



Live with Carine and Christine: Using Risk, Creativity, and Rituals to Uncover a World of Teaching Possibilities

SPEAKERS

Tierney King, Christine Boyko-Head, Carine Chisu

Tierney King 00:01

This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast sponsored by the Teaching Professor. 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. Alright, today, we have Christine Boyko-Head, and Carine Chisu with us. And so Christine is an educator at Mohawk College, and Carine is a professional trainer, and we're actually coming to you from three different time zones today, which is pretty neat. So the two of you are actually writing a book together, and you conduct a series of workshops called Return on Risk, Return on Ritual, and basically, you explain the risk educators and learners need to take, especially now with new codes of virtual learning and teaching, and the response you give to this risk-taking by proposing rituals in learning and teaching. So there are a few different parts to this, and I'll kind of have you start off by explaining the whole of it, and then we'll dive deeper into the actual focus of each individual part. So take us away and kind of the wholeness of it.

Christine Boyko-Head 01:09

So Carine and I met actually over Zoom, we have never met in person. So we are the product of COVID, really, and it enabled us to span these different time zones, share our thoughts about teaching, definitely share the risks that we were taking, and that other educators were taking, and we realized that we thought we had something to offer to other educators. And so we've done a few workshops together over Zoom, in order to address the risk that is involved now, but also, let's be honest, there is always a risk in teaching, whether it's face-to-face, whether it's online. So what we're trying to do is share some of the best practices that we have found and share some of the risk-taking that we've done and that has been effective with learners. And that basically, is what we're doing as far as workshops, and also the book we're writing, we thought, we have enough material that we can go into the theoretical aspect of it as well, the theory of risks the theory, of rituals, as well as give some practical activities and lessons that people could use. And so we'll start with this entrepreneur-thinking

mindset, and how does that have a place...how does that type of thinking, have a place in this for both educators and learners?

Carine Chisu 02:46

Well, actually, when you look at entrepreneurship, it's all about risks - people taking risks. And even if you went to look in the dictionary, and you look at the definition of "risk" it's everything that could be wrong and could go wrong. So that's a very negative way of looking at things. We looked at risk being like, instead of things that could go wrong, being opportunities, and when you look at opportunities, then everything opens up. And then you have more courage to do things and so on. So in entrepreneurship, we're in the current situation, we can look at everything that could be going wrong, the the online learning or teaching that is not the same anymore, and so on, and so on. But we can also look at it from the other side and say, "Well, this is an incredible opportunity as a learner to be able to dare more and to take risks and do new things." And for the educators to do exactly the same, especially because we have seen, now, that we are all interconnected. And learning and teaching is interconnected as well. So both are taking that risk, but that kind of positive risk in a way. But for some people it can be very negative or have very high risk and that's where we come with a solution.

Christine Boyko-Head 04:18

I think as well just to add to that, that by looking at risk in the entrepreneurial way and the sense that it's an opportunity, we're also adding compassion into the equation. And definitely, with things being online, now, you have learners that have children at home, or they have needy pets. And so we have to be compassionate. Whereas when we were in the classroom before you didn't see that and so even though we said that we were learner focused, I think Carine and I question: Were we really or was it just something that was easy to ignore? Because students came to the classroom, we've had online learning, you know, for decades really, you know, but this forced everybody into this new environment where the risks were higher. And the compassion had to be greater to us, as far as just real-life integrating with the learning.

Carine Chisu 05:21

Even for this podcast now, I live in the middle of the city in the center, and you might have heard a police siren coming by. That's, that's life. And it has come into teaching-learning much more than before, as Christine said. So this realization has been introduced in that learning environment, which was much less the case before.

Christine Boyko-Head 05:45

And just as another example, I was teaching a class this morning where one of my learners was presenting, but she had to have her toddler on her lap, because he happened to not be feeling well, and she was apologizing about it. But at the same time, we were also doing, she was doing a presentation about agile thinking. And, you know, that's all about being flexible and she was modeling it. And we were modeling it by accepting that, and it wasn't a problem at all because it added the richness - that's needed sometimes.

Tierney King 06:25

Yeah, that's been a really interesting component on how it just, it's come in handy for this compassion and this empathy that, you know, you've had to integrate into the online classroom of kids and animals and it actually pertains to the class sometimes. The next part we'll go into that you guys cover in your workshops is that as you know, we've transitioned to this online teaching, and we've always been teaching online, but it's become more pertinent because of the pandemic. So explain the risks that accompany online teaching, and how your motto of "creativity has your back always" fits into this.

Carine Chisu 07:03

Yeah, actually, creativity is about, again, courage. And the more you are creative, the more you dare to be creative, the better you become. It's like a muscle. And the more you train, the more you get better at it. But not only that, by getting better at it, you also feel more confident. And it's not only feeling more confident in using the creativity, but just generally feeling more confident, because you have more possibilities to find solutions than just yes or no, black or white, you have a new world of possibilities. So when you trust the creative process, in a way, it will always help you, you just have to dare and trust the process. And then you go, and you always get a return.

Christine Boyko-Head 07:56

And teaching is about courage as well. It always has been, nevermind COVID, it just has always been something that requires courage. But with the online environment, now, maybe that bit of courage is becoming more transparent, you know, when your Zoom goes down, or you can't find the breakout rooms or you realize you set the breakout room but you forgot to change the time and you know, you almost become more human to your learners because you're modeling how the brain works. You're modeling how to handle mistakes and stress, even though you know you're shaking, that's one positive thing about Zoom, you know, they can't see you sweat. But they are seeing you problem solve, they are seeing you handle graciously some of the issues that can come up with with technology, and at the same time of modeling that you're learning along with them. And you know, students are stepping up and saying, "Well, you know, press this button" or "Try this." And I always relate everything back to the classroom. I use it as a living laboratory. And last week, I had a student who couldn't get her microphone to work and they were to go into breakout rooms to share what they did over their reading week. So she, you know, put in the chat, you know, "I can't use my mic." And so we just all said, "You know what? Let's do charades. So go in your breakout room and for the first 30 seconds or so act out what you did during reading week," just so that we could accommodate her and she didn't feel left out. So we turned it into a game and then I said and then speak if you have to, but it was just a short little activity, but it also showed inclusion, that showed equity, that it also showed the creativity that Carine was talking about and whether it worked, I don't know, but we had a laugh about it anyways.

Carine Chisu 10:07

And I really would like to add on what Christine just said that the learning and the teaching has become much more like a continuum, because there is much more exchange in learning. The teaching people I would say, are learning and the learners are sometimes teaching because they might know better how to use the technology, and especially at the beginning. And so yeah, there is much more continuum of teaching and learning. And that is also the reason why we prefer to say learning and teaching instead of teaching and learning, because the learning is much more important now than the teaching.

Christine Boyko-Head 10:50

A few years ago, I published an article about reciprocal learning, and my definition of that is exactly what Carine just said, that everyone is experiencing. Now, when I wrote this article, it was basically to just try and keep up with the technology that was happening 10 years ago. And as an instructor, we can't keep up. So I decided, I'm not even going to try, I'm going to turn that over to my students. They have these skills, they have these positions of strength regarding certain technologies that they're using, whether it's Discord now or Animoto or iMovie, whatever. So why not let them choose their technology, and this was pre-COVID, choose their technology and educate me instead of me dictating to them, or trying to stay on top of every new software or application or what have you that that's out there. So the idea of that reciprocal learning, I can teach them something, but they can certainly teach me as well. And I think that's what Carine and I are both really all about is that continuous learning. And that's why, you know, like what you said, Carine, the learning and teaching rather than conventional way of saying it.

Carine Chisu 12:13

And we also realize that the risk, coming back to the risk, is not at the same level for everyone. For us it could be a small risk or low risk, for someone else can be a very high risk. And that is why we we introduce the rituals to lower that risk. Yeah, it's really about lowering the risk for everyone, for the learner and for the instructor.

Tierney King 12:17

I'm gonna backtrack one second. I want you to, you know, this reciprocal learning is really interesting. And I want to know how it kind of benefits the students because, you know, so often the teachers teaching and instead, you know, these past few years, you've had to use your students and have them almost be the teachers at some point. And how does that benefit them and giving them a kind of a different role in your classroom?

Christine Boyko-Head 13:08

Yeah. Oh, I mean, so once again, just to repeat that that article was written pre-COVID, probably by five or six years, pre-COVID. And what it actually did was, it positioned them in a place of strength. So while I have certain learning outcomes that I have to meet in my classroom, I teach communications. So it's critical thinking, it's communication, it's collaboration, and it doesn't matter really what media I asked them to use. So why should I dictate that? Why should I say, use, you know, animoto.com, if they don't know that. Let them use what they want. And number one, it means they're going to their strengths. Number two, they feel a sense of autonomy over the assignment or what I'm asking them to do. Number three, we're all sharing then in the learning process and learning much more than one application because everyone's choosing their own. And yes, there'll be an overlap. But we might learn three or four other things that we didn't even know existed. And we know from research that the sense of autonomy, this sense of engagement, that they get to come from a position of strength that's linked to motivation, and all of that is linked to engagement in the classroom. So it's taking off the authoritative teacher hat, and saying, let's share in the knowledge and the places that we're at, and so we're also prioritizing their past experiences. We're validating those experiences, and we're doing it in a way that it benefits all the learners, including the instructor.

Carine Chisu 15:04

Yeah, and to build on that, I would say that we shift towards a position of facilitating learning, and meaning really like making learning easier. And that means that it's not only coming from us, but that also that can be peer learning, especially when in adult training, that goes very easily because everyone has interesting experiences and ways of learning as well. So why not use them all and exchange on that and learn much more than if there is only one person selling everything and selling this is the only way it should be?

Christine Boyko-Head 15:49

I think we know that's not the world we're living in anymore. You know, information is not just coming from one source, it's coming from all different directions. And so knowing how to filter that information and knowing how to critically assess whether it's reliable and valid, is important. And as well, you know, modeling this in the classroom, that it can't just come from one person anymore, and our students are coming from all different experiences, you know, they're not just direct entry from high school. They're mature students, they're international students, and they have a lot to share and a lot of experience and knowledge and we need to validate that and and recognize it that's important. It's not just the instructors knowledge anymore.

Tierney King 16:43

Absolutely. And we're gonna kind of go back to explaining how you frame these activities within a ritual and how these rituals have their benefits. So we're gonna go backtrack a little bit and go back to that as part of your return on risk.

Christine Boyko-Head 17:00

Well, I think it started, I know it started from a real distaste for people that do icebreakers as trivial games to open a meeting or a class. And so you know, we enjoy these games, but they need to be framed. And we have been in so many workshops where people say, "Okay, we're going to do an icebreaker," the eyes roll, the groans are filling the room, they do the icebreaker, and then they move on to the meeting. And that can cause serious damage, because you haven't debriefed and so how we turn any activity, no matter how small or short, or how long or major into a ritualized activity is by debriefing it. And so, the 3D-briefing process, it's called 3D-briefing because it's so three dimensional. It can be done before, during and after, it's about the individual, it's about the collective. It's very simple. It's just what did we do? So what was the significance? And now what will you carry forward? Or now what did you learn about yourself? And the what, so what, now what is coming from paramedic training, it's a very common reflective tool. But it's become three-dimensional in the fact that I use it all the time. We don't do anything in my classroom without saying we're going to 3D-brief. And if we don't have time for that, because let's be honest, the classroom is always a time pressure cooker, then the students know this formula that they can then debrief on their own. And it can help with people understanding the process of things, understanding the people they're dealing with, and not having if something went wrong with let's say, an icebreaker, not having it slide into some dangerous stereotyping and assumptions you know, just nasty thoughts about other people. So it's a very strong and powerful reflective tool. But it can also work to anticipate what needs to happen, as well as adjust and modify what is happening in the moment. So we ritualize it, we ritualize everything we do all our activities in our workshops. We have this debriefing component and it stemmed from the fact that we've seen some

very good facilitators do icebreakers but never debrief them, and it can cause damage, it can cause damage to a group. It can cause damage to an individual and if you don't debrief, then you don't know that and you can't repair what you don't know.

Carine Chisu 20:02

It's really about understanding, fundamentally understanding, why are we doing this kind of icebreaker. But if we really need to call it icebreaker, why are we doing this, and when you know why, then you understand, okay, we are going somewhere. And it makes sense, or we come from somewhere, and it makes sense. So it's not just an activity in the middle of something, it's more like a bridge, because it is a ritual, exactly like real rituals in real life. It's gives you the opportunity to transform from one state to another state. And that is the comfort a ritual gives you. And that is the comfort that we want to give to the learners and the instructors to feel more comfortable about the learning or the end or the teaching by lowering that risk.

Christine Boyko-Head 20:17

Yeah, and it comes back to risk, too, because rituals, while they're comfortable, they also contain risk. And it's that element of transformation, it's not always a transformation in keeping with the dominant thought. It can transform things into new ways. And that's that playful risk that we're working with in the liminal state of the middle of the activity. And that's why it doesn't matter what the activity is, it can be something small, or it can be major. But by 3D-briefing, you get at all the outcomes you wanted, you can get at additional learnings, because each person is going to experience that activity or that lesson differently. And by sharing it, we just build on on the richness of what we're doing. So in a sense, it's almost economical to apply this 3D briefing to anything that you do, because you'll get so much more than what you expected.

Carine Chisu 22:09

It really enhances the learning. It's really like when talking about facilitating the learning. Well, this helps facilitating by making it easier to learn.

Tierney King 22:22

And kind of explain, you know, the 3D-briefing and how you integrate that after an activity, you know, you have your debrief, but are there certain questions you asked? You have an activity? How do you integrate it after every single activity? Is it always the same?

Christine Boyko-Head 22:37

That's actually the beauty of it. It is accessible to everyone because it is the same, it consists of the three questions: What? So what? Now what? That's it. And we know that "so what?" question is a why question. And "now what?" question might be a how might we question. But for students that are struggling with how to organize their thoughts, with how to do critical thinking, with how to organize an essay, how to respond in class and provide feedback, these three questions provide a reliable, consistent, and accessible framework for them. And then as they practice and apply it to everything, then they can start to modify those questions and realize I can ask five, "so what?" questions I can ask three "now what?" questions and it does apply to everything. Just to simply break it down, the what is an identification question. So this whole framework aligns to Bloom's Taxonomy, it aligns to creative

problem solving, it aligns to design thinking and Cobbs reflection model, it aligns to all the models we have out there. But it simplifies the language and that's what I found my students telling me that they can apply it in their other classes, because once they understand it really is about identification with the "what?" analysis, and interpretation with the "so what?" and then evaluation and creation with the "now what?" They're modeling the way our brain functions. It's sequentially stepping them through but once they get really good at it, they realize it's not a linear model, it's a spiral because they might get at the so what and have to backtrack to the what and identify something when they're in the so what. They might jump forward and then come back as again to the so what once they jumped to the now what. It's something that you can apply to everything. My students use it to write their essays and a lot of my students are not writers. So essay writing is something they struggle with. They're coming from different disciplines, but they have to take my mandatory communications course. So why make it difficult for them when they can find something that's accessible? And they can apply it. Because, as I said, the three questions stem from paramedic or health training. And when we think about even the trades, you know, being an electrician or a plumber, when something goes wrong, you have to assess, and that is what's wrong. So what is the cause of this? And now what am I going to do to fix it? So it applies to so many different things.

Carine Chisu 25:42

And actually, I also use it in corporate training to make people understand what coaching is about. So when you ask the what, so what, now what questions, people understand that you can repeat something. If you understand what you have been doing, it's not just about analyzing what you have been doing. But if you want to be able to analyze, you first have to, as Christine said, you first have to identify what have I done, and several times this step is just skipped, because we are so used to going immediately into analysis, and then the future, and so on. But the first element is really identifying what have I done well, for example, and then afterwards, you say, how can I repeat that?

Christine Boyko-Head 26:30

It minimizes, to go back to the risk element that Corinne was talking about in teaching in general. Now what? That question turns everything into an opportunity. So now what just happened? My car broke down. Now, what am I going to do about this? And and so we get action steps in that last question, which is about us. And for me, a lot of this stemmed from students who are doing collaborative work. And we know that many students don't like to collaborate, but yet it's a necessary skill they have to learn. And when it came to reflection on what happened in their collaboration, they would always point the finger at someone else in their group. The now what question doesn't allow that it's now what can you control now? What can you do next time? And so it really shifted the language that students were using when they were reflecting on their collaborations. And even during their collaboration, they were thinking more empathetically. They were thinking more proactively of what they could do better, as opposed to I mean, the other way of debriefing is what did you like and what did you dislike? And that right away puts you in a negative position, because then we're searching for what we dislike. And I mean, we're sometimes negative enough, we don't need help.

Tierney King 28:01

These are some great insights. And I don't think a lot of people, you know, they might intuitively do it, but they don't practice it, you know, and integrate it into the classroom strategically as a ritual. I think that's really beneficial to both, you know, yourself as a teacher and to your students.

Christine Boyko-Head 28:21

I think we need to just say that there is this misunderstanding, I believe, that in order to learn, and in order to be rigorous, it has to be serious, and it has to be a struggle. And that's what we're finding that our students are learning maybe even more, because we make it fun. And the ritual is what helps us with that risk factor. So I mean, we do have some workshops coming up. We're writing this book on the risk and the ritual, because we found there's just so much to it, and even going back into the literature of Victor Turner's work on on ritual, and just how much it applies to education today. That those are our projects for the future. And we're having fun doing them.

Carine Chisu 29:18

Yeah, I think another element that has been missing here maybe is how passionate we are about teaching. And it's always a pleasure. It's because there is this exchange. It's it's really about that, and that makes sense. After so many years, it still is fun to do. I think that's the most important thing.

Tierney King 29:43

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