Building a Fearless Learning Culture

Spring 2019 Perspectives Week, May 14th

BRAINSTORMING POSSIBILITIES

1) What would it look like to create a fearless learning culture in the classroom where our students feel safe making mistakes and failing in order to learn?
2) What would we see students and faculty doing in the classroom?
3) What would it look like to create a fearless learning culture for our students across the institution?

IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS

☐ Asking: "Who is going to be brave today? Who's going to be bold? Let's be bold/brave together! Pick a friend to help you out—to struggle together!" This can foster interconnection among students, laughter, and a light-hearted experience of attending to moments of struggle.

☐ Using formative assessment: Set expectations for Health Professions simulation lab and let students know that "this is a safe place to make a mistake (and better to do it in class than out on the clinic floor years later!)" Debrief the experience and talk about how to learn from mistakes.
   o **Step 1 - Prebrief:** Set clear objectives. Set expectations low at first (let students experience initial success), then gently increase demands and raise expectations, expecting students to struggle and fail as a mechanism for optimal learning.
   o **Step 2 - Debrief** after the simulation lab with a reflection on what transpired.

☐ We can demonstrate vulnerability and share our own mistakes with students ("Here's what I did wrong..."), which can help create safety in the classroom and set a standard for students (we all make mistakes and we are all here to teach each other).

- Video assessments with feedback can help dial back student anxiety. Students report feeling really comfortable in class with this process and they can "be themselves."

- Creates safety at the beginning of the semester that enables students to be their authentic selves and feel safe taking risks and making mistakes in class. Help them realize that it is better to make mistakes in the classroom, where it's a safe environment, rather than later on when they are law enforcement officers.

- Possibly create a token economy, where students have concrete incentives to ask questions and take risks.

- Present very challenging problems for students to attempt to work through in class and where "failure" is almost guaranteed, such that they collaborate and learn. Learn to fail. Learn to "un fail."

- After class discussion and power point presentation, use Kahoot questions about material and then discuss the questions where students struggled – normalizing the process of making mistakes as a natural part of learning.

- Consider closely classroom relationships: students may be more inclined to do what we want (i.e. take risks for the sake of growth) if they feel secure about the relationship we have with them (i.e. that it's not adversarial).

- When students answer questions incorrectly, respond with "YES!!! That is SO NOT RIGHT, but SO INTERESTING!" Or . . . "That's not what I was thinking, but I like it!!"

- Establishing positive rapport with students and fostering general safety to encourage comfort with risk might be enhanced by relating to students on course-unrelated matters.

- After a student offers an answer or makes a comment, instead of responding immediately, ask the class, "What do the REST of you think?" Which shows that we are genuinely interested in their thoughts and opinions and the process of making meaning, not just getting to an answer as quickly as possible.

- Possible challenges to establishing good rapport and a culture or risk and safe failing may come from students who want a "maternal" female instructor. Possible ways of handling this could include anticipating what their concerns might be and addressing them proactively up front ("I can't change my demographic, but we can learn how to deal with it together in a healthy and respectful manner...").

- Another possibility may be to get away from the podium and sit with or near students so that conversations/interactions feel more like an intimate conversation and less like a reification of traditional power dynamics (that may compromise student willingness to engage and take risks, but rather to feel safe to fail).

Example from Spring 2018 Perspectives Week: Building a Fearless Learning Culture

☐ Last spring, faculty and life coaches created digital signs in which they shared failures in their early college experiences and what they learned from them to "normalize" mistakes and failure as a natural part of the learning process

"Festival of Errors"
Digital Sign Campaign Example