

# Collaborative Learning: Fostering Identity Safety and Through Community in the Classroom



# Agenda

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- **Community**
  - Social connectedness
  - Identity Safety
  - Safe(r) spaces
- **Our Roles & Collaborative Practices**
  - Establishing norms
  - Addressing context
  - Acknowledging identities
  - Employing inclusive practices

**\*Scenarios Throughout\***



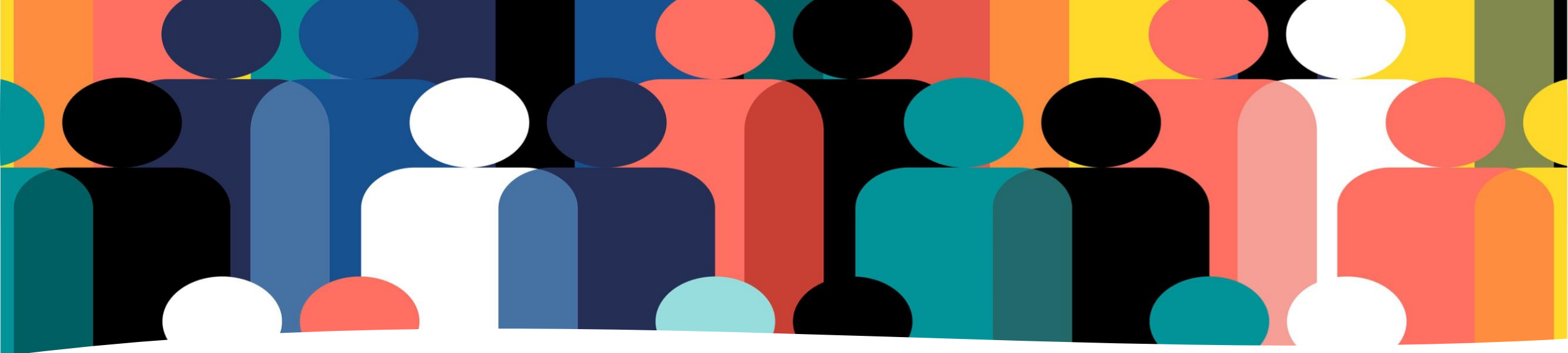
# Building Community

**Lots of ways to build community**

**Strength of withstanding a  
challenge lies in the mortar**

- Mortar (social  
connectedness/identity safety)
- Bricks (collaborative learning)





“Social connectedness refers to the creation of bonding relationships. . .[and] are essential elements of student satisfaction, academic success, and retention. . .” [Practices to Encourage Social Connectedness](#)

## Social Connectedness

- Relationships can be student to student, or student to instructor
- When we know people, we are more likely to show up to the spaces where they are; when we show up, we succeed; when we succeed we decide to stay.
- Social Brokenness = Lack of Accountability and Care



# Identity Safety

- **Identity safety** is the feeling that an individual feels valued in a particular context.
  - [Practices to Promote Identity Safety](#)
- Safety is a precondition for learning well.
  - [Trauma-Informed Pedagogy](#)



# Identity Safety Opposes Identity Threat

***Identity threat** is the feeling that one's social identities are devalued; feeling safe is lost in that context.*

“Experiencing **identity threat** as a result of being **negatively stereotyped** (i.e., women aren't good at math), **underestimated** based on group identity (i.e., you speak so eloquently; or, this score is better than I expected), or being subjected to a **hostile racial climate**, has been found to **undermine academic retention** and achievement and lower social belonging for students who, absent an oppressive culture, will thrive”

(Gonzalez et al., 2002; Murphy, Steele, & Gross, 2007; Johnson et al., 2007; Logel et al., 2009; Chang et al., 2014).

Source: <https://collegetransitioncollaborative.org/ensuring-id-safety/>





# Safe(r) Spaces

**Q: Why is identity safety important to learning?**



Students who are connected and feel safe are *more motivated*.

We want students to feel like their identities are not hinderances in the space—rather *assets* that will/can support our communal learning and their own (avoid identity threat)



## Identity Safety and Social Connection Support Belonging

- Students authentically engage
- Belong, Not “Fit in”
- All Identities Welcome
- Participating without barriers
- Authentic self
- Safety
- Community



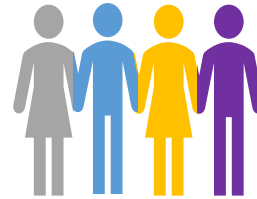
# Our Roles in Fostering Identity Safety



**Establishing Norms  
for Course Conduct**



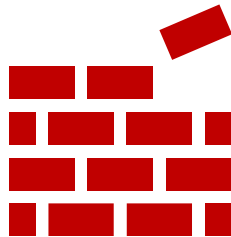
**Addressing Social  
or Historical Context**



**Acknowledging  
Diverse Identities**



**Employing Routine  
Inclusive Teaching  
Practices**



**Collaborative Learning Techniques for Social Connection: All of This!**


# Collaborative Learning

“Collaborative learning (CL) is an educational approach to teaching and learning that involves groups of learners **working together** to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product” *(Laal & Laal 2012)*



Explore Yang's (2023) historical review of cooperative & collaborative learning to learn more



The background of the image is a dense, close-up shot of many red and brown bricks. The bricks are of various sizes and are scattered across the entire frame, creating a textured, masonry-like background. The colors range from deep red to a more muted, earthy brown.

Share your ideas  
for collaborative learning activities  
(small group activities) on the  
Microsoft Teams whiteboard



# Building Community with Small Group CL Activities

- **Define each activity**

- Goal
- Output expectations
- Time to work
- Student roles

- **Regularly planned activities**

- Deliberate group membership
- Allow for community building (mascot/name)
- Checks on “how it’s going”



**Establishing Norms  
for Course Conduct**



**Addressing Social or  
Historical Context**



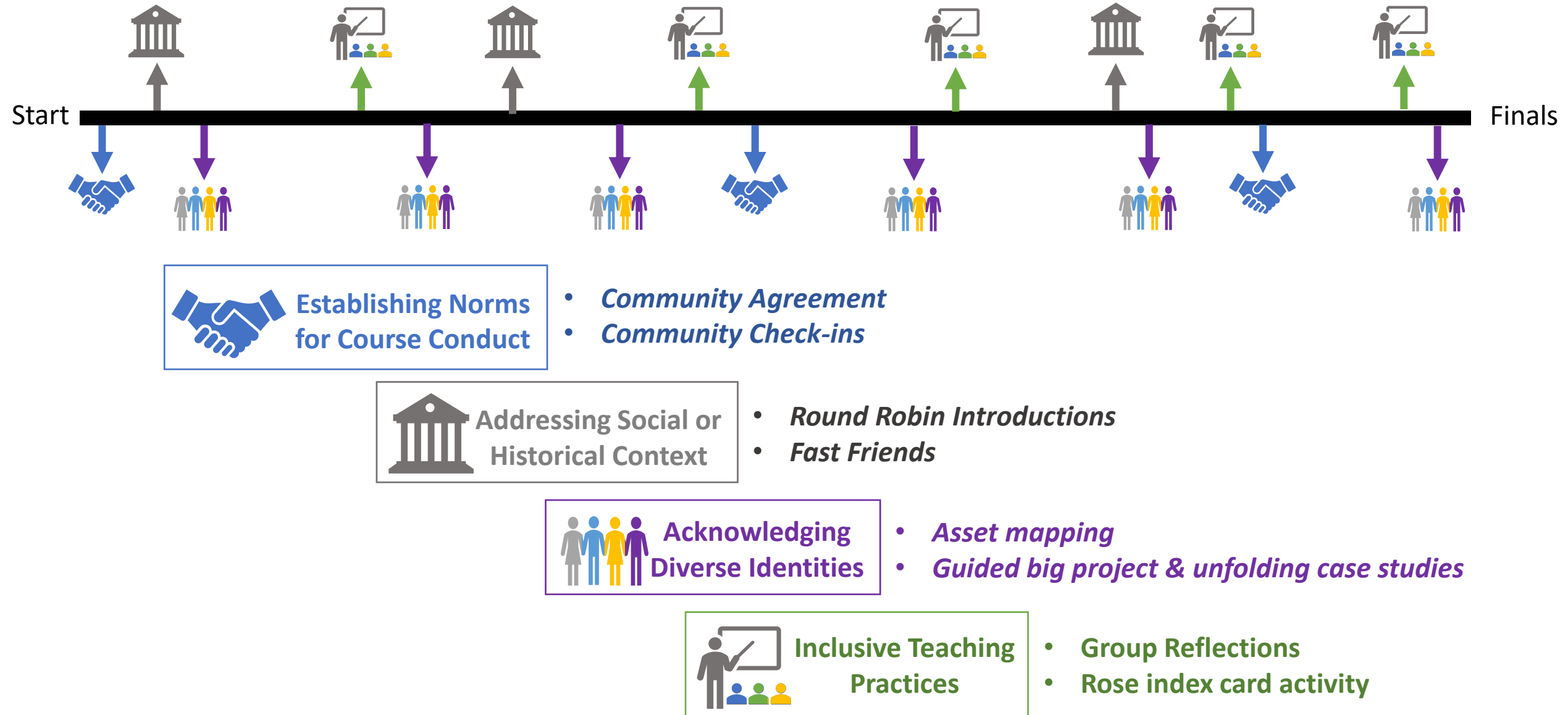
**Acknowledging  
Diverse Identities**



**Inclusive Teaching  
Practices**



# Collaboration Strategy Filled Semester





# Community Agreement

*A shared understanding between learners about how everyone wants to work together during the course*

- **Shared sense of responsibility & accountability**
- **Learning environment where all feel valued**
- **Offers students an opportunity to advocate for their needs**

*Take space, make space*

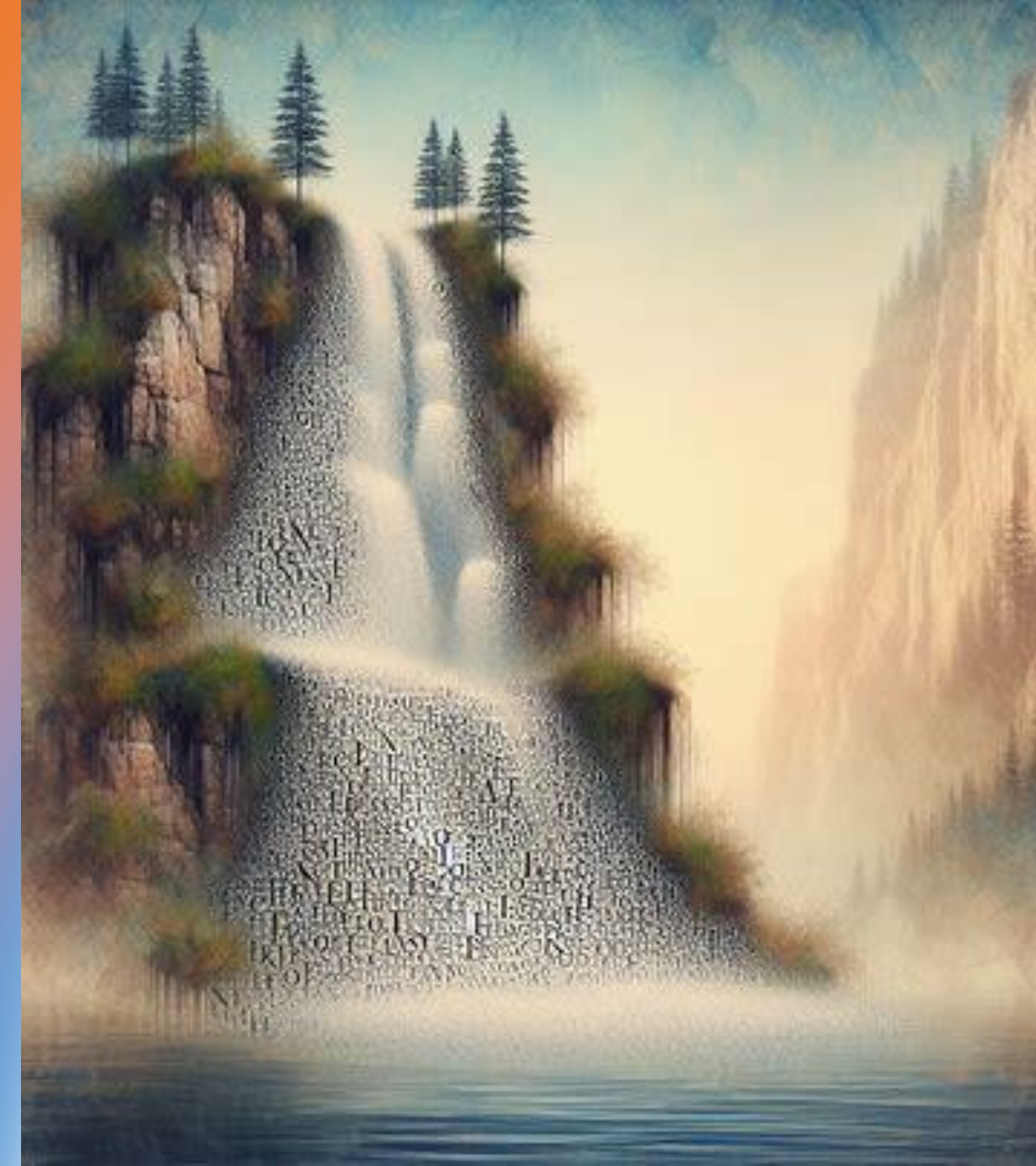
*Listen actively, not  
just to respond*

*Throw glitter, not shade*

*Stories stay, lessons leave*

*Stay engaged, limit  
distractions*





# Chatterfall Activity

*Type your response but do not hit enter (send) until instructed to do so*

**Q: What additional statement(s) would you want to be part of your classroom community agreement....?**



Establishing Norms  
for Course Conduct

# Co-Creation of a Community Agreement

Brainstorm: have students respond to questions/phrases like...

- I feel included when... How can this group support that?
- I don't feel included when...
- When do you feel respected and valued?
- What do you expect from one another?



Workshop in a Flash

Collectively create items for the agreement:



"partner-up/small groups/entire class and write a list of statements you think we should consider for our community agreement"





# Getting to Know Each Other Activities

## Round Robin Introductions

1. Partner with someone near you
2. Person 1 introduces themselves (1 min)
3. Person 2 asks questions (1 min)
4. Person 2 introduces themselves (1 min)
5. Person 1 asks questions (1 min)
6. Partners introduce each other



## Fast Friends ([resource](#))

- Students group/pair and answer a set of questions asked



# Fast Friends Scenario

**Roles:** (1) reader, (2) includer, (3) note-taker, (4) sharer

**Scenario:** It is the beginning of your in-person course, first day, and you want to try an icebreaker activity that will help students get to know each other. You have done a simple pairing of students near each other and put questions on the board to help them be “fast friends,” with the instructions that they should get to know each other and then introduce their partner. Students move and talk immediately, but you notice that in one pair there isn’t really any talking and one student looks visibly upset.

**Task:** Spend 3-4 minutes discussing with your group... What you would do



# Asset Theory vs. Deficit Theory

“

The most destructive tool of the culture of classism is deficit theory. In education, we often talk about the deficit perspective—defining students by their weaknesses rather than their strengths. Deficit theory takes this attitude a step further, suggesting that poor people are poor because of their own moral and intellectual deficiencies (Collins, 1988). Deficit theorists use two strategies for propagating this world view: (1) drawing on well-established stereotypes, and (2) ignoring systemic conditions, such as inequitable access to high-quality schooling, that support the cycle of poverty.

Paul Gorski, qtd. In “[Introducing Asset Mapping](#)”

# Student Assets: A Cultural Wealth Model

## Forms of cultural capital

**Aspirational** – students' hopes and dreams for the future

**Linguistic** – broadly-defined communication skills (e.g., storytelling)

**Familial** – social and personal resources from familial and community networks

**Social** – peers and other social contacts in the college environment

**Navigational** – knowledge, skills and abilities to navigate the social institution of college; can empower to navigate unwelcoming or unsupportive environments

**Resistance** - desire to secure equal rights and collective well-being



# Asset Mapping

- Identify and recognize strengths
  - [Participatory Asset Mapping](#)
  - Students create ***Strengths*** of their community, group, or self
- Identify and recognize areas of growth (Opportunities/Challenges)
  - Fear of failure / pride / perfectionism
  - Procrastination / time management
  - Lack of focus / organization
  - Intolerance / impatience
- Build groups that have folks with differing strengths/opportunities for folks to grow in safe ways



# Student Project Scenario



**Switch Roles:** (1) reader, (2) includer, (3) note-taker, (4) sharer

**Scenario:** Students formed groups on their own and with your help earlier in the semester based on projects they were interested in completing and the people they wanted to work with. This is an online class, so you make sure they have google docs for showing collaborative work. A fairly large deadline is coming up, and one group has nothing in their google doc but no one has emailed you.

**Task:** Spend 3-4 minutes discussing with your group... **If you were to consider a re-set for the group, how could you utilize asset mapping to get the group back on track?**



# Larger Collaborative Learning Strategies

- **Guided Group Projects**
  - Group member diversity (asset-focused)
  - Audience/output diversity (real-world)
  - Project broken into parts
- **(unfolding) Case Studies**
- [Circle Way](#) + others in the Identify Safety Handout [Identity Safe Handout.docx](#)

# Group / Community Reflections

## Individual reflection prompts

Circle the number that represents your agreement with the statements  
(5 = completely agree, 1 = do not agree)

1. I contributed meaningfully to our activity
2. My voice was heard and valued
3. All members of the group contributed to the activity
4. All members contributions were respected
5. Our group observed the principle of “take space, make space”.
6. I believe the product of our groupwork reflects a team effort.

### **Total Score Overall Reference Guide (Example)**

- 24-30: outstanding groupwork
- 20-23: productive work
- 15-19: room for improvement
- <15: let's work together





# Group / Community Reflections

## Rose Index Card Activity

- 1) Write "a bud" (something going well, they like)
- 2) Write "a thorn" (something not going well, they dislike)
- 3) Collect, shuffle, and redistribute index cards for folks to share
- 4) Discuss themes and solutions



Level-up the inclusivity of your activities by using the  
["ice-breaker selection model"](#)

# Icebreaker Selection Model

Developed by:  
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Lisa LaCross, lacross@southalabama.edu

1

Primary  
Goal

Build  
relationships  
and  
connections

2

Secondary Goals  
Decision Points

What kind of energy am I  
trying to create with respect  
to contextual factors? *E.g.,  
Energizing, Calming, Creative,  
Social*

What stage of the  
relationship am I building?  
*E.g., Establishing, Building,  
Maintaining*

optional

Is there a way to incorporate  
technology students need to  
practice? *E.g., collaboration or  
student response platforms*

Is there a way to align the  
icebreaker with the target  
content, respecting all  
previous decision points?

3

Icebreaker  
Selection

Select your  
icebreaker

4

Pre-implementation  
Equity Checks

*Swimming Pool Check:*  
Can learners choose to  
engage in the shallow or  
deep end?

*Inclusion Check:*  
Who might feel excluded  
or uncomfortable with the  
topic or format of this  
icebreaker?

*Flexibility Check:*  
How can this icebreaker  
allow flexible participation  
or extend to another  
modality?



# Collaborative Learning Activity

**Group Task: Redesign the activity briefly described to better attend to the elements of identity safety, building community, and collaborative learning**



**Establishing Norms  
for Course Conduct**



**Addressing Social or  
Historical Context**



**Acknowledging  
Diverse Identities**



**Inclusive Teaching  
Practices**

## The Activity:

*You are preparing students to do problems on their own after class and tell students work on problem number with folks around them at the end of the class period.*

## The How:

- (1) Think about the activity while waiting to move (Teams breakout rooms)
- (2) Designate roles (switch again) *1 min*
  - task lead (4 elements) -timer
  - note-taker -includer
- (3) Discuss the activity, the elements & redesign the activity (provide specific details) *8 min*

# Intentionality at its Core

## Purposeful

- transparent alignment with objectives
- Size & make-up of groups intentional
- Connected to real-world/their interests (each group → different task)

## Active engagement

- Examining own beliefs, values and biases
- Disrupt hidden assumptions, highlight implicit and unconscious biases



# Collaborative Practices Throughout the Semester



Establishing Norms  
for Course Conduct



Addressing Social or  
Historical Context



Acknowledging  
Diverse Identities



Inclusive Teaching  
Practices



Round Robin  
Introductions



Rose  
Index  
Cards



Fast Friends



Group  
Reflection



Group  
Reflection



Fast Friends



Rose  
Index  
Cards



Group  
Reflection

Start Finals

Community  
Agreement



Asset Mapping



Group  
Project  
Part 1



Unfolding Case  
Study Part a



Community  
Check-in



Group  
Project  
Part 2



Unfolding Case  
Study Part 2



Community  
Check-in



Group  
Project  
Part 3





Questions



# Teaching Recognition Awards!



1. Learn something
2. Make a plan
3. Schedule a consultation



<https://www.kent.edu/ctl/teaching-recognition-awards>

# Center for Teaching and Learning



Support for Faculty:  
Teaching & Learning

- Consultations
- Check out our website
  - Events
  - Programs
  - Resources



# Thank you

<http://tinyurl.com/2024ISCL>

