

Constructing and Maintaining Authority in Inclusive Classrooms

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As you consider constructing and maintaining your authority and credibility in the classroom, you should simultaneously consider the type of classroom climate you are trying to achieve. The manner in which you deal with student-to-student interactions as well as your own interaction with students can undermine or reinforce your authority and credibility in the classroom.

Constructing a Foundation for Developing Authority and Credibility

Share with your students your qualifications to do the teaching you're doing—the experiences, both academic and life, which contribute to your expertise in the area.

Be clear about your expectations related to their performance and how they approach their work as students (written work, oral participation, etc.).

Establish ground rules for interaction in the classroom.

Let students know that you are open to challenges of **ideas** (theirs and yours).

If you have identity characteristics that you think will pose a challenge to your authority and credibility, discuss these up front with your students.

If you know you will be presenting in “non-traditional” ways, be forthcoming about how you plan to approach the content and the value of your approach.

Identify ahead of time the sources of resistance (known or anticipated) to your view of the content and/or methods that you use to teach.

Maintaining your Authority and Credibility

Acknowledge efforts made by students to maintain a climate in which all, including you, are respected.

Voice appreciation, without singling out particular individuals, for those who act in respectful ways (e.g., students who might challenge an instructor and peers in ways that do not demean the instructor or peers).

Do not allow students to gang up on one another or treat anyone, including you, disrespectfully. These incidents must be addressed immediately.

Remind, remind, remind. When people violate rules for classroom interaction, make sure such violations are publicly addressed by a gentle reminder. Try not to embarrass people, but everyone can learn from individual mistakes. It is also important not to dwell on them.

Adapted from:

Hart, J., Krause, V. and Marks, B. (1999). Constructing, maintaining, and reconstructing authority in the classroom. Used at “Who am I and how am I seen in the classroom? A workshop on authority, identity, and presence for new GSIs” at GSI Orientation.