



# FACULTY WORKSHOPS

ONLINE | WINTER 2023

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Leadership Communication Skills Center

# HEARTS AND MINDS: THE SOFT POWER OF RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING WITH INTERNATIONAL MILITARY STUDENTS

WCCG Faculty Workshop Series



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2:30 P.M. EST  
Virtual

# Reflection Activity

**Directions: Discuss the questions on the slide in breakout rooms for 10 minutes. Summarize your individual responses using the chat. We will ask three volunteers to share when we return to the large group.**

Think back to your most positive mentorship experience. Why was it meaningful? What impact did it have on your own success/achievement of your goals?

To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

*I would have been likely to achieve my goals without this relationship.*

Why do you think your mentor chose to mentor you? What was their motivation?

Education: Was your mentor a teacher?

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Military: Was your mentor a service member in your military organization?

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Other: Was your mentor a leader in your career organization, a friend, or another figure in your life?

# Workshop Structure

## Objective 1:

Participants will explore the impacts of interpersonal relationship building on students' academic achievement.

## Objective 2:

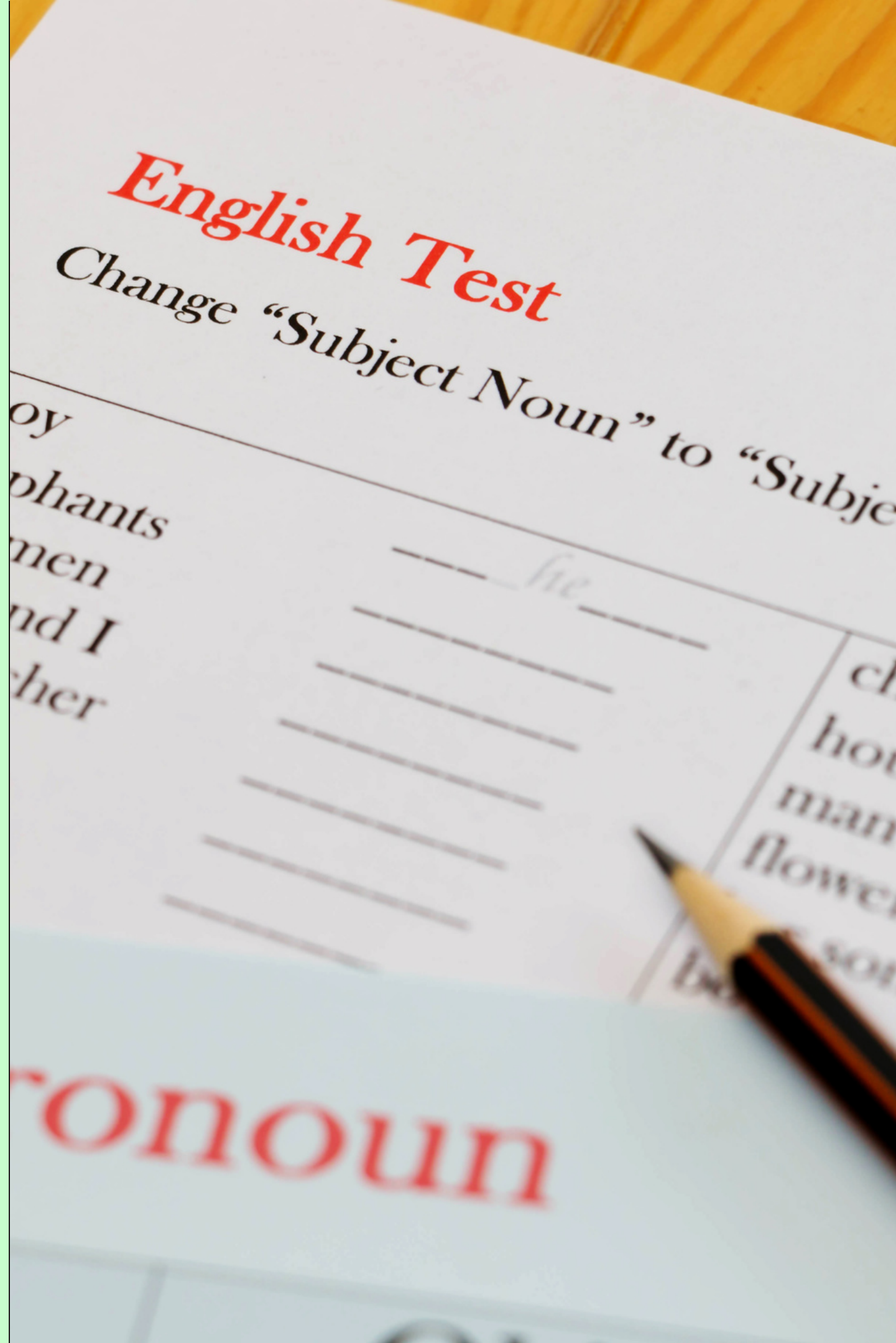
Participants will come away with strategies for fostering relationship building with their students.

- Program Sharing: Pilot IMS Course
- Interdisciplinary Exploration of Relationship Building and its Impact on Students' Academic Performance
  - MBE Science
  - Evolution of Humans' Social Adaptations in Learning Brains
  - Attachment theory: **adult education focus**
- Discussion: Challenges in working with International Students
- Best Practices: Tips and Strategies

# Quick Write:

Reflect on your experience as a faculty member:

Write down or think to yourself about the *most significant challenge* you have faced when teaching international students for whom English is a foreign language.



# Pilot Program: A Research Inquiry

## 2010-2020: My first decade at the LCSC

- Provided academic support to IMS in person through:
  - one-on-one mentorship sessions
  - instructional courses and classes (including TOEFL prep)
  - writing camps and workshops
- IMS Graduate Communication Prep Course evolved
- Attended IMS events, including FSP trips to White House and NYC
- Designed, developed, and taught MCU International Military Spouses English Conversation Course in person

## Pandemic: Limits on in-person social interactions

- Taught IMS Graduate Communication Preparatory Course virtually, then in-person socially distant with masks and hybrid options
- Individual support was virtual
- Instruction was largely virtual, including Spouses English Conversation Course

### Observations:

- Usage dropped from 100% of IMS in AY 19/20 to 63% of IMS in AY20/21
- Anecdotal: Student stress levels seemed to increase, but their attendance in support courses seemed to decrease

## Post-Pandemic: LCSC back to in-person operations with renewed emphasis on relationship building

- Spouses English Conversation Class in person with hybrid option, added 2 co-instructors as center expanded
- **Piloted similar model for IMS Conversation Course in person with 3 co-instructors, non-academic conversation topics, safe space for students to ask questions and practice speaking English**

# Class Structure

Idiom of the day

English language practice: Discussion on a given topic

Question and answer session

What's happening this weekend: Area events



# SUCCESS SO FAR

- Average attendance in voluntary class: 50%+ of IMS (from Command and Staff College) showed up consistently on Friday afternoons first semester for optional conversation class
- Students expressed interest in continuing class in the second semester (attendance dropped by 27% as sessions became more sporadic due to schedule conflicts, but participants remained highly engaged)
- Increased IMS participation in workshops, studio courses, and other LCSC-sponsored events and activities
- 94% increase in IMS scheduled LCSC appointments from prior year
- Perceived increase in IMS drop-in visits to share academic and personal challenges/concerns

## Other possible causal factors:

Nearly 100% of CSC IMS expressed interest in pursuing masters degree program (demonstrating high levels of motivation) when interviewed by MMS Program Director at beginning of AY

Possible causes include but are not limited to the following:

- Great crop of self-motivated students selected for MCU PME
- Result of increased coordination between LCSC Director/faculty and schoolhouse faculty/MMS Program Director this year, including brief during IMS Grad. Comm. Course to explain academic requirements and demonstrate a one-team approach to students' academic success



# How do interpersonal relationships impact students' academic performance?

An interdisciplinary exploration



# Mind, Brain, and Education Science

FIGURE 2.  
Tenets in mind, brain, and education science (2017)

<b>TENET 1</b>	Motivation influences learning.
<b>TENET 2</b>	Emotions and cognition are mutually influential.
<b>TENET 3</b>	Stress influences learning.
<b>TENET 4</b>	Anxiety influences learning.
<b>TENET 5</b>	Depression influences learning.
<b>TENET 6</b>	Learning is influenced by both challenge and threat as perceived by the learner.
<b>TENET 7</b>	Reactions to facial expressions are both universal and highly individualized.
<b>TENET 8</b>	The brain interprets tones of voices unconsciously and almost immediately.
<b>TENET 9</b>	Humans are social beings who learn from and with each other.
<b>TENET 10</b>	Attention is a complex phenomenon comprising multiple systems.
<b>TENET 11</b>	Most learning does not occur linearly.
<b>TENET 12</b>	Learning involves conscious and unconscious processes.
<b>TENET 13</b>	Learning is developmental (nature and nurture) as well as experiential (nurture).
<b>TENET 14</b>	Learning engages the entire physiology.
<b>TENET 15</b>	Sleep and dreaming influence learning in different ways.
<b>TENET 16</b>	Nutrition influences learning.
<b>TENET 17</b>	Physical activity influences learning.
<b>TENET 18</b>	Use it or lose it: Brains that remain active cognitively help development and can also stave off cognitive decline.
<b>TENET 19</b>	Feedback about learning progress influences learning outcomes.
<b>TENET 20</b>	It is easier to retrieve memories when facts and skills have been embedded in individually relevant and meaningful contexts.
<b>TENET 21</b>	Brains detect novelty and pattern.

Adapted from: Tokuhami-Espinosa, T. (2018). *Neuromyths: Debunking False Ideas about the Brain*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton.

**Tenet 9: Humans are social beings who learn from and with each other.**

Social interactions influence learning.

# Evolution of our Brains as Social Organs of Adaptation



Adapted from Louis Cozolino, *Attachment-Based Teaching: Creating a Tribal Classroom*, 2014

Historical precedent: Humans lived in groups (tribalism).

Adaptations driving natural selection shifted to social environment.

- Humans have primitive social instincts\* to:
  - bond, attach, and connect
  - self-sacrifice and act charitably
  - resist oppression and unfair power dynamics
- Modern industrial societal/educational norms ≠ primitive social instincts

\*driven by biochemical reactions triggered in group/relationship situations

Learning brain must be understood in context of relationships and attachments to faculty, fellow students, and others in learning environment

# Neuroplasticity

## DEFINED

"that property of the brain that allows it to change its structure and its function" (Doidge, 2009)

"the brain's amazing capacity to change and adapt...the physiological changes in the brain that happen as the result of our interactions with our environment" (Campbell, 2009)

Our brains can and do change constantly throughout our lives in response to what we learn and experience.

## INVOLVES THREE PROCESSES



Proliferation: new synaptic & fiber tract connections made world leaves its imprint on our brains



Pruning: rid brain of unused synapses & axonal fiber tracts elimination of irrelevant/non-useful connections in brain



Consolidation: forming recognizable patterns that allow for automatic responses brain's statistical analysis (Burns, 2019)

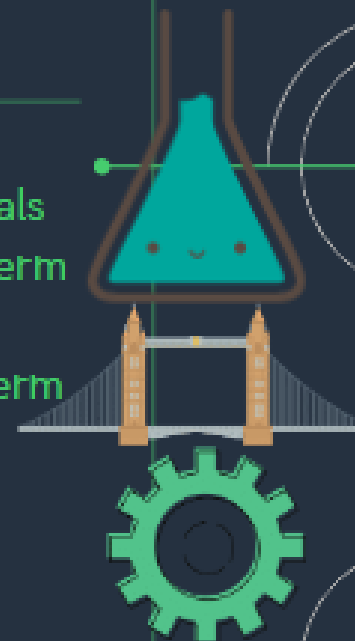
## BRAIN CHANGE TYPES

Chemical change in signals between neurons (short-term memory)

Structural change (long-term memory)

Functional change

All changes occurring simultaneously, interrelatedly, and constantly to support **LEARNING** (Boyd, 2015)



## REVOLUTIONARY CONCEPT

Idea that thoughts can change matter and structure = **fantastic** (of the supernatural) and **ordinary** (willing our feet to move)

A **resilient** brain is also a **vulnerable** brain. (Doidge, 2009)

# Understanding adult classroom relationship dynamics via Attachment Theory lens



Learners' Attachment Styles: Secure and Insecure

Strange Situation: Classroom Edition

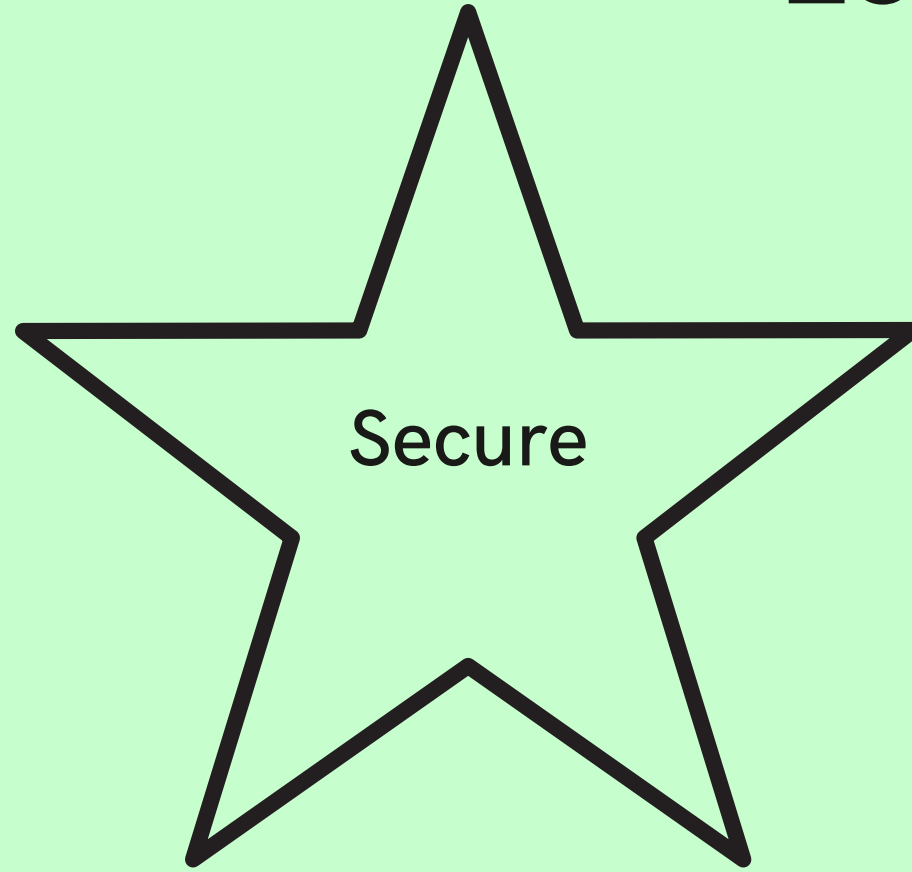
Internal Working Models

Providing a Secure Base

Practicing Mind-Mindedness

Adapted from J. Bowlby and T. Fleming

**Low Avoidance**



Preoccupied  
Anxious

**Low  
Anxiety**

**High  
Anxiety**

Dismissive  
Avoidant

Fearful  
Avoidant

**High Avoidance**

An iceberg floating in the ocean. The tip of the iceberg is above the water line, and the much larger base is submerged. The background is a blue sky with light clouds above the water and a darker blue sea below. The text is centered on the iceberg.

**Learning Behaviors  
Attitudes  
Demonstrated Academic Skills**

**Attachment Styles  
Working Memory Capacity  
Socio-cultural impact  
Childhood trauma  
Generational trauma  
Language Challenges  
Military experiences  
Physical health  
Invisible injuries  
Special Learning  
Abilities**

**Understanding  
factors in student  
(and faculty)  
anxiety and  
avoidance levels**

# Discussion

What challenges have you faced as an educator in working with international military students?

Think back to your "Quick Write" response. Has your perspective on these challenges and/or your understanding of this student population changed? If yes, how?

In what areas of your instructional practice would you like support and strategies?





# Key Takeaways

Mind-mindedness as a foundation for secure attachments in adult education

Taking time to reflect on the "strange situation" for international military students and the ways in which this impacts their class participation and willingness to engage in learning process

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Knowledge of students' hearts and minds is soft power.

## Ideal Impact of Teacher-Student Relationship Building:

Graduates who can deal more securely with challenges, who can think more creatively without fear of failure, who are less risk averse in decision-making, and who are less resistant to organizational change

# Suggested Best Practices

## Engaging international students (IMS) in seminar:

- Class expectations on first day: set open and positive tone
- Pre-class preparation to integrate IMS more smoothly into seminar discussions
- Small group activities where IMS are paired with a sponsor or trusted peer who can encourage participation
- Student take-over days (students are given advanced notice to prepare for and teach a mini-unit within the lesson (20 minutes or less): great assessment tool for SLOs
- Partner interview activity (how well do you know your classmate): Does not have to occur at the beginning of the AY, but can be helpful

## Creating secure base for IMS in classroom:

- Advertise office hours and encourage students to attend
- Provide contact information for students to email if they do not feel comfortable speaking face-to-face
- Check in with struggling students regularly
- Provide appropriate disclosure to empathize with students and build safe environment to disclose challenges
- Demonstrate appreciation and respect for students' unique perspectives, values, and internal working models
- Create work-arounds (Cozolino, 2014) to create small groups and teams where students can build community
  - Example: CGs, sponsorship programs
- Attend non-required events for IMS (sporting events, welcome picnic, base high school football game)
- Avoid tokening students in class discussions

# Suggested Best Practices

## Responding to IMS Writing

- Less edits, more comments
- Less "this should say," more guiding questions "what do you mean here"
  - Do *not* assume you know what they mean to say
- Comment on writing strengths with positive feedback: what students should keep doing on their subsequent assignments
- End with summary comment explaining rationale for grade, connecting grade with feedback, recommending areas for improvement
- Encourage a follow-up (synchronous dialogue) in written comments

## Mindfulness

- Increase awareness of students' interpersonal relationship behaviors in classroom dynamics
  - How might these behaviors reflect an attachment style or internal working model?
- Increase awareness of your own interpersonal relationship behaviors in classroom dynamics
  - How might these behaviors reflect an attachment style or internal working model?

# Faculty Journal Prompt

## Ideas: Reflection

What do I know about my students personally?

What do I know about my students professionally?

How available am I to students for one-on-one meetings and mentoring sessions?

In what ways am I fostering positive relationship-building in my classroom? How might I be hindering this process?

How do I respond when students share perspectives in class discussions that I find offensive or against my beliefs and values?

How am I encouraging students to seek my support when they face challenges?

Who among my students is struggling most with the material? Have I reached out to them lately or asked how they're really doing?

How am I involving students in decision-making processes in the classroom?

In what ways am I encouraging risk-taking in academic endeavors? How do I respond when students fail after taking a risk?

In what ways am I rewarding critical and creative thinking? In what ways might I be unintentionally discouraging critical and creative thinking?

# Take care of yourself.

You're doing the best you can with what you have.

- How is the way you show up impacted by organizational, administrative, or professional stressors?
- What support would allow you to take on a mentorship role with struggling students in your classroom? Who can you approach to request this support?
- What support do you need from your university, your military organization, your department, your team, etc. to show up as your best self in the classroom?
- What does professional self-care look like for you?
- What would implementing these concepts and strategies look like in your academic environment?



# Thank you for participating!

Questions? Comments? Advice for me on assessing IMS support courses and programs?  
Let's continue the discussion!  
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