weekend. These small closures serve to increase cohesion of the class as group and reinforce the alliance.

At the end of term, evaluation is a central part of closure. Teachers and students want to know how they fared in the course. There are scores of methods by which teachers can gather information about student opinions and attitudes regarding the teaching-learning situation (see Cross and Angelo, 1988; Weimer, 1987). Student ratings are the most popular form of course and teacher evaluation, but there is reason to believe that direct, face-to-face discussion between teachers and students may be more effective than written questionnaires, particularly in influencing teachers' and students' attitudes toward one another. This means that ratings must be administered prior to the end of the semester.

1. Ask students to engage in an informal feedback session, reflecting on the successes and failures of the course. This may be more instructive than the computerized evaluations typically conducted by departments.
2. Set aside at least one class to recapitulate major points of learning that occurred throughout the term, to reflect on how the class worked together as a group, and to link learning with future courses.

Unfortunately, evaluative information to students is often lacking at terms' end. Papers are graded and left in boxes for students to retrieve during the next semester. Final exams are taken, without discussion of results. Opportunities for self-evaluation are usually absent. Meaningful closure requires some major adjustments to standard course structures (and perhaps to institutional policies).

1. Term papers should be due well before the end of the course, so that information can be given to students in a meaningful way.
2. Give final exams one or two weeks prior to term's end, so that results can be discussed.
3. Invite students to write brief evaluations of what they have learned and what they have contributed to the class. These can be shared in small groups.
4. If time permits, hold a cooperative class party to say goodbye. This leaves a positive invitation with students to continue interacting with both you and each other after the course has ended.

### Cooperation

This key feature of the alliance involves moving students from competition toward cooperation. Kohn (1986, pp. 123-124) summarizes a substantial body of literature that points to competition as one of the primary inhibitors of "the security that is so vital for healthy human development. We are anxious about losing, conflicted about winning, and fearful about the effects of competition on our relationships with others—effects that include hos-

tility, resentment, and disapproval." Kohn reminds us about the well-documented negative effect of anxiety on performance. As an antidote, he recommends heavy doses of cooperation. His recommendation is supported by Johnson, Johnson, and Maruyama's (1983) review of ninety-eight studies, in which they conclude that cooperation promotes more positive relationships. Teachers can design classroom structures so that students gain by helping one another, rather than by beating one another (see Millis, 1990).

**Guideline 17: Promote Cooperation and Teamwork.** It is important to devote class time to discussing these issues and participating in activities that illustrate them.

1. Teach students how to become more aware of their own competitiveness. Inform them about the destructive potential of competition.
2. Shift to process competition, in which students engage in an activity for its own sake, rather than for some product or outcome.

Palmer (1987, p. 25) makes a distinction between healthy conflict and competition: conflict stimulates the active engagement of students in dialogue with one another, while "competitive individualism breeds silent, *sub rosa*, private combat for personal reward." Indeed, he argues that, to sustain healthy conflict, the destructive effects of competition must be reduced by group supportiveness, making learners feel emotionally safe in the group.

Billson (forthcoming) has devised a method of team exams in introductory-level criminology courses. Students work in pairs throughout the semester—reviewing materials, generating questions for class discussion and clarification, and testing each other on central concepts, trends, and theories. The pairs take three exams (without books or notes), working through a standard objective test of multiple-choice, true-false, and matching questions. The two students must negotiate the answers quietly, filling in the computer sheet only when they have reached a high level of agreement. This forces students to think through questions and answers and reduces "potshot" responses. Students also define several concepts and write an essay collaboratively. Under this model, which rests on team cooperation and some mild interteam competition, students' performance on exams is slightly higher than on individual exams. Class morale builds rapidly, teams tend to study harder than many individuals otherwise would, there is more commitment to asking questions about material, and the teacher has only half the exams to evaluate. Students who prefer to take individual exams are permitted to do so, but few choose that option.

**Guideline 18: Foster Even Participation Levels.** Students fall along a continuum of participation, from high (dominators) to low (quiet ones). Although most students want to participate, it is not unusual for a handful of students (and not always the brighter or best-prepared ones) to dominate



discussion. This is true of most groups, unless specific efforts are made by the leader to elicit broader participation.

Although simultaneous talking and interrupting can be signs of a dynamic discussion and high involvement, they can also be used to close out less assertive members of a class. Very early in each course, students begin to be labeled as dominant or quiet. Labels tend to harden unless the teacher facilitates even participation. A variety of gatekeeping measures can be utilized for this purpose.

1. When a high-level participator makes a point, invite comments from others: "How do others feel about this?" "Any other ideas on this question?" "Let's hear from some who haven't had a chance to talk yet" "Are there other ways to look at this? Other solutions?"
2. Use nonverbal cues and body language to invite participation from other students.
3. Make eye contact with quieter students. Shift your stance toward them. Sit next to them.
4. If you use a circle for discussion, change your position each session. Never sit directly opposite a high participator who tends to monopolize the conversation.
5. Establish, with students' consent, a norm of noninterruption, to help quieter students who find it difficult to complete a sentence in an ongoing discussion and who succumb quickly to the efforts of dominants and interrupters.
6. Be cognizant of participation levels in forming work groups.
7. If the problem of a few dominants persists, consider engaging the class in a discussion of how they feel about the participation levels.

Many teachers are reluctant to call on students who do not voluntarily participate. However, good gatekeeping typically creates an atmosphere in which more students voluntarily participate, and in which being called on is not a traumatic experience.

**Guideline 19: Work Toward Exploration and Resolution of Conflict.** Being able to mediate conflicts and bring debates to some level of resolution is a central role for the facilitative teacher. In virtually any group, differences generate the formation of subgroups along certain lines (cleavages), such as gender, age, major, social class, race, residence, political views, and so forth. Students tend to form various subgroups in class. Efforts to explore and cut across cleavages heighten participation at the classwide level. Activities or discussions that cut across cleavages tend to reduce conflict and increase empathy among subgroups, thereby increasing participation.

1. Find ways to create heterogeneous work groups. You can ask students to count off, or ask students to work with others in their row, section of

the classroom, or year in school. Better still, ask students to select others who they think may have different views.

2. When conflict emerges, invite students to break into brainstorming groups or focused-discussion groups, in order to explore the sources and nature of the conflict, as well as possible resolutions. Groups can reflect new combinations of students for each conflict.
3. When cleavages seem to cluster around two major positions (for example, opposing or supporting gun control, abortion, or intervention in world affairs), organize on-the-spot debates. Make sure that approximately half the class is on each side, by asking students to cross over to the minority position. It can be equally instructive for them to argue positions they do not hold. Give each side ten minutes to prepare arguments and select someone to make an opening statement. Ask students to raise their hands to be recognized, one person per side, one statement per person, until all students on both sides have had a chance to speak. Then ask the class as a whole to discuss the merits of each side's arguments.
4. Ask students to answer, on paper, the question "Who am I?" ten times. Then ask them to form groups of four or five and discuss their responses with each other. This is especially appropriate for stimulating class discussion of such concepts as identity, self-image, personality, and ethnic, racial, or gender identification. Empathy and tolerance may improve.
5. Stimulate debate and dissent while maintaining norms of respect and tolerance for differences of opinion.

### Security and Trust

An effective social context requires students and teachers alike to work toward a safe, coercion-free environment. Student participation, performance, and evaluation of teachers are higher when the classroom is safe; when students feel threatened, they regress to surface learning strategies (Eizenberg, cited in Jones, 1989; Numella and Rosengren, 1986). Reciprocal feedback, cooperation, and mutual responsibility cannot occur in a climate of threat, anxiety, and fear of reprisal or putdowns. The alliance hinges on the student's sense of security and safety in the classroom.

In a safe climate, students will feel more comfortable about displaying either ignorance or knowledge. They will also be more willing to share experiences and expertise and to disagree with other points of view. Reduction of self-consciousness, apathy, and boredom will enhance dialogue; participation levels and class attendance will increase. The group climate affects students' sense of belonging and whether they look forward to class, participate, drop the class, or leave college altogether. Safety and security depend on many factors.

Although structural changes, such as separating the role of teacher as facilitator from the role of teacher as evaluator, are important, they require

massive reordering of the university environment toward mastery learning or competency-based evaluation. Still, there is much that individual teachers can do to develop trust.

**Guideline 20: Make It Safe to Take Risks and to Be Wrong.** Svinicki (1989) reminds us that learning is a risky business, and teachers need to support learners to make learning safer. She describes four strategies for building a trusting relationship with the learner: modeling how to take risks, minimizing the pain of making an error, exuding organization and competence, and providing risk-taking opportunities. In practical terms, this may include the following strategies:

1. Work toward accepting criticism of your own ideas or methods.
2. Build in ungraded student minipresentations (risk taking, but minimizing pain of making errors).
3. Take offbeat ideas seriously.
4. Freely admit when you do not understand or know something. This helps students feel safe in doing the same.
5. Help students establish norms of not interrupting or ridiculing each other when they disagree.
6. Avoid personal comparisons as a method of motivating students.

**Guideline 21: Keep the Doors Open for All Students.** A classroom that is dominated by a few students does not constitute an alliance. It is merely the interaction of a comfortable, vocal elite with the teacher. Others may feel left out and may find it too threatening to break into the dialogue. Work toward even participation, in which dominators are motivated to share classroom space with quieter students, and low participators feel safe to express themselves.

**Guideline 22: Reduce the Status Differential Between Teacher and Student.** According to Boyer and Bolton (1971), the professor who is perceived by students as having “psychological bigness” inhibits participation and the establishment of a positive climate. Psychological bigness stems from frequent reference to the teacher’s high status and titles, a formal manner, displaying an overwhelming amount of detailed knowledge, and using sarcasm, ridicule, veiled or open threats, or terminal statements. These characteristics tend to be associated with domination, rather than with leadership. Here are some suggestions for not outranking students:

1. Resist cutting off questioning.
2. Include and invite multiple explanations of reality.
3. Do not insist that your position is the only correct one. Encourage students to do their own research and exploration.
4. Respond positively to a student’s initial attempts to communicate, and

invite further contributions. This will affect whether a student risks contributing again.

5. Respond to all comments. Avoid passing students over. Comments that are not quite on the mark can be responded to invitationally: “Good. Now let’s take it a step farther.” “Keep going.” “That could become important later. Don’t forget what you had in mind.”
6. Avoid putdowns and close-off comments, such as “You’re way off” or “You’re the only one who doesn’t understand” or “You’ve missed the whole point” or “You haven’t heard of. . . .?”
7. Avoid sarcasm or ridicule.
8. Avoid making terminal statements, where no disagreement is possible.
9. Before dialogue has passed on to another focus, make healing comments to both sides of a conflict. This will ensure that students are not reluctant to participate again.

**Guideline 23: Ask Questions in an Open and Constructive Manner.** Another factor in creating a safe environment is the method of questioning to find out what students know or believe. Firing questions at students to determine their level of comprehension is likely to provoke protective silence. Questions should be constructed that encourage students to risk speaking out in class.

1. Begin by asking open-ended questions, or questions that require a group response rather than a single-person response.
2. Reserve a question period. Once you have decided to use this method, stick to it. Do not rush to fill the time by talking if questions are slow in coming.
3. Ask students to try out their questions first on someone who sits beside them in class.
4. Have students prepare questions between classes, which they submit in writing at the beginning of the next class. These set the tone for the lecture and other in-class activities.

**Guideline 24: Handle Disturbing Behavior Constructively.** Trust and security in the classroom also depend on how disturbing behavior is handled. Violation of classroom ground rules or of basic norms governing social conduct must be addressed if the classroom is to remain safe. Teachers who, for fear of making matters worse, allow one or two students to disrupt the classroom usually create growing resentment on the part of students who are oriented toward cooperative interaction. The majority must feel that their rights are being protected, too. At all times, however, the question of handling inappropriate behavior is a sensitive one.

1. Negotiate ground rules with students at the beginning of the course. Then, such classroom discourtesies as arriving late, leaving early, talking off subject, interrupting, horsing around, failing to hold up one's end in group projects, and so forth, can be addressed by referring the student back to those ground rules, which belong to the group, not to the teacher alone.
2. If disruptive behavior persists, suggest that the class reassess its ground rules.

Security becomes self-reinforcing. Participation broadens as trust increases. As students begin to open up, they discover they are not alone in their confusion or in their opinions. The resulting "all in the same boat" feeling increases trust and participation (Billson, 1986). There are many other devices for creating security, stimulating questions, and fostering interaction that helps teachers to learn about students. For large-group teaching, see Weimer (1987); for small-group teaching, see Tiberius (1990).

**Guideline 25: Be Aware of the Development of Group Norms.** A group will set its own norms of behavior and will expect conformity to them. These may extend to the teacher. Norms develop in every classroom group. Negative norms may emerge, such as entering late, leaving early, missing classes, relying on a handful of students to engage in pseudodiscussion, punishing "rate busters" who read and complete assignments on time, and manipulating extensions on due dates. Positive norms, such as being prepared to discuss readings, cooperating with others to solve problems, and showing tolerance of diversity, may also develop. In either case, it is more likely that emerging norms will be apparent to the teacher in a safe climate and when channels of communication are open.

1. As soon as you or students notice them, openly discuss norms that work against achieving the goals of the course.
2. Note the emergence of positive norms, and invite students to continue the good work. Chances are that they have also noticed that others are reading, contributing, or showing respect.

## Conclusion

Schön (1987) points out the gap between our growing awareness of the importance of social arrangements in the classroom and the actual behavior of teachers. Translating theory into practice, or insight into a dynamic teaching-learning relationship, can be frustratingly elusive. Defining the classroom as a cooperative learning group that is subject to the same principles of interaction as other groups can contribute to our chances of making the shift from theory to practice. The guidelines delineated here can make us more aware of classroom interaction, process, and communi-

cation patterns. We can shape techniques of classroom management according to our understanding of group processes, through creating personalized strategies appropriate to subject areas and personal teaching styles.

Sensitivity to group-building and group-maintenance techniques can contribute to enhanced satisfaction, success, and retention by raising levels of both academic and social involvement in the learning process. Social arrangements between students and teachers can be strengthened in ways that foster intellectual and social growth for students and challenges for teachers. This in turn will nurture teachers' satisfaction with and enjoyment of teaching.

There are many roads to learning, and learning is enhanced in an atmosphere of cooperation (Tiberius, 1986). Viewing the teaching-learning process as an alliance, conceiving of the classroom as a group situation, and taking full account of the social context of educational experiences we share with students moves us toward the metaphor of a dialogue and away from that of the transmission of banks of material. A secure classroom climate, in which students help set the agenda, improves chances that they will engage meaningfully in the learning process.

The effectiveness of a teacher's strategy depends on the nature of the alliance between teacher and students. In turn, the alliance rests on whether the methods a teacher chooses are helpful to students, are accepted by students, and are seen by students as the outcome of a caring teacher who is trying to facilitate learning.

How a teacher regards the alliance is partly a function of that teacher's stage of professional development. According to Pratt (1989), teachers at an early stage of development need the certainty of universal strategies. Teachers at this stage of readiness tend to view the alliance as a product of their own good performance. They may rigidly apply recommendations such as those described in this chapter in the hope of making an alliance happen. With luck, if circumstances are right, they may achieve more effective social arrangements with their students. However, their chances of success will be much greater as they begin to learn that recommended strategies, particularly those aimed at enhancing the social arrangements underlying teaching and learning, are not universal but apply only to certain well-defined situations. Knowing when to do what is a judgment that comes slowly, with experience and reflection.

During the second stage of teacher development, teachers shift "from fixed routines to flexible problem solving" (Pratt, 1989, p. 79). Teachers at this stage are more flexible in responding to the demands of the situation with constructions of their own that reflect a sensitivity to new situations. They regard all teaching strategies as conditional—that is, as dependent on the context and the situation. They begin to perceive their teaching situation "as a set of dynamic, interactive variables that require flexible and adaptive use of their existing knowledge" (Pratt, 1989, p. 80). Teachers at

this stage of development tend to perceive the alliance between teachers and learners as more than a product of good teaching. They also view it as a vehicle or method for improving teaching and learning.

The third stage of professional development, according to Pratt (1989, p. 81), "is characterized by a consideration of the relationship between social and cultural values and teachers' professional knowledge. . . . Ways of thinking and acting are understood to be cultural as well as conditional." Teachers at this stage begin to realize that their perceptions of the alliance are formed by the metaphors of teaching and learning and by the implicit theories of teaching and learning that they and their students hold. They try to make their theories more explicit, and to incorporate those contextual factors into them, both within and beyond the classroom.

## References

- Anderson, J. F. "Instructor Nonverbal Communication: Listening to Our Silent Messages." In J. M. Civikly (ed.), *Communicating in College Classrooms*. New Directions for Teaching and Learning, no. 26. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986.
- Benjamin, A. *Behavior in Small Groups*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978.
- Billson, J. M. "The College Classroom as a Small Group: Some Implications for Teaching and Learning." *Teaching Sociology*, 1986, 14, 143-151.
- Billson, J. M. "Group Process in the Classroom: Building Relationships for Learning." In C. B. Howery, N. Perrin, and J. Seem (eds.), *Teaching Applied Sociology: A Resource Book*. Washington, D.C.: American Sociological Association, forthcoming.
- Boyer, R. K., and Bolton, C. K. *One-Way and Two-Way Communication Processes in the Classroom*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Faculty Resource Center, University of Cincinnati, 1971.
- Constantinople, A., Cornelius, R., and Gray, J. "The Chilly Climate: Fact or Artifact?" *Journal of Higher Education*, 1988, 59, 527-551.
- Cross, K. P., and Angelo, T. A. *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for Faculty*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: National Center for Research on Improving Postsecondary Teaching and Learning, 1988.
- DeVito, J. A. "Teaching as Relational Development." In J. M. Civikly (ed.), *Communicating in College Classrooms*. New Directions for Teaching and Learning, no. 26. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986.
- Eble, K. E. *The Craft of Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1976.
- Egan, G. *Encounter: Group Processes for Interpersonal Growth*. Belmont, Calif.: Brooks/Cole, 1970.
- Elbow, P. *Embracing Contraries: Explorations in Learning and Teaching*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Goldman-Eisler, F. "Speech Production and the Predictability of Words in Context." *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 1958, 10, 96-106.
- Guskey, T. R. *Improving Student Learning in College Classrooms*. Springfield, Ill.: Thomas, 1988.
- Hight, G. *The Immortal Profession*. New York: Weybright and Talley, 1976.
- Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., and Maruyama, G. "Interdependence and Interpersonal Attraction Among Heterogeneous Individuals: A Theoretical Formulation and a Meta-Analysis of the Research." *Review of Educational Research*, 1983, 53, 5-54.
- Jones, J. "Students' Ratings of Teacher Personality and Teaching Competence." *Higher Education*, 1989, 18, 551-558.
- Katz, J., and Henry, M. *Turning Professors into Teachers: A New Approach to Faculty Development and Student Learning*. New York: American Council on Education/Macmillan, 1988.
- Kazmierski, P. "The Adult Learner." In D. Grieve (ed.), *Teaching in College: A Resource for College Teachers*. Cleveland, Ohio: INFO-TEC, 1989.
- Kohn, A. *No Contest: The Case Against Competition*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986.
- Marton, F., and Ramsden, P. "What Does It Take to Improve Teaching?" In P. Ramsden (ed.), *Improving Learning: New Perspectives*. London: Kogan Page, 1988.
- Millis, B. J. "Helping Faculty Build Learning Communities Through Cooperative Groups." *To Improve the Academy*, 1990, 9, 43-58.
- Numella, R. M., and Rosengren, T. M. "What's Happening in Students' Brains May Redefine Teaching." *Educational Leadership*, May 1986, pp. 49-53.
- Palmer, P. J. "Community, Conflict, and Ways of Knowing." *Change*, 1987, 19 (5), 20-25.
- Pratt, D. D. "Three Stages of Teacher Competence: A Developmental Perspective." In E. Hayes (ed.), *Effective Teaching Styles*. New Directions for Continuing Education, no. 43. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1989.
- Scholl-Buchwald, S. "The First Meeting of the Class." In J. Katz (ed.), *Teaching as Though Students Mattered*. New Directions for Teaching and Learning, no. 21. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1985.
- Schön, D. A. *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987.
- Svinicki, M. "If Learning Involves Risk-Taking, Teaching Involves Trust-Building." *Teaching Excellence: Toward the Best in the Academy*, Fall 1989, pp. 1-2.
- Tiberius, R. G. "Metaphors Underlying the Improvement of Teaching and Learning." *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 1986, 17, 144-156.
- Tiberius, R. G. *Small-Group Teaching: A Trouble-Shooting Guide*. Toronto, Canada: OISE Press, 1990.
- Weimer, M. G. *Teaching Large Classes Well*. New Directions for Teaching and Learning, no. 32. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987.

Janet Mancini Billson is professor of sociology and women's studies at Rhode Island College, Providence.

Richard G. Tiberius is associate professor and deputy director, Centre for Studies in Medical Education, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto.