

These notes are from the Duke University *Center for Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation's* workshop on racial healing and relationship building, hosted by Patricia Garrett-Peters and Jayne Ifekwunigwe.

View Part I (Narrative Change) [here](#).

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We can take concrete steps to **build relationships**— both among students and between student and instructor— in the classroom, to create a sense of belonging. We can provide students with the opportunity to share their stories.

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### **What is Racial Healing and Relationship Building?**

- The national Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation framework (TRHT) divides antiracism work into a few categories: narrative change, racial healing and relationship building, (the “people-work”) and a few types of systemic changes, such as to the law or economy (the institutional work).
  - They refer to Racial Healing and Relationship Building as “building *mutually respectful relationships* (across racial and ethnic lines) that *honor and value each person's humanity*, and to build trusting intergenerational and diverse community relationships that better reflect our *common humanity*.”
  - This includes viewing students as whole people; allowing them opportunities to share their truth, perspective, or story; meeting their need for belonging in a wider community of mathematicians; and showing students that they're not alone in their experiences by allowing them to connect with their peers and instructor.
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### **The ABC's of Racial Healing and Relationship Building:**

**A:** Appreciation, Affirmation

**B:** Belonging

**C:** Consciousness Change

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### **A: Appreciation, Affirmation**

- Build your course on a *foundation of compassion*, with an emphasis on nurturing positive relationships between instructor and students.
- Do what you can to *flatten the hierarchy* and diffuse uncomfortable power dynamics between student and professor.
- Provide *personalized, helpful feedback* to students regularly, not just when they're doing poorly.
- Provide regular *office hours* and take steps to make them welcoming.
- *Check in* on each student's course progress and well-being by initiating one-on-one meetings, or if the course is larger, individual emails or canvas messages.

- *Take the pulse* before the course begins. Give students an opportunity (such as a survey or email) to share with you...
  - Their name pronunciation and pronouns, and anything else they'd like to share about themselves
  - Their learning needs, background in the course material, and expectations for the course

## **B: Belonging**

- Provide opportunities for students to work in small groups. Properly incentivize collaboration instead of just suggesting it. Allow student groups to discuss past positive and negative experiences with group work and decide on a set of rules, expectations, or norms for their group.

**Resource:** [Humanizing Group Work](#)

- Create a sense of shared community for your class, such as a shared joke or communal call-and-response that the whole class knows, or an activity that the class can do together. This could be anything from playing a quiz game as a class or taking a class field trip to climb the Duke chapel tower.
- Invite students to sit next to or reach out to someone they don't know in the course.
- Encourage students to exchange phone numbers.
- Consider creating randomized longer-term groups, where they'll collaborate on a few smaller assignments: the first of which is to meet over a meal or coffee and get to know each other (and report back with what they've learned).

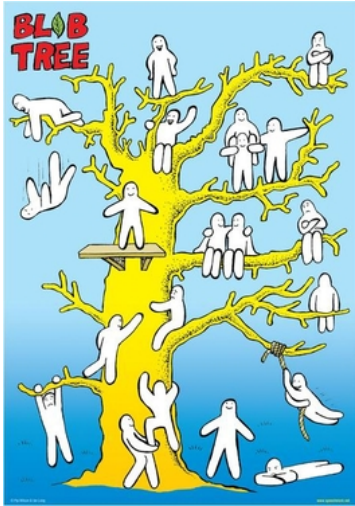
*There is a difference between being included and feeling like you belong.*

## **C: Consciousness Change**

- Humanize yourself as a mathematician. Talk about your interests, your story as a mathematician, and common experiences you've had doing mathematics (making mistakes, finding material difficult).
- Give students a chance to be the storyteller, such as by talking about their thoughts on a problem or assignment with the class or a small group.
- Show students what good listening looks like. Give them a chance to listen to other students' thought process without interrupting or speaking over them. After a student is done sharing, other students can share what they noticed they had in common to create connections.

*We have more in common than we think. We can all learn from each other and benefit from listening to our peers' perspectives. We should take the time to get to know our peers, not just those we're already friends with.*

## Sample Activities



### The Blob Tree

As an introductory or icebreaker activity, ask students which blob they feel like today and why.

Image from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blob\\_Tree](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blob_Tree)

### Storytelling in Pairs

Provide a prompt or question and have students discuss in pairs. Each student will take a turn to share, and the other student listens actively without inserting their own thoughts. After each student has shared, both students discuss what they have in common and what questions they have.

**Storyteller 1:** 3 minutes

**Storyteller 2:** 3 minutes

**Discuss:** 4 minutes

Example questions could include...

- How did you approach [assignment/problem]? What did you find difficult? Is there anything you're proud of or unsure of?
- What is your favorite or most surprising math fact that you've learned?
- Who is an instructor that has had an impact on your development as a mathematician, and why?

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There are also some things departments can do to foster relationships and a sense of belonging. These include...

- Creating advising groups of undergraduate or early graduate students with a shared faculty mentor that meet regularly to discuss courses, professional development, and simply check in.
  - Creating focus groups of students who take classes together and regularly meet outside of class.
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View more at: <https://healourcommunities.org/>