



Playful Pedagogy: Connecting Students to the Content with Creativity

**SPEAKERS**

Susan Wehling, Tierney King, James May, Erin Pompa

**Tierney King 00:01**

This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast sponsored by the Teaching Professor Annual Conference. This year, join us in New Orleans from June 9th through the 11th and attend a conference where you'll network, learn, and refocus on why you got into teaching in the first place. 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. Here's to having a little fun in class. Here's to using creativity to connect with students and connect students to the content. Here's to playing games in the classroom. Your lecture doesn't have to snooze students to sleep. So today, we're going to talk about how to foster creativity and connection in the classroom; we'll talk about how to use tools such as AutoDraw, Pixlr, and Thinglink to strengthen student engagement; and lastly, we'll talk about specific games you can use to engage students with the content and with you. To start, Erin Pompa will explain how you can introduce creativity into your classes to build connection with your students.

**Erin Pompa 01:08**

It is normal post-covid that you may walk into a classroom, teach your heart out, and your students lack engagement, inspiration, involvement in your class. Students, for two years, were sitting behind a computer screen, and they were able to disappear behind the video off button. Not pushing them to share their thoughts, their ideas, communicate or engage with their peers or their teacher. But this was even the case before covid. Stimulus is everywhere. With the rise of social media, emails beingsent, parents, jobs, relationships, expectations, a student can get distracted or shut down at the drop of a dime. Based on these facts, I'm sure you're finding students are more disengaged and disconnected in your classes. First, I want you to know that you are not a bad educator. It is easy to look at ourselves when we feel like our class is not successful, and doubt ourselves and take out the punching bag on ourselves. You are a great educator. You are knowledgeable in your subject area. But what I like to remember, it is not our job to teach information, to bank our students with information. It is our job to help our students find a pathway to connect to what we are teaching to embody what we're teaching,

**Tierney King 02:35**

There are three main learning styles that can help you bring more creativity and connection into your classes. There's the auditory learner, so those who are listening to the lecture, the sounds and the

audio. There are the visual learners. So those who learn by seeing visuals and graphics, and the kinesthetic learner, so they learn by actually doing something. As we continue, Erin will introduce these learning styles and how you can begin implementing them into your lesson planning with just a bit of creativity.

**Erin Pompa 03:04**

I'm gonna post the next few steps from the lens of you being a lecture-based teacher. But if you're not a lecture-based teacher, you can flip flop what I'm teaching into any order to support you. So I want you to start with doing your lesson plan, planning it as you normally do. Prepare your lecture as a lecture-based teacher, get it all out, have it organized. Why am I asking you to do it this way? Because I want you to approach this from your comfort zone. And then we will start to layer on levels of difficulty. I don't want you to approach it from something that you're not familiar with. Because when we do that, that could make you want to retreat, and just go back to your normal lecture-base way of teaching. Now we're going to start with your comfort zone. And as we move through this, we are going to add levels of difficulty. And by the end you will have a nice, diverse, creative, engaging lesson plan for your class. Great. So you have your lesson plan all created from the auditory standpoint as a lecture. Next, I want you to go through that lesson plan, pick it apart and see how you can incorporate visual aspects into your lesson planning. Now for this you're going to have to follow your curiosity. How can you add in a prop, videos, graphics, to replace or enhance what you're teaching? Let me give you an example. I was doing a demonstration on students helping them understand the concept that they are in charge of the action, but not the outcome of how things end up in their life. I gave each student a turn with a dice, so I told the students to visualize the die as something that they want in life. I then told the students to roll the die and to throw the die and the rolling and the throwing represented the work that they have to do in life. I told the students to identify a number they wanted to the die to land on - that is their expectation. I asked how many students got the number that they wanted, some raise their hand. I also asked the students how many of them didn't get the number they wanted, and some of them raise their hands. And I went on to explain to the students that we are in charge of setting the intention of what we want doing the work, but once we release it, it is not up to us what the outcome is. But the beauty is that we can keep picking up the die and rolling it until we get the outcome we want. And accept that we will not always get the outcome we want, but that does not mean that we failed. The students love this because it gave them a visual representation of the concept that I was teaching. So as you are sifting through and exploring your creativity in your lesson plan, I want you to start to think about how can you connect those dots for the students outside of using your voice, but using visuals to emphasize the point you are trying to get across? Now you're going to do the same thing with the kinesthetic element of learning. Go into your lesson plan and see how you can actually have students do something rather than speaking it to them. How can they actually do something so that they can embody what you're teaching. Kinesthetic is all about getting in there - action, touching, doing, exploring. Let's recap. Number one, you want to create a pathway for relatability to your students, you want them to know that you're human, and you have stories and depth in the content has impacted your life in some way, shape, or form. And what they are learning is a value step to play with your lesson plans. First, approach it from your comfort zone, then go in and modify it using the additional two learning styles. Step three, commit to following your curiosity. As an educator, you don't have to be an arts educator to be able to bring more creativity and connection into your classes, you just have to be willing to follow your curiosity and to commit to seeing it as an experiment.

**Tierney King** 07:22

So far, today, we've really talked about creativity, and really just using that creativity to inspire and connect your students to the content. In this program, James May talks about a couple of different tools to foster this creativity from Google AutoDraw, which essentially uses your drawing to predict what you want to draw and gives you options to replace it, Pixlr, a free photo editing tool, and Thinglink a tool to present all your content in an interactive presentation.

**James May** 07:50

Now in this presentation, we're gonna talk about a couple of tools that you can use to make visuals happen in your classroom. And you can do that by creating visuals or curating vision. Now, as a teacher, I like to use visuals with my students. And one of the things I like to do with my students to get them excited about learning and kind of get them to be creative is to have them draw, they're not used to drawing. But if they can put their ideas on paper, then that's good. If they can communicate to me with an image, that's good, but they're often afraid of drawing. But how do we get good at drawing, as I mentioned earlier, Autodesk is allowing engineers to work with individuals and kind of work together in a symbiotic relationship. Well, this is happening with drawing to a new release is something called AutoDraw, which Google has put out. And what you're able to do with this beta or this test tool is you can start drawing something, take out your iPad and start drawing something, and Google will try to predict what it is you're drawing. Now, as a linguist for a long time, I've been aware that people don't pay attention to the words I'm actually saying, You are predicting right now what I'm about to say, before I actually say it. How's that possible? You know what I'm going to say? Well, context and everything aside, you've listened, you understand, that's how language works. But can computers actually predict what we're going to draw? And Google AutoDraw allows that and for teachers who don't feel like they have the ability to draw, it's kind of a fun tool to use in the classroom, because what you can do is you can actually begin to draw, and Google will predict is this what you're looking for. Now, this is an entire new type of creativity, because then you can click on the thing that Google's recommending, and it'll come into the picture. So you can create your own artwork in the classroom, students can do things that are amazing. And they can put presentations together using Google AutoDraw. Maybe they want to edit images, maybe they want to get really specific. Well, some people have heard of Photoshop, but there's another tool called Pixlr. And what Pixlr is, is Pixlr is a tool like Photoshop, it allows you to edit images. And I'd like to also give you a demo of that, because while you can create infographics in Canva, you can actually edit them and enhance them even more in Pixlr. And this generation of content creators, they love this tool because they can do amazing things. When you bring it all together, you have your images, maybe you have some videos you've created, you need a tool to help you present that content. Well, another application that I find works well and allows students to explore their creativity is something called Thinglink. Thinglink is an application that allows you to link to things, you can actually take a picture and put little things inside of that picture. So as people click on those links, new windows open up, what you're looking at here is a picture of a Thinglink. And Thinglink now has the ability in their upgraded version to make 360 reality linkable, so you could put on a virtual reality headset, and then look around the room, and maybe click on a door. And then that'll open up to a new virtual reality. Thinglink allows you to connect things.

**Tierney King** 11:01

As you think about how you can use these tools in your course to foster connection and creativity, the following play-based games can also help inject life into lecture-heavy teaching, while building student rapport. In this program, Susan Wehling explains how chalk, food, word associations, and "sometimes, always, never" games can inspire students and wake up your content.

**Susan Wehling 11:24**

Games that I play once a semester. Chalk outside is one game I learned from another K-12 teacher. And what you do is you give groups students in groups of two to three a piece of chalk. I usually play this at mid-semester when I'm teaching something very difficult. So that's either late fall or early spring, and I choose a nice day and the last 20 to 30 minutes of class, I have students go outside and solve an idea or write a conjugation or do a problem on the sidewalk. So whatever field you're teaching, you can come up with something creative. I send them outside, for example, in Spanish, I'll have them conjugate something in the imperfect and then write tense sentences using the imperfect, then they have to take a selfie of themselves with their artwork with their conjugations and email it to me. And what this does is, first of all, it cements their learning because they're practicing what they should know. And they want to do their best job. So they're actually re-studying the material, because they don't like for anything to be public and be wrong. And so sometimes I'll give them a homework grade or an in class grade for doing this. Sometimes I'll even give them a quiz grade if it's something extremely difficult. And what this does is it promotes whatever you're teaching all over campus, it interests people. I have other colleagues emailing me and telling me that such and such wrote a sentence in the wrong conjugation, but it gets a stir a buzz going on campus about what you're teaching. And so it's a great way to engage students, they love doing this. And again, it only works once a semeste. More than that is too much. Food is fun. So one of the best classes that I ever took was an economics class where professor gave us all Snickers bars, and we had 10 minutes to figure out where each ingredient came from, and where each how much each ingredient cost per pound. I'll never forget that we worked in a group it was really fun and very educational. And from now from then on, I seriously look at food labels in a different way. I also, for example, I teach Spanish so I do the Colombian food exchange. And I give everyone peanut M&Ms and we talk about cacahuates and chocolate, which are both Aztec foods and I relate them to Napoleon and the French Revolution. I'm sure you can think of a way to incorporate food, but remember to incorporate it once a semester, right? You can market it, you can talk about the history, the politics of food, but food is fine on the first day, sometimes, or the first week. And then usually once every week or every other week, I play associations. It's a very simple game. I'm sure you've all played it before. But I have students get in groups of, I don't know four to seven, depending on your class size. And they don't need to have anything on the table except a piece of paper and a pen. And we just play associations. So I tell them, okay, I'm going to go ahead and give you the category. You have one minute and you list down every vocabulary word or idea or concept we've learned in class so far related to the topic that I'm going to tell you. And I'll give them the association, for example, on the screen here you can see religion and I'll say okay, you have one minute write down everything you can relate to have religion go ahead and go. So they're busy writing for a minute, and they're all brainstorming. And again, this is where I get a lot buy in and studying because they want to be able to contribute to the group getting the most points. After a minute, I'll say, okay, everyone stop, put down your pens. And I'll ask each group to tell me how many words do you have, and the group with the most words wins. And I will then ask that group to stand up and read off the list of words - as a class we'll agree that those words are fair and related. So that group gets a point. And then I'll mention

the next word or association group. So it might be I might be more specific, Islam, you have one minute to discuss everything you know about Islam, then the next category might be Buddhism. And I'll usually have four different words for that day. And at the end of our four word association plays, the group with the most points will win. And they'll either get a little candy bar, or maybe I'll give them three points on a quiz, or sometimes I don't even give them anything, but they've had the benefit of reviewing during that association game. Sometimes I play it at the beginning of class to refresh what we learned in the previous class. Sometimes they play at the end to refresh what we've learned that day. It's great at the beginning of the semester, to review what they should have learned in the prerequisite for your course, or what you think that they should know coming into your course, students love to play this game. And it doesn't take any effort really on anyone's part. And it breaks up the class periods. So it's not so monotonous. Another game that students love that I play once a unit or once a chapter is called "sometimes, always, never." And this is using the strategies from Robert Marzano about, one of the best practices you can do for student retention of learning is comparing similarities and differences. So this game "sometimes, always, never" does that. And what you do is you come up with a list of statements on that unit or chapter that are sometimes true, always true and never true. And you type them out, and you print the sheet of paper, I make about eight copies, for I have about 40 students in my class. So groups of five, I have about eight groups. I laminate the sheet of paper, I cut it into strips, and then I put it into envelopes. So you'll have if you have a groups, you'll have eight envelopes, all with the same strips in them sentence strips. And then I give each group an envelope. And when I say go, they have to sort the statements into sometimes true, always true or never true. And I usually walk around the room to see what they're doing. They love this game. They argue about whether something's true, always or sometimes or never. And so I'm able to see what they've retained, what they've understood what they don't understand. And I really like them as they're engaging to see who has got the better argumentative skills. Sometimes people don't have a lot of knowledge are more insecure and so they learn also to express themselves.

**Tierney King 18:14**

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