

# Getting Results

## **MODULE 1:**

### **Creating a Community of Learners**

See how getting to know your students and establishing a positive classroom environment can greatly increase student success.

# Getting Results

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# Module 1: Creating a Community of Learners

## Section 1: Introduction and Intended Outcome

### I. Preface

Creating a community of learners is the foundation of effective teaching. You may be passionate about the subject you teach, plan relevant and interesting activities, and deliver fascinating information—but none of this matters if students are afraid to speak up in class, feel that they can't contribute, and don't get the support and encouragement they need to learn.

In this course module, you'll explore characteristics of learners that make them unique and diverse individuals, and discover how to create a physical, social, and psychological climate conducive to learning.

#### Intended Outcome for This Module

As a result of this learning experience, you should be able to set up and manage a classroom environment that contributes to your students' abilities to engage fully in learning.

### II. Module Overview **V I D E O**

Watch this video showing community college students in an Aquarium Science class.

#### **V** Video Note

At this point in the module, please view the **Creating a Community of Learners** video. This video is available on the *Getting Results* course Web site at [www.league.org/gettingresults](http://www.league.org/gettingresults) or on the CD-ROM, available from the League ([www.league.org](http://www.league.org)).

At the beginning of the video, Dr. John Bransford, professor of education from the University of Washington School of Education and editor of *How People Learn*, introduces the concept of a community of learners.

## Think About

What evidence do you see that this class is a community of learners?

What do you see teachers doing to help build community in the classroom?

### **V** More about the class in the video

Bruce Koike and Dave Beran team-teach a Life Support and Operations course in the Aquarium Science program at Oregon Coast Community College. Students in the program are training to become aquatic animal care specialists, or aquarists, and will likely pursue jobs at public aquariums and aquaculture facilities.

## Did You Notice?

The teachers in this video use many strategies to make their students feel at ease in the classroom. They encourage students to ask questions by explicitly telling them that questions are welcome and expected. They respond thoughtfully to all questions that students ask, even those that may seem simple or silly. They give students opportunities to talk about their thinking in low-pressure situations, such as asking students to brainstorm ideas in teams (students may feel less vulnerable working with a partner) or making informal presentations in class (many students are more comfortable talking in class when they know they are not being graded).

### Section 2: Learning About Your Students

#### I. Discovering Student Differences

Community college students have a wide-ranging mix of personalities, backgrounds, interests, and abilities. Discovering their differences can be a joy; addressing them can be a challenge. As an instructor, your job is to ensure that all students are engaged in learning, regardless of their backgrounds. The first step in helping students learn is to get a clear picture of who they are, both as a group and as individuals.

#### Quiz: Test Your Student Savvy

How prepared are you for the diversity of students you will see in your class? Take this quiz to find out whether your expectations are on target.

*These statistics are national averages. Your own community college might be quite different. Talk to other faculty or consult the college registrar or student advising center to find out more about your own campus.*

1. In a typical class of 20 community college students, how many are likely to be less than 25 years old?  
A. 5    B. 9    C. 15    D. 18
2. Out of a class of 20 community college students, how many might represent the first generation in their families to attend college?  
A. 3    B. 7    C. 10    D. 14
3. Out of a class of 20 students, how many are likely to work while attending community college?  
A. 8    B. 10    C. 12    D. 17
4. Out of a class of 20 community college students, how many are likely to be non-white?  
A. 7    B. 10    C. 12    D. 14
5. Out of a class of 20 community college students, how many students are likely to speak English as a second language?  
A. 3    B. 4    C. 5    D. 6

*Answers on page 4*

## II. Getting to Know Your Students

### Brain Fact

People learn best when they feel safe and known. If a student is afraid a response to a question or problem is not acceptable, he or she will not function at the highest level.

Make students feel welcome in your classroom by making the effort to learn about their backgrounds and interests. This will help you build a sense of community and also can improve instruction. When you know your students, you have a better understanding of their special needs, learning preferences and styles, relevant prior experience, and practical issues that will play a role in the class. One way to get to know your students is to find out their prior to current work experiences. This gives you a chance to acknowledge what students already know and to emphasize topics of particular interest. An initial effort to get to know your students also pays rich dividends when you are grouping students into teams.

Starting the first day of class, ask students to talk about themselves and their educational goals. Ask students to fill out index cards with their hopes or concerns for the class. Ask students how they learn best.

Taking the time to learn about each other can also prove beneficial for students. College may offer some students their first opportunity to engage with and relate to a wide range of people, and this can help them make the transition to the world of work.

Encourage students in your class to share their backgrounds with each other. Invite older students to share experiences that may help younger students appreciate working with those who are different. Try to help older students understand what skills or abilities younger students bring to the classroom as well. In the technological workplace, you never know whose talent, skills, knowledge, or unique attribute will be just what is needed to address the next challenge and lead to success.

### Check Answers *from Quiz, page 3*

1. B. Students less than 25 years old comprise about 44% of students at community colleges, compared with 75% of students at traditional four-year institutions.
2. C. About half of all community college students are the first generation in their families to attend college. These students may face particular academic and social challenges that prevent them from completing their coursework.
3. D. Almost 85% of students in public two-year institutions are employed. Of these students, 53.8% work full time and 30.4% work part time. Students who work while attending school may need more support than students who do not work.
4. A. About 34% of community college students are non-white. Minority students report being more engaged in their studies than their white peers.
5. A. Almost 15% of community college students speak a language other than English at home. Non-native English speakers may have more difficulty understanding lectures or reading assignments.

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), *Enrollment in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2001*, and *Financial Statistics, Fiscal Year 2001*; American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), *National Profile of Community Colleges: Trends & Statistics, 3rd Edition*; NCES, *The Condition of Education 2003*.

## Icebreaker

Joan DeYoung, a faculty member at Mt. Hood Community College, writes:

We do a bingo game. [See bingo card below.] The boxes have queries that are completed by finding someone in the room who has that experience or knowledge. I might ask some content-related questions to learn a little about what the students know about natural resources, as well as queries about recreational activities, favorite music, cultural awareness, etc. In our second year, we integrate our international students with our U.S. students, so I usually include questions about culture, language, and travel to help the group stretch beyond their own experience. The first person to get bingo gets a little prize. They're getting to know each other. They're also finding out who are some resource experts in the class—this guy knows how to use a map, this person's been to Central America, this person speaks three languages. So we learn about each other and how we can interact with each other in terms of some skills we wouldn't have otherwise known. It starts to build a sense of community that is so important for them to be successful.

— Joan DeYoung, Instructor, Natural Resources Technology at Mt. Hood Community College

<b>B I N G O</b>			
Someone who...			
has gone kayaking	has gotten poison ivy/oak	can speak more than two languages	has been north of the Arctic Circle
has seen a Fer de Lance in the wild	has been bungee jumping	is getting married this summer	has been to the Louvre
has been in the canopy of an old growth forest	has lived in two countries for at least nine months	<b>Free</b>	has been to the Museum of Natural History
has been sky diving	has been on a bike trip longer than one week	has been south of the equator	has seen a cougar in the wild
plays a musical instrument	has used a helicopter to fly to their job site	can name all the Canadian provinces	has summited a peak over 14,000 ft.

## Think About

What are some strategies you have used in the past for getting to know your students? How has learning about your students positively impacted your teaching and student learning?

### Why Does Past Experience Matter?

Learning about the experiences your students bring to the classroom is especially important in light of recent research on how people learn. Instead of a passive transfer of knowledge from teacher to student, most educators now see learning as an active process. In this view of learning, students are involved in a creative act, constructing meaning based on their own prior experiences and new information.

## III. Learning Your Students' Names

Learning your students' names is the first step in knowing who they are. Calling students by name communicates respect, helps them feel recognized as individuals, and helps to draw out and include shy students in class discussions. Here are a few ideas for getting to know your students' names.

- Ask students to wear nametags, or have them write their first names on the front and back of tented index cards on their desktops.
- Take a few moments and have the students introduce themselves to their neighbors. Then have each student introduce a neighbor to the class, along with one interesting fact about him or her.
- Take a Polaroid or digital camera to class and snap a photo of each student. Write the students' names on the photos and keep them with you for reference.
- Have the students create "business cards"—4x6-inch index cards with specific information about themselves in each corner of the card—as individuals and as learners (i.e., brief bio info, something they know a lot about, some of their strengths as learners, etc.)—and use these to make introductions in small groups. Afterwards, you may collect them to learn more about your students.



### Section 3: Diversity and Classroom Management

#### I. Students from Diverse Backgrounds

##### **In This Section**

- Learn to identify the diverse range of students in your class.
- Modify your teaching methods to gain from the diverse backgrounds of your students.
- Create a game plan to quickly adapt to diversity issues as they arise in class.
- Use the diversity in your class as a tool to promote learning.

Community colleges are diverse communities of learners. In this section of Module 1, we'll look at this powerful and positive aspect of teaching in the community college. How do you define the term diversity with respect to your own life and experience? For the purposes of this discussion, we define diversity as a community that has varied backgrounds, experiences, and characteristics. We hope that your definition of diversity will grow and deepen as you work through this module and as you gain experience as a teacher.

As an educator in a community college, you have undoubtedly experienced a diverse range of students—from young women and men looking for career opportunities to immigrants gaining a foothold on a new life. In each classroom you have encountered, and will continue to encounter, there is a different mix of student demographics. In order to be an effective educator, you need to adapt your curriculum and teaching methods to each unique situation.

## II. Looking at Your Class

Here are photos of three people. Imagine for a moment that they are your students, sitting in the front row on the first day of class. What are their stories?



### Notebook

For each photo, write a few sentences that tell this person's story.

#### Ask Yourself

- Is this person's primary language English?
- What kind of job does this person have?
- Does this person live alone?
- Is this person a parent?
- Is this person the primary breadwinner in his/her household?
- Was this person born in the United States?
- Does this person have a disability?
- What is this person's ethnic, cultural, or national background?
- Does this person have any other diverse characteristics?
- How might any of these descriptions affect their learning?
- How did you arrive at these guesses?
- Do you ever think about your students in this way?

## III. Reflect on Your Answers

Look at the first photo again. Did you guess that this person primarily speaks French and was a civil engineer in his hometown in Belgium?

Look at the second photo. This woman is a mother of three children under the age of 6. She is the only breadwinner in her home. She works as a scheduler in a construction firm.

Look at the third photo. This man has an M.S. in biotechnology from a university in India. He is the full-time caregiver for his children while his wife completes a business degree.

Examine what you wrote about the people in these photos. Did you make any assumptions about them based on their clothing, their skin color, their age?

How might you adapt your teaching style to allow for, and benefit from, these varied backgrounds?

What are the unique situations in your own class? How will you work with this in class?

## IV. Honoring Diversity: What Would You Do?

When you respect diversity in the classroom, you'll be able to create an atmosphere in which all participants can engage in active, collaborative learning and substantive discussions. Fostering an atmosphere of tolerance takes practice and preparedness.

In this activity we'd like you to explore how you would respond to actual situations that arose in other community college classrooms. Please read through the mini case studies, take a moment to reflect on how you might approach the situation, and then review our comments.

### Case Studies in Diversity

#### 1. Cultural Stereotypes

In an Introduction to Engineering Technology course, a very quiet East Asian student doesn't participate in class. She seems reluctant to look anyone in the eye or to interact with others in the manner typical of the class. She is being ignored and even ostracized by others. She is hoping to work in a U.S. engineering environment where direct communication and eye contact will likely be an advantage. Is she bored by the content? Or is it a question of cultural norms regarding eye contact in her country?

**Use your notebook to explore these questions:**

- How would you determine the cause of the problem?
- How would you handle this situation in your class?
- If you are working with a colleague or in a group, discuss this case and how you might approach it. Be specific about strategy.

#### Teaching Tip

There may be a number of reasons why a person in class is unwilling to make eye contact or participate in discussions. Don't assume that social differences are cultural, even if you are aware of stereotypes that might reinforce your assumption. Speaking with the person about your concerns and offering tips that may help in their chosen field is a good way to offer support.

*continued*

## 2. Language Barriers

A group of students from Cape Verde persistently work with one another, speak Portuguese, and decline to interact with speakers of other languages. This becomes disruptive during lectures, because they frequently translate concepts to one another. What would you do if these students were in your class?

**Use your notebook to explore these questions:**

- How would you determine the cause of the problem?
- How would you handle this situation in your class?
- If you are working with a colleague or in a group, discuss this case and how you might approach it. Be specific about your strategy.

### Teaching Tip

Learning five sentences in Portuguese could help you form a relationship of trust with your students by showing respect for their culture and language. You could encourage students to communicate in English. Remind students that they will most likely pursue jobs that will require fluency in English, and that their English will improve through exclusive use in the classroom. There may be a program within the college that helps students make the transition from their native language to English. You could recommend additional help for students who are having difficulty with English proficiency.

## 3. Ethnicity

In a course's online discussion forum, students are asked to introduce themselves and describe what motivates them to attend college.

An outspoken, second-year Latino student describes himself with stories of instances when he felt discriminated against because of his ethnicity:

- He and his cousin were followed through a garden supply store by employees who assumed they were there to steal.
- One of his white classmates was awarded an internship leading tours through a local nature center, while he was given a job in the center's vehicle maintenance department.
- A high school counselor recommended that he pursue a vocational career, even though his test scores were high.

*continued*

The student concludes that his experiences have taught him that Latinos have been discriminated against. For this student, this discrimination highlights the need for better representation in natural resources management. The student feels that he cannot always rely on people in the workplace to help him achieve his dreams, and that he will need to push for the opportunities he is pursuing.

**Use your notebook to explore these questions:**

- How would you determine the cause of the problem?
- How would you handle this situation in your class?
- If you are working with a colleague or in a group, discuss this case and how you might approach it. Be specific about strategy.

**Teaching Tip**

Not all frank talk of discrimination should be regarded as negative. Underrepresented minorities often experience discrimination that can create barriers to higher education. Students who did not experience discrimination growing up can learn from students who choose to relate their experiences of discrimination. Students who share similar experiences can learn positive strategies for overcoming the effects of discrimination on their opportunities for higher education. Many employers want to hear from potential employees about their ability to overcome negative situations.

## V. Creating a Safe Place to Learn

Most students come to college with fears and uncertainty. Whether they are right out of high school or returning to college after a decade or more in the workplace, students fear failing tests, not fitting in with peers, and appearing ignorant in front of their classmates.

Being afraid to ask questions, express opinions, or join group discussions can greatly hinder a student's learning. But you can create an environment that nurtures their confidence and allows them to explore and expand their knowledge without undue risk or fear.

## Think About

Most people have experienced difficulty learning at some time in their academic careers. Think back to a class in which you felt intimidated. Did your teacher do anything, even inadvertently, to contribute to that feeling? Now think back to a class in which it was safe to ask questions and make comments. How did your teacher encourage you to express and develop your ideas?

### Notebook

- How did the students in the **Creating a Community of Learners** video you watched earlier in this module feel about making mistakes?
- What did you see teachers doing to make students feel comfortable taking risks?
- What strategies do you use or could you use to create an environment in which students aren't afraid to ask and answer questions?

## VI. Working with Non-traditional Learners

### VIDEO

A large number of your students are most likely older adults with workplace experience. Many adults have different learning needs than younger students who have come straight out of high school.

Watch this video for strategies on accommodating those needs to help set the stage for student success.

### V Video Note

At this point in the module, please view the **Working with Non-traditional Learners** video. This video is available on the *Getting Results* course Web site at [www.league.org/gettingresults](http://www.league.org/gettingresults) or on the CD-ROM, available from the League ([www.league.org](http://www.league.org)).

## Think About

What do you notice about the adults' motivation and approach to learning in this video?

### V More about the class in the video

Leslie Barber teaches biotechnology at New Hampshire Community Technical College. Students are studying DNA and working on isolating proteins.

## **VII. Building a Physical Space for Learning**

The physical environment can play a big role in enhancing or impeding students' learning. Think about the following components of your space and how you can use them to your advantage.

### **Desk Placement**

The way your classroom furniture is arranged has an effect on learning. Desks in a U-shape are conducive to full-class discussion, and small groups of desks clustered together allow students to work in teams or discuss ideas informally with their neighbors. Consider moving desks around occasionally to prevent students from always sitting near, and interacting with, the same classmates. Keep in mind that students who are hearing- or visually impaired may need to sit closer to the front of the room. Make sure that any handicapped students will be accommodated in your class and in any labs.

### **Equipment**

Your classroom will probably be equipped with a chalkboard or whiteboard, and perhaps a computer projector or video screen. If you are going to use visual aids, it's a good idea to walk around the room beforehand and make sure that images on the board or screen are visible from every desk. Make sure the equipment is in working order before you begin your lesson to avoid frustration and lost time.

Ask instructional technology support staff to introduce you to the equipment; many colleges have sophisticated presentation systems, such as "smart classrooms." Always have a "Plan B" in case the equipment unexpectedly breaks down during class. Many a class hour has been lost when a bulb blew in a projector and the instructor had no alternate way to share information.

### **Classroom Schedule and Availability**

If your room is not being used immediately before or after your class, arrive a few minutes early and greet students as they enter the classroom. Try to stay a few minutes after class ends as well, so that you are available for students who have questions or comments on classroom material, homework assignments, or grades.

### **Temperature, Lighting, and Noise Level**

These factors are not always noticeable in the classroom—unless there's a problem—but they can have a significant impact on learning. If something is not working, talk to your administration to get the problem fixed as quickly as possible.

### **Furniture**

Are the desks and chairs adequate for the students in your classroom? In some cases, larger students or handicapped students may not fit into the desks and chairs in your room. Make sure there is a place in your room for these students to learn comfortably.

## Easels, Posters, and Flip Charts

Consider providing flip chart pages (preferably the type that will self-stick to a wall) on which students can record their ideas when working in teams. The pages can be used for sharing ideas with the entire class, and they can be rolled up and saved for reuse in a later class. A flip chart tablet or pages promote shared ownership of work for the student teams over time and provides continuity between classes.

## VIII. Different Types of Learners

### In This Section

- Explore the types of learners that may be a part of a typical technical classroom.
- Read summaries of each group and develop your own strategies for reaching learners.
- Watch video examples from community classrooms and see strategies other teachers have used.

### Different Levels of Language Proficiency

Students from other cultures vary greatly in their understanding and command of English. For some, English is their second language; for others, it can be their third or even fourth language. In any given class, you'll likely have students at several different levels of language development. The most important thing a teacher can do is respect and value the language and experiences that these students bring to class.

To help your second-language learners, find out who they are and what their experience has been up to this point. Acknowledge that language may be a challenge, but that you will work to make sure they understand what's going on. Most of all, check in regularly on their understanding and encourage feedback.

## IX. Considering English Language Learners



Watch this video showing how a teacher adjusts instruction to accommodate a range of students.

### V Video Note

At this point in the module, please view the **Considering English Language Learners** video. This video is available on the *Getting Results* course Web site at [www.league.org/gettingresults](http://www.league.org/gettingresults) or on the CD-ROM, available from the League ([www.league.org](http://www.league.org)).



## Think About

Imagine that you have a small number of non-native English speakers in your class with minimal reading and writing skills. What strategies can you use to help them understand the content and maintain interest in the class?

### **V** More about the class in the video

The students in Kate Holleran's class, many of whom are English language learners from Central America, are using aerial photography and GPS technology to interpret landscapes. As participants in the Natural Resources program at Mt. Hood Community College, students learn both the basic and complex skills that every natural resource technician must use in the field.

Read this additional comment from Kate Holleran about working with diverse learners.

*I try to do a couple of things. One is that I really let them know that I know that they're from a different place. So when I talk about the mammals of Oregon, I make reference to a particular species also found in Panama or Nicaragua, their home countries. I also try to use Spanish at a very novice level.*



— Kate Holleran, Instructor, National Resources Technology

## X. Accommodating Adult Learners

For some important considerations when dealing with adult learners, read the following excerpts from Stephen Lieb's essay "Adults as Learners."

- Adults are autonomous and self-directed. They need to be free to direct themselves. Their teachers must actively involve them in the learning process and serve as their facilitators. Specifically, teachers must get participants' perspectives about what topics to cover and let them work on projects that reflect their interests. Teachers should allow the participants to assume responsibility for presentations and group leadership. They have to be sure to act as facilitators, guiding participants to their own knowledge rather than supplying them with facts.
- Adults have accumulated a foundation of life experiences and knowledge that may include work-related activities, family responsibilities, and previous education. They need to connect learning to this knowledge/experience base. To help them do so, teachers should draw out participants' experience and knowledge that is relevant to the topic. They must relate theories and concepts to their students' prior experiences and recognize the value of experience in learning.

- Adults are goal-oriented. Upon enrolling in a course, they usually know what goal they want to attain. Therefore, they appreciate an educational program that is organized and has clearly defined elements. Instructors must show participants how this class will help them attain their goals.
- Adults are relevancy-oriented. They must see a reason for learning something. Learning has to be applicable to their work or other responsibilities to be of value to them. Therefore, instructors must identify objectives for adult participants before the course begins, and try to relate theories and concepts to a setting familiar to participants. Letting participants choose projects that reflect their own interests can fulfill this need.
- Adults are practical, focusing on the aspects of a lesson most useful to them in their work. They may not be interested in knowledge for its own sake. Instructors must tell participants explicitly how the lesson will be useful to them on the job.
- Adults need to be shown respect. Instructors must acknowledge the wealth of experiences that adult participants bring to the classroom. These adults should be treated as equals in experience and knowledge and allowed to voice their opinions freely in class.

## **XI. Supporting Individual Students**

With students of mixed ages and different backgrounds, be aware of ways in which individuals need support. Younger students are generally more comfortable with technology and need guidance in speaking up in class or making presentations about their work. However, students of any age could need support in either area.

Creating a positive learning environment and catering to non-traditional learners will go a long way towards helping students achieve success. But to meet the needs of all learners in your classroom, you need to consider the individual needs of a diverse student body.

### **Notebook**

Now that you've watched the video and read the Lieb article, how do you think differently about working with non-traditional learners? What percentage of your students come to you "ready to learn"? What experiences have you had with students not being there yet? What might be some of the reasons they aren't ready? How might you help them get there?

## XII. Different Learning Styles

People learn in many different ways. For example, when learning to use a new software program, you might read the entire manual first while your colleague instead opens up the program and starts experimenting. Although there are several different ways to categorize learning styles, many educators structure their lessons to include seeing, hearing, reading and writing, or doing in every class session. By designing lessons that incorporate auditory, visual, and kinesthetic elements, you can create opportunities for students to construct meaning and apply concepts. (You will learn more about this in Module 3.)

Read the following teacher quotes to gain some insight on working with students with different learning styles.

*We strive to teach by repetition. It's not like we just do an experiment once and then we're done with it, because oftentimes the students aren't able to retain it. Last week we had some students explain the different parts of the bioreactor. Tonight we'll start off with a review of the different parts of the bioreactor, and I will have the students assist in assembling it. They'll also have to look at a diagram to know how all the parts fit together.*

— Deb Audino, Instructor, Biotechnology



*I present theoretical material, but I don't overwhelm them. We have sort of a bite-sized piece of theoretical material, and then we pause. Then they work with an actual experiment or two based on that theory. They work with it enough that by the time they finish doing the experiment and working up a lab report, they really have that theory set in their minds in a way that just talking about it or reading an example or looking at an illustration can't do.*

— Leslie Barber, Instructor, Biotechnology



### Think About

Imagine that you are teaching students how to use a new piece of technology. How can you take advantage of different learning styles to help all your students understand?

## XIII. Recognizing Skill Levels

Community colleges accept students with a wide range of experience levels. Your students may include those with high-level industry experience as well as those who may not have been high achievers in high school.

One survey shows that 41 percent of students entering public community colleges are enrolled in one or more remedial courses. Teaching students with differing levels of math, science, and technology knowledge is a challenge faced by almost all community college teachers. But there are strategies that can help all students, regardless of their educational level, move forward in class.

## XIV. Organizing Teams **V I D E O**

Watch this video to gain insight on working with students who have varying backgrounds in science and math.

### **V Video Note**

At this point in the module, please view the **Organizing Teams** video. This video is available on the *Getting Results* course Web site at [www.league.org/gettingresults](http://www.league.org/gettingresults) or on the CD-ROM, available from the League ([www.league.org](http://www.league.org)).

### **Think About**

Did anything surprise you about the way these students are working together? What challenges do you think might come up in working with students in teams?

### **V More about the class in the video**

David Edwards and Joshua Phiri teach Engineering and Technology at Florence-Darlington Technical College in South Carolina. Students in the engineering program begin with classes such as physics, math, technology, and English, and are given assignments that tie in to practical problems.

## XV. Encouraging Student Success

Imagine that you have several students in your class who are weak in science and math skills and are falling behind the rest of the students in their assignments. What strategies can you use to help these students succeed in your class?

Here are some simple ideas to try in your classroom.

### **Encourage Collaboration**

Group work can help draw out quiet students who may feel shy speaking up in front of the whole class. Take a moment to list some pros and cons for engaging students in collaborative work, both from the teacher's point of view and the students'. How might you design group activities to capitalize on the pros and minimize the cons?

### **Pause and Check for Understanding**

Give students a short pause after you've gone over an important concept in class. Ask them to check their notes with a neighbor to make sure they understand what is being explained.

### **Pair Work**

Try a version of "think-pair-share," as seen on the **Organizing Teams** video. Pose an open-ended question and ask students to think about it on their own for a minute. Then have them share their ideas and opinions with a neighbor. After a few minutes, ask pairs to share their conclusions with the entire class.

## **Circle Response**

To get the whole class to share their ideas, try a circle response activity. After you've introduced a topic, go around in a circle and ask each student to briefly talk about his or her thoughts, opinions, and/or questions.

## **Learn from Mistakes**

Good teachers emphasize that mistakes are opportunities for learning. They also take cues from what happens when mistakes are made in the workplace: "What should be done so that this doesn't happen again?" "How can we do this better next time?" Continuous quality improvement is expected in many technical work settings, and plans are put in place after mistakes occur to check performance. Instructors can model this process by providing frequent feedback and helping students set goals for improved performance.

Ultimately, good teachers remember that the focus in the classroom is on helping all students to succeed.

## **XVI. Valuing Racial and Cultural Diversity**

Community colleges continue to attract a rich mix of racially and culturally diverse students. These groups have traditionally been underrepresented in American higher education, and every effort should be made to help them complete college programs. Many educators believe that such students are much more likely to succeed when allowed to learn math, science, or technology in small working groups. Especially at the start of a course, these students might learn more if they are allowed to choose their own working groups.

Racism or cultural prejudice is often invisible to white instructors because they are not followed in stores, stopped by police when simply going for a walk, or made to jump through numerous hoops in order to secure a bank loan. Institutional manifestations of racism can reinforce an erroneous notion that some races are superior to others. Be careful to include examples from cultures other than Western European in your teaching.

Regardless of the racial and cultural range of your students, point out that when they are employed, they will be assigned to work with people they did not previously know. When placing students in teams, tell them to pretend they are "on the job" with teammates and other classmates as coworkers. This will greatly enhance their workplace readiness. Members of the class, most of whom will have had jobs in the past, can share their personal experiences of coworkers with fellow students. What made someone a bad coworker? A good coworker? How can they develop skills that can always put them in the "good" category? A student's ability to get along with teammates, communicate well with classmates, and bring out the best in the group will help ensure their success in the future.

### Section 4: Self-Assessment and Resources

#### **I. Looking Back at Your Notebook**

Look back at your notebook. Reflect on what you've learned about accommodating non-traditional learners, creating a welcoming classroom environment, and supporting diversity in your classroom. What strategies can you now add to your list? Also, review the outcomes on the opening page of this module. Did you achieve them? What are your next steps?

#### **II. Resources and Readings**

Bransford, John D., ed., et al. *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*, expanded ed. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 2000.

Cross, K. Patricia. *Adults as Learners: Increasing Participation and Facilitating Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1982.

Lieb, Stephen. Adults as Learners. *Vision*. Fall 1991.

Smilkstein, Rita. *We're Born to Learn: Using the Brain's Natural Learning Process to Create Today's Curriculum*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 2002.

Stewart, Deborah A. *Effective Teaching: A Guide for Community College Instructors*. American Association of Community Colleges. Washington, D.C.: Community College Press, 2003.

For more information on constructivism and other learning theories, explore the following Web site: [http://www.funderstanding.com/about\\_learning.cfm](http://www.funderstanding.com/about_learning.cfm).

### III. Summary of Module 1

Teaching in the community college environment requires more than just a thorough knowledge of your subject area. As an instructor of adult learners, you need to create a physical, social, and psychological environment that supports effective learning.

- You need to *get to know your students*. Identifying the similarities and discovering the differences among students in your class can contribute to an environment of respect and learning.
- You need to *recognize the diversity* represented in the community college classroom.
- You must *work to create an atmosphere* that values your students' individual contributions, and addresses the learning needs of each of them.
- You need to *build community* within the classroom where the *physical environment enhances the learning experiences* of students, and individual students are valued for their unique experiences and contributions.
- Finally, you need to remember that *good teaching is about helping all students succeed*.