

What Behavioral Changes Can I Make to Inspire Enthusiasm in My Classroom?

Presented by:

Flower Darby

Senior Instructional Designer, Northern Arizona University

Flower Darby is passionate about student success through engaging, innovative teaching approaches, and effective instructional design. As faculty and an instructional designer at Northern Arizona University, Darby designs in-person, online, and blended classes that support students in their learning. She has taught at NAU for over 20 years in areas ranging from English literature to educational technology to dance to Pilates. She loves to apply teaching and learning principles across the disciplines, both in her classes and in those of the faculty she supports. Darby is a Quality Matters master reviewer and presents internationally on online and blended course design.



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Supplemental Materials

Be intentional about the emotional impact you yourself have on your class.

Take advantage of emotional contagion

- Your emotions or mood will affect those of your students
- Strive to leave negativity outside the door
 - Carefully review announcements, posts and feedback before posting online
 - Check for unintentional negative tone
- Make a deliberate effort to bring a positive attitude into class
 - Smile
 - Project enthusiasm, confidence and optimism
 - Look for ways to create a positive, encouraging tone in online posts and announcements

Feed your passion

- Consciously remind yourself of what you love about your discipline and what made you decide to teach in the first place
- Teach what you love
 - When possible, seek teaching assignments that allow you to explore special interests in your subject area
 - Strive to bring examples, case studies and personal experience that you find especially interesting
 - Your enthusiasm and interest will be contagious

Be likeable

- Students learn better from someone they like
 - More willing to attend class or office hours
 - Listen more closely to someone they like and respect
- Practice immediacy
 - Behaviors that communicate warmth and a willingness to connect
 - Make eye contact
 - Smile and try to maintain a positive and encouraging facial expression
 - Demonstrate affirmative responses
 - Nod your head as a student is talking
 - Verbalize encouraging comments such as, “yes, that’s right, go on”
 - Move into closer proximity with students (as appropriate)
 - Don’t hide behind the lectern
 - Move around the room during class

- Establish rapport with your students
 - Make small talk before and after class
 - Demonstrate empathy and interest in their lives
 - Use appropriate humor
 - Show your students that you like them and care about them
- Adapt these practices to your online class
 - Show your personality
 - Share cartoons, funny videos, memes, etc., as appropriate
 - Demonstrate caring for students' wellbeing and success through supportive emails, feedback and announcements

Develop your public speaking skills

- Again, make eye contact and smile
- Practice energetic and animated speaking
- Vary your tone of voice to convey enthusiasm or significance
- Pause and repeat as needed to reinforce important statements
- Include short video mini-lectures or announcements in your online class to practice these same techniques

Manage the emotional climate of the classroom

- Defuse "hot moments" by reminding students to take a break, use neutral language, etc.
- Acknowledge times when the whole room may be subdued by a local or national tragedy
 - Ask students if they want to talk about it
 - Provide resources such as referrals to counseling services
- When possible, plan in-class or online activities that students will enjoy while also learning, practicing and applying class content

Target knowledge emotions

- Curiosity
 - Ask engaging questions
 - Have students predict outcomes or solutions
- Interest
 - Ensure activities are relevant to class learning goals
 - Demonstrate relevance to students' personal, academic and career goals
 - Offer options for tasks and topics
 - Allow students to pursue activities that they are naturally interested in
- Flow
 - Pitch the challenge level of a task to the upper end of what students can succeed at doing
 - Too high is frustrating and demotivating
 - Too low is boring and demotivating
 - Aim for the upper end of "just right" to stretch students to reach the limits of their potential

Anticipate that designing for emotions may backfire

- Targeting emotions can be risky
- Develop strategies to address unexpected reactions
 - Call a time-out or short break during class to allow people to re-focus
 - Consider giving “trigger warnings” for potentially provocative material
 - Provide alternative options for controversial content or activities
- Think through your own emotional response to content
 - Decide how much you are willing to share with your students
 - More transparency is better? You decide.
 - Make a plan for what to do if you lose control in class

Design to minimize anxiety in your students

- Demonstrate empathy for your students
- Make sure activities and assignments align with course learning goals
 - Tasks should be purposeful
 - Avoid busywork
 - Explain why you are asking students to do something and how it benefits them
- Clarify your instructions and expectations
 - Check for student understanding
 - Provide student examples to show success and offer constructive feedback (what a student might have done better)
 - Give rubrics and clear criteria so students know exactly what you are looking for
- Plan group work carefully
 - Major source of stress, frustration and anxiety for students
 - Design group tasks to minimize frustration
 - Solicit student input
 - Group task design
 - Team contracts
 - Participation and grading policies
- Solicit student input on class policies and grading criteria
 - Foster buy-in
 - Prevent frustration

Further Reading

Cavanagh, S. R. (n.d.). *The Spark of Learning*.

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Lucardie, D. (2014). The impact of fun and enjoyment on adult's learning . *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Science*, 439 - 446.