Five Tips for Fostering Learning, from students:

Tip #1. Build a community of learners.
Many students mentioned that it was rare that they have a class where they learn everyone’s name and really get to know one another. They mentioned the word “family” when they talked about how they viewed the class, and how they felt safe and supported by each other. One student said he would be having a really bad day and then he would walk into the class and find the stress of the day melt away. One student recalled a morning she woke up late. She said, “I felt awful that I had missed class…not that I don’t feel bad when I miss other classes, but I felt I had let my classmates down by not showing up that day. I’ve never felt like that in another class.”

Tip #2. Make learning relevant.
I have my students write down a goal they want to achieve and then create a plan of action. Several students commented that they had never written down their goals before and they liked how I “made” them do it. One student summed it up by saying, “What I really loved is that we were talking about our goals in our speeches, stuff that actually mattered to us. It made us want to listen to each other when we knew the speaker’s topic was something they really cared about…we didn’t judge their speaking qualities…we wanted to just listen to their message. I liked that we talked about things that mattered to us.”

Tip #3. Let students know you care about them. (modified by Steve for my audience)
Periodically use a tool like “Stop, Start, Continue” (simply have them break out a sheet of paper, put “Stop” at the top, “Start” in the middle, and “Continue” near the bottom). Ask them to quickly write one thing for each. Use this feedback to adjust to their needs and presto – they get the idea you really care about their learning! They don’t care what you know till they know that you care and this demonstrates that in spades!” (see Angelo & Cross: “Classroom Assessment Techniques”).

Tip #4. Incorporate active involvement for all students, along with high expectations.
Research says that the students learn more if they are actively involved in the learning. Several students commented that they liked how I put them in charge of their own class, and kept encouraging them to reach higher. One student said that he was asked by a friend if this was an easy class. He responded, “Are you kidding, Mrs. Spencer makes us do all of the work. We could totally have class, even if she didn’t show up!” (see Elizabeth Berkley: Student Engagement Techniques”).

Tip #5. Make learning fun.
I have a quote at the bottom of all my emails that says “If you love what you do and think that it matters, what could be more fun!” One of my student’s parting words began with this. “I’m not going to lie to you, I loved this class. I didn’t actually think about it as a class … it thought about it more like a recess. Time to have fun!”

So, five tips on fostering learning in the classroom: Build a community of learners, make learning relevant, let students know you care about them, incorporate active learning with high expectations, and make learning fun.

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