

# **Supporting faculty to recognise the role of trust in teaching and learning**

A workshop at the University of Palermo

Kathryn Sutherland

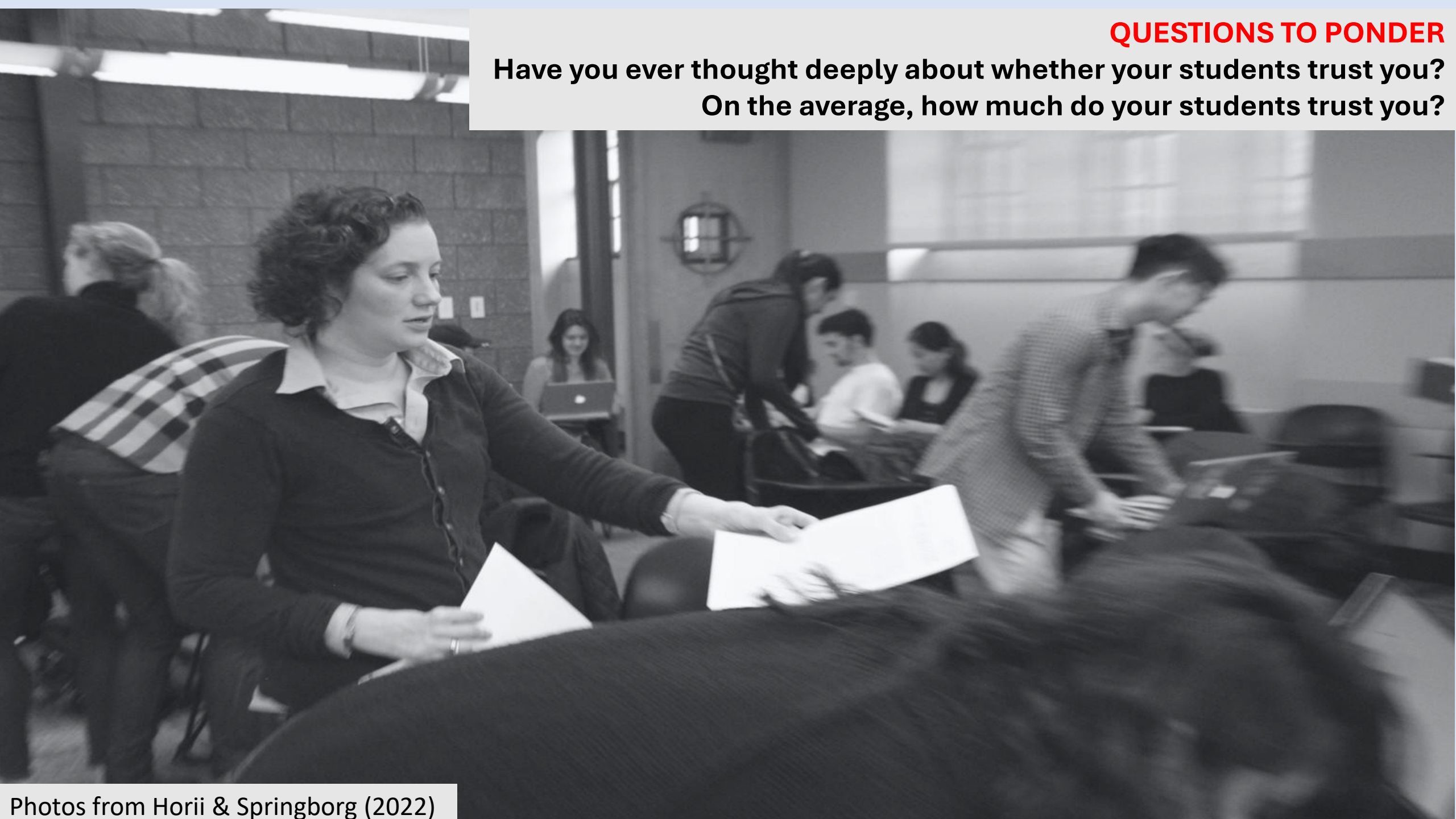
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## QUESTIONS TO PONDER

Have you ever thought deeply about whether your students trust you?  
On the average, how much do your students trust you?





## **Trust in the university classroom is...**

“students’ willingness to take risks based on their judgment that the teacher is committed to student success.”

(Chew & Cerbin, 2021, p. 23)

“the perception that the instructor understands the challenges facing students as they progress through the course, accepts students for who they are, and cares about the educational welfare of students.”

(Cavanagh et al., 2018, p. 2)



# Trust in the university classroom is *not*...

evenly distributed – *significant* variations of student trust in faculty and the institution by race, first-gen status, and family income.

(Fosnacht & Calderone, 2020)

necessarily high *among* students – which matters for active learning, seminars, labs, etc.

(Eddy et al., 2017)



## **YOUR REFLECTIONS**

**Have you ever thought deeply about whether your students trust you?  
On the average, how much do your students trust you?**



# Our research on trust \*

**Objective:** To understand what higher education teachers believe they do to establish or maintain trust.

**Approach:** Appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider 2017; Ludema, Cooperrider, and Barrett 2006).

**Method:** Semi-structured interviews focusing on effective practices to create a trusting environment.

**Expected outcome:** Providing usable resources and recommendations for faculty to encourage trust-building.



**Sampling:** Purposive then snowball.

**Participants:** 29 faculty from four countries (Canada, New Zealand, Sweden, US), >5 years experience.

**Focus:** Teaching large enrolment courses in STEM and quantitative fields.

\* Felten, Forsyth & Sutherland 2023; Sutherland, Forsyth & Felten 2024; Pleschová, Sutherland, Felten, Forsyth, & Wright 2025

# Expressions of trust

“expressions” not always said to students

**Trust me:** The focus in this category of statements is on why students can and should trust their teacher.

**I trust you:** In this category teachers explicitly state their belief that students can and will take responsibility for their own learning.

**Trust yourself:** Statements in this category aim to help students trust themselves as learners.

**Trust each other:** This category emphasises why students should trust their peers in the course, typically within the context of active learning pedagogies that require students to work together.

Which expression was mentioned *least* often in our interviews? Why?



# Trust me

I'm an expert

We have things in common

**I care about your learning/success:** “I would say that they trust me in that I repeatedly assure them I will do everything I can to provide what they need to succeed.” (Nils, Sweden)

**I'm not going to trick you:** “Telling [students] what you're going to do, and then actually doing it often surprises them around assessment, because in a lot of undergraduate science teaching they experience assessment as punishment . . . as a way to signal to them that they can't hack it. So I try really, really hard to be like, ‘I'm telling you that this is how it's going to happen, and I promise you that is how it's going to happen.’” (Nanette, Canada)

**I won't make a fool of you:** “When I think about trust, I think about students feeling comfortable asking questions and talking to the lecturer and not feeling like the lecturer will put them down or ignore them or say that's a stupid question.” (Pauline, New Zealand)



**I trust you:** “I trust the students to know what’s best for them....We’ve got all these resources flying at them, and I trust that they’ll think about it and devise a formula for themselves that will help them succeed.” (Isaac, USA)

**Trust yourself:** “They get in the habit of like, ‘Oh okay, I’ve seen this before’ so they don’t panic, as if they’ve never seen it before. They know that, ‘Okay, I’ve just got to focus and think back to that and prepare myself then for what he’s about to tell me’ and they know where to look for things.” (Micah, USA)

**Trust each other:** “I tell them that in a lab course, your partner is key. You have to trust that person, or if you don’t, you have to do all the work by yourself . . . Trusting your lab partner honestly makes the lab fun, or [lacking trust] makes it a nightmare.” (Bonnie, Canada)

# What expressions do (or could) you use?

trust me – I trust you – trust yourself – trust each other

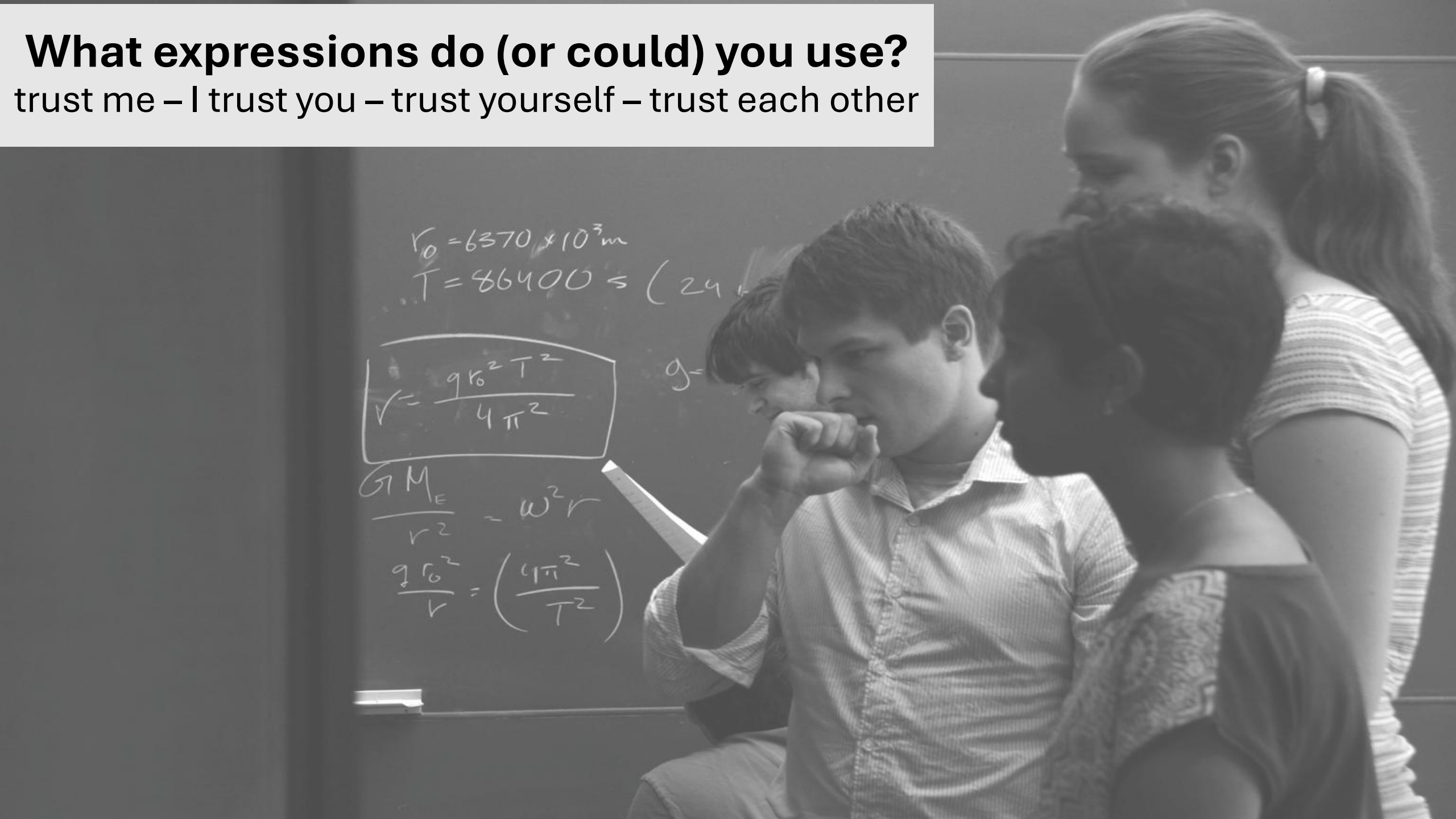
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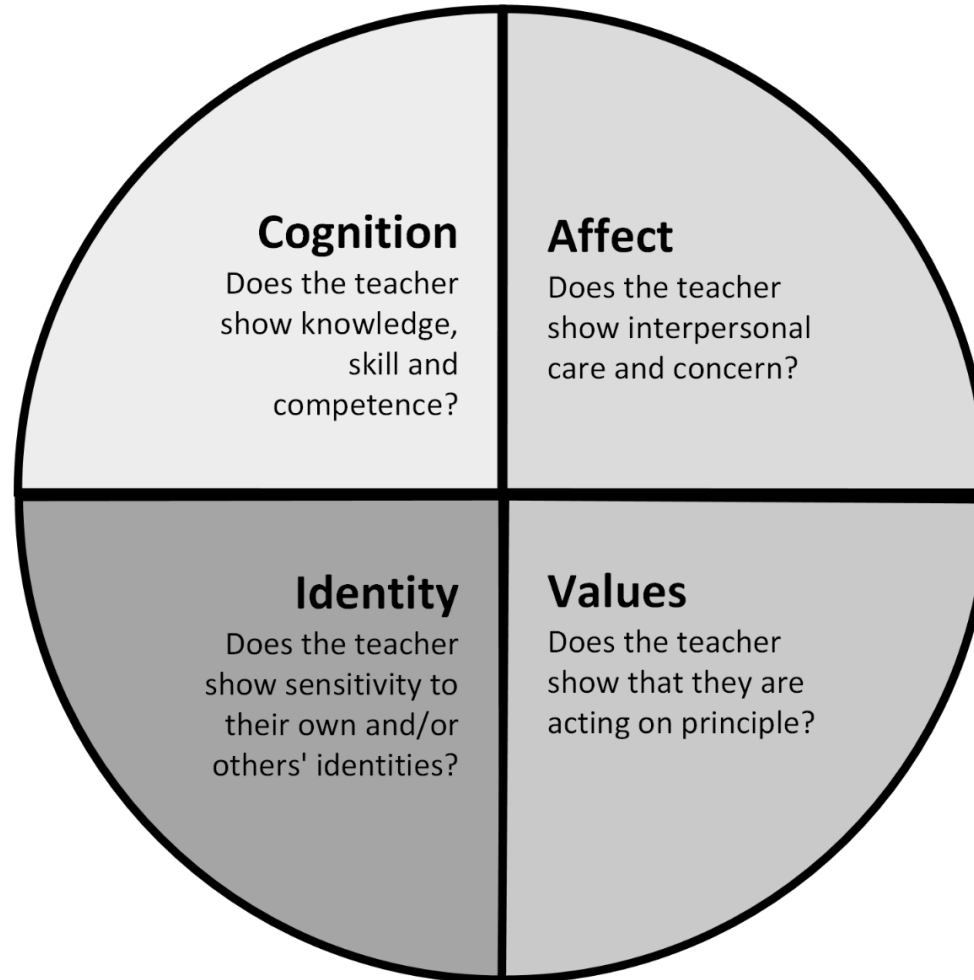
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# “Trust moves”

“When I was starting out as a faculty member...I worried that some students wouldn’t trust me if I wasn’t organized and if I didn’t know my stuff.”

“I do think that some students have probably felt more comfortable reaching out to me or staying after class to chat for a little bit or talking more outside of class because of our shared identities.”

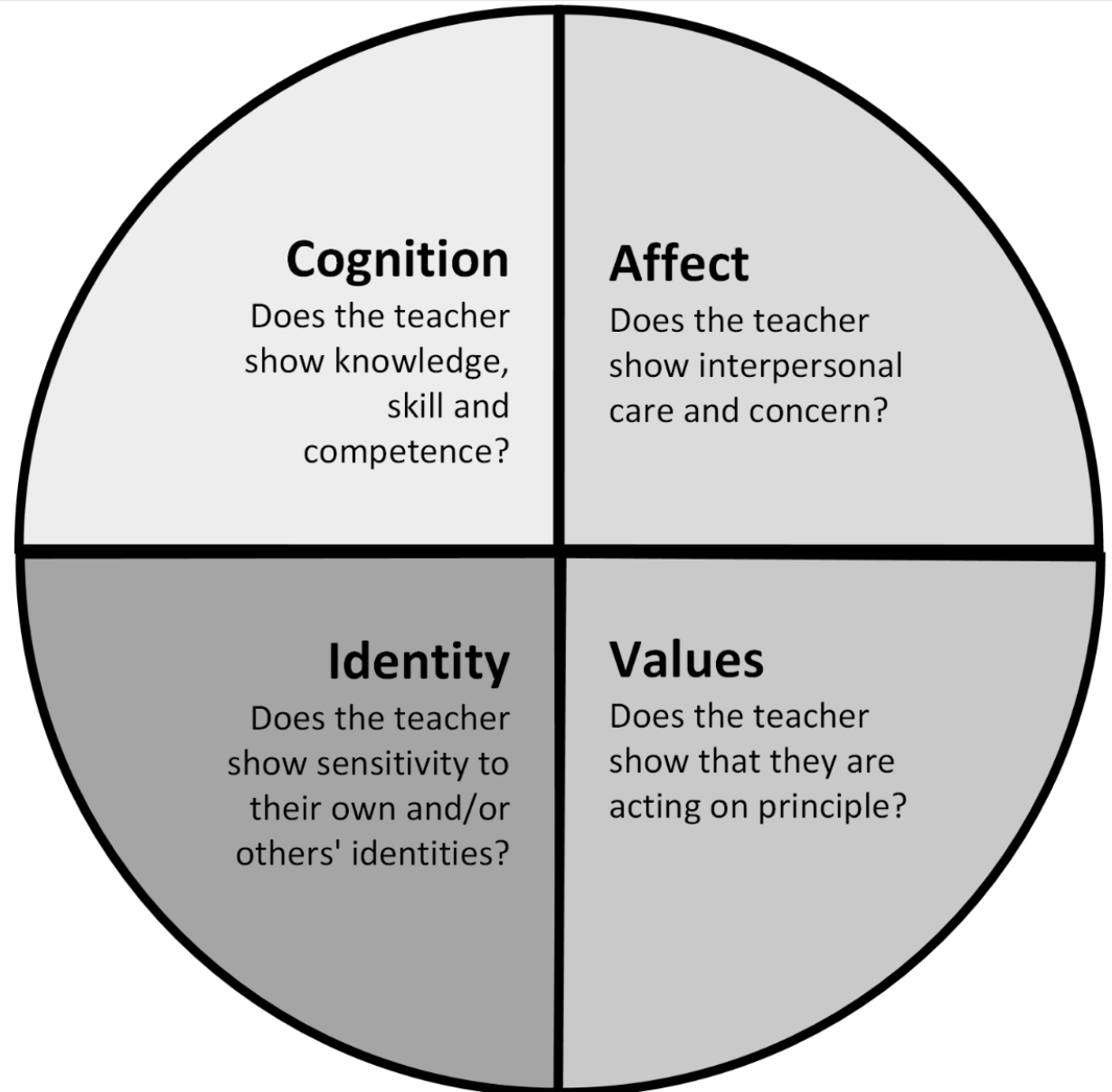


(Felten et al., 2023)

“On the first day of class, I give students note cards where they write their names and I’ll ask for some random facts, could be favourite song... I think that’s something that builds trust with them.”

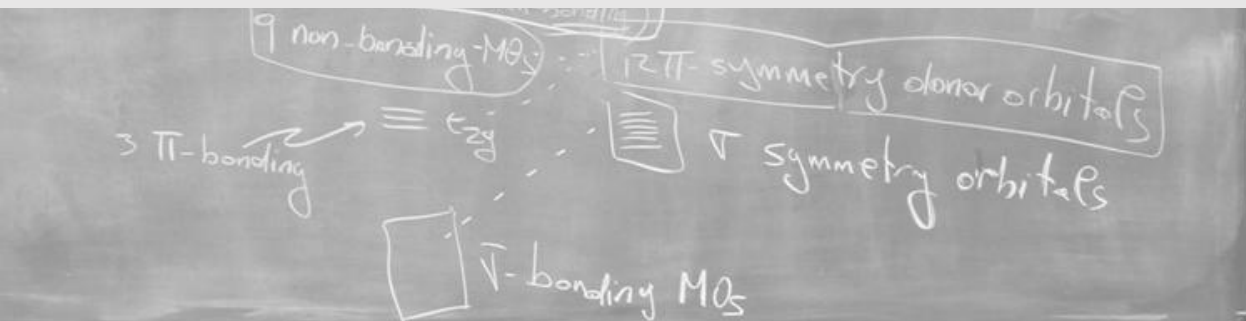
“When doing in-class labs, I will demo what it should look like in terms of how you ask permission to touch a patient, explaining what you’re going to be doing specifically, and then explaining what landmarks you’ll use...and just emphasize how to do it in a professional manner.”

# What “trust moves” do you (or could you) use in your teaching?

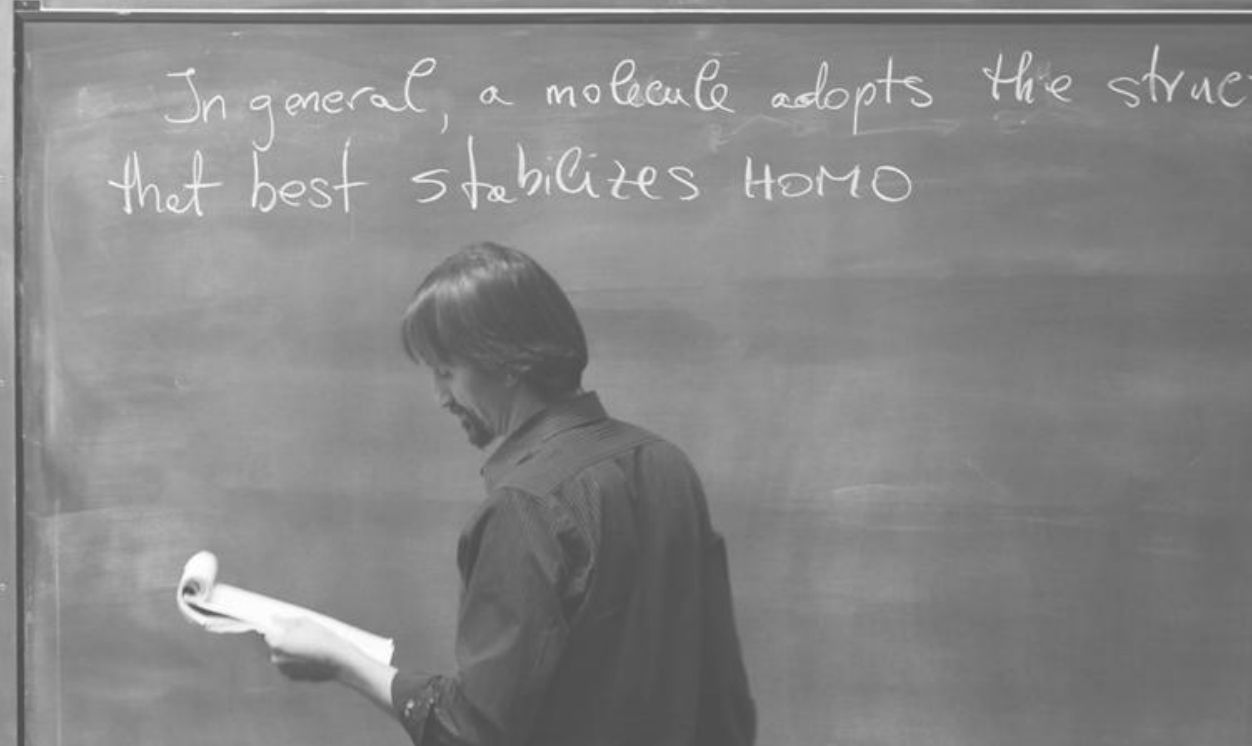
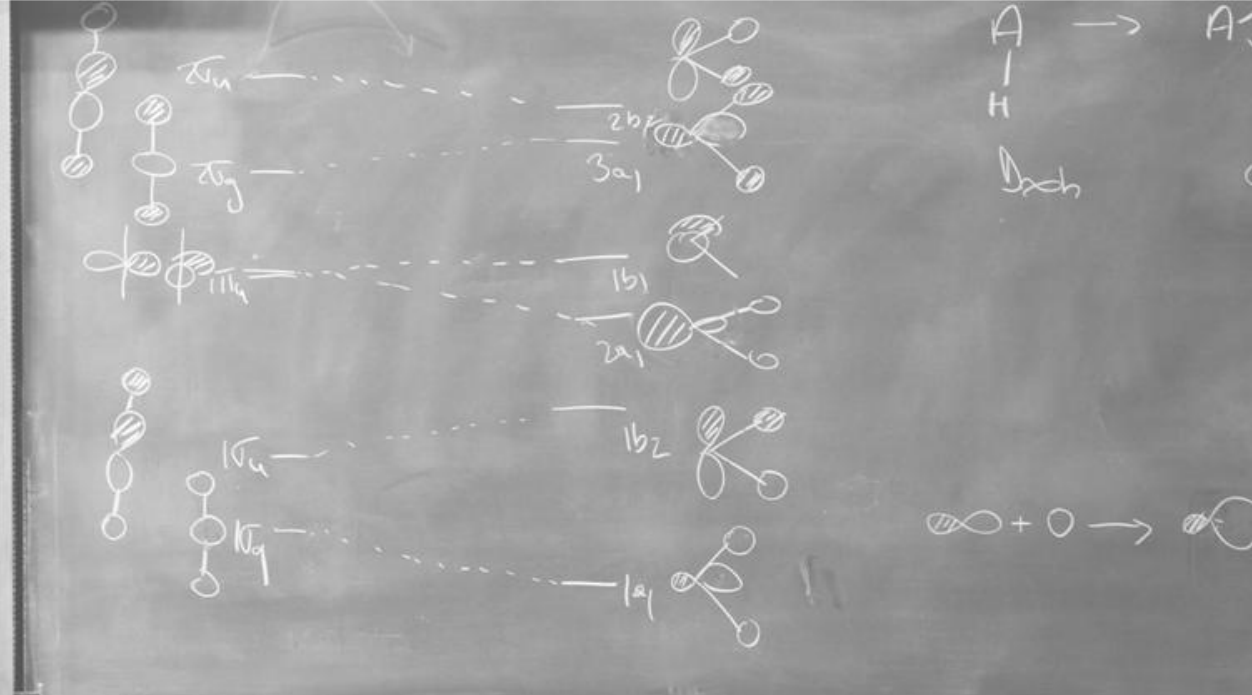




Students who trust professors and peers are more likely to take intellectual risks and to thrive in college.




We need to intentionally build trust with and among students.



“Learning and talking together, we break the notion that our experience of gaining knowledge is private, individualistic, and competitive. By choosing and fostering dialogue, we engage mutually in a learning partnership.” (hooks, 2009, p. 43)





Based on our conversation today, what are one or two things you'll do to build trust with and among your learners?

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