**Discussion Post 1**

*Does Mirchandani's description of a liberal arts education resemble your experience with Honors so far? How do you describe the Honors program to people that are unfamiliar with it?*

Much of what Mirchandani spoke of correlated with my Honors experience. Though a humanities major, and so not as tightly tracked as many students studying STEM, I already feel the pressure to complete the required courses for my major, and focus on depth, not breadth. Honors offers - no, requires - me to explore classes in various fields, expanding my knowledge basis beyond the dozens of English classes I would wind up taking on my own. To someone unfamiliar with Honors, that's what I would describe as the primary benefit: the chance to take small, rigorous classes in a variety of fields and explore subjects you might never have discovered on your own.

*Which strategies from the article stood out to you and why? Are there any other strategies that your previous instructors have done to create community in the classroom on the first day of class?*

I like the idea of contacting individuals prior to the first session. We as humans love to talk about ourselves, and typically value when others remember details about us and our lives. I think that contacting students before a class starts is a great way to build rapport and connection before diving into the more serious task of learning. I remember my own Honors Peer Educator doing this, and appreciated his efforts to introduce himself and connect with us in order to start fostering community as soon as he could.

I also fully support the importance of learning names. In my job teaching kiddos, I always make it my priority to learn and use the names of every child in my classes. This simple act works wonders in making individuals feel welcomed and valued within the group.

In the segment about icebreakers (which I happen to love, although I know many  people do not), I particularly liked the line: "Never ask the group to do something where you remain aloof." I have observed this often in my experience teaching, and whether working with kids or adults, when the person in authority is willing to participate in every activity, it makes the group as a whole much more relaxed and willing. This also helps to make learning enjoyable, which to me should be one of the primary goals of anyone who teaches!

I also think the idea of allowing students to achieve something, however small, in every session is critical. There's no worse feedback as a teacher than hearing that students felt your class a waste of time. If students can leave feeling confident in your ability to teach them, and their own ability to learn, they'll be much more eager to return for the next session.

Overall, I found this reading incredibly useful. I wanted to make note of nearly every bullet, finding them all important, and definitely will refer back to this article in planning my own first class session.

**Discussion Post 2**

*Complete the prompts (in full sentences) from page 11 of the article. (eg..."I bring to teaching a belief that..."). Comment on how this type of reflective thinking can help you as a teacher.*

**I bring to teaching the belief that** all of my students matter, and have the ability to succeed.

**In the classroom, I see myself as** an authority, but also a guide. Friendly, but not a friend.

**I believe students are** trying their best. They want to learn and succeed. But they also need reassurance that they’re doing well to maintain that motivation to try.

**I seek to foster in students** excitement for the subject I’m teaching. Desire to try their best. Aspirations to continue learning beyond the classroom. Kindness and empathy for each other.

**I think learning is** a constant process, on the part of teacher and student alike.

This kind of reflective thinking can help me as a teacher center myself around the goals I aspire towards in the long-term. It can be easy to get bogged down in the day-to-day minutia of Power Points and lesson plans, and lose sight of why it is you chose to do this. In my job teaching martial arts, my boss has all his instructors attend an annual “instructor college” with one of his mentors, and that mentor shares with us every year his ‘instructor’s creed,’ which he recites to himself every day before he starts teaching: “I will teach this class because it is the most important class I will ever teach. I am patient and enthusiastic. I lead by example.” His creed may not perfectly connect with every teacher, but the idea behind it is what’s key: Remember why you’re doing this, and what tools you need to succeed. Don’t lose sight of what’s important to you in your classroom. Reflection allows a teacher to maintain their magic over time, remember the spark that got them started.

*Think about two teachers or mentors with different teaching styles who were successful at creating that magic that Emdin describes. What did they do to create that positive impact on your learning experience? Which teacher/mentor did you relate more to and why?*

The first teacher that comes to mind when I think of Emdin’s magic is my high school English teacher, Mr. Ferguson. I actually wrote an essay at one point referring to him as the “classroom sorcerer” for his ability to hold a class rapt, to make even the driest and most ancient of texts exciting. He brought little animal figurines to class to act out Shakespeare’s *King Lear* for us. He once let me stand on a table to yell out the riveting conclusion of Euripides’ *Medea*. He would start class each day with applause and a song for a randomly selected “student of the day.” In addition, I had total faith in both his knowledge of and passion for our course material. Practically every student I knew loved his class.

Another teacher-turned-mentor in my life is Allyson, who taught my own karate classes when I was younger, and I now teach alongside. Allyson’s teaching style is not quite as exuberant, yet I admire her ability to always be clear and concise in her explanations, without ever giving the impression that she’s talking down. She constantly presents the same rotating curriculum that’s required of us in interesting, creative ways that engage students from four-year-olds to adults (thankfully not all at once). Since I started teaching, I have looked to her as a mentor and guide, and frequently borrow her ideas and activities to use for my own karate students (she encourages this, and doesn’t mind).

Both of these teachers have different styles and contexts, but have managed to connect with me as a student nevertheless. I relate to both of them in different ways. I love channeling the passion and energy that Mr. Ferguson brings when he teaches. But I also aspire towards Allyson’s rationality, and the way she carefully ensures that every student knows they are valued and heard. I am fortunate to have had both of these people as role models, and wish to encapsulate both of their styles within my own as I continue to develop my technique.

**Discussion Post 3**

*What did you learn about your teaching style from the the mini-teach?*

I tend to be an enthusiastic teacher, bubbly and excited about what I'm teaching, which I think carried through here. However, since my topic was semi-serious (practical self-defense), I think I managed to temper this enthusiasm with a respect for the content and the reactions of the students I was teaching. This is an important balance that I strive for when I teach; I strongly believe that a teacher's excitement is contagious, but I also recognize the importance of empathy when working with potentially controversial or sensitive subject matter. Finally, I recognized how important it was to me to be organized and prepared in advance - having my lesson plan explicitly written out gave me much more confidence when it came to presenting my material.

*What did you do that worked and what gave you the impression it was working?*

Students appeared engaged and excited about my topic. They followed along enthusiastically, but didn't allow the excitement of trying self-defense drills verge into silliness - they respected the seriousness of the topic. This gave me the impression that I managed to impart to them the importance of what I was teaching. Despite the brevity of my mini-teach, students seemed appreciative when I had finished, giving me the impression that they had learned something interesting and new - isn't that every teacher's goal?

*If you could do this teach over again, what would you do differently and why?*

I tend to talk fast and throw a lot of information at my students at once, especially when talking about a topic I'm excited about. I would slow down, and perhaps narrow the focus of my lesson so that students would really get a chance to process what they were learning. I would also offer the chance for questions, which the tight time frame of my lesson plan didn't allow for this time.

*What did you see a peer do well that you would incorporate into your teaching?*

Peers did a great job incorporating humor and modesty into their teaching.  I don't tend to be a naturally funny person , but I do think humor relaxes people and makes them feel more at ease. I also tend to take charge and set myself in an authoritative position when teaching, but I recognize that modesty helps teachers to appear more relatable to their students. These are both qualities I wish to improve in my own teaching; I feel these qualities are particularly important for a Peer Educator, who are, after all, students themselves as well as teachers.

**Discussion Post 4**

Out of the four implications listed, I connected most strongly with 'genuine dialogue.' I don't feel like I've personally experienced 'strong ties' or 'superordinate goals' in a classroom environment yet in my college career. Though I like the concept of 'third places,' this one didn't stand out as much as having helped me to find community. However, I definitely have found 'genuine dialogue' to positively foster connections in a classroom environment. One example of this I experienced was in my Honors class fall quarter, Storytelling In The Sciences. The purpose of the class was to improve our scientific presentation skills, but our professor thought it was equally important to form a classroom environment in which all students felt comfortable to share, so we would be able to present to the top of our ability. We started each class with improv games that helped us all to trust each other as a group and work together. During all our class discussions, our professor seemed genuinely interested in what each of us had to say, meeting every comment with quiet approval and support. By the end of the quarter, the classroom felt like an extremely welcome and supportive place where all students could take risks and speak their minds, to be met positively every time.

Out of these four implications, the two that I feel most excited to try in my Honors 100 class are 'third places' and 'genuine dialogue.' I feel that the other two implications are a bit more difficult to foster artificially, but these first two are more within my capacity to control. For 'third places,' I love the idea of a classroom being a 'home away from home' for students, especially in this stage of just starting college, when many of them are living away from home for the first time. Bringing food and setting up a comfortable space seems like a simple yet powerful way to grow community and learning. 'Genuine dialogue' is the characteristic of community that I myself value most as a student, and I find it equally important to encourage in my students. Not being a person who is naturally open and vulnerable myself, I will have to make an active effort to display the candor needed to make students feel comfortable expressing themselves, but I believe this effort is worthwhile in producing the best possible sense of community for my students.

**Discussion Post 5**

Our retreat activity about leadership styles caused me to reflect on who we are vs. who we want to be as leaders. When initially categorized as a 'spontaneous motivator,' I was uncertain of whether I felt this categorization fit with my image of myself and the type of leader I want to be. As we continued to talk and reflect about the strengths and weaknesses of each style, however, I began to see and relate to more of the listed traits. This exercise reminded me that despite attempts to categorize 'types' of leaders, every individual's still is unique, and no label can pin down a person's exact methods of leadership. That being said, categorization can be a useful tool to lay out leadership techniques that often appear together, recognizing patterns and offering responses accordingly.

The segments of the retreat that stood out the most to me were the moments that fostered human connection. In particular, our exercise sharing our childhood Good Experiences and our tapping circle of anonymous positivity left me feeling warm inside and so grateful for the people surrounding me. Though I am uncertain of whether the structure of Honors 100 will allow for such activities, particularly because students are only together for 80 minutes once a week, I would love to attempt something similar. I think it is so important to remember the people around us are just as human as we are, with all the same intricacies and doubts and insecurities. Especially when attempting to foster community, a little reminder that we're not alone, and that our everyday kindnesses do not go unnoticed, is such a powerful thing.

**Discussion Post 6**

By the definitions given in our reading, I don't know if I've ever successfully facilitated a group discussion. There were so many nuances brought up that I've never really considered before (that I will certainly consider now!) That being said, I still have had experiences leading discussions that I am proud of.

I teach children's martial arts classes. Leading discussions for kids is slightly different than teaching adults, but that is much of the experience I have, and many of the same skills still apply. One of my favorite parts of my job is what we call our 'mat chats': short discussions each day on our 'powerful word of the month.' These are always character traits; some of my past favorites include kindness, optimism, and mental health. I lead our 'mat chats' almost every time I teach classes, usually several times a day, and I know that some days are better than others, for the students and I alike. Because of the nature of teaching children, and the time constraints we have on our discussion (about 3-5 minutes, maximum), I don't always get to employ all of the strategies discussed, and I do end up guiding the conversation a little more than is recommended with adults. However, I strive to have conversations where the children's contributions are what shine, and I am only there to facilitate and reinforce their message. I'm given a short description of the topics I should touch on each day, but am always willing to be flexible and adapt to what the kids have to mention. The particularly discussion I remember being proud of hinged around the word fairness. I remember asking the kids what they thought fairness meant and what some examples were, and a girl launched into a detailed description of the difference between equality (everything is the same for everyone) and equity (things can be different, but everyone gets what they need and what they deserve) and how important it was for people to understand the latter. Another boy chimed in saying how he agreed, and described a poster on the wall of his school that outlined the two. I was so proud of these kids for drawing from prior experience to give insightful comments with almost no prompting necessary from me. I was struck by how lucky I was to work with such thoughtful and compassionate individuals. I walk away from a discussion happiest when I feel that everyone present, myself included, has learned a little bit more and become a little bit kinder.

Some of the main strategies that stood out to me in the article that I could incorporate into my own teaching were in regards to translating my facilitation abilities from children to adults. For instance, I definitely have a habit of presenting myself as an authority figure: logical and even necessary when working with young children, but not as effective when working with adults. I found recommendations from this section to be quite useful. I also loved the tips on creating trust within your group environment. I think this is one of the most important aspects of group discussion, equally difficult to foster naturally and artificially. I think an awareness and focus on this is only beneficial. Finally, I appreciated the recommendations about seeing patterns and responding with questions. I think that an awareness of my own role as a discussion facilitator and how this translates to interactions with students will help me to avoid the safety-net habit of acting as an authority and to foster the desired trust with my students.

**Discussion Post 7**

I was surprised by Treisman's findings about the different general studying styles of students of various races. Being white myself, I didn't realize how isolating stereotype threat can be in an academic environment, though I can relate to the desire to prove myself, independent from those around me. I certainly can see how intense isolation in order to avoid unwanted stereotyping could contribute to academic hardship. To me, this example also tied into the so-called 'ghost' that stereotype threat causes, contributing an additional barrier that individuals must fend off to complete a task - in this case, self-isolation.

As a privileged white woman, I have been fortunate enough that I have not had to face all that many instances of stereotype threat. The closest example I can think of would be in my martial arts training, where I am frequently surrounded by majority male peers. I frequently feel a pressure to prove myself as strong and capable in comparison to them: keeping up with their speed on conditioning, executing moves with comparable levels of aptitude and power. I am well aware that I am much smaller and lighter than many of them, and while I cannot eradicate this physical disadvantage, I can try to maintain comparable skill and technique. I work hard to counteract stereotypes that girls and women cannot succeed in martial arts, cannot be strong and confident, both for myself and for the students I teach. (Also thanks for your patience with the fact that my answers are always karate-related; it's where I spend a lot of my life!)

Coming from a position of privilege, I try very hard to educate myself on stereotypes that different groups around me might face. It's important to me to be conscientious of such stereotypes, both so that I can try to empathize with students facing such threats, and so I can do my best to not perpetuate them further. I never want a student to feel incompetent or out-of-place based on their identity, but I know in our complex, multifaceted, brutal world, this is sometimes unavoidable. I want students to always be able to come to me with issues or stereotypes they may be grappling with, and know that I will always do my best to listen, even if I cannot entirely understand their experience.