Effective Instructional Practice:

Facilitating Student Participation

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Student participation is considered just one facet of student engagement. In the instructional communication literature, participation is often defined as "any comments or questions that the students offered or raised in class" (Fassinger, 1995, p. 27). However, other scholars recognize a greater range of behaviors that indicate students are participating. Perhaps the most inclusive range of participation behaviors can be found in Fritschner's (2000) six levels of participation developed from both student and instructor perspectives. Specifically, her participants identified these behaviors as participatory:

> Breathing and staying awake were *level one. Level two* included students who came to class, took notes, and did the assignments. The *third level* included writing papers that were reflective and thoughtful. *Level four* included asking questions in class, making comments, and providing input for class discussions. The *fifth level* was doing additional kinds of research or coming to class with additional questions, and *level six* included oral presentations where the students themselves became the teachers. (p. 354)

Facilitating student participation across all levels is important for three reasons. First, Rocca (2010) argued that participation is a primary responsibility of the instructor. Although some expectation for participative responsibility is placed on the student (Howard & Baird, 2000), it is ultimately instructors who develop a course where participation occurs. This responsibility has been a challenge in the past as Nunn (1996) found that only one minute of a 40-minute class was spent on participation. However, increasing the time dedicated to student participation is beneficial to instructors, who gain insight into students' progress and understanding (Fassinger, 1995).

Second, participation is linked to positive academic outcomes. Specifically, participation is associated positively with students' state motivation and perceived affective, behavioral, and cognitive learning (Frisby & Myers, 2008; Menzel & Carrell, 1999). In other studies of actual cognitive learning, Blankenstein, Dolmans, Vleuten, and Schmidt (2011) found increases in long term recall. In other words, participation allows students to practice verbalizing, synthesizing, analyzing, clarifying, and evaluating information that leads to learning (Nunn, 1996; Menzel & Carrell, 1994). Third, participation gives students a chance to practice and refine their oral communication skills (Dallimore, Hertenstein, & Platt, 2008; Dancer & Kamvounias, 2005). Specifically, this type of student engagement improves students' oral articulation and communication with both their peers and their instructors (Dancer & Kamvounias).

Five Tips to Facilitate Student Participation

1. The first step to facilitate participation should be to create a conducive physical space and course structure. For example, keeping class size small (Myers et al., 2009), using circular seating (Fritschner, 2000), and either grading or requiring participation (Fassinger, 1995) enhances student participation. As part of the course structure, instructors should also allow time in their lessons for participation by planning effective discussion questions. For example, asking analytical questions encourages greater rates of participation than asking factual questions (Auster & MacRone, 1994).

2. However, students may still be hesitant to participate. Neer (1987) identified classroom participation as a "case of specialized CA" or communication apprehension about engaging in discussion-based activities in the classroom (p. 155). Students may lack preparation, fear judgment and evaluation from peers and instructors, or be

concerned about social acceptance. To overcome participation apprehension, instructors should first recognize that it exists and then work to build a comfortable classroom climate or provide students with an adequate amount of time to prepare for participating orally.

3. Because developing classroom climate is so important, we need our students to feel that they are in a safe psychological space. Boostrom (1998) posited that safe spaces, or "a figurative space constructed through social relations" (p. 399), constitute inclusive and supportive environments where students are protected from emotional and psychological harm. Students describe instructors who create a safe space as caring, respectful, supportive, and encouraging (Holley & Steiner, 2005).

4. One way to build this safe space is to build rapport with students and between students. Frisby and her colleagues (Frisby, Berger, Burchett, Herovic, & Strawser, 2014; Frisby & Martin, 2010, Frisby & Myers, 2008) have demonstrated consistent support for the strong relationship between rapport and class participation. An enjoyable student-teacher relationship encourages students to participate. Similarly, Frisby and Martin (2010) also found relationships between a connected classroom climate and students' willingness to orally participate. To build rapport, instructors should get to know their students personally, practice immediacy by using plural pronouns (e.g., "we") and reducing physical distance with their students, and encourage students to get to know each other personally.

5. Often, the ability to build rapport is established through instructor displays of effective instructional behaviors. For example, students' social attraction (i.e., liking), and background homophily (i.e., similarity) with instructors predicts student participation

(Myers et al., 2009). One way to develop perceptions of social attraction and homophily is to appropriately engage in self-disclosure (Goldstein & Benassi, 1994) to discover commonalities with your students.

Assessing Student Participation

To assess the extent to which your students participate in class, do so by completing the seven-item Revised Oral Participation Measure (Frymier & Houser, 2016).

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