



## A Quest for Knowledge: Making Learning Irresistible through Gamification Strategies

### SPEAKERS

Katherine Jones, Tierney King, Kristin Ziska Strange, Andrew Davies

#### **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. How do you motivate your students? How do you engage your reluctant learners when they fail? How do you get them to get back up and try again? In today's episode, we're going to talk about gamification strategies, from playful openers like solving a word puzzle, to filling in a Wheel of Fortune puzzle, or coloring in a photo to changing the names in a case study to Harry Potter characters to a full course framework incorporation where you gamify your course and suddenly your students are stranded on an island - not actually, of course. We'll talk about gamification strategies to boost student engagement and motivation. To start Kristin Ziska Strange will talk about how failing can be used as a gamification stepping stone to keep students motivated, and then the thought process behind gamification and where you can start, in this program, How Can I Use Simple Gamification Strategies to Engage My Students?

#### **Kristin Ziska Strange 01:12**

So let's take a moment to talk about student persistence. Why do our students keep going when things get a little bit tough? So gaming has perfected this, there's this game out there, it's called Dark Souls. Dark Souls is notorious for killing off players. A lot of students use how many times they've died as a badge of honor. So how do we create that within our class? We can't have students who fail once, give up. So how do we create this "failing is fun" where they can grow from it? So you're creating this aspect of flow. And flow is where the challenge of what students are doing is just a little bit above what they're capable of. Now, the first way you can create this is through those choice assignments, allowing students to opt into different paths. Another way that you can do this is by offering students a lot of feedback. Now, this can be a little bit unsustainable if you're doing handwritten feedback every single time. But if students turn something in, and you can maximize on the type of feedback that your learning management system might offer, or you can use canned feedback in a way, so telling students you're looking for one thing in particular, this can become a sustainable model. With student motivation—student motivation is pretty much encouraging them to get through the boring things. Unfortunately, we all know that student that sits in our classroom because they have to. They need this course as a way to get their degree. They need this course as a stepping stone to get to another course

that they're much more interested in. So how do we get students motivated within our courses, and get them past doing the boring things that we're requiring of them? A lot of times we know that students are within our classes because they need this as a stepping stone to get someplace else—either to their degree or to another course within the series. By gamifying your course, you can create problems that students can solve creatively—that they can see in their present lives, or that they can see in the professional lives. So by offering these options—by offering these problems—you create a level of motivation that can't be achieved any other way. Students can use the knowledge that they have now, or use knowledge that they feel like they'll need, in order to create more motivation. So, students will go out and do the research. They will find the answers. And they'll begin to think a little bit more critically about the world around them. You can also allow students to opt into these challenges. So, some people will offer a problem at the beginning of class. One that I remember vividly from my own undergraduate days, is my Physical Science professor told us that we could leave early the day that we can tell him how bikes are nuclear powered. So all of my knowledge of bikes was that you peddle them. So I paid extra attention in class, to try to figure out how nuclear power can power a bike. So, challenges like this—like, I know what a bike is, and I know that I pedal them to get them around. But he kind of gamified things, by making us think more abstractly about a problem— more abstractly about a content. So what do you need to do to prepare to gamify more of your course? The most important thing is to keep playing games. Yes, I am telling you to keep playing games. [LAUGHS] You have to look at these games, and analyze, what are the game goals? So as you play more games, you notice that some games have the same goal. In Candy Crush, you need to match three. In Dark Souls, you need to survive, and kill skeletons. They all have a certain game goal. So by playing more games, you get more ideas for game goals within your own class. And how do these games get you to concentrate on the objectives? So, the game goal wants you to survive, but the objective is telling you that you need to survive and collect coins, or survive and grow taller. How are they constructing their objectives, and how is the game goal related to that? Finally, how are they getting you to come back? What is the most fun for you? What did you notice, and what did you think about long after you turned that game off? Your students will be doing the same thing with your class.

#### **Tierney King 05:25**

As you begin to think about how you can integrate gamification strategies into your own course, Andrew Davies offers a specific strategies he has used to transform his skeptical students into engage learners with gaming techniques. In this program, How Can I Spark and Sustain Engagement in Reluctant Learners?

#### **Andrew Davies 05:44**

Thankfully, engaging reluctant learners is precisely the scenario that game-based teaching is perfect for. And after a lot of research and trial and error, I ended up settling on five game inspired tactics to transform my boring introduction to typography class into an enjoyable yet effective learning experience. They are playful openers, game-infused instruction, game-based retrieval practice, storyfied assessments, and gamified extra credit. First up playful openers. In my class, the activities start from the moment they log into the Zoom classroom, where on the screen, they're greeted with a fun, easy, no stakes activity prompt, like using nearby objects to make their initials, solving a silly word puzzle or simply using the zoom annotation tools to color in a black and white drawing I'm sharing on the screen. What this does is immediately set the tone for the class and signals to my students brains

that it's time to switch from sleep mode to class. But the great thing is, is that it sort of works. Even if the students don't partake in the activity, the mere presence of something that they could be doing is enough to at least grab their attention and signal to them that participation is welcomed. Openers work as not just great icebreakers but also a sneaky way to introduce the topic of the day. For example, one of my openers asked them to select a font that matches their mood at the moment. This leads into a discussion about what their font choices say about their mood, which then serves as a smooth on ramp to the main topic of the day about matching a fonts personality with their desired mood for their project. But since it's done in a casual conversational manner, students are more likely to participate than if I had started with an overtly educational prompt. You can also use these openers as a way of recapping material done in a previous class. A few of my favorites are asking students to create a meme about the class or class material, to find all of the errors in an image or to pretend the topic we covered last class was a physical product, and now they have to create an ad for that product. So if inserting short games into your existing lesson plan sounds like something you'd like to try, just keep in mind a few things. How would a student prove to you that they've learned a skill or concept that you're trying to teach in that class? Then how can you put an obstacle that makes using the skill slightly more challenging, for example, a time restriction or removing some of the letters from the answer or wrapping the question in a puzzle. Lastly, think about familiar game formats like Tic-Tac-Toe or hangman or Wheel of Fortune to use as those challenges because if the students are already familiar with the format, then you can spend less time explaining the rules and more time playing the game. Now my next tactic storified assessments, this strategy might be the most enjoyable for you and your students, but it does demand a great deal of creativity and planning, as it involves wrapping your entire class in a fictitious world. The setting determines the backstory for each project that the students need to complete as an assessments for the course. For example, one of my classes learning outcomes require students to demonstrate knowledge of the major typeface classifications. Within the storyline of my class, this is framed as creating a ransom note to secure the release of a kidnapped celebrity. Another project involves laying out a poster, so that now becomes a quest to design a sacred artifact. Now if you're more sensible than I am, you could borrow from an existing well-known story instead of trying to create one from scratch. For example, there's this chemistry class run by Dr. Rebecca Lai at the University of Nebraska Lincoln. She calls it a Muggles Guide to Harry Potter's Chemistry, where everything in that actual chemistry class is framed, as if she's your potions professor at Hogwarts. Another professor Roberto Corrada, set his administrative law class in the world of Jurassic Park. So in addition to the typical workplaces procedures, students now have to contend with dealing with employees possibly being eaten by the attractions and the kinds of workplace policies that would ensue. So either way, if storifying your assessment tickles your fancy, then think about what kind of setting would make the most sense for your subject matter or would be the most interesting for your class. So would a fantastical setting based on a fictional world pique their interest? Or would a more practical real-world simulation be more useful? Then, try your hand at writing a backstory for each assessment so that they make sense within this world that you're building. It could be a different story for each project or one unifying story that uses each assessment to build toward a conclusion.

### **Tierney King 10:45**

Lastly, how do you know what games to use? How do you know if the cultural topic will still be relevant or resonate with your learners? Katherine Jones talks about how to connect with your students through

pop culture, and gamification strategies in this program, How Can I Bring Pop to My Classroom with Pop Culture?

**Katherine Jones** 11:02

Pop culture provides us with a source of memorability as well, obviously, anyone who's worked in academia for a long time is aware of how to incorporate mnemonic devices to help students remember those little fiddly pieces of information that are more difficult to retain. For my purposes, I used an apocalyptic survival scenario in order to teach information literacy to my college students. And we use the seven pillars and information literacy system, which worked reasonably well except that pillar number two is scope. And they found the word scope to be very difficult to remember, because they just weren't sure of the definition for that piece of jargon, within the scenario that we use in the classroom. However, during the week of scope, they found a hidden hatch in the deserted island that they found themselves in. And within that hidden hatch, they had access to these various different servers that once they got them working again, we're in the real world, our access to the Google search engine, or to the library catalog. And having that reference point within the scenario, helped them to remember that scope means how much information is out there, and how we access it. Pop culture in the end just makes learning a lot more fun for both you and the student as well. It provides that reference point that you can use to communicate a little bit of that human flavor within the more advanced academic concepts that you're talking about. And it's just a lot of fun and very enjoyable for everyone involved. Now, students hate introducing themselves in the classroom, or perhaps you're working with a class that has a large number of students and having everyone know just themselves at the beginning is not feasible. But there's a lot of ways to get around that. If you would like to, you could set up a discussion board in your course learning management system. You might encourage students to write their various interests on a post-it note and then put those post-it notes up on the wall in the classroom and maybe group them by genre or area of interest. And that provides your students an additional opportunity to really get to know each other as well. And it gives you a good idea of what kinds of things you might look into when you start developing the structure for your content. You also want to put some consideration into the various connections between your course material and the pop culture that's available to you. You don't want to force the issue. You want to make it pretty seamless and pretty flexible. A good example of this might be if you were teaching a history course and you're focusing specifically on American history. Maybe you come across the chapter about Alexander Hamilton. Obviously, Hamilton the musical is a big source of entertainment for students and faculty, alike, at this point. That might be something you can incorporate into the classroom. Maybe play one of the songs from the musical and have the students analyze the lyrics, something to that effect. You also want to decide the extent of incorporation of the media in your classroom. This can come in a lot of different levels. But two of the ones that I want you to focus on are assignment-based incorporation and full-course framework incorporation. With assignment-based, as a good example, maybe you teach a psychology class. Typically, a psychology class looks at various kinds of case studies and uses those case studies to analyze the behavior of these hypothetical patients. Sometimes that can get a little dry and boring for your students. And one of the ways to get around that that's quite simple is that you might incorporate the names of characters from a popular source of media, rather than the provided names of the characters that are in the case study. You might want to use the names of Harry Potter characters as an example, just to give it a little bit of added flavor and a little bit of added incorporation into your course. Or you might go on the other side of the spectrum and use full-course framework

development. I used this recently in my own classes. Obviously, as a librarian, I typically teach information literacy. And I had the opportunity to teach an eight-week course on the subject. And within that course, I developed the entire content based around a survival scenario with the conceit that it was post some apocalyptic event. The event itself did not matter. All the students needed to know is that they had woke up on a deserted island, and they didn't know where they were or how they were going to survive. And their biggest goal was to find the information that they needed in order to succeed as a new society. So using that kind of conceit or framework to build a scenario that the students can use as a touchstone, or to use as a way to support that content is very useful. Obviously, that full course integration takes a lot more work, and it's also something that you would need to know far in advance. But it is especially useful if you have a pretty good idea of various tropes, and if you are comfortable enough with working specifically within a genre, in my case, the apocalyptic scenario versus a more specific media type.

**Tierney King** 16:01

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