

TC PRACTICE: GETTING TO KNOW STUDENTS AS INDIVIDUALS

What is this practice?

Getting to know students as individuals in and outside your classroom is more than just knowing what grades they usually get in class and anecdotes you may have heard about them. Knowing your students as whole people means getting to know their interests, backgrounds, experiences, challenges, passions, and more. After all, the time they spend in your classroom is only a fraction of their daily life.

Why is it important?

The most effective first step you can take in the clinical experience is to find out who your students are. This means taking time to talk with them and building relationships, but it also means understanding the community they live in (see *TC Practice: Getting to Know Your School and the Communities It Serves*). Learning about your students right from the beginning is crucial for creating rapport and the safe environment that is so important for their learning, and has been shown to positively affect academic outcomes¹. Getting to know students is also a matter of equity—of understanding what *all* students have to offer (beyond what they first put forth) and growing in your capacity to support students within and beyond the classroom community. And this is a reciprocal process—it is equally important for students to get to know you as another adult in the classroom, as a resource, and as a teacher. Over time your knowledge of your students and the relationships you have built will become influential for preparing and teaching lessons and units that includes their funds of knowledge and fit their strengths, needs, and interests.

To some extent just knowing [students] makes it more likely that I can kind of joke around with them during class... I think that affects my teaching just because it makes me more comfortable in the class, and it makes them more comfortable in the class... Just getting that relationship built, it makes it a better classroom environment that facilitates the whole learning process.

TC, end of clinical experience

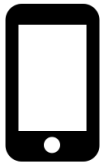
Tips for doing this practice effectively

Consider getting to know your students with a three-pronged approach: observation, communication, and information.



Observation allows you to see how students interact amongst each other or with staff and teachers outside the classroom—how do students greet each other? Who do you always see with several other students, and who tends to be on their own? Observing students *in* the classroom allows you to

recognize their ways of participating and compare how they interact in different settings. Also, note that the beginning of the school year can provide a special perspective, as students are often more energetic and engaged than later in the year. Being able to detect differences in their behavior as the school year progresses may help you identify when students need extra support.



Communication with students requires a more active stance. While communicating with some students will come easy to you, having casual conversations with others can be challenging. Over time, aim to become comfortable talking with *all* of your students in and outside the classroom. This will often mean consciously seeking out opportunities to interact with students with whom you have not connected recently. Building on shared experiences that are meaningful to the student (e.g., a school soccer game you both attended; a community event they helped organize) can provide a solid foundation for communication.



Information and data about students prevent us from making assumptions based purely on our own intuitions. Especially for students we are concerned about, or with whom we have not had many conversations, gaining some background information may help us understand them better and open up windows for communication.

Where to start?

The beginning of the school year is a prime opportunity to get to know your students, as everyone is getting to know each other and is figuring out how best to interact. See our "*Observation-Communication-Information Guide*" for specific suggestions about what you might try at the start of the school year.

Summing up

- Learn increasingly more about your students' interests, backgrounds, experiences, challenges, etc. on an ongoing basis
- Observe how students interact with each other and others inside and outside of the classroom
- Communicate with *all* students; intentionally keep track of and vary who you talk with each week
- Seek information or data that helps you get to know your students better

¹ Gehlbach, H., Brinkworth, M. E., & Harris, A. D. (2012). Changes in teacher-student relationships. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 82(4), 690-704.