Effective Instructional Practice:

Providing Confirmation to Students

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Instructor confirmation is the process by which instructors utilize communication to recognize and acknowledge students for their efforts while validating their importance as individuals (Ellis, 2000). Receiving confirmation helps students to feel better about their educational experiences and reiterates the importance of their contributions to the learning environment (Goldman & Goodboy, 2014). As an instructor, you can offer confirmation by using a variety of methods, most notably by communicating in a way that endorses students for their work and reflects a positive evaluation of their worth.

Students often feel confirmed when you respond to their questions, demonstrate an interest in their learning, and teach with an interactive style that optimizes their ability to understand course material (Ellis, 2000). Providing direct and meaningful responses to students' questions facilitates confirmation as it signifies that you find their inquiries to be important and worthy of a response. Moreover, demonstrating interest in students' learning helps them to feel confirmed as it indicates your concern about their individual growth and reflects your desire to see them succeed (Ellis, 2004). Likewise, by using an interactive, dynamic, and adaptive teaching style, you can confirm students by showing a willingness to modify your instructional strategies to foster a learning environment that maximizes their personal and academic success.

Providing confirmation to your students is important for three reasons. First, students report experiencing increases in their affective and cognitive learning when instructors offer them confirmation in the classroom (Goodboy & Myers, 2008). One

reason that confirmation helps to encourage students' learning is that it reduces the apprehension that students feel when receiving and processing messages (Hsu, 2012). In turn, students are able to shift and focus more of their cognitive energy toward understanding and processing the material of your course (Schrodt & Finn, 2011).

Second, offering confirmation to your students helps increase their academic involvement (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010). Students who feel confirmed by their instructor are more likely to speak and participate in-class and continue their involvement outside of the classroom by reviewing and studying the course material on their own time. In part, this involvement can be attributed to the increased interest and positive emotions that are associated with confirmation (Goldman & Goodboy, 2014). Third, receiving confirmation helps student to solidify their personal identity as it recognizes them for their accomplishments and makes them feel unique and appreciated (Dailey, 2010). Although you may not realize it, the interactions that you have with students and the confirming messages that you offer can potentially influence their identity and by extension who they become long after your course has concluded.

Five Tips on Using Confirmation in the Classroom

1. Because there are numerous ways in which instructors can provide confirmation to students, you should choose behaviors that coincide with your personality and approach toward teaching. Confirming messages that are not authentic will likely fail to meet their intended purpose of making students feel validated and appreciated (Ellis, 2004). Thus, avoid certain confirmation behaviors if they make you feel uncomfortable, and instead focus on the ways that allow you to genuinely endorse your students for their efforts.

2. One confirmation strategy is the process of answering students' questions (Ellis, 2000). To maximize the confirmation that students feel from these exchanges, practice responding to their inquiries in a way that commends them for asking questions and speaking in class. Try responding to students' questions with phrases such as "I am glad that you asked such an important question" or "that's an interesting way of thinking about it" as opposed to less confirming replies like "I don't understand what you are trying to say." Using these confirming messages to clarify or respond to students' questions signifies the value of their inquiries and is likely to elicit greater participation, including future question asking (Goodboy & Myers, 2008).

3. An additional technique for optimizing your confirmation behaviors is to facilitate an environment that promotes feelings of support and connectedness among your students (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010). To accomplish this, consider using confirmation to address your entire class, in addition to sharing confirming messages to students on an individual basis. One way in which you can demonstrate an interest in the overall success of the class is by using language that reflects inclusivity and validates the efforts of all students simultaneously. For instance, try using terms such as "our class" to endorse positive accomplishments (e.g., a satisfying average score on a course exam). Doing so is likely to foster a sense of community among your students which in turn can promote future learning (Edwards, Edwards, Torrens, & Beck, 2011).

4. Students also feel confirmed when you demonstrate a willingness to adjust your teaching style around their individual needs and learning preferences. Specifically, students' perceptions of confirmation increase when instructors use multiple exercises and techniques to help them understand course material (Ellis, 2004). Toward this goal,

try using a minimum of 2-3 distinct strategies for teaching each major concept in your course. For example, if you typically cover a chapter in your course by lecturing and offering notes, consider adding a related group activity, video example, case study, or other practical application to ensure that students with different learning styles can equally benefit from your instruction. By no means are these suggestions an exhaustive list of best teaching practices; instead, recognize your willingness to adapt to students' needs, as this will enable them to feel respected and validated in your classroom.

5. There also are behaviors that communicate disconfirmation, of which you should avoid. Disconfirming messages reflect indifference and dismissiveness and often are used to negate the importance of an individual's contributions to an interpersonal interaction (Ellis, 2000). Most instructors do not intentionally use disconfirming messages; however, they may unknowingly come across as disconfirming if they are perceived as communicating in a rude or disrespectful manner. Mistakes such as routinely mispronouncing a student's name also is likely to facilitate disconfirmation as it suggests that you are not motivated enough to learn the accurate pronunciation. You should actively work to minimize the presence of these negative behaviors as they can be damaging to your perceived credibility (Schrodt, Turman & Soliz, 2006).

Assessing Your Confirmation Behaviors

To assess your own use of confirmation behaviors in the classroom, complete the 16-item Teacher Confirmation Scale (Ellis, 2000).

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