Strategies for Building Positive Student-Instructor Interactions in Large Classes

Oscar J. Solis[1] and Windi D. Turner
Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061

Abstract

Although large classes in and of themselves are pragmatic for universities, they can be challenging for both students and instructors. The purpose of this study was to investigate pedagogical strategies that instructors teaching large classes can utilize to create positive student-instructor interactions to counter these challenges. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected by means of two online surveys with undergraduate students enrolled in two large consumer studies courses. The data suggested that strategies such as self-disclosure, caring leadership, and making the class feel smaller have positive implications for undergraduate students, faculty, the department, and the university.

Keywords: Large classes, student-instructor interactions, caring leadership, self-disclosure, making the class feel smaller

One of the most practical face-to-face teaching approaches at universities is the longstanding format of an instructor lecturing to large classes. Although pragmatic for universities, large classroom settings present students with many opportunities to become disengaged from learning (Smith, 2001). In a large class, students might perceive that they are just a number–that the instructor does not know their names and will not know if they are in attendance or not. As a result, student attendance begins to dwindle throughout the course (Christopher, 2011). Another perception is that the instructor does not interact with students, but simply stands at a podium or in front of the class and lectures for 50 to 75 minutes.

Despite the growing body of literature on best practices for teaching large classes, there still remains a need to fill the gap between positive student-instructor interactions and student engagement. The purpose of this study was to investigate strategies available to instructors, such as self-disclosure and caring leadership, which can lead to positive student-instructor interactions in large classes. Employing various pedagogical practices and techniques, instructors teaching large classes can make positive connections with their students to make the class feel smaller. The literature has not come to a consensus about how to define what constitutes a large class. Large classroom settings might vary from 50 to 500 students in one course, and the number that qualifies a class as "large" depends on

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[1] Corresponding author's email: ojsolis@vt.edu

the individual instructor's viewpoint (Christopher, 2011). For this article, a large class is defined as up to 150 students being taught by one faculty member or instructor.

Review of the Literature

Self-Disclosure

Appropriate self-disclosure expresses to students a likeness between the instructor and students (Rocca, 2010). Self-disclosure can either help or hinder students' communication in the classroom. When students view the instructor's self-disclosure as being relevant, they are more apt to actively participate in class and ask questions that relate to the course material (Cayanus, Martin, & Goodboy, 2009). Through storytelling, an instructor's personal stories and experiences can lead to connections with students (Lowenthal, 2008) as the instructor relates to course material and the students' stories.

Shared by instructors and students, personal and relevant stories can become influential and engaging strategies for teaching and learning. For students, stories can help create meaning out of their experiences (Bruner, 1996; Schank, 1990). These experiences, and the stories that describe them, are key to learning (Schank, 1990; Zull, 2002). In addition, stories enhance memory skills and build bridges to prior knowledge (Schank, 1990). Consequently, students can recall the best stories for later reference (Rex, Murnen, Hobbs, & McEachen, 2002). As Frisby and Martin (2010) explained, "An instructor's behavior dictates the type of learning environment that is constructed, the type of relationships that bloom, and the academic outcomes that students achieve" (p. 160).

Caring Leadership

Caring instructors understand that student learning is affected by negative student attitudes and disruptive behavior; therefore, they set the tone for the class early in the semester. With a clear vision for course expectations, classroom management, and curriculum delivery, an instructor who demonstrates caring leadership will nurture a positive learning environment that promotes student engagement and reduces negativity and disruptions. Researchers have noted key traits among the most effective teachers: the delivery of clear expectations and captivating instruction, the use of evidence-based teaching and classroom management tactics, and an effort to build solid relationships with students (MacSuga-Gage, Simonsen, & Briere, 2012).

In a large classroom, caring leadership is a proven way to enhance the student experience. Caring instructors are respectful of others and have a work ethic that demonstrates a passion for students and the profession. Because an effective classroom environment is built upon motivation and respect, the instructor's caring attitude promotes and encourages a higher level of commitment from students (Wilson, 2013). For instance, a student who is facing personal or academic challenges will respond to an instructor's empathy and sensitivity, thus improving the relationship (Bain, 2004). When instructors demonstrate that they are fully devoted to student achievement, students are more likely to reciprocate with deeper engagement, leading to improved communication, trust, rates of satisfaction,

class discussion, and student motivation. Instructors who invest time in relationship-building find that the classroom environment becomes more productive and students become more proactive (Weimer, 2010). Students report higher levels of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and confidence in their scholastic capabilities when they believe that their instructors are respectful and available (Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010).

Making the Class Feel Smaller

Depending on an institution's academic facilities, the characteristics of a large class's physical environment—e.g., a lecture hall with a sloped floor, or a room with auditorium seating, or a room with or without a stage, tables, chairs, or desks—can pose mobility challenges for the instructor and students that hinder positive interactions and student participation. Although teacher authority and class size may very well discourage student participation, several techniques can make a large class feel smaller. Interaction between students and instructors outside the classroom setting might lessen obstacles to communication and subsequently nurture overall participation (Weaver & Qi, 2005). This personal communication outside of the formal teacher/student roles formulates an interpersonal relationship that in turn creates respect and trust (Frymier & Houser, 2000). In addition, a caring attitude demonstrated by instructors cultivates a level of commitment from students that drives motivation and discipline, criteria essential for an effective classroom environment (Wilson, 2013). Instructors can show their interest in and support for students by making eye contact and smiling to engage students (Rocca, 2010). These tactics will help build a supportive classroom climate, which repeatedly has been shown to increase participation.

To summarize, effective teaching is far more than having expertise in content and delivery. Instructors must be able to meaningfully engage students with faculty, the content, and their peers in order to be effective in the classroom (Francis, 2012). Student engagement refers to "how involved or interested students appear to be in their learning and how connected they are to their classes, their institutions, and each other" (Axelson & Flick, 2011, p. 38). When instructors express messages of inclusion, appreciation, and willingness to communicate, student engagement is enhanced (Mottet, Martin, & Myers, 2004). Paolini (2015) reported that effective instructors stimulate student learning via discussions, interactive learning, and displaying care and concern for their students' learning and growth. Effective instructors also create active learning environments by connecting relevant material to their students' lives. When an instructor in a large class motivates and encourages his or her students to succeed, the students are generally more likely to feel connected to the material.

Goodboy, Myers, and Bolkan (2010) examined the extent to which the five student motives for communicating with an instructor (relational, functional, participatory, excuse-making, and sycophancy) were associated with perceived instructor misbehaviors (incompetence, indolence, and offensiveness). They found that students who perceived their instructors as incompetent were, to some extent, less likely to communicate based on all five motives. This result indicates that students are not interested in getting to know in-

competent instructors, both in and out of the classroom. Mottet, Martin, and Myers (2004) found that students who perceived faculty as using more verbal-approach relational strategies were also more motivated to communicate with faculty for relational, participatory, excuse-making, and sycophantic reasons. Twelve categories were considered as verbal-approach relational strategies: personal recognition, humor, ritualistic, closeness/inclusiveness, self-disclosure, character, willingness to communicate, language appropriateness, honesty, complimentary, responsiveness, and caring/appreciation.

The quality of interaction between a faculty member and a student takes into account the instructor's compassion, understanding, approachability, helpfulness, responsiveness, and concern, as well as how these traits are perceived by the student. Researchers have found that students are more likely to be academically successful and to engage with instructors who demonstrate leadership skills and are sociable, supportive, intelligent, and objective (Furnham & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2005).

Materials and Methods

Data Collection

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected by means of two online surveys with undergraduate students enrolled in two large consumer studies courses in the spring 2015 term at a large research institution situated in the southeastern United States. Because of the descriptive nature of this research, the qualitative data will provide the thick, rich description essential to understanding the importance of positive student-instructor interactions in large classes. The quantitative data will provide matters of measurement and degree of positive student-instructor interactions in large classes. The two authors of this article had dual roles in this study: instructor and researcher. Each author taught one of the two large classes; therefore, they are referred to as *instructor-researcher(s)*.

Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT) Survey

At the end of each term, the university's centrally supported method for gathering student perceptions of teaching is available to collect student feedback on courses and instruction. When the online questionnaire opened during the spring 2015 term, an e-mail was sent to students requesting that they complete the survey for each class that they were enrolled in.

There were 138 undergraduate students enrolled in one of the consumer studies classes and 84 students enrolled in the other class, for a total of 222. Ninety-eight (44.1%) students anonymously completed the online SPOT survey consisting of eight Likert-type questions with response options ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6) and one ranging from very bad (1) to very good (6). The survey also included four open-ended questions:

- What did the instructor do that most helped in your learning?
- What could you have done to be a better learner?

- Please add any additional comments regarding the course and/or instructor.
- Please add any comments about the physical environment.

The university administered survey does not include any demographic data. When the survey closed, each instructor-researcher received a report detailing the results that are discussed in the results section. Feedback received from the SPOT survey data highlighted and identified strategies that students perceived to build positive student-instructor interactions. This information was used by the instructor-researchers to develop the questions for the survey *Building Positive Student-Instructor Interactions in Large Classes (BPSIILC) online survey.*

BPSIILC Online Survey

The *BPSIILC online survey* served two purposes. First, the instructor-researchers wanted to examine the presence of positive student-instructor interactions. Second, the instructor-researchers wanted to explore additional strategies instructors can use in the classroom to build positive student-instructor interactions. In June 2015, an e-mail was sent by the instructor-researchers to students enrolled in both consumer studies courses requesting that they complete the online survey hosted by surveymonkey.com. The e-mail informed students of the purpose of the study, consent information, and a link to the survey. The online survey was distributed after the term concluded; therefore, no extra credit incentive could be offered. However, an incentive of having their name placed in a drawing for one of three gift cards was offered to students for completing the survey. The online survey was open for seven days.

In compliance with the research protocol established by the university and to protect the rights of the participants in this study, institutional IRB approval was secured prior to implementation of the *BPSIILC online survey*. Sixty-five undergraduate students anonymously participated in this survey of five Likert-type questions and two open ended questions, yielding a response rate of 29.3%. Of the 65 participants, a total of five questionnaires were removed due to incompletion, thus, making the final sample for this study 60 (27%). This response rate is consistent with Sheehan and McMillan's (1999) report that online survey response rates have a large range spanning from six to 75%.

Data Analysis

Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT) Survey

The instructor-researchers utilized an open coding strategy (Rossman & Rallis, 2011) to independently code the open-ended questions of each survey report to identify common descriptors students were using to describe their experiences in each of these two large consumer studies courses. During a second session of coding, the instructor-researchers jointly reached a consensus on categories. Lists of unique words or phrases were maintained during the coding sessions to allow for category development and to identify quotes for inclusion within the second level of analysis. As the categories were compared to form concepts and eventually develop themes, the instructor-researchers identified

three strategies that promote positive student-instructor interactions in large classes: self-disclosure, caring leadership, and making the class feel smaller.

Self-Disclosure

The SPOT survey responses revealed the theme of self-disclosure which included the following categories: (a) storytelling to relate to course material; (b) disclosing instructor's personal stories; and (c) sharing peer stories. Selected examples of students' comments supporting this theme are as follows:

- The instructor explained things very well. The instructor also emphasized and gave us advice that were (sic) very helpful. The instructor even had speakers come in to talk about their financial experiences. In addition, the instructor gave us examples and stories that made me want to take care of my finances. In addition, the instructor's assignments were very applicable to real life.
- The instructor told some stories to help solidify the importance of what we were learning and that it was important for us to understand.
- The instructor explained things very well and used life experience examples that would happen to everybody. The instructor also related things to the real world and talked about important things that are happening in the news today.
- The instructor was extremely thorough in the course material. The instructor offered personal experiences and situations relative to the topic which eased some challenges in understanding concepts.
- The instructor was very helpful by taking life experiences and relating it to the course material. The instructor also asked for our experiences and made the course much more relatable.
- I thought the written responses we had to do were interesting and engaging. I also appreciate that the instructor was more interested in teaching information we need for everyday life rather than obscure facts from the book.

Caring Leadership

A common thread in the SPOT survey responses was caring leadership, which encompassed the following categories: (a) fostering mutual respect; (b) valuing students' opinions; and (c) connecting the course material to students on a personal level. Selected examples of students' comments associated with caring leadership are as follows:

- The instructor genuinely cares about how the material is going to be useful in the students' everyday life and future.
- The instructor is passionate about the subject and clearly wants to see students succeed. The instructor presented class material clearly and made the course challenging enough to truly help students learn and understand the material.
- The instructor is an amazing, knowledgeable professor. It's so refreshing to have a professor that actually cares about their students!!
- The instructor obviously cares about students. The instructor really wanted to make sure that students understood the material and got the chance to under-

stand the material. Class was always different and it made class always inter-esting because we knew that it would be a great class. The instructor has such an upbeat personality and you could tell that the instructor loved being there and seeing students.

- The instructor cares about students and that shows in the instructor's quick re-sponses in e-mails and the instructor's attitude in class towards students.

Making the Class Feel Smaller

The instructor-researchers identified a third salient theme: making the class feel smaller. The responses indicated the following categories: (a) knowing students' names; (b) utiliz-ing general information about students as it applies to course material; and (c) encourag-ing student participation. Selected examples of student's comments for the theme of mak-ing the class feel smaller are as follows:

- The instructor did a great job. I feel that everything I have learned will help me in the future and is all useful information. The instructor did their best to interact with the student in a large lecture and make a one-on-one connection.
- I really liked the instructor as a teacher. The instructor never made the class boring. I like how the instructor got to know each individual and their names even though there were over a hundred students in the class.
- I liked how the instructor really tried to engage the students in conversation and get their input.
- The instructor was personable, remembered names, told stories, open for feedback from the class.
- The instructor was very nice and clearly made an effort to learn students' names even though there were a lot of them, which I can appreciate.

BPSIILC Online Survey

The instructor-researchers purposefully crafted the *BPSIILC online survey* to target the feedback received from the SPOT survey. Since the questions derived from the identified themes and categories of the SPOT survey data, the findings are presented accordingly. The instructor-researchers coded the responses from the *BPSIILC online survey* in the same manner as the responses from the SPOT survey. Student responses to the *BPSIILC online survey's* open ended questions were independently coded by each instructor-researcher through several iterations of reading the responses and maintaining a list of unique words or phrases students used to describe their experiences in each of these two large consumer studies courses. Each instructor-researcher compiled their own findings and compared the same during a second session.

The *BPSIILC online survey* captured the following demographic information: gender and classification at the beginning of the spring 2015 semester. Sixty undergraduate students completed the online survey; however, demographic data were only provided by 58 stu-dents. Eleven (18.9 %) of the 58 participants were male and 47 (81.03%) were female, which was consistent with the enrollment in both classes. These undergraduate students

were mostly juniors (46.6%) followed by sophomores (37.9%), freshman (8.6%) and the smallest group were seniors (6.9%), which was parallel with the enrollment of both classes.

It was important for the instructor-researchers to know how many large classes each student participants had experienced. This provided the instructor-researchers insight to the exposure to large classes by the participants. Thus, the first question in the survey was "*How many classes with over 50 students have you been enrolled in, including this class?*" Of the 60 participants, over 50% had been enrolled in eight or more large classes (see Table 1).

Table 1. Question 1: "How many classes with over 50 students have you been enrolled in, including this class?

Response	N
1	0
2	1
3	0
4	5
5	9
6	9
7	4
8	4
9	6
10 or more	22

The second question posed was "*Did your instructor do the following activity in your class:* used student's personal information from activities; used storytelling/personal experiences; made an effort to learn students' names; provided timely feedback and comments on graded assessments and activities; encouraged students to actively participate in class; treated students with respect and as individuals; consistently took attendance; was passionate about teaching the content." Of the 60 participants, 59 (98.3%) answered that the instructor treated students with respect and as individuals and 42 (70.0%) answered that the instructor consistently took attendance (see Table 2).

The third question in the survey was "*How effective was the following activity in creating positive student-instructor interactions in this large class*: used student's personal information from activities; used storytelling/personal experiences; made an effort to learn students' names; provided timely feedback and comments on graded assessments and activities; encouraged students to actively participate in class; treated students with respect and as individuals; consistently took attendance; was passionate about teaching the content."

For the present study, the mean for each activity was computed for the participants' responses. The scale ranged from very ineffective (1) to very effective (5). A brief report of

Table 2. Question 2: "Did your instructor do the following activity in your class?

Activity	Yes	No	%
treated students with respect and as individuals	59	1	98.3
used storytelling/personal experiences	58	2	96.7
was passionate about teaching the content	58	2	96.7
made an effort to learn students' names	55	5	91.7
encouraged students to actively participate in class	53	7	88.3
provided timely feedback and comments on graded assessments and activities	53	7	88.3
used student's personal information from activities	45	15	75
consistently took attendance	42	18	70

the mean and standard deviation of each activity is shown in Table 3. The highest mean for effectiveness in creating positive student-instructor interactions was "treated students with respect and as individuals" (4.77). The lowest mean was for "used student's personal information from activities" (4.08).

Table 3. Question 3: "How effective was the following activity in creating positive student-instructor interactions in this large class? ($N = 60$)

Activity	Mean	Std. Deviation
treated students with respect and as individuals	4.77	.46
was passionate about teaching the content	4.73	.45
used storytelling/personal experiences	4.62	.58
made an effort to learn students' names	4.57	.83
provided timely feedback and comments on graded assessments and activities	4.57	.77
encouraged students to actively participate in class	4.45	.79
consistently took attendance	4.22	.94
used student's personal information from activities	4.08	.89

Note: The scale ranged from very ineffective (1) to very effective (5)

The fourth question was "*What additional comments do you have pertaining to strategies and/or activities that the instructor used in order to create positive student-instructor interactions in this large class?*" The results relating to the identified theme of self-disclosure captured the following categories: (a) storytelling to relate to course material; (b) disclosing instructor's personal stories; and (c) sharing peer stories. Selected examples of student's comments supporting this theme are as follows:

- The instructor would ask us about our life experiences so we would engage and participate more in the content.
- Sharing personal stories that related to the course material and allowing us to share our own stories helped to obtain a better understanding of the material.
- Encouraging students to share their own experiences and stories about the subject.
- I think the instructor did a great job of keeping the students engaged with their personal stories.
- I think that two strategies were very effective in the large class and those two were the instructor trying their best to know students' names and telling stories during lecture. When the instructor demonstrated that they knew your name, the instructor became even more approachable to the students. And I think telling stories not only helped students understand course concepts better, but also made the instructor more engaging and relatable to the students.

A common thread in the *BPSIILC online survey* responses was caring leadership which encompassed the following categories: (a) fostering mutual respect; (b) valuing students' opinions; and (c) connecting the course material to students on a personal level. Selected examples of student's comments associated with caring leadership are as follows:

- I always find that a professor knowing my name helps me feel welcome and cared for!
- The instructor often asked about people's own experiences dealing with the content of the material, which applied it to real life.
- The instructor made the content very relatable. The instructor asked when the instructor could share information with the class about a classmate that could help the others.
- The instructor would actively engage with students during class, and have conversation rather than just typical student teacher transaction.
- The way the course is planned out and taught is hands down the best way to teach a class of that size. When I walked into the classroom, I felt like I was known by people instead of just sneaking into my seat each day.
- I really enjoyed the class because of the teacher mainly. The instructor really knew the information and was very dedicated to teaching it. The instructor knew me by name and graded things quickly, responded to e-mails quickly, and gave enough resources to do good on the tests and assignments.

The instructor-researchers' identified third salient theme of making the class feel smaller indicated the following categories: (a) knowing students' names; (b) utilizing general information about students as it applies to course material; and (c) encouraging student par-

ticipation. Selected examples of student's comments for the theme of making the class feel smaller are as follows:

- I think learning students' name was a great strategy because it makes the class seem smaller.
- I believe that all instructors teaching relatively large classes should try to learn all of the students' names to show the students that they are in-fact, more than a number.
- I like that the instructor knew my name. It definitely made the class feel smaller and like the instructor cared for us and wanted us to achieve success. I also like the instructor's passion to teach the class. It made the class much more enjoyable and relatable.
- The instructor would talk to the class like they were talking to the students individually. The instructor would engage the whole class in activities and lecture.
- Although the class was quite large, I felt a personal connection with the instructor because the instructor always greeted me by name.
- The instructor knew everyone's name in class. This made a large class feel very small. The instructor obviously cared more than just the grades. In turn that made me more interested in the class.
- The instructor made a large class feel small by learning our names and encouraging us to participate.
- I was very impressed with the instructor's effort to learn the names of students-even when they didn't constantly interact.

The fifth question was "*What additional strategies and/or activities do you feel instructors could use in order to create positive student-instructor interactions in large classes?*" Suggestions provided by the students are as follows:

- I think the differences I have seen in the classes is that some teachers aren't personable. If that is the case, why would anyone want to listen to some one speak about a topic that they aren't passionate about? Professors should be able to relate to the content they are teaching; that way, even if it is a large class, one is more apt to listening.
- Anytime you offer the class options it makes the class feel "powerful." It could be as simple as when to turn in a homework assignment (Monday vs. Friday).
- The main thing is making the students feel like they aren't in a large class. They want to feel like they can have the one-on-one interaction with the professor.
- Maybe having the large class split up and meet in a smaller group.
- I think maybe making it clear to students that an instructor is available during office hours and wants students to show up to office hours and ask questions/get clarification on course topics is important. It really helped students and is noticed by the students when instructors take time during office hours to help address students' issues.

Discussion of the Findings

The instructor-researchers of this study identified three strategies to promote positive student-instructor interactions in large classes at a research institution. Students participating in this study emphasized the following strategies in their responses to the SPOT survey: self-disclosure, caring leadership, and making the class feel smaller. The second survey, *BPSIILC online survey*, requested greater detail about each specific strategy and their effectiveness in promoting positive student-instructor interactions.

Self-Disclosure

Students reported an increase in motivation to learn and attend class when the instructor shared personal experiences and stories related to the course material. Students also expressed a greater sense of knowledge and understanding when course material was related to real world experiences. Thusly, linking current events, personal stories, and storytelling is an effective way to build positive student-instructor interactions provided that the instructor remains on topic.

Caring Leadership

When it came to caring leadership, having an instructor genuinely care about how the course material would affect their life and their future resonated with students. In the *BPSIILC online survey*, students reported an instructor's passion is effective in building positive student instructor interactions. Students are more likely to be engaged and learn when an instructor's passion is evident during course lectures. As Wilson (2013) put it, "caring leadership reinforces life-long learning skills, develops positive habits, and enhances self-efficacy" (p. 26).

Making the Class Feel Smaller

An effective engaging instructor has the ability to make a large class feel smaller. Addressing students' by name when asking or answering questions is an effective way to motivate and encourage student engagement. Asking and encouraging questions is one technique an instructor can use during an interactive lecture. Questions can be used to initiate and stimulate instructor-student and peer-to-peer interactions. As for students, they are expected to actively participate, answer faculty questions, participate in collaborative in-class activities, and share stories or experiences related to course topics. When students have a clear outline and understanding of course expectations they are more likely to participate in class and have a positive attitude about the course.

Implications

The findings from this study highlight the importance and benefits of positive student-instructor interactions in large classes. The proven value of positive interactions suggests that instructors must strive to add to their subject-matter expertise and curriculum a layer of connectedness with students. For instructors, the effectiveness of such interactions will

depend upon using multiple strategies and using them consistently while working around the challenges associated with student-instructor exchanges in large classrooms.

Challenges and Solutions for Self-Disclosure

Storytelling offers instructors an opportunity to supplement a traditional lecture by immersing the class in an intellectually in-depth, applicable illustration relevant to the subject matter. In large classes, a natural challenge to engage students exists, partly due to the amount of students. However, appropriate and concise storytelling can lead to a connection with students (Lowenthal, 2008). One hurdle instructors face is the potential to veer off-topic and thus disengage students. To resolve this, instructors need to consistently articulate stories and personal experiences that are both relevant to the subject matter and relate to students' current and future situations. Encouraging students prior to class to be prepared to share personal experiences related to the subject matter is another solution that builds connectedness.

Challenges and Solutions for Caring Leadership

In large classes, some students are not comfortable raising their hands to ask or answer questions, share stories, or be called upon. Thus, instructors should lead interactive activities or discussions that may ease students into making contributions to the class, even when the students initially feel timid or intimidated.

One way that instructors can exemplify caring leadership is to use the names of students who ask or answer questions. If a student answers a question and the instructor does not know his or her name, the instructor can say, "Thank you for answering the question. Please tell me your name." Then the instructor can incorporate the student's name when addressing the question or transitioning into other course material: "As Luke mentioned...." In large classes, such engagement can promote learning. Williams, Childers, and Kemp (2013) reported that a stimulating and encouraging classroom enhances student participation, attendance, and comprehension of course content.

Another effective and realistic way for instructors to exemplify caring leadership is to convey the benefits of learning the course material and completing assignments. Although students know that they will be graded against course requirements, they can be motivated beyond the simple completion of assignments. When instructors outline the practical and applicable benefits of the course, students are more likely to be connected to the material. For instance, the authors have had success sharing former students' stories with current students: "My former students have expressed that this particular assignment assisted them in the real world when…." Conveying these additional benefits is a proven way to connect with individual students in large classes. As supported by Paolini (2015), the more instructors encourage and motivate students to succeed, the more likely students will be connected to the material.

Challenges and Solutions for Making the Classroom Feel Smaller

When employing strategies to make a large class feel smaller, a caring and genuine instructor will convey to students messages of inclusion, appreciation, and a willingness to communicate, thus enhancing student engagement (Mottet et al., 2004). As a result, students are engaged and they learn more. Consider a comment from one student in the study who completed the SPOT survey: "I really appreciated how well the instructor could command the classroom. The instructor had an ability to engage the students in the material in a way that was interesting and fun. I noticed that more students were actively engaged in the class and material versus other classes that I have been in."

In large classes, instructors may have a tendency to spend too much time prior to or during class trying to learn students' names and remembering information about them. Given these time constraints, one remedy is to briefly interact with students before class. For example, an instructor can approach a student before class begins, confirm the student's name, and ask a question about the material as simple as, "What did you learn from the reading material or the last class?" The instructor will then have an anecdote to share during the lecture such as: "Earlier, Samantha mentioned that she enjoyed learning about…." Such interchanges engage students and encourage participation, at the same time establishing connections with others in the large classroom. Additionally, the instructor's initiative to engage one student immediately sends several direct and indirect messages to the entire class: that the instructor cares enough to interact with each individual; that the instructor knows the students' names and will refer to them by name; and that each student should be prepared to answer questions and participate in class discussion. From the BPSIILC online survey, one student noted that having personal conversations with each student is a strategy that instructors could use to promote positive student-instructor interactions in large classes. Therefore, we can see that instructors should be diligent to engage with individual students as often as class schedules and availability will permit.

Benefits for Faculty

As much as students gain from the personal attention and positive interactions with instructors, the instructor will also realize benefits: (a) students are attentive and engaged in class; (b) students are more comfortable talking to them; (c) the course is more interactive and engaging; and (d) the positive student feedback offers the instructor further opportunities for professional development. This study's instructor-researchers unequivocally agree that seeking positive interactions with students is the foundation for successful teaching, especially in classes with up to 150 students.

Limitations

There are limitations of this study that should be acknowledged. First, the student participants came from a large public university. It is unknown how these perceptions might compare to students at other institutions. Second, the e-mail solicitation of survey participants typically leads to low response rates and could have been easily dismissed by students in the summer time. Despite the limitations, the findings reported here corroborate

what the instructor-researchers believe to be three effective strategies and techniques to build positive student-instructor interactions in a large class.

Conclusion

It is often perceived that students in large classes are not highly motivated, satisfied, or engaged. To respond to this, the authors posit that building positive student-instructor interactions can promote student engagement in large classes. In a context where large classes are more frequent, it is important to consider strategies that will achieve the same outcomes desired in small classes. To accomplish this, careful consideration should be given to how instructors interact with students.

This study contributes to the literature by incorporating results from two online surveys to identify effective strategies to build positive student-instructor interactions: self-disclosure, caring leadership, and making the class feel smaller. This study is important because it provides a better understanding of the significance of positive student-instructor interactions in large classes from the student's perspective. The findings underscore the important role that instructors play in facing the challenges of large class settings.

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