Building Rapport

Speaker

…being aware of the teaching environment that you’re creating for the students, so, that what the convenor hands you is the curriculum, what you do with that, how you enact it, how you structure things, that’s the hidden curriculum. And that can be just as powerful a message, so things to remember around the hidden curriculum is, what’s my body language like, you know being aware of pitch, pace, pause, volume, emphasis. Because remember, if the students are coming in with a lot of self doubt, they’re very primed to see confirming evidence that they don’t belong here, so they’re going to be paying attention to what your values are and how you’re treating them. So modelling good behaviour is really important.

A great way to do this is to ask for feedback in your first tutoring session, by handing out a little survey at the end of it, just, you know, how was your learning experience, is there anything more I could be doing, how did you like my teaching style, that sort of thing. And so from the word go you’re modelling that this is a transparent process, you’re setting up trust between you and your students and you’re letting them know that feedback is an inherent part of the university environment and that they can come to you and let you know if there’s something going on in their lives and it helps to develop rapport.

Another thing that first year tutors really need to be aware of is learning student names and I know that we often sort of say oh, I’m so bad at learning names, but there are plenty of memory devices that you can use to effectively learn names and it’s important because that’s a protective factor, so, letting the students know, look it’s going to take me about a month, that I’m going to give it a good go, calling students by their names so that they learn each others names and also relationship building activities, so a first year tutor you’ll probably need to do that in every single tutorial at the beginning of it, whereas a second or third year tutor you can probably just do that in weeks one and two. Because remember, sense of connection is a very powerful thing that students need to have when they’re transitioning in to university.

So you never know that sometimes your mistakes, if you work through them in a genuine manner, can actually end up being a really powerful bonding experience.

Another thing that I once tried to do was I was trying to link material between what I was teaching in one course with material I thought that they were learning in another course and I drew it on the board and got it totally wrong and luckily there was enough rapport for one of them to bring it up and go oh, actually, you’ve drawn that wrong there and we were able to have a laugh about it and I was able to show to them that learning is not a linear journey, you do make mistakes, things don’t turn out right.