UK CELT

Co-creating
COMMUNITY GUIDELINES

A step-by-step plan for co-creating community guidelines together with your class this semester.

Community guidelines can set the tone for the classroom environment. Working with students to create a robust set of guidelines can clarify expectations of collaboration and mutual accountability. Try not to think of them as a hard and fast list of rules that cannot be broken, but rather a document that illuminates the ways you and your students will support each other in learning. Starting the semester with a guideline-building activity can get everyone off to a great start!

Tip: consider starting with a reading that might help the class collectively frame this process of guideline creation together.

1 Start with Something

Don't try to create guidelines with students from scratch. Instead, start with a short list of potential guidelines for students to see examples and practice refining those. This also takes the 'easy' guidelines off of the table, so students must think more deeply and more specifically about the way they will interact. Guidelines can and should include things like no name-calling, no comments that could be perceived as denigrating others based on their identity, etc. but can also include things more specific to your class and students.

Frame the Guidelines

Talk to students about the purpose of this activity. Think about shared goals, principles, and commitments together. A goal might be "Every student meets the learning objectives." The principle behind this might be "Every student deserves to learn." The commitments include what your commitments are to them, what their commitments are to you, and what students' commitments are to each other. If something comes up that isn't in an explicit guideline, these foundations can be revisited to help the class decide how to move forward.

Tip: set up practical ways to help students participate, such as building the guidelines document together in Google Docs.

Create Together

Have students share their ideas for guidelines. Ensure everyone is participating. You can also create a shared vocabulary together. If you say "debate and discuss, not argue," it's essential to clarify the difference. When does debate or discussion move into an argument? Even words like 'fact' and 'opinion' can be defined. These shared definitions will help provide a framework for discussions. Other words that might be helpful to define include 'safety' and 'comfort.'

Accountability 2

Be explicit in the expectation that there will be mistakes, by students and yourself. The guidelines don't mean anything if there is no process to address mistakes. The goal should not be to be punitive, but rather to address the issue so the class can maintain the learning environment. Include students in this part of the process as well; they will have to think about what they would need from others while having to keep in mind they will also be held to the accountability steps.

Tip: consider building in reflection opportunities as you go - you might ask what discussion has gone best or worst so far and why.

3 Revisit, Revise, Reflect

The class you have on the first day of class may not be the same as the class you have four weeks into the semester when students have gotten to know you and each other. Do not be afraid to revisit regularly or before a potentially charged conversation, and don't be afraid to work with the class to update as needed. You might also look for opportunities to build in reflection opportunities on how the guidelines are or aren't working as you go, and use this reflection time to revise as needed.

Everyday Interventions

While everyone in the community should feel empowered to remind others of the guidelines and hold each other accountable, ultimately, that responsibility belongs to the instructor. Students should feel confident in your ability to step in and hold classmates to the guidelines. Be mindful of how you are both modeling the guidelines yourself and how you are calling students in and helping create a productive and inclusive learning space for everyone.

Learning to co-create community guidelines with a class is a process of trial and error. There's no one right or wrong way to do this. Give it a try, and try again as needed. And be in touch with CELT to talk it out as you go.

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