



Live with Melissa Schettler: How to Increase Student Engagement with an Engagement Rubric

SPEAKERS

Tierney King, Melissa Schettler

Tierney King 00:01

This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast. I'm your host, Tierney King, and I'm here to bring you inspiration, energy and creative strategies that you can utilize in your everyday teaching. This week's episode is sponsored by the Teaching Professor Virtual Conference, available through September 30. With the virtual conference, you'll have on-demand access to numerous sessions on instruction vitality, student engagement, diversity and inclusion, technology tools for teaching, and so much more. Don't miss out on this chance to inspire your teaching and network with others virtually. Today, we have Melissa Schettler, who was actually a presenter at our Teaching Professor Conference. So to start, I'm going to have you briefly explain your background. And then why the topics that we're going to discuss today, student engagement and active learning, are such big passions of yours.

Melissa Schettler 00:52

Absolutely. So I always tell people I am first and foremost a teacher. I was an elementary teacher for nine years before I moved into higher ed. And as you can imagine, teaching elementary students requires a different level of creativity, keeping them super engaged. It's much, much more exhausting, too, I can say that. Yeah, so I taught in elementary for nine years, and then was kind of at that point where I was ready to move out of the classroom and have a bigger impact on the world of teaching. I'd been doing a lot of leadership roles and professional development with my colleagues, but was looking for that next step. And that's where I fell into this position here at William Penn University. So we're really small college in South Central Iowa, and I teach in the teacher ed program, so all students who are going through college to become teachers. And, you know, when I first got this job, I had this mindset of I need to fulfill the role of quote unquote, a professor, and what does that look like? And that's, you know, standing at a podium and having a PowerPoint and, you know, lecturing. And the more I thought about it, I was like, I know effective teaching pedagogy at the end of the day is effective teaching pedagogy. And so I kind of took that piece out, because, you know, I didn't really have any higher ed experience minus being a student myself before this. And so that's where I really thought about, what is it that I did with my young students that got them really engaged in learning? And how can I first and foremost model that for my students, because these are future teachers. So I'd rather show them what I want them to do rather than tell them, and then how can I kind of modify some things a little bit so that my college students aren't feeling like they're being treated like second graders, of course. And so that's really where I started to focus a lot on what student engagement looks like in higher ed. And that has been very much a passion of mine. And I've enjoyed sharing that with some of my colleagues, in part because I've realized, you know, a lot of people that take that academic route to become a professor, they don't have that background in teaching, they don't have a whole lot of instruction in what effective teaching or teaching strategies look like. And you know, a lot of them are

really just simple little things that we can do, like on our toes, are implemented in two lessons here and there that can really make a difference in how engaged students are in the classroom. And obviously, then, if they're more engaged, they're going to get more out of them. And so that's really kind of where my passion has been focused as far as my personal professional development as a professor and currently working on my doctorate. So I'm kind of looking at student engagement as a long term project for myself as well.

Tierney King 03:24

And so student participation is hard. It's, you know, one of the things you came to the classroom and it wasn't easy to get students engaged. And students exhibit different different behaviors when engaging in an activity. There's desired behaviors, there's undesired behaviors, there's challenging behaviors, so kind of take us through these dimensions of these different behaviors, and why it's so important to acknowledge these.

Melissa Schettler 03:49

So I think it's always important for me to first share, because I do have future teachers in my classroom, what that looks like in my classroom is a little different, because these are typically the students who they themselves love to school, they were the teacher's pet. So I have a little bit of an advantage in that regard. And anybody who also teaches future educators knows that as well. But with that being said, there is still quite a range of behaviors that these students exhibit in the classroom. And you certainly have some students, too, that, although they're in the realm of education, need a little bit more support and how to be actively engaged in the classroom. And so when we think about what it is that we want students to do in the classroom, and what we see students do in the classroom, it really can fall into two categories. You've got those desired behaviors, those things that are conducive to the learning environment that you as an individual, as the instructor, appreciate and want to see more of. And then there are those things that aren't so conducive to the learning environment that we don't want in the classroom as much. And what that looks like for each individual can vary slightly. You know, there are obviously certain things that across the board are going to be more conducive to the learning environment than others. But things that I personally see as desired or undesired behaviors might look different than some of my colleagues. Cell phones, I think, are a really easy example. I think, after talking to a lot of people, I think overwhelmingly, students on their cell phones is one of those things that can be frustrating for instructors. But there are some who are like, you know, I don't really care that you have your phone out. And that's up to you. In my classroom, because I have my students engage in so much activity, so many hands-on activities in collaboration with their peers, I really want those cell phones put away as much as possible, because, you know, nobody wants to be engaged in a conversation with somebody who's looking at their cell phone the whole time. But again, other people might feel differently. And so I think as instructors, it's important for us to identify those behaviors that we want in the classroom and those that we want to eliminate. And some of that, a component of that, too, is identifying your personal pet peeves. What are those things that when students do it, you know, and it doesn't take very much, or you don't have to teach very long before you identify what those things are that are your pet peeves. What are those things that when they occur in the classroom, they just trigger you a little bit? You feel a little bit frustrated. I mean, think it's really important to identify those, and communicate those to students. These are things that are frustrating to me, I want to see you do this instead, this is what it should look like in the classroom. Because obviously, if you're slightly

frustrated, or somebody does something that makes you a little irritated, you're likely to react to that student differently than you would be if you're in a much more calm state. And that's not to say that, you know, when a student takes a cell phone on in the classroom, that I'm in a fit of rage by any means. But it's just that like, Oh, can we just put it away, that little tiny frustration, but then when another one comes out and another one and before long, then it becomes a little bit more frustrating. And so identifying that ahead of time, so that it can be eliminated for students can not only help you, as an instructor, kind of continue to develop those relationships and have a positive learning environment, but then you're communicating to students ahead of time, these are the things that aren't expected in my classroom. So one of the classes I teach is classroom management. And we oftentimes think of classroom management as being a K-12 thing. But really, effective management is effective management. When we think about any sort of managerial position, there are certain traits and things that people do that are more effective than others. And that's no different in higher ed. And so when we look at the research on classroom management, one thing that's very consistent across many different classroom management gurus is clarifying what your expectations are. What is it that you want students to do in the classroom? How do you want them to act and communicate that to them? And so that's really where that first piece of deciding what those behaviors are both desired and undesired come down to.

Tierney King 07:50

And so you reference something known as "perfect participation." And so this probably looks a little bit different than those undesired behaviors. Why should instructors imagine perfect participation and kind of how will this help them with student engagement?

Melissa Schettler 08:05

Yeah, so again, like when I said, there's those two dimensions of behaviors, those desired and undesired, and what that looks like for each person can vary a bit. And so I think it's really helpful to decide what does it look like in your classroom to have that perfect participation? Like what are the things that you really, really, really want, because that looks different from one instructor to the next, based on your personality, your experience, your content area, that's a really big one. And then you can communicate those to your students. And then it comes back to this idea to have that Pygmalion effect. When we have really high expectations, our students are more likely to achieve at a high level. And so instead of just sitting back and saying, Okay, well, this is what, at a very basic level, I want my students to do this, we could do that. And they might achieve that level, likely, they'll be slightly below. Or we can say, you know, best case scenario, the thing that I want to see if I walked into my classroom and had this hands-on learning activity, or any sort of group based learning, if I just sat back and observed, I want to see this, this is what I want it to look like. And this is the thing that's going to make my heart sing. And I think when we identify that we get really specific into what is it that we're looking for, and we're setting that bar really, really high so that hopefully then our students can achieve that high level. Sometimes, you know, we just assume that our students know what it is that we want. We assume that they know what classroom etiquette looks like. For example, I always tell my students when I'm teaching classroom management that, you know, we as teachers, we always say we want our students to be respectful. That's always in the classroom rules, expectations. We're going to be respectful to one another. And I say, "Well, what does that mean?" Because what's respectful for one person or in one person's home may look different in another person's home. Not only because of cultural differences, but because of family differences. As an experience, you know, when you walk into my house, I prefer

that you take your shoes off. My friend's house, he wants you to keep your shoes on. Like, it's you know, and you don't expect that when you walk in. And so it's just really identifying what it is that you want. And kind of clarifying that and not assuming that our students are going to know because they just might not.

Tierney King 10:21

Do you have any, you know, specific perfect participation things that you always have to have on your list? On your number one perfect participation list, what's on it?

Melissa Schettler 10:33

My number one. I would say just that students are engaging with one another, they're listening and they're responding. I, you know, I think it's always important that we're taking the time to listen, but I'm also really looking for my students to respond. I want them to ask questions, I want them to challenge their thoughts. And in that process to be open to changing your thoughts, too, you know. I think as time goes on, we all get a little bit more stubborn. And we have our ideas coming into a situation. And I always tell my students, I want you to be open to the idea of changing your thoughts. And even I have times where students come to me, you know, even a class that I've taught five times before, and a student has a thought and I say, "Oh my gosh, I hadn't considered that. I'm so glad you shared that. Because now I'm thinking about this differently." So I would say just kind of that response piece would be maybe my number one I want. I want them to just listen and respond to one another.

Tierney King 11:28

Perfect. And so you have a really inspiring method of actually building an engagement rubric. So take us through that process, and how can other instructors, one, start creating this type of engagement rubric and start using it in their own classes?

Melissa Schettler 11:44

Yeah, so if I kind of circle back a little bit, you know, like I said, a lot of my instruction in my classroom is very hands-on. We do a lot of collaborative learning in, you know, this is not the kind of huge, weeks-long, project-based learning that is kind of becoming a popular thing now. But rather, it might just be that for 10 minutes during class, I have students grappling with some challenging questions. And they're working on it together, or I have them do some sort of jigsaw activity, where each group has a different concept that they're going to become a master of and they're going to mix up the groups. And so they're going to be a master in each group, and share their knowledge. So any little thing like that, too. And so, since my classes are so hands-on, I really then was kind of struggling with, do I also give attendance points or participation points? That's kind of where some of this came from. And it really is in talking to other people that I realized I am very much not alone in this struggle. You know, do I give you attendance points if you just show up, but you don't offer anything? What if your excuse is for an athletic event? Do you still get those points? Do you get those participation points because you're excused when maybe if you were in class, you cause more problems than not, you know? It just, there wasn't clear a clear picture for what to do. And so that's where I just started kind of diving in figuring out like, what have other professors done? Is there a good direction here, something that I can follow? And I came up with this idea of assessing engagement rather than participation, or just participation or attendance? And so I started to think, Well, what does that look like for me? And this is one thing that I

was, this is kind of the meat of what I walked everybody through at my session, at the Teaching Professor Conference, was first identifying, like we talked about earlier, those desired behaviors, what does it look like? And then what does it really look like for that perfect participation? Clarifying those pieces a little bit. First, you know, this doesn't have to be like for a specific activity. So if I use, you know, an education related thing, I'm gonna have my students do a sample lesson for fourth grade math concept. You know, it's not specific to that, but just any sort of hands-on or collaborative learning experience, what are some of those things that I want to see? And so that's where I started first listing those out, and again, I thought about my pet peeves. What are those things that I really want to eliminate from the classroom so that it's just a more engaging experience for everybody, but also a more positive experience for everybody. And then from there, I really looked at how do I make sure I stated those in positive terms, first and foremost, because I want to tell students what it is that I want. So instead of put yourself or don't have a cell phone out, I said, minimize distractions. And then as I explained this to students, I clarify, here's some examples of what that looks like. And then from there, I kind of took that list of expectations or those desired behaviors and classify them and kind of group them together. And so for me that fell out into three categories. First, it was preparation. I realized there are things that I am looking for my students to be prepared for when they come into these learning experiences. If we're going to talk about the chapter today or the article that was assigned, you need to read it first. You know, it was one of those things that was frustrating when we were gonna dive right into this activity and I have those handful of students that are like rustling through their bag to find their article and skim it quickly. So you gotta gotta be prepared. Bring your materials that you need, have those readings done ahead of time. And usually, you know, I think as instructors, we have a pretty good gauge as to whether or not students have done those things, especially if you're actively engaged in the process and moving around the room talking with different groups and things like that. So that first category for me was preparation, the second one being participation. So what does it look like in those moments? What do I want students to do? And I kind of grouped some of those categories together. And that's where, as I mentioned previously, that listening and responding was a big piece for me, striving to move the conversation forward. And then lastly, I had this kind of hodgepodge of things. And I called it classroom etiquette. I'll be honest, I do not love the term etiquette, it just goes back and reminds me of my days when I was getting married, and my mom bought me a wedding etiquette book - this is not me, mom. So like, if anybody has a great, great word to substitute there, but it works. You know, it's that idea of creating this comfortable and kind, caring learning environment. So we're minimizing our distractions. So I want you to put your cell phones away, I want you to find a seat that's maybe not by your best friend if you feel super encouraged to talk to your friend the whole time. And then just making sure that you're looking at people as they're talking and responding with that general body language, because again, you know, we have this assumption that a lot of times these college students are coming to us and they have these skills, or at least they know them. Sometimes we need to encourage them to use them. Obviously, most of them probably have those skills, but maybe need a little bit of support in implementing them in the classroom. So yeah, I identified those, and it kind of fell out into those three categories: preparation, participation and etiquette. And then from there, for me, personally, I added points to it. And then I categorized it into different point values. And so those categories for me are: I am fully engaged, and I have clarified what that looks like. I am moderately engaged. And again, those are kind of like I'm a little bit there, but not quite. And then that last piece is I am not sure how to be engaged, I need some direction. And so I have it in student focus language, so that it really kind of focuses on them, because it's about the students not about me. And then also I

have that last piece of, I need some support or some direction, I'm not there yet kind of building in that growth mindset. Because for some students, this is hard. It is hard to speak up in class. It is hard to kind of put themselves out there. And so those are the students that I might work with a little bit more individually, and provide them with some ideas of how to be engaged a little bit more. And then as far as how I use that in my classroom, it kind of varies. I have it specific enough. And then I have the criteria identified that I'm looking for on a regular basis, but general enough that I can use it to do an engagement score for a whole class. So maybe it's 10% of their overall grade. Or maybe I'm going to use it for a specific learning experience where they have to work together with a group for a few class periods. And part of that grade is your engagement grade. It just really kind of varies based on the class and the level of the hands on engagement that I have in those different classes.

Tierney King 18:09

Students, sometimes, you know, they'll inflate how they're doing, sometimes, or how they're feeling about the class. So how do you try to get truthful answers, you know, "Hey, I need some support with this engagement," as the student perspective? How do you try to, you know, motivate those perspectives?

Melissa Schettler 18:26

That's a great question. And a point that maybe I should clarify. So although I have it in student focused language, I typically am the one that does that grading. And so, yeah, there's that disconnect there. Sometimes I will have students do kind of a self-reflection on it. And then we'll have that like, combined conversation. But for the most part, I would say that those students who are in that category of, I need some support, I don't know how to be engaged, in my experience, they're aware of it, or I point out some specific examples. I'm a big note taker. So that's a question too that I get is like, how do you know? Well, in part, I teach it a small division. So my students, some of my students have me for two to four classes. So I see them regularly, smaller class sizes, but I take a lot of notes. And so I can go back, you know, to some of those notes. And, you know, here's an example of this or an example of this. And so I tried to make it as productive for students as possible. It's not meant to be this negative thing where I'm pointing to you and saying, "You're not doing a good job. You're not engaged, I'm frustrated with you. I'm upset, you're not doing well." Not that at all, but rather, you know, here's what I'm seeing. Here are some ideas that might help you. Here's some suggestions. And it might be as simple as you know, some of my students that come in and sit in the back of the room every day. Why don't you try to sit closer to the front of the room. Does not have to be the front row, but a little bit closer. And then when you walk in, put your cell phone in your bag, not in your pocket. When it's in your pocket or you put it on your desk, you're more likely to look at it. So try to put it in your backpack. And a lot of times to those students, like I'll see them try that, they'll try some things. And usually, if I'm going to actually have it tied to a whole course grade for like a percentage of their grade, I do a grading at midterm. So I give them feedback. That way, they know what they're doing well to continue and some ideas of how to improve. So they constantly have that feedback from me. And then those students that maybe need a little bit more direction, I'll probably check in with them about three fourths of the way through the semester. Sometimes they just need that little that boost and that pat on the back to say, you know, you're trying hard, and I really appreciate it.

Tierney King 20:35

And since incorporating this engagement rubric into your own classes, I guess, how has it impacted your students? Have you seen, you know, overall success with the activities and their engagement?

Melissa Schettler 20:47

Yeah, so I think one thing, like first and foremost, I'll be honest, for me, it's taken out a lot of that guesswork and that struggle of like, do I give them attendance points, participation points, things like that. I have a clear direction for myself, just like, if I'm grading a paper and there's a well defined Rubric or grades are, they make more sense than if we're just going to decide how many points out of 20 to go? And so that's really a huge benefit that I have experienced with this. But then I also find that my students do respond really well to it. I've always had those students, and we all have those students, who are those go getters. You've asked them to do something and they're like, yeah, ready to go. They've got their, their planners out with their colored pens, their postits, and they're organizing everybody. And we love those students. It's the ones that are like a little bit below, or the ones that need a lot of support getting engaged I found that it has really helped because they're like, "Okay, this is what Professor Schettler is looking for. She's looking for x, y, and z." And I can even come around, you know, anytime students are engaged in a group activity, I'm not sitting back. I'm constantly walking around from group to group. So I might sit down and say to somebody, or say to a group, "Hey, you know, the conversation seems a little bit focused on one person. I'm curious, what are your other thoughts over here?" "Hey, so and so, what do you think about this?" And I'll help get them engaged. And then I might come back a little bit later, and like, say, "Hey, thanks for sharing your thoughts. I really appreciate it." And so I think it's not only provided that clear criteria for students, so they know exactly what I'm looking for, but it's provided just some talking points, really, for both of us as far as, alright, how do we get more engaged? I would say it has also helped kind of even the playing field a little bit for some of those students, those go getters that might sometimes do a little bit too much, that doesn't allow other students an opportunity to engage Well, it helps kind of rein them in a little bit, too. You know, I mean, really, these are people skills. These are skills that we need in nearly any field of work that we go into. For my students in particular going into the world of education, it's extra essential. So that's one part of why this is so important to me. But I think if I taught any content, to be honest, this is probably what it would look like in my classroom.

Tierney King 23:02

Perfect. And we will include the student engagement rubric in the resources mentioned, so you will have access to that. So thank you so much for being on the podcast today.

Melissa Schettler 23:13

Thank you for having me. This has been fun.

Tierney King 23:15

Whether you're driving to work, or you just need a 15-minute thinks session, we hope the Faculty Focus Live podcast will inspire your teaching, and offer ideas that you can integrate into your own course. For more information on the resources included in this episode, please check out the links provided in the episode description.