



Transformational Teaching &  
Learning Conference



**Connecting, Mattering, Learning**  
Cultivating Well-Being for Students – and for Us  
*Peter Felten, Center for Engaged Learning, Elon University*

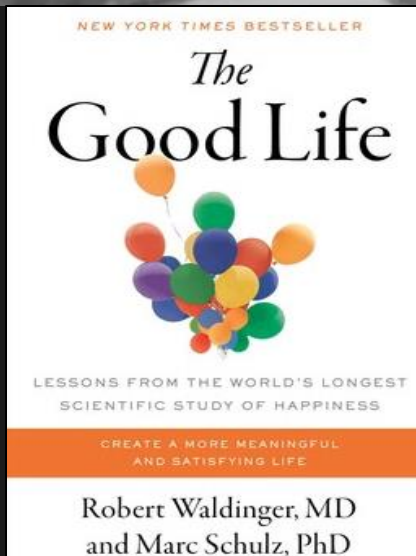
Photos from Horii & Springborg (2022)

Student-faculty, student-staff, and student-student relationships are crucial for learning, well-being, mattering, and success.



## Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation 2023

The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community



“Students did *not* suggest that teachers go beyond their professional role – only that they give more attention to the social dimensions of learning that are within their role.”

“Addressing the factors that *your* students identify as causing stress and impacting their wellbeing is vitally important because when we do that, students have the experience of us listening to them and taking their concerns seriously.”

(Baik et al., 2019, p. 683, 685)



# Mattering (and Belonging)

“Mattering is the feeling of being significant and important to other people.”

(Flett, Khan, & Su, 2019, p. 667)

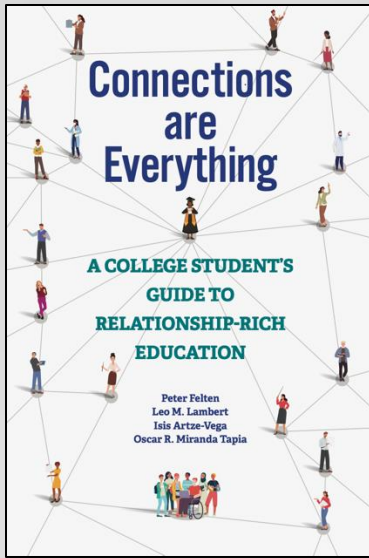
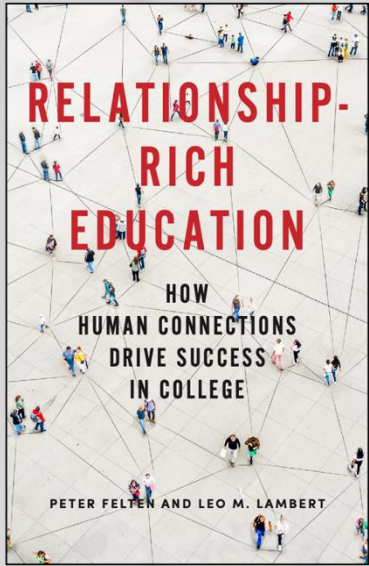
Mattering recognizes and values students as individuals with distinct identities and contributions to make to the community.

(Schlossberg, 1989)

“[This program] made me feel like who I am is more than enough—that my identity, my thoughts, my ideas are significant and valuable.”

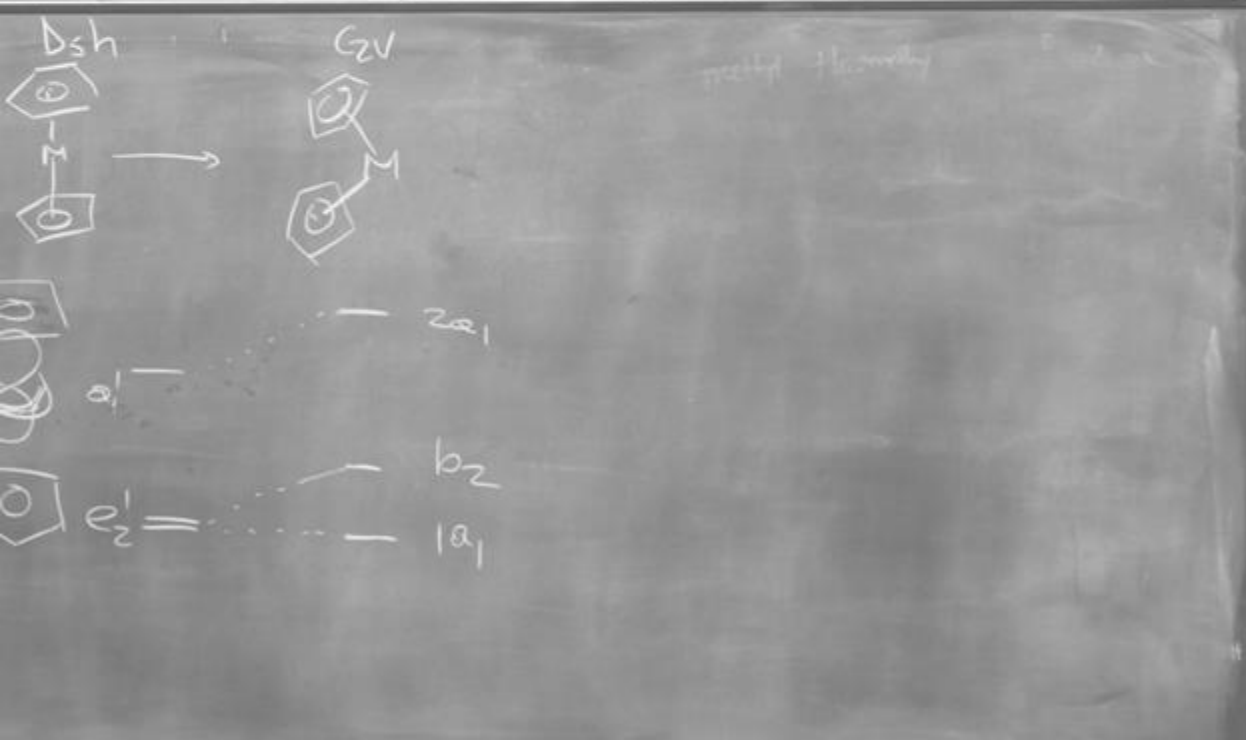
(Student quoted in Cook-Sather et al., 2023)





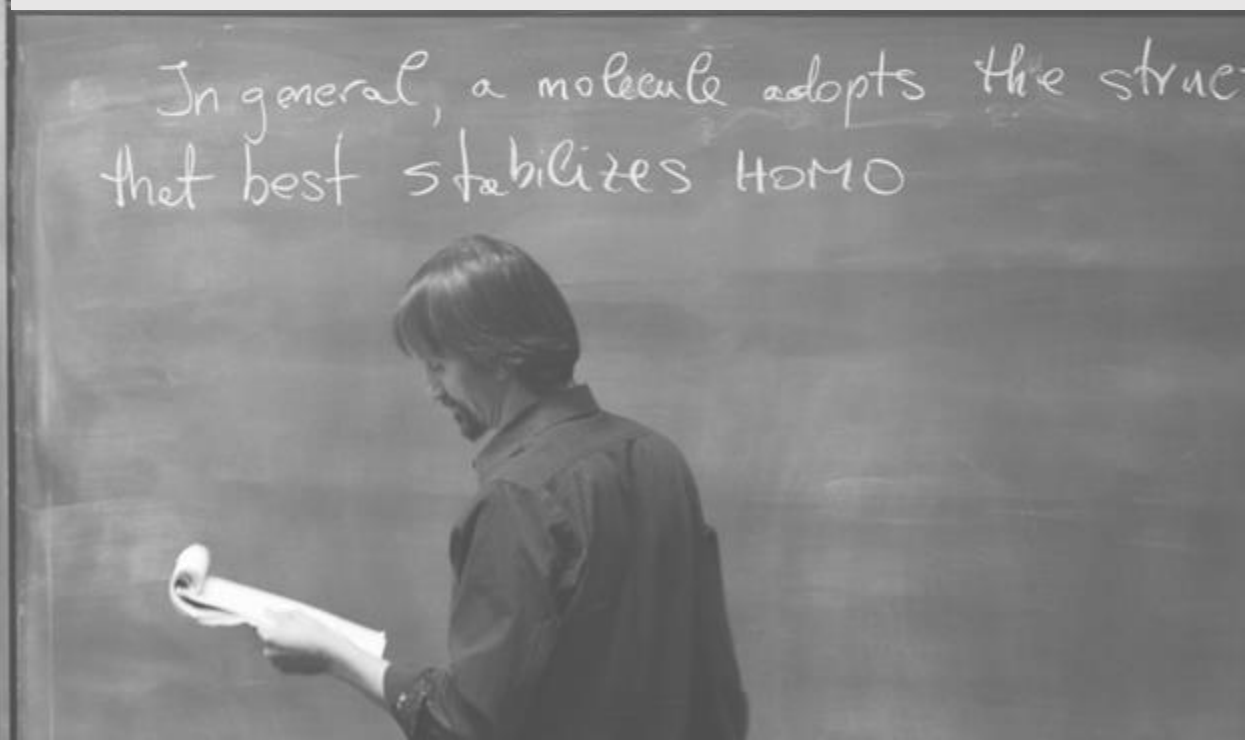
What works for you to build relationships with and among students?  
What are barriers to those kinds of connections?





“I was thrilled to be at UW. But, sitting in these large classrooms...I convinced myself that they’re all more successful than me. I was comparing myself to others and imagining all of their accomplishments. I was freaking out, to be honest.”

(Gigi Gaultier, University of Washington)



“I feel like too many times students really struggle because they're too scared to ask for help. I know sometimes my pride gets in the way of acknowledging that I don't understand something. Everyone at the college is always willing to help me, but it can be intimidating to go to them.”

(Abraham Segundo, San Antonio College)







“Once students recognize that you care about them, about where they come from, about their goals and what they’re trying to accomplish, then you have a strong foundation for teaching and learning.”

(Matthew Smith, California State University Dominguez Hills)

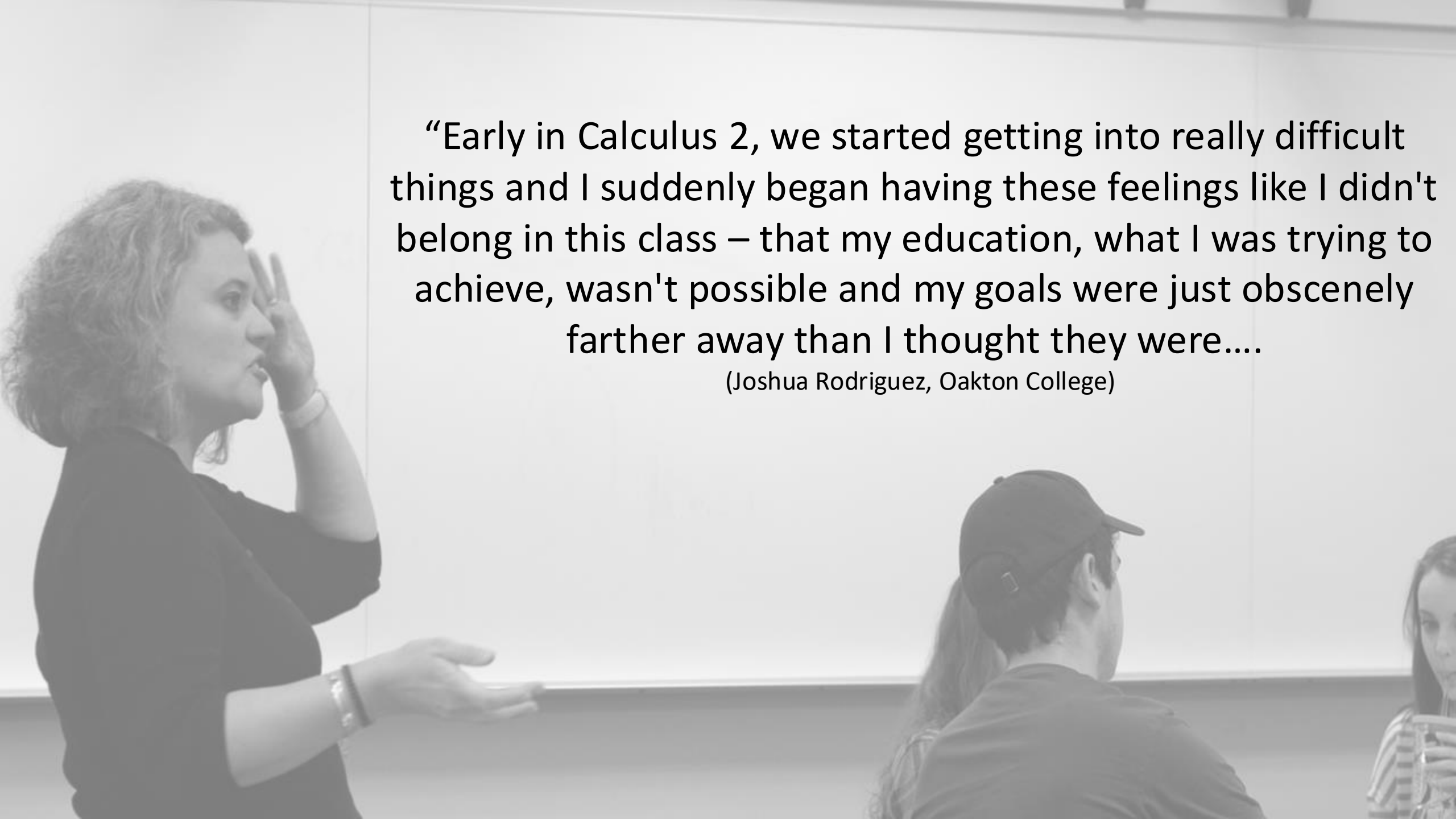
**Validation Theory**

(Laura Rendón, 1994)

“My professor made something as boring as rocks interesting. The passion she had...her subject was something that she loved. The most important thing is that the class became a community. She made us interact with each other and with the subject. It just came together because of her passion.”

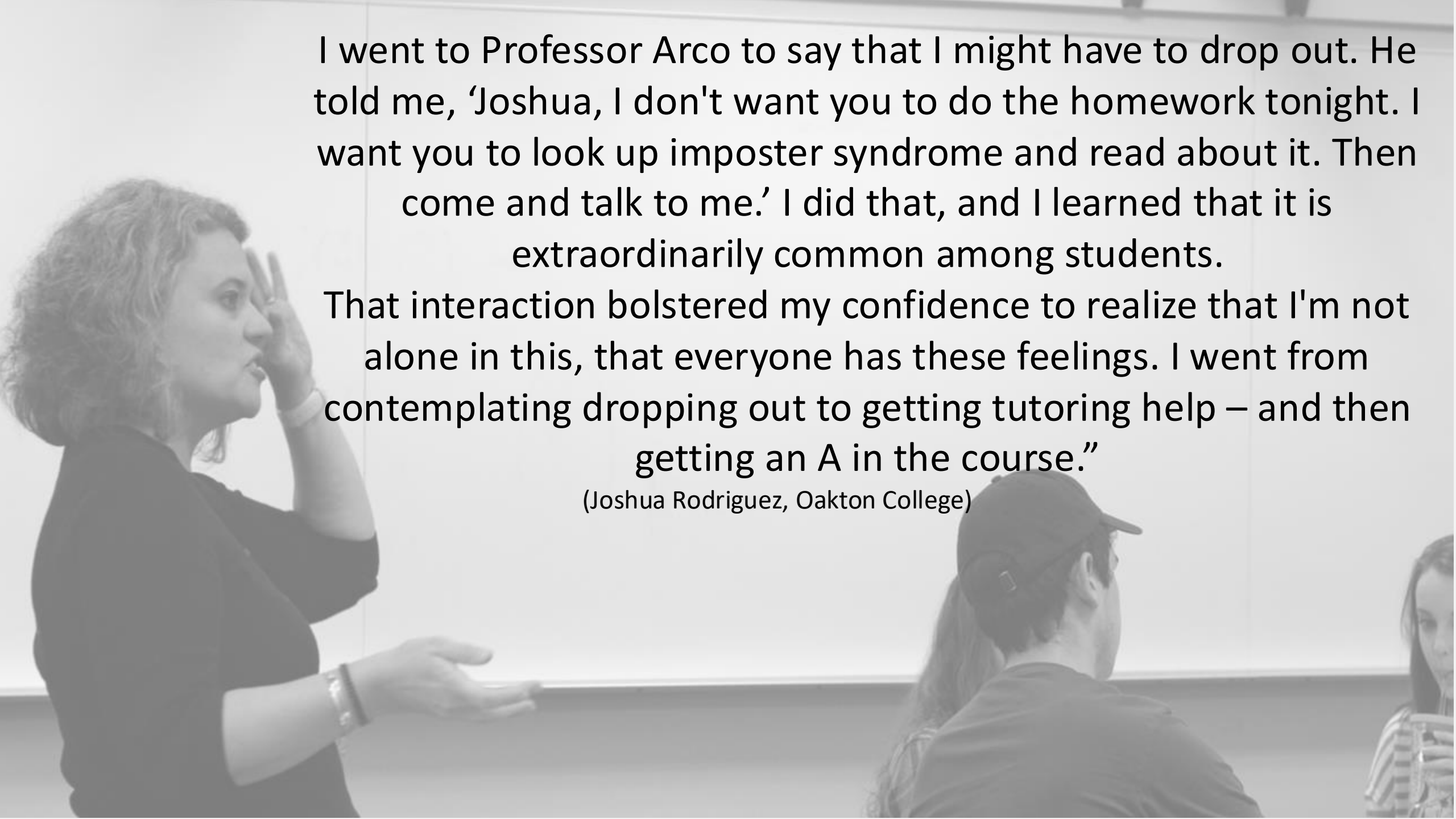
(José Robles, Nevada State College)





“Early in Calculus 2, we started getting into really difficult things and I suddenly began having these feelings like I didn't belong in this class – that my education, what I was trying to achieve, wasn't possible and my goals were just obscenely farther away than I thought they were....

(Joshua Rodriguez, Oakton College)

A woman with curly hair, wearing a dark top, is standing and speaking to a group of students. She has her right hand raised near her face and her left hand extended forward. The students are seated in the foreground, looking towards her. The background is a plain wall.

I went to Professor Arco to say that I might have to drop out. He told me, 'Joshua, I don't want you to do the homework tonight. I want you to look up imposter syndrome and read about it. Then come and talk to me.' I did that, and I learned that it is extraordinarily common among students.

That interaction bolstered my confidence to realize that I'm not alone in this, that everyone has these feelings. I went from contemplating dropping out to getting tutoring help – and then getting an A in the course.”

(Joshua Rodriguez, Oakton College)



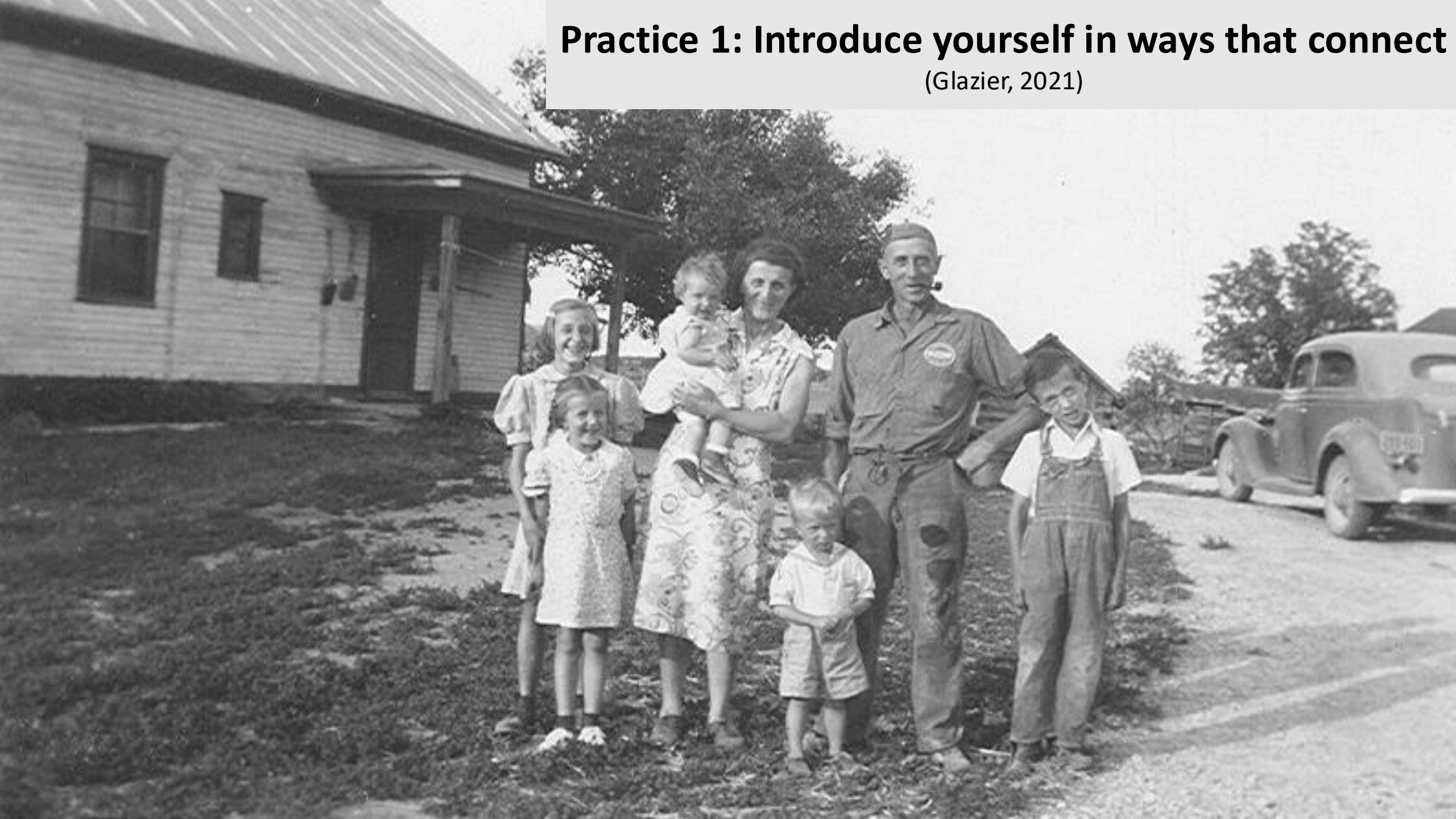


### **We need to help all students:**

- 1. Understand** that relationships matter for learning, well-being, and mattering.
- 2. Learn** strategies to connect meaningfully with faculty, staff, and peers.
- 3. Act** in ways that enable them to build those relationships.

# Practice 1: Introduce yourself in ways that connect

(Glazier, 2021)





## **Practice 2: Talk with students about the value of relationships**

“I've become an evangelist of friendship. I tell my students that one of the goals of this course beyond understanding biology is that you make a friend. A friend's going to help you get through this course and degree. This person might be a colleague throughout your career, they might become your best friend for life. You need to make friends when you're in my class.”

(Martha Mullally, Carleton University)



### **Practice 3: Validate student capacity**

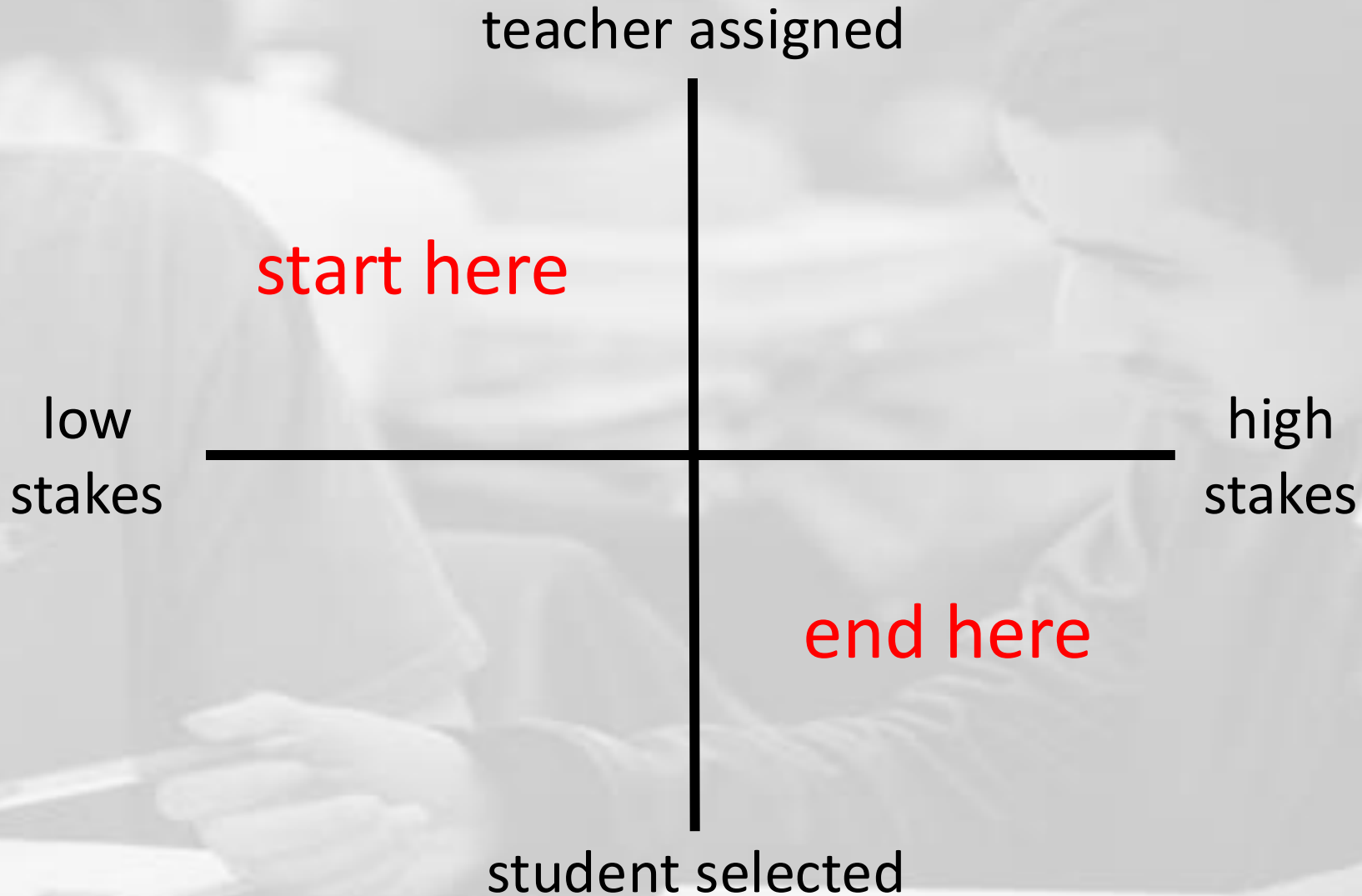
“On some papers, she would have this little paragraph in the comments saying, ‘You did this super well in your paper’ and that little bit of encouragement, even though I’m not face-to-face with this teacher at all, made a world of difference to me. We’ve never met in person or even had a conversation, but she has made a huge positive difference in my education, which is kind of hard to do when you’re not actually interacting with students in a classroom.”

(Nellie Bourne, San Antonio College)

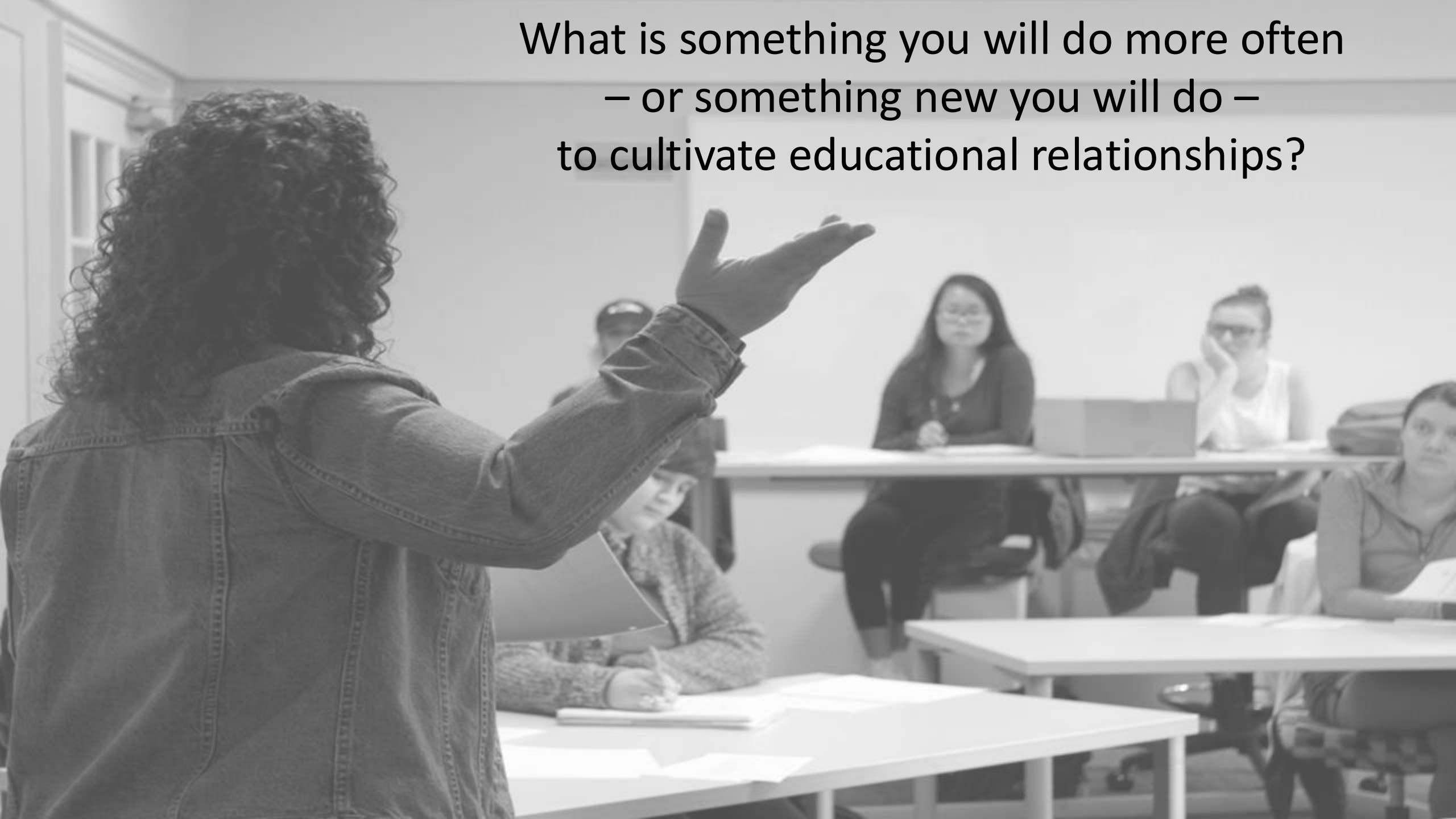




# Practice 4: Sequence group work to promote student well-being, connections, and learning



What is something you will do more often  
– or something new you will do –  
to cultivate educational relationships?



“Beyond the serious science we’re doing, there’s this whole other aspect of caring about each other’s lives. The faculty will make the time to ask, ‘How are your classes going?’ ‘What are you thinking about for next year?’ ‘What are you getting involved in outside of the lab?’ ‘Who do you want to be after you graduate?’ And then they would really listen and encourage me, even when I wasn’t sure if I knew what I was doing or where I was going.”

(Samantha Paskvan, University of Washington)



“It only takes meeting that one person  
who ignites a fire within you.”

(Tianna Guerra, Oakton College)





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