



PROFESSORS AT  
*Play*  
PLAYBOOK

Real-world techniques  
from a more playful higher  
education classroom

EDITED BY LISA FORBES & DAVID THOMAS

# Professors at Play PlayBook



# PROFESSORS AT PLAY

## PLAYBOOK

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# Foreword by Play Expert Peter Gray

Peter Gray

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I went into academia because it's fun. Perhaps you did too. What a luxury it is to be paid to fiddle around with things. We may fiddle with things in the lab, asking the child's question, "*What will happen if I do this to that?*" We may fiddle with thoughts, ideas in our heads, testing them out to see how they fly when we describe them to others or subject them to some sort of empirical test. We may fiddle with numbers, coming up with new "proofs" of one theorem or another. We are paid to play. Wow.

If you look up the word *academic* as an adjective in any standard dictionary, one of the definitions you'll find is "having no practical value." To some that sounds like a put-down. Why devote time to something that has no practical value? That attitude is also why, as a society, we don't value children's play as much as we should. Play, as part of its definition, is something that is done for no practical gain, at least not conscious practical gain. You do it for fun, because you want to do it, because you experience the high of freedom and joy of life when you do it, not for praise, trophies, pay, improving your resumé, or making the world better.

Why do we play? That's like asking, "Why do we live?" I agree with the 18th century German poet and philosopher Friedrich Schiller who famously wrote, "Man is only fully human when he plays." What's the point of our brief time on earth if not to enjoy it, and maybe in the process bring some joy to others (our playmates) as well?

Of course, the practical side of me, who has some hunches about the practical side of you, hastens to add that although play is something we do just because it's fun, it often produces practical benefits as side effects. I have devoted much of my research career to documenting the value that play has for children's development. Children play just for fun, but in the process, they develop their intelligence, social and emotional skills, and physical bodies. Play for us adults does some of the same things that it does for children. It opens our minds to new ideas, leads to new insights and inventions (some of which may be useful), and connects us with others as friends and colleagues.

I must also acknowledge that many of us (I included) became professors not *just* for fun, but also to add some benefit to the world. Our choices of what to fiddle with are typically informed in part by our beliefs that such fiddling might help solve some real problem in the world. So, our play might not

be *pure play*, like a child's play, done just for its own sake, but we can nevertheless bring a childlike playful spirit to it. That spirit opens our minds in ways that may lead to new insights into how to solve the problem, which we would not have seen if we were more narrowly focused on what seemed most practical. If you look into the autobiographies of those who have contributed most creatively to our culture, you will find that many, maybe most, say it was for them primarily play.

Why then are we in this situation where we must make conscious effort to bring play to ourselves and students in academies of higher education? Why doesn't it come naturally? The answer has to do with our system of schooling. We force students to go through the motions of "learning" what they are not interested in, where the reward is not the pleasure of doing and discovering but grades, which are passed off as tickets to some hypothetical future success. Play is punished in this system, because it leads students to do things not in the curriculum. It disrupts the orderly classroom and interferes with the spouting back of the lessons the system wants students to spout. By the time students go on to tertiary education their expectations about the nature of "education" are rather well set, as something to endure, not enjoy. And by the time professors become professors all too many have become way too serious in what and how they teach, and the methods in college are not much different from the non-playful methods of earlier on. In school at all levels, we refer to learning as "work," not play.

And so, here we have this valuable book in which professors have written not just about reasons for bringing play and playfulness into their teaching but have collectively provided many examples of ways to do it. You can't turn the system on its head (unfortunately), but you can, within the system, do things that bring out your own and your students' playfulness, despite the forces (such as the grading system) working against it.

I like the way this book is organized. It begins with a chapter on the value of play in our teaching. Then it progresses through chapters with examples of how to bring your own playfulness into the classroom (Ch 2); how to use play early in a course to create a sense of community among students and between students and yourself (Ch 3); how to use play as a means of conveying course content (Ch 4); and how, for some, a play scenario might provide the framework for an entire course (Ch 5). I, like the book's editors, think the purpose of all these examples is not to provide a recipe for you to follow, but to stimulate your own thinking about what might work for you, given your personality, the nature of what you teach, the nature of your students, and your beliefs about what you would like students to take away from your course.

Lisa and David have granted me permission to devote the rest of this forward to describing some things I did back when I was still teaching, some years ago. My primary goal as a professor was to encourage critical thinking. Our testing and grading system has trained students not to think, but to memorize and regurgitate. Critical thinking is play; memorizing and regurgitating are not. Critical thinking is playing with ideas. We turn them upside down to see what happens, contrast them with other ideas to look for consistencies or contradictions, try them out on other people to get their reactions, and so on. Students come into the class believing they don't have permission to think. They are mere students, so their job is to "learn," not think, and learning means memorizing and regurgitating. To disrupt this ingrained schoolish habit and encourage thinking I developed what I call the *idea approach* to organizing a course (for more complete descriptions, see Gray, 1993, 1997).

## Application of the Idea Approach to a Large Lecture Class

Here's how I brought the idea approach to my introductory psychology course, where there were typically 150 to 200 students. On the first day of class I would open with something like the following:

"What is Psychology? It's not a set of facts or names and beliefs of famous psychologists. It's a set of ideas. It's a set of idea about the human mind and human behavior, about how we humans tick. ... What's an idea? It's something to think about. It's something that could be true or not, or perhaps more often is in some ways true and some ways not. You probably already have some ideas about the human mind and behavior, and it will be interesting to think about them as you go through the course. Facts are specific, objective observations that are only interesting in this course to the degree that they help us verify, reject, or qualify an idea. Famous psychologists are only interesting in this course to the degree that it can be fun to know who came up with some of the ideas we are talking about and what evidence they provided for those ideas."

Notice that I could have said that this course is about *theories* in psychology, but theories is too highfalutin a word. Students, especially in the introductory course, might think they are incapable of theories, but everyone has ideas. I used one of the textbooks I wrote that focused on what I took to be the main ideas in psychology and evidence concerning those ideas, and I used lectures largely to address ideas that the students themselves expressed, or their questions about the ideas in the book.

Even with this big class, I empowered students to play a large role in what I talked about. For example, before giving a lecture on the psychology of sleep and dreams, I would ask students, at the end of a class period, to jot down and hand in their ideas about the following: Why do we sleep (i.e., what purpose does sleep serve)? Why do we dream? Can we learn anything about a person from their dreams? This would be before most had read the chapter on sleep and dreams (almost nobody reads chapters in advance). Then I would do a quick qualitative analysis of what they wrote and devote the next lecture to discussing the most common ideas they came up with. In my discussion, I would bring in research evidence concerning each idea and maybe ask for thoughts about how one might do a study to gain more evidence for or against the idea.

One day each week the class met in small separate discussion groups, each led by an advanced undergraduate student while I circulated. The purpose of each meeting was to discuss the pros, cons, and limitations of one or more of the ideas that had been presented that week, based on their own experiences in the world as well as their reading of the chapter. To aid discussion, students were required to bring to the group written, thoughtful questions, in paragraph form, about at least one of the ideas to be discussed. I would circulate among the groups and offer a thought if asked.

I can't say that this approach worked for everyone, but it worked for most. I found them really thinking about the ideas and taking some ownership of their learning in the course. There was a degree of personal empowerment and permission that, I think, is the first step toward academic play. Some told me that they had, on their own initiative, applied the idea approach to their thinking in other courses. The courses became more enjoyable and interesting to them when they thought about ideas instead of just facts to regurgitate on a test. Some said they even did better on the tests because of that. The ideas led to engagement and the facts became more meaningful and memorable.

## **Application of the Idea Approach to a Smaller Class or Seminar**

Once, about midway through my teaching career, I had the experience of walking down hallways looking into one classroom after another. What I saw, in room after room, was one person (the professor) up on the stage, often quite animated, and a bunch of others (the students) in seats looking quite bored. Hmm, I thought, what might I do to get the students on the stage and me in a seat?

So, the next semester I tried a new approach in my relatively small course (about 30 students) in evolutionary psychology. I chose the most interesting readings I could find—books and articles filled with provocative ideas about human behavior from a Darwinian perspective. I told students at the beginning that the assignment, for each course meeting, was to come to class with written thought questions (thoughtful questions, in paragraph form, which might include disagreements) concerning what they found to be the most interesting ideas in the assigned readings. Each meeting would then be led by a pair of students—a different pair each meeting—who would be up on the stage. They would start by presenting what they viewed as the most interesting ideas in the readings and then would chair the rest of the meeting, as students read out their thought questions for discussion. I sat with the other students, inconspicuously in the middle of the room. I told the students at the beginning that I would share my thoughts on any question if asked, but only if asked.

At first the questions and discussion seemed a bit strained, but by the third or fourth week of class the students were into it. They came enthusiastically with ideas and critiques. The discussion was lively, and I observed real debate, critical thinking, and even some laughter as students loosened up enough to joke about some of the ideas or the ways researchers had tested them. Two or three times in a course meeting, sometimes more, someone would ask, “So, Peter (I had by that time gotten them to call me by my first name), what do you think about this?” Then, and only then, I might present some knowledge or thought I had relevant to the question. Students loved the course, and so did I. I think part of the success came from reducing my role as an authority figure, which had the effect of empowering others to debate and think—that is, to play. What a pleasure it was to me to present my thoughts and information only when asked, not to force them on the students.

## **Doing Rather Than Just Lecturing**

Many of the examples in this book involve getting students active in class. Play, by definition, is active. It’s always mentally active and often physically active as well. Such activity is especially useful if it is related to the course content and not just something to get the blood flowing and wake up the brain.

Sometimes in my large lecture class, I would perform a little experiment or demonstration. For example, before lecturing on the psychological phenomenon of group polarization I would conduct a class demonstration in which I asked students to rank their belief about something on a 10-point scale—from strongly disagree to strongly agree. For example, I might ask if the next test in the course should be multiple choice rather than essay in format. Then I’d separate the class into small groups of students who had similar views on the issue. Some groups were of those who favored essays and others were of those who favored multiple-choice. I asked them to discuss the question within their group and then, after about 15 minutes, I brought them back to their seats and asked them to rate, again, the strength and direction of their preference. They handed in their ranking sheets, and I analyzed them before the next class meeting.

The result invariably, which I reported at the next class meeting, was that those who favored essays before the group discussion favored them even more strongly after it, and those who favored multiple choice favored that even more after the discussion. This is the phenomenon of group polarization. When you talk only with people who tend to agree with you, you become even more extreme than before in your belief. After presenting the results, I asked the class why this occurred, and they came up, on their own, with all the possible explanations that research psychologists have ever presented about this phenomenon. They also came up with ways of testing the differing explanations. They were being scientific psychologists.

Finally, let me say something about my teaching of statistics. My experience is that most students, even at the relatively selective college where I was teaching, are math phobic. They don't understand math concepts because they think they can't and are afraid to try. **They just memorize and apply procedures, and that has generally worked for them in school.** To promote thinking, I began my statistics course by having the students fill out a questionnaire (anonymously) that asked for lots of information, including their gender, height, political inclination (Democrat, Republican, other), average grade in high-school math, degree of self-perceived math phobia, etc. etc. Then I gave them all the data, in a form, of course, that did not include students' names.

As we went through the course, I would ask various questions relevant to the data on that large questionnaire and get people's initial beliefs. As examples: *Are the women in the course more math phobic, by their own accounts, than the men? Is there any relationship between self-reported math phobia and performance on our most recent class test? Are tall people more likely to be Republicans than short people? If so, is this confounded by gender (because men are on average taller than women)?* Then I would ask if people could think of any ways to address the question just asked, using the data we had collected and the statistical procedures we were studying. And then I'd ask students, as homework, to do those calculations and come back with their findings. By doing the course this way, students understood the reasons for the statistical procedures we were going through and found them to be interesting and useful. It was also fun to see whose guesses were supported or not by the data analyses.

I haven't described here all my teaching, but just some things I did as a professor that turned out to be helpful and brought a degree of playfulness to the class. In retrospect, I could have been more playful, in all my courses, than I was. Had I had access to the book you have in your hands, perhaps I would have been.

Before closing I must mention a book that has helped me, as I've grown older, to be more playful in all aspects of life than before. It's a book by the late Bernie DeKoven – *A Playful Path*, which I recommend to anyone wanting to find more delight in each moment. Here's a quote from the book that I particularly like (p 34):

*"You don't have to play to be playful. You don't need toys or games or costumes or joke books. But you do have to be open, vulnerable, you do have to let go... Playfulness is all about being vulnerable, responsive, yielding to the moment... You are loose. Responsive. Present. You have to be present to enjoy the sunrise, to delight in the light of your child's delight, because otherwise you simply aren't there to catch it. It goes by you as if it and you aren't even there."*

Now read on, playfully. Enjoy the book, your students, your courses, and your life.

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# Chapter One: The Power of Play in Life and Adult Learning

## Play in Learning: Silly Rabbit, Play Is (not just) For Kids

Anyone remember the 1987 Trix cereal commercial? “Silly rabbit, Trix are for kids!” That was the marketing anyway. But here’s the thing, Trix cereal isn’t just for kids. I had some just last month—it was delicious. Anyway, we digress already. Kind of. Trix aren’t just for kids and guess what? Play isn’t just for kids either but sometimes play is marketed like that in our culture but it’s all a big misunderstanding. We promise, this all ties back to playful pedagogy for adult learners. Read on...

When you do a quick Google search with keywords something like “play in learning,” overwhelmingly, what you find is play being utilized in childhood education. We believe that this lack of attention to play in adulthood and higher education directly relates to the societal stigma and narrative that says, “play is for kids, not adults.” We will discuss this more later but even with the play in learning literature largely representing primary education, there even exists a concern about the decline in play in childhood education. If there’s a decline in play in elementary schools and childhood, then this makes advocating for play in higher education seem radical or reckless.

A major name in the field of play is Peter Gray. Besides being amazingly generous to write the foreword for this book, Gray is a research professor of psychology who is a leading expert in play, child development and education. Gray has authored several books, articles, is a TEDx talk speaker, and a play expert interviewed for documentaries (e.g., Playing for Keeps)—among other things. Gray has given several warnings regarding the decline of play in childhood leading to an incline in mental health issues among youth (e.g., Gray, 2010; Gray, 2011, Gray, 2013; Gray, 2020, etc.). Gray argued that children will learn the most and thrive in a constantly changing world if they are able to steer their own learning through play (Gray, 2013). Therefore, he has criticized formalized education arguing that its current design is problematic for our students and causes barriers to meaningful learning and development and actually contributes to subsequent problems (Gray, 2020).

While Gray’s work focuses primarily on children, his work has had a huge influence on our understanding of **play in learning for adults**. Our culture often separates primary education from tertiary education but we believe there really isn’t that much difference regarding effective pedagogy. In our eyes, it’s all the same, except with some developmental considerations and content differences. Like Gray, we also believe that play is vital for well-being and that play is an essential medium for learning. We also question the current system of education and want to challenge the ways that we typically teach to explore more active, playful, and effective approaches for deeper, more meaningful learning.

Although there is relatively limited literature on play in higher education, if you look long enough, you will find some important publications. However, these resources appear as the exception rather than the norm in the grand scheme of pedagogy literature for tertiary learning (notice we didn't say "rule" because we don't like rules, we don't really like norms either but...).

While this is not a finite review of the play in higher education literature, we wanted to share some of the works specifically focused on playful pedagogy in higher education that influence our work. One publication that initially inspired our search and advocacy for more play in academia is *The Power of Play in Higher Education: Creativity in Tertiary Education* edited by Alison James and Chrissi Nerantzi. James and Nerantzi (2019) argued that play has been separated out from adult learning and that education as a whole has evolved to become viewed as a serious endeavor. If you look at other publications on play and higher education, you will find similar viewpoints and some examples of what play can look like in teaching adults. Some of those publications are:

- *The Playful Classroom: The Power of Play for all Ages* (Dearybury & Jones, 2020)
- *The Process of Playful Learning in Higher Education: A Phenomenological Study* (Forbes, 2021)
- *The Power of Play in Higher Education: Creativity in Tertiary Education* (James & Nerantzi, 2019)
- *Playful Learning* (Langan & Smart, 2018)
- *Playful Learning in Higher Education: Developing a Signature Pedagogy* (Nørgård, Toft-Nielsen, & Whitton, 2017)
- *Play Matters* (Sicart, 2014)
- *Playful Learning: Events and Activities to Engage Adults* (Whitton & Moseley, 2019)
- *Play and Learning in Adulthood* (Whitton, 2022)

While, the discussion of playful pedagogy in adult learning is limited, the topic is not new. There have been people who have been advocating for a more playful approach to education, however, the literature and act of play in adult learning has become more prevalent in the past five to eight years. We are hopeful that this relatively small ripple will soon become a tidal wave taking over higher education. Those who have been experimenting with and publishing about play in learning have paved the way for a more focused and larger scale conversation about play and its place in higher education. We have learned a lot from the above-mentioned authors and hope to continue to expand on the work that they have done.

Despite these encouraging publications on play in the past several years, barriers still exist often excluding play from academia. Legendary play researcher, Stuart Brown put it plainly that we are made to feel guilty about play and given the message that play is unproductive and unprofessional (Brown, 2009). Brown summarizes play's stigma nicely:

"As we grow older we are taught that learning should be serious, that subjects are complicated. Serious subjects are complicated. Serious subjects require serious study, we are told, play only trivializes them. Sometimes the best way to get the feel of a complicated subject is to play with it" (Brown, 2009, p 101).

In our experience, there are several reasons why play is uncommon in higher education. It includes the cultural narratives that devalue play in adulthood but also sometimes there is personal fear to do something different and opening yourself up to potential "failure" or "looking silly." The political climate in higher education can be a barrier to play as some policies push accountability and time

efficiency and often devalue risk taking and innovation. Oftentimes we encounter a perception that designing play into learning is too time consuming or that the time it takes to design play into learning is not worth the effort. You can probably guess our opinion on that.

Other faculty may believe if they bring play into learning, they will lose credibility or it will reduce the “rigor” of their course. Some might say they teach in a serious discipline and play would only devalue or trivialize the importance of the content or profession. Another might say, “*I need to keep rigid boundaries with students because if I need to engage them in student misconduct or remediation efforts, I can't be “buddy-buddy” with them.*” We've also heard, “*I am training students to be a professional and so I need to be a solid model for what that looks like.*” Another fun one is, “*just because you find using play in learning to be meaningful, doesn't mean students will find that meaningful.*” Ha! That one makes us laugh.

Here's the thing: Play in learning does not reduce the rigor or seriousness of the course or discipline. Play does not take away from what needs to be taught and what needs to be learned. You can still teach the same things you've always taught. You can still be “rigorous” and maintain high standards and expectations. But by developing stronger relationships with your students and earning their buy-in, you can get students to perform at even higher standards. You can still maintain professional boundaries and credibility. Play does not make you a super silly or unprofessional person who lacks substance. Play can help balance out the seriousness of learning and the discipline so we aren't consumed by it leading to burnout. Play makes you human. Play helps you think more flexibly and creatively about HOW you are going to teach what you need to teach so the students can learn what they need to learn. Play helps you re-engage students and get them inspired to learn on a deeper level. Play gets students excited to come to class and re-ignites their natural and innate desire to learn and grow. Essentially, play changes students' relationship and association to learning. And that change in relationship to learning empowers you as an instructor.

Play positively changes your relationship with the students. Unless done extremely poorly, play does not blur the necessary boundaries of student and professor and if it does, that's more about the professor's own stuff than it is about use of playful pedagogy. Play does not necessarily make you “buddy-buddy” with students and lacking professionalism—unless you interpret playful pedagogy incorrectly (see chapter seven of this book by Alison James for more on this). And the whole “*I need to model what it means to be a professional*” bit, we are curious what those critics even imagine they are trying to model for their students. We know this varies by discipline but we're willing to bet that you'd want to model some of the following characteristics as a “professional:” flexibility, creativity, boundaried yet inviting, relational, understanding, a sense of humor, enthusiasm, passion, etc. Sure, you might argue you could display some of this without a belief in playful pedagogy, but we want to make the point that just because you are a playful professor, doesn't mean you aren't modeling appropriate professionalism. Hopefully, the examples in this book will help those skeptics understand how play supplements, rather than destroys, rigor and professionalism. We believe that the use of play makes you more effective in your work, not less.

In Lisa's profession (mental health counseling), it is well known that the quality of the therapeutic relationship is the most influential factor to effective treatment. That is, if a counselor can create a strong therapeutic alliance with clients, then clients will feel more comfortable opening up, they are going to feel accepted and valued for who they are and they will be more likely to be inspired to take action to make changes in their life. When the relationship is strong, the counselor can provide difficult

feedback like a mirror reflecting parts of the client that are unknown to them and difficult to accept. If the therapeutic alliance is weak, those benefits and positive outcomes won't happen or will be slow to happen. So, couldn't the same be true for the teacher-student relationship in the learning process? If we had stronger alliances with our students, wouldn't that make them feel more comfortable to engage in difficult conversations and learning? Wouldn't it make them feel more included and valued in the learning community thus increase their engagement? Wouldn't it help them trust you as their instructor? Wouldn't that inspire them to work harder? Wouldn't a strong teacher-student relationship communicate your belief in each student leading to greater confidence in themselves as learners and help them feel as though they really do belong in higher education? Think about all those students who have been marginalized from education in some way—what if we could send them a different message? And when it came time to give students difficult feedback or discuss potential remediation issues, don't you think having a pre-established strong relationship with that student would be a benefit during that conversation?

We acknowledge that everyone is different. Everyone has a different style, taste, or presentation of playfulness. Everyone has a different comfort level with being playful and flexible in a professional setting. We acknowledge that those of us with certain marginalized identities or those of us without tenure or professional power might feel as though we don't have as much freedom and are simply trying to get others to take us seriously in the first place. But we also want to make the point that we can't automatically throw the baby out with the bathwater the second we hear "playful pedagogy" or when we get confronted with the idea of being less rigid and a bit more playful as an academic. (No babies have been harmed in the making of this book). Even if everyone adopted a playful pedagogy, it wouldn't look the same for all of us. Some might use play all the time, in everything they do, in each class session. Others' demonstration of playful pedagogy might be more subtle and sporadic. That's okay. But what really grinds our gears is when people completely dismiss the idea of playful pedagogy without even learning what it really is. It's easy to scoff at an idea but if you really value students and learning and want to explore ways to increase student engagement and learning outcomes, you might give playful pedagogy a chance. We are not saying playful pedagogy is the only way to value students and enhance learning but it's pretty dang powerful. Oh, and it's a whole lot of fun! So, not only is a playful pedagogy about the students, it's also about creating your own signature pedagogy as a professor to have more fun in your career, to actually look forward to planning classes, and to evade burnout and indifference.

Last, playful pedagogy can be silly at times but it can also be serious. If you aren't down for the silly parts of play, then think of play as rebellion—a force that allows you to fight against the status quo that confine you. One of our deepest held beliefs about why play is neglected in higher education stems from the idea that the hierarchical, lecture-based, sage on the stage approach has become the unquestioned norm of academia—a nasty habit. We like to point out that academia kills creativity and that we are implicitly encouraged to fit a faculty mold that replicates common practices that have been passed down from generation to generation. It happened to us as faculty, without even noticing it until one day, we realize we have become something we weren't and we were teaching in ways that were boring and against our beliefs about teaching and learning. It becomes extremely difficult to think outside of the box to do something you have never been taught or never had modeled to you. So, adopting a full-on playful pedagogy might not be your jam but play as a mindset can help you approach your work with flexibility and creativity to challenge the long-standing status quo of academia and not simply repeating what's been done because "we've always done it this way." Give us a barf bag!

This is all to say: bringing play into adult learning is largely devalued and underutilized. On the surface, it might appear to be trivial or a waste of time, but we hope this book (and the above-mentioned publications on play) can describe how play (even play that seems irrelevant to the content) is essential and has a powerful impact on learning.

### **Seeking the Power of Play**

Despite the naysayers, the deadpans (James & Nerantzi, 2019), the “normies” (as our friend Sarah Iverson at Curious Sunshine says) and the social narratives that devalue play, we wholeheartedly believe that play should not be separated from learning. In fact, we believe that play is the key that unlocks a hidden power in learning.

What is that hidden power of play, you say?

Let’s start with the overall benefits of play for humans. Stuart Brown’s name comes up a lot in this work. He is one of our favorite play researchers because of the unique route that his career took to become invested in play. Before his focus on play, Brown was a psychiatrist and a part of an expert team assigned to investigate potential causes for a mass murder in 1996. Brown was in charge of compiling behavioral data to determine which factors may have been key causes to the mass murder. Perhaps one surprising key factor was the shooter’s play deprivation as a child (Brown, 2009). Brown continued studying other violent people and found similar stories of early life play deprivation. Why dwell on these grim findings? Because not only does this make a solid case for the profound need for play in everyone’s life, but it also demonstrates the power of play and the importance and seriousness of Brown’s play research.

When you want to know the benefits of play across the lifespan, Stuart Brown’s extensive play research clearly demonstrates the immense power and value. So, in summary, here’s a list of benefits of play (albeit not finite) that Brown has found:

- Enlivens and energizes us
- Renews our sense of optimism
- Opens us to new possibilities
- Fosters learning, creativity, innovation
- Sustains and strengthens relationships
- Cures boredom and living in the mundane
- Increases productivity
- Increases one’s mood
- Diminishes self-consciousness
- Allows for fresh insights and perspectives
- Increases acquisition of new knowledge
- Makes new cognitive connections
- Teaches emotional intelligence
- Encourages flexibility, adaptability, and resilience

You can probably see how the benefits of play for humans applies to the learning environment but let’s take a closer look.

When you examine the literature specifically on play and learning, you find that play provides opportunities for joy and increased motivation to sustain engagement in the learning process (James & Nerantzi, 2019; Whitton & Moseley, 2014). Play is naturally active and hands-on which creates an environment that encourages risk taking and the normalization of failure—the type of experimentation that can lead to creativity and innovation (James & Nerantzi, 2019). Play allows for a reduction of self-consciousness which opens new opportunities to make mistakes (Brown, 2009) leading to meaning making (Sicart, 2014). Oftentimes in education, a gap exists between theory and practice but with play, that gap is minimized because play encourages *doing* rather than passive learning. Play creates different avenues and opportunities to build knowledge and leads to more personal and memorable learning experiences (Brown, 2009; Forbes, 2021; Sicart, 2014).

Several authors have suggested that playful learning ignites students' intrinsic motivation (Forbes, 2021; Gee, 2003; Whitton & Moseley, 2014) which increases interest and enjoyment in the learning process (Isen & Reeve, 2005). When students are more interested and engaged, they are more curious and intrigued with the material (Whitton & Moseley, 2014). To put it simply, play makes your students *want* to learn—that's more than half of the battle.

But, if that didn't quite convince you of play's superpower in learning, here's more. In addition to play being a direct route to enhanced learning (as discussed above), it also indirectly supports the students within the learning environment and creates a different kind of classroom culture. Play increases social bonding (Brown, 2009; Sicart, 2014) which can lead to a sense of connection, community, and trust among students and the instructor (Forbes, 2021). Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory (1980) described that the most effective learning takes place in an active process within a social context. Play is what creates that sense of community and connection which arguably creates a ripe environment for valuable and deep learning. When humans are socially connected, they feel more invested and their cognitive ability is improved (Hutcherson et al., 2014).

What's more, allowing for a playful approach can be one way to support students' well-being. Perhaps because education is viewed as a serious endeavor (James & Nerantzi, 2019), positive emotions within students aren't normally pursued or valued. However, students' emotions can have a big impact on their success because positive emotions and lower levels of stress improves focus and establishes better brain functioning (Tang, 2017). Authors who have published on play in the learning context, report that play brings joy, relaxation, liberation, focus, and creates a safe and engaged learning environment (Forbes, 2021; James & Nerantzi, 2019). Play can serve as a tool to balance out the seriousness of learning so students can enter the learning space with less anxiety and more focus (Brown, 2009; Forbes, 2019). Many faculty preach about the importance of self-care but what if we actually modeled it and provided opportunities for it in our classrooms? If academics were really "student-centered" like so many universities pride themselves on, they'd value and make more space for play. There, we said it.

In one of Lisa's research studies (Forbes, 2021) she examined students' experiences of play as a foundational component to the learning process, much of what she found validates the above benefits of play in learning. However, the data from her study illuminated a systematic process that happens when play is present in learning (See Figure 1). The student participants described that when play is included in the learning experience (even play that is not directly related to the course content), it creates joy, laughter, excitement, and novelty. This seemed to simultaneously generate both a sense of relational safety and a reduction of barriers to learning. First, **relational safety** seemed to be ignited

because play connects people, gets people laughing, relating, and finding a sense of camaraderie and belonging. Students described feeling more connected to their peers and professor than in other courses that didn't include play. Students indicated that that comfort in connection with others allowed for trust, community, and a warm humanistic classroom environment. Second, both the presence of play and the activation of relational safety seemed to reduce students' barriers to learning. Students reported that once they played, they had lower levels of stress, anxiety, and self-consciousness which helped them feel more centered and primed to learn. Once they felt a sense of community and reduced stress and anxiety, students reported feeling more motivated to learn. Students indicated they were excited to learn and the material became more intriguing—they were drawn to the challenge of learning and simply enjoyed class time. With a greater motivation to learn and comfort in the classroom environment, students reported being more willing to be vulnerably engaged. Students described being more willing to work hard, to take risks, and to be open to constructive feedback without feeling as anxious or defensive. Because of this process, students believed that the learning was valuable because it was memorable, personable, and meaningful.

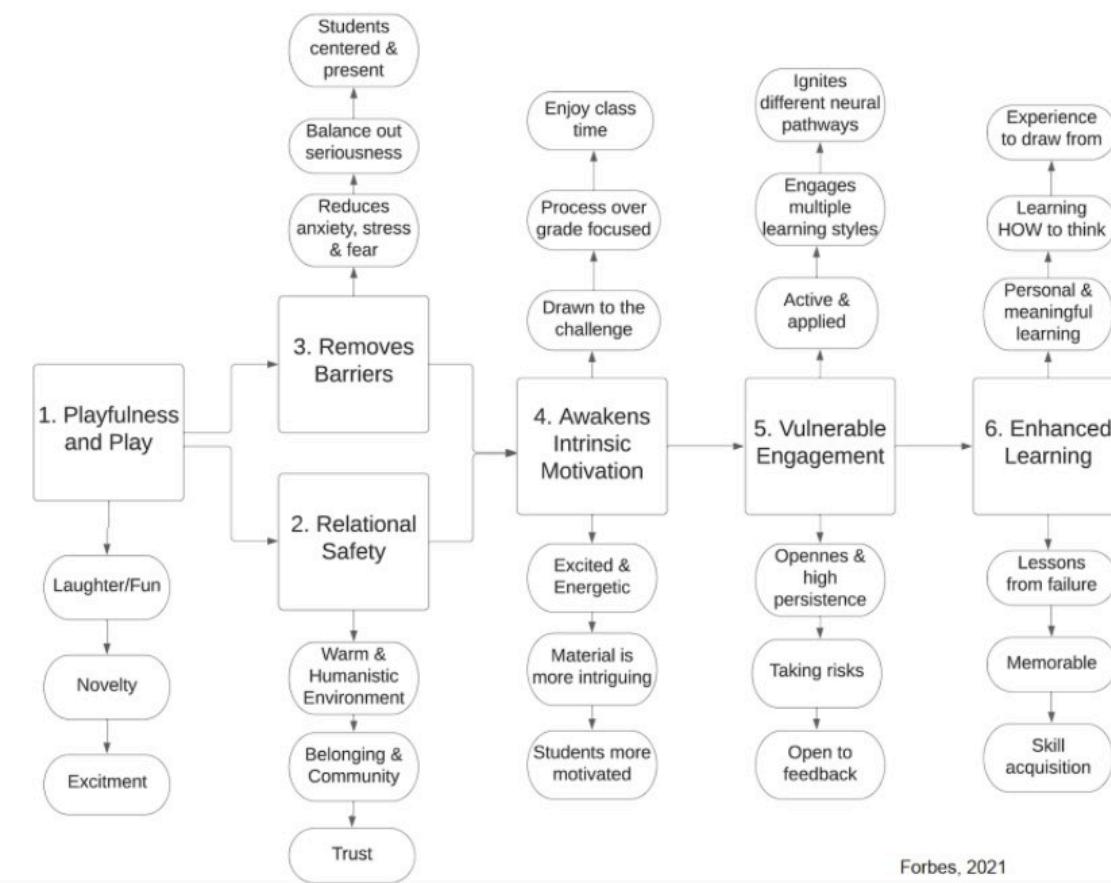


Figure 1: The Process of Play

But, let's leave it to a Stuart Brown quote to aptly sum up the power of play in education:

"Play isn't the enemy of learning, it's learning's partner. Play is like fertilizer for brain growth. It's crazy not to use it" (Brown, 2009, p 101).

So, if it's crazy not to use play in learning, why is it so often separated from education?

### Play in Higher Education

Students commonly talk about earning a higher education degree as a chore—something to endure. Unfortunately, this sentiment is totally the opposite of the human internal drive to learn and to be curious. In his book *Free to Learn*, Peter Gray (2013) wrote: "The biggest, most enduring lesson of school is that learning is work, to be avoided when possible" (pg. 15). We share this concern about what learning has become associated with and we wonder, how have we (i.e., higher education professionals) turned something that is so innately desirable (i.e., to learn/discover) into a chore and something to slog through?

Another powerful quote from Gray (2015) is straight to the point:

"Everyone who has ever been to school knows that school is prison, but almost nobody beyond school age says it is... We all tiptoe around the truth because admitting it would make us seem cruel and would point a finger at well-intentioned people doing what they believe to be essential... A prison, according to the common, general definition, is any place of involuntary confinement and restriction of liberty. In school, as in adult prisons, the inmates are told exactly what they must do and are punished for failure to comply" (pg. 67).

Um, mic drop!

We completely agree with this. Okay, look at this picture:



Photo by NeONBRAND on Unsplash

Seems like a pretty typical image of a higher education class, right? We look at this picture of students listening to a lecture and we think: *This is education? Why do we continue to drone on and on at students like this? Where's the joy? Where's the fun? Where's the excitement?* While Peter Gray's jail quote above was referring to childhood education, we believe it holds true for adult education as well. Adults technically freely choose to attend tertiary education but once there to earn a degree, they're told exactly what to learn, how to learn it, how to demonstrate how well they learned it, etc. And if they fail to comply, they are punished. Sit, listen, take notes, memorize facts... Don't even get us started on grading. We are concerned that earning a degree has become stale and unnecessarily serious, stripping the joy from learning which leads to disengagement and disinterest—learning's enemies. A few of them anyway.

Back to the photo above, we're sure you could find other pictures of adult learning with more engaged students, but this image pretty accurately depicts a typical classroom in higher education, doesn't it? Even for faculty who are more flexible, creative, and innovative in their approaches, we'd argue they still get caught up in the status quo from time to time. We know we do. That's the trap of status quo—they're extremely hard to escape because the whole system is built around it, all the participants continually feed into it, and eventually it becomes almost unnoticeable and unrecognizable. It becomes the norm, the standard. Like a fish swimming in water, it becomes hard to know anything *but* the water.

We're starting to wonder if students and/or faculty even believe learning *could* be something different. We are personally trying to escape the all-encompassing “water” of academia and lecture-based learning to explore how else education could be. The quote below is from a graduate-level student regarding play in learning and we think it is a good representation about how students might feel about higher education and the promise of play:

“Everything about grad school feels non-fun-oriented: extensive program handbooks, performative quizzes, unnecessarily complex assignments, formidable grading and attendance policies, all of which seem designed to discipline rather than educate; loads and loads of reading which is never discussed or applied in class, and so it feels removed from usefulness. Play provided an uplifting break from the seriousness of all this. My experience has shown that the value of play in learning is not to be underestimated. The incorporation of a little levity and a laugh has been life-affirming in general, but has also felt useful in creating a spaciousness for learning that is palpable, and palpably absent in other classes where the focus is more on performative quizzes and lengthy PowerPoint presentations. I feel better primed to learn when it’s not quite such a rigid class environment. The spaciousness has been invaluable” (data from Forbes, 2021).

### **So, what have we done to education?**

We want to reiterate, again, that we know there are some exceptional faculty doing amazing things in their teaching. But even with some faculty daring to be innovative, playful, or flexible, we'd argue that the overall script of academia aligns with the student's experience as highlighted in the above quote. This student's words pretty well reflect the core of our educational system and we think that's a major problem.

If we take a step back from our everyday lived reality of teaching and truly examine the efficacy of our most common teaching approaches, might we consider education differently? Let's honestly answer these:

- How well do students *really* retain information that is lectured to them?
- Is it really that effective to present PowerPoint after PowerPoint of content-heavy slides simply reiterating exactly what students read in their textbooks?
- Does lecturing about the textbook reading teach students they can skip the reading all together?
- Might students learn more if they had more fun and enjoyed class time?
- Might students learn more if each class session was novel, dynamic, or creative?
- Might students learn more if they designed their own project that reflected their personal strengths and individual interests in order to demonstrate *their* learning instead of the obligatory and prescribed research paper?
- Is it necessary or helpful to take a rigid and strict approach with students?
- Can education be fun, joyful, energizing, novel, and still “rigorous”?
- Can we change our approaches to earn our students’ attention and motivation instead of expecting it or demanding it simply because they are paying to earn their degrees?
- Is being feared (or often disguised as “respected) by students the best route to get them to be willing to take risks and make mistakes?

We could go on and on but you get the point.

In many ways, we need to get over our egos to change higher education. Personally, we dream of a playful culture within academia where the process of learning and earning a degree isn’t regarded as a burden and a chore. We dream of education where play is valued, invited, and celebrated. Where we give permission for play to exist not only in our classrooms but on the campus buildings, sidewalks, and structures—and within meetings and events. We dream of a world where going to work and getting an education isn’t something that levels you. If we just let play co-exist, we will find more joy, connection, and well-being. So, what’s the hold up?! We understand that a lot of people aren’t ready to hear this perspective. At the same time, it baffles us that highly educated, critical thinkers can be so closed off to new ideas and struggle to accept dualities like the ability for play and professionalism to co-exist or that you can be playful and still be “rigorous” and serious in your discipline.

It’s got to be because of the word “play,” right? Because many perceive that word as something silly and childish? Then it’s all a big misunderstanding? Or is it resistance of some kind? Maybe the naysayers would listen to our “hard science” colleagues?

### This is Your Brain on Play

If you’re not yet fired up about the issues in academia needing reform and you need more concrete evidence for why play is the answer (okay, maybe one answer), we can look to brain science. We must remind ourselves that students are more than bodies in a classroom. We know, profound... They have brains, organs, and a nervous system and these factors, in our opinion, are often absent within discussions of teaching and learning. You probably already know this but it’s worth a review—the brain is the organ that drives all learning through a process called neuroplasticity (i.e., the brain’s ability to change, reorganize, and remap itself). Neuroplasticity should be a vital consideration for academics (Jansen & McConchie, 2020) because we can either create an environment that optimizes students’ brain states for learning or we can create an environment that negatively impacts learning and minimizes neuroplasticity. See, play is not just about silly fun.

To enhance learning, there are various neurotransmitters responsible for strengthening that process. But first, cortisol—the stress hormone, is counterproductive in the neuroplasticity process so this tells us that stressful, threatening, or boring environments may actually make learning more challenging (Jansen & McConchie, 2020). That right there is a reason to include more play and social connection in the classroom environment.

But let's get back to the neurotransmitters that support learning. One of them is dopamine which is produced from joy, pleasure, and the reward response. Higher levels of this hormone increase motivation, attention, and memory (Wang & Aamodt, 2012)—all important precursors to learning wouldn't you say? Norepinephrine increases students' mood and enhances their ability to concentrate by generating a sense of urgency and excitement (Jansen & McConchie, 2020). Acetylcholine is vital for learning as it is involved in memory and is released when we experience surprise and novelty (Rangel-Gomez & Meeter, 2016). Oxytocin is released during social interaction and closeness with others. This neurotransmitter is important for learning as it increases students' sense of safety in the environment and trust in others which both aid in the learning process (Ryan & Shin, 2011). Oxytocin also lowers the threat that the brain perceives in the environment. If the brain perceives threat, the prefrontal cortex (i.e., responsible for logic, reason, decision-making) shuts off—and, at that point, what good will teaching do?

If we can understand that these neurotransmitters are responsible for and strengthen neuroplasticity, and if we know what types of experiences can release more of those neurotransmitters in students' brains, we can better design our learning space and mode of education to support that process. Below are common conditions and emotions conducive to brain-based learning and that may increase the presence of those positive neurotransmitters (this list is a summary from Jansen & McConchie, 2020; Tang, 2017, Taylor & Marineau, 2016; Wang & Aamodt, 2012).

- Novelty
- Social connection
- Relevance
- Fun
- Play
- Engagement
- Humor
- Safety
- Variety
- Enjoyable activities
- Surprise/Joy
- Alertness
- Motivation
- Curiosity
- Creativity
- Relaxation
- Excitement
- Effort
- Trust

But, if you think about a traditional classroom in higher education, does it typically generate novelty, social connection, fun, engagement, humor, enjoyable activities, surprise, creativity, curiosity, etc.? We don't think so. But, what if our pedagogy intentionally supported the presence of these conditions and emotions in the classroom? What if we could make choices and changes that could increase the presence of joy, attention, and learning for our students? We should consider how we have more influence over students' brain states and learning stance than we think. But we might need to take more accountability for how we influence the humans sitting in our classrooms. Jansen and McConchie (2020) believed educators often look at teaching as, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink. Essentially, we lecture about all of the necessary facts and content that students need to know, we assign important readings, and craft "rigorous" assignments but we can't *make* students learn. It's up to them to care and put in the effort (enter furrowed brow and crossed arms). This is true to some degree but when students struggle to learn, we often blame them for not being engaged or motivated enough or something. Or maybe a less negative view, faculty often expect or hope that students will miraculously become curious, open, and excited without making many adjustments to the ways we teach.

Maybe it's time academia had a learning overhaul. We know there are amazing instructors who are already doing this but we believe it's rare, devalued, or considered radical (or as our colleague Margaret Lamar puts it—"punk"). Otherwise, why would students so often consider learning to be a chore or burden? But, what if we changed our perspective from "you can't make a horse drink" to "how can we inspire the horse to be thirsty" (Jansen & McConchie, 2020)? That is, how can we inspire students to be more engaged and intrigued in the material by establishing an environment that is more conducive to learning? Not-so-spoiler alert: playful pedagogy! What we have discovered in our teaching, research, and ongoing conversations with faculty from all over the world through our Professors at Play platform, is that play is the special ingredient that unlocks this flood of pro-learning brain chemistry. But, even with the evidence supporting play's ability to enhance learning and change the disposition of the learner, why isn't play a more common and openly accepted approach in higher education?

We can blame the status quo and the overall lack of innovation in higher education. Certainly, we are all due for some change. But, we believe there are several things holding us play back from being more playful. We will discuss those further in depth later in the book. We believe overcoming the barriers requires is a tiered buy-in process.

1. **Truly understand what play is and the power it holds** – At first, it's nothing more than a misunderstanding of what play is—that it's not just for kids—and clearing up some misconceptions of play and how it actually can have value and enhance the learning process even for adults. We have found that it's not that difficult to convince people of play's immense power in the learning process and to inspire a sense of excitement and urgency to incorporate it into their classrooms. But at that point, it's as though someone is excited for a road trip but lacking a map.
2. **Learn examples of play in learning** – The next tier of the buy-in process is once someone is convinced of play's power and place in academia, the question then becomes: *How do I do this? What does play even look like in adult learning? How can I utilize play in my content area?* Well, you're in luck because that's kind of the entire point of this book! We wanted to gather several examples of play from across many different disciplines to give you a sense of how it can look. So, it's as though someone is excited for a road trip, has a map in hand, but forgot to

take care of several personal issues at home preventing their departure.

3. **Confront and overcome barriers** – Yet, another tier of the buy-in process is overcoming various personal barriers. Once you believe in play and also know what it can look like and how to design it into your classes, there's often still some fear or concerns about the implications of actually doing it. We will say more about this in Chapter Six: Getting Past the Wall. At this point, Lisa likes to slide in a nod for personal therapy. 😊

But, for play to gain momentum and become a more commonly accepted and utilized approach in higher education, there needs to be systemic support and changes, not just individual faculty using playful pedagogy.

### Enter the Playvolution!

Overwhelmingly, when we hear people talk about play in learning the words “student engagement” soon follow. There’s nothing wrong with this—it’s true that one of play’s superpowers is getting students engaged in the content and the learning process. But our issue arises when we reduce play to a tool that saves us from having bored and disengaged students. Play can do more than engage people. If academia wants to fulfill its missions and aspirational promises we make to ourselves and to our students, it behooves us to see play as bigger than an engagement tool. We see play as a broader means to have a larger impact on organizations, institutions, societies, humanity, and problematic status quo. The bottom line is, play changes people. It prepares students to engage with the world in a totally different way. Play has the ability to train a more playful mindset which fosters new and innovative ideas through creativity and imagination (Brown, 2009). Further, those with playful mindsets are more intrinsically motivated, dynamic, and unconstrained by prescribed rules (Van Vleet & Feeney, 2015). Isn’t that what the current world needs from our graduates? And wanna know something exciting? Fostering this ability for change starts in our classrooms. Call us crazy but one classroom at a time, changing the course of humanity—that’s the Playvolution!

Our idea of the Playvolution will seek to inspire a powerful and playful movement that attempts to reimagine higher education by breaking the boundaries and bending the rules. When we play, we influence others. When others experience play, they engage, connect, and learn. And, underneath our thick skulls, something else amazing starts to happen—the very structure of our brains begin to change. Based on our repeated experiences, our brain re-shapes itself to carve out new neural pathways—so if we play enough, engage others in play enough, and play becomes a more common aspect of our culture—peoples’ brains will be re-structured to have a more playful disposition and become less prone to stress (Brown, 2009). Wanna know what happens when our brains are structured to be more playful? We have a greater sense of optimism, self-esteem (Brown, 2009), confidence (Tang, 2017), resilience (Brown, 2009), adaptability (Guitard et al., 2005; Sutton-Smith, 1970), and flexibility (Brown, 2009). Remember, those with a playful disposition have a tendency to think in unconventional ways leading to creatively solving problems (Lauer & Lauer, 2002; Tang, 2017). Meaningful and long-lasting change comes from foundational changes. Ever wonder why some of our biggest problems in academia seem resistant to change? It’s because many times, our solutions aim for (perhaps unknowingly) symptom reduction instead of systemic change. In that sense, we spend our careers pulling pesky weeds in our garden, only to have them repeatedly grow back simply because we haven’t addressed the real,

foundational problem—the weed’s root. We wholeheartedly believe that the Playvolution could inspire actual innovative ideas to systemically address our most wicked problems.

To summarize, we see play at the center of the Playvolution, as a medium that puts us and our graduates in a position to solve the world’s most concerning social problems. Just writing that makes us feel all tingly inside.

### Play is at the center of the Playvolution:

1. **Play as a way of being:** Being playful and not taking ourselves so seriously.
2. **Play as an activity:** Harnessing the power of play in learning.
3. **Play as a philosophy:** *Playing with* the status quo to break then remake learning and academia to be more flexible, inclusive, and expansive.

The Playvolution encourages faculty to examine the status quo of higher education and the lecture-based modes of learning to widen the possibilities of education. The Playvolution inspires faculty to play with their ways of teaching and dare to be different and playful. The Playvolution creates a counterculture to higher education that encourages vulnerability, risking failure, and a growth mindset in action. The Playvolution re-positions faculty within the web of academia to come out from behind the lecture podium and polished professionalism in order to co-construct learning and meaning alongside their students. It seeks to lessen the focus of the all-knowing expert and minimizes the intimidating and distancing hierarchy between faculty and students. The Playvolution reduces the existence of passive learning, note-taking, and rote memorization and invokes involvement, engagement, and excitement in learning. The Playvolution allows students to be freer in their education and be able to bring their whole and true selves into the classroom. While the expectations of learning within tertiary education will remain high, there will be more spaciousness to explore, wonder, critique, and risk failure. In the Playvolution, the outcomes are not reached by fear-based and anxiety-producing rubrics/grades but instead they are generated from risk-taking, trial by error, application of knowledge, iteration and feedback to foster growth and deep learning. The Playvolution not only inspires faculty to become more playful and energized by their work, it also ignites students’ natural curiosity and joy of learning. The Playvolution ensures that students and faculty will no longer be pitted against each other over grades or distanced as a result of unnecessary hierarchies. Classrooms will foster belonging and encourage meaning making through relational safety. Entire campuses will promote and invite play through adult playground equipment, playful colors, smells, and games painted on sidewalks and buildings. Just imagine it all...

Remember that play in learning is bigger than making teaching and learning a more joyful experience. It’s bigger than a tool to engage students. Play prepares students to be adaptive, creative, and innovative in their careers. We don’t need more mindless, straight-A students who can ace exams. We need students who have the ability to break out of outdated systems and mindsets to help solve our world’s most troubling issues.

Some of this might sound similar to other movements of critical pedagogies—we are not the only ones with this dream for a different future in academia. We are simply proposing that play be the answer—the guide that gets us there.

## What is “Professors at Play” and What is the PlayBook?

Professors at Play (P@P) is a global multi-disciplinary faculty group created by us—Lisa Forbes and David Thomas in June of 2020 (call it boredom from COVID-19 stay-at-home orders or simply a coincidence in timing). P@P is a community of amazingly creative academics, teachers, and higher education professionals from across the international higher education landscape who share an interest in playful pedagogy. The group aims to trade ideas, provide encouragement and community all while increasing the legitimacy of play in higher education. With almost 800 Professors at Play members (as of fall 2022), this grand number of members suggests a growing interest in playful approaches within adult learning. If this sounds exciting to you and you are not yet a member, go to [www.professorsatplay.org](http://www.professorsatplay.org) to register for our listserv or follow our social media accounts! All are welcomed.

But anyway, in the short time since we have created P@P, we have been repeatedly asked for ideas, examples, and demonstrations about *how* to be more playful in the classroom. We do not claim to be the end-all-be-all experts on playful pedagogy, so when people seek out our “expertise,” we can share some of the things *we* have tried in our teaching but we want to acknowledge that our ideas are just one approach and rather limited in the grand scheme of playful pedagogy. Therefore, we wanted to provide these play-seeking instructors something more meaningful and robust to satisfy their interests and exploration of what play can look like in teaching. As a result, we created a P@P community project to create a collection of techniques and examples that demonstrate how a wide array of instructors have made learning more playful and fun. The resulting compendium, *The Professors at Play PlayBook* which showcases a wide range of playful approaches to tertiary learning and is comprised of submissions by playful educators from the P@P community. Each technique or approach comes from experience, as all the ideas in this book have been tested out in multi-disciplinary classrooms all over the world. We hope the PlayBook will serve as a valuable resource for any faculty who wants to be more playful but doesn’t yet know how. This book can also encourage additional exploration or an expansion of creativity for those already immersed in playful teaching. Ultimately, we hope that this publication will have a small part in further legitimizing play in higher education and generate some tidal wave momentum.

### PlayBook Method

To build the PlayBook, we reached out to the Professors at Play listserv in the Fall of 2021 with a simple request: “*Share your tested ideas for making your classroom more playful.*” To structure the responses, we provided a proposal template and solicited submissions within four categories based on the Pyramid of Play (see Figure 2) which is how David and Lisa conceptualize the expression and inclusion of play in learning.

This organization, based on the Pyramid of Play, was meant to provide some structure and cognitive framing of the variance of play, but we also recognize that play is not just one thing and it can present itself in many ways. Each of the levels of the Pyramid of Play will be discussed in more depth within each chapter but a general summary is this:

- **Playful Professor** – Bringing play into higher education starts with you. You could have amazing playful techniques or activities but if you as a faculty member are rigid, dry, and overly serious, the techniques won’t land. It starts with not taking yourself so seriously. The Playful Professor section talks about the base and the most necessary core of a playful

pedagogy—being playful.

- **Connection-Formers** – The next level of the pyramid, connection formers, is a compilation of “icebreakers” that can be used at the start of a term, at the start of any class session, that are just for fun and laughs or one that connects to the content. But, many times, these activities are not even related to the content of the course, and that’s okay because the purpose of those types of play are to form connections, build trust, and reduce stress and anxiety so that students can enter the learning in a more centered and joyous space. Recall Figure 1.
- **Play to Teach Content** – The second to the top level on the pyramid is Play to Teach Content. True to its name, these playful techniques are examples of how play can be used as a vehicle to teach the content of your course. The specific examples in this book might not fit within your exact discipline and that’s okay! Maybe the examples can be slightly adapted to fit for your course or maybe they will spark some other ideas or creativity. But, these examples demonstrate that play and learning can go together and can be quite meaningful.
- **Whole-Course Design** – The top level on the pyramid of play is Whole-Course Design. This level is a bit more complex, challenging, and potentially more time consuming to implement into your courses as they are an all-encompassing and thematic approach which require more sophisticated planning. But hopefully the examples presented show you how an idea of play can be the bones of the entire course. Could an entire law course be designed around the book Jurassic Park where students work in legal teams to create laws and regulations for extinct dinosaur parks? Yep, it’s possible! This course actually exists.

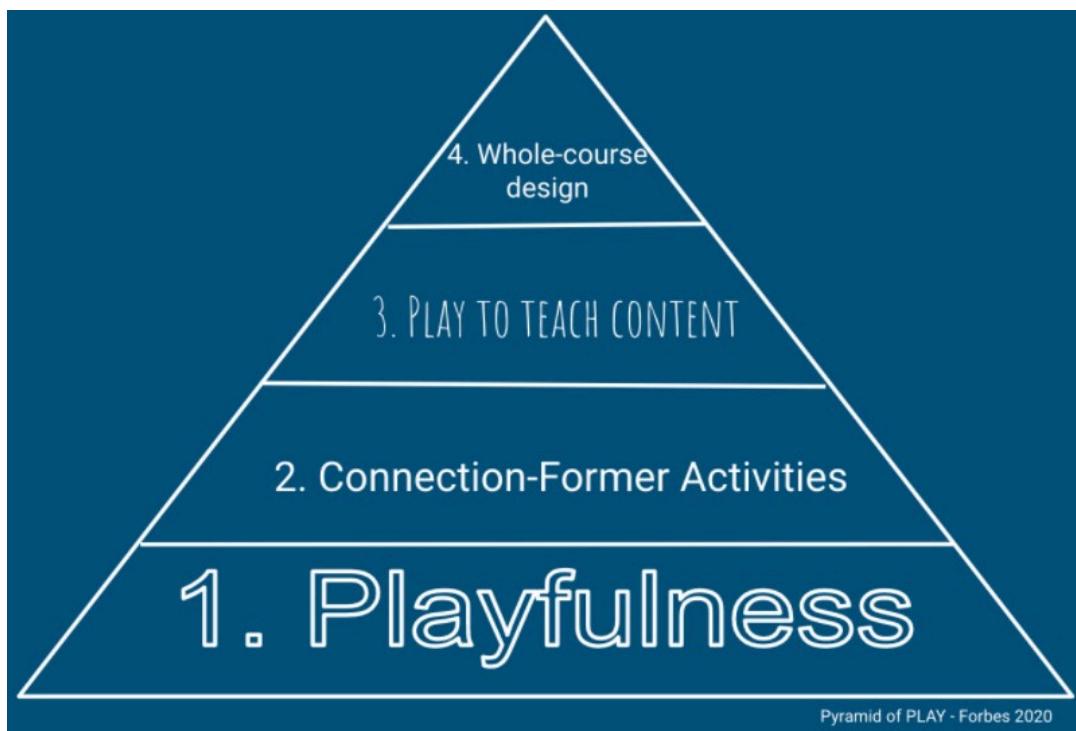


Figure 2: The Pyramid of Play

We compiled and reviewed submissions through March of 2022. In some cases, we asked for major revisions of the proposed techniques to ensure fit with our format. In most cases, we accepted the submissions with an eye toward an ethnography of play in higher education. Some of the techniques are clear and obvious examples of play in higher education. Other techniques may, to some readers, seem barely playful at all. In all cases, an instructor proposed a technique they viewed as playful and as something they had tried in their classes with positive responses from students. We had an extremely high acceptance rate for proposals because this book is less about what *we* think are good examples of playful pedagogy in higher education and more about capturing a broad understanding of playful pedagogy at this point in time.

Throughout the text, we have provided commentary to help contextualize the wide range of techniques and disciplines. Taken as a whole, we believe that this collection represents the depth and breadth of play across the higher education landscape—an ethnography of how playful pedagogy is understood and what it looks like in 2022. We find it inspiring to see the playfulness that is happening out there and it energizes us to continue encouraging play as a vital and worthwhile endeavor in academia.

### Permission to Play

Okay, okay, we've been talking for a really long time now. On to the techniques soon, but one last thing—we hope that the following playful ideas provide you a sense of what play can look like within learning in higher education but mostly, we hope to provide you the permission to play. However, this is not a recipe book with ready-to-make meals, *per se*. Instead, this is a messy anthology of ideas and examples of play from real-life professors at play. Maybe there's an idea here that you can borrow and use in your class this week. Maybe some other play examples inspire you to craft your own activity. But we hope this book is a kit of parts that inspires you, challenges you to expand, and gives you permission to tinker and try. We hope this book urges you to explore the playful path and join the Playvolution!

So, in the spirit of play—play with these ideas. Play with teaching norms. Play with your own limits. Embrace the ambiguity and openness of play. Inspire your students to play with meaning and understanding. Reach out and connect with the people around you as playmates and share the connection. Most of all, bring joy back to teaching, inspire wonder in learning and don't forget to just have a little fun!

Lisa Forbes & David Thomas

Denver, CO November 2022

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# Focus On: A Playful Perspective

*Before diving into Chapter Two: The Playful Professor, we wanted to share a playful short essay by one of our P@P members, Sharon Peck. Sharon provides a perspective that we think people need to hear. She makes many points worth noticing, including the fact that play is all around us – that we play more than we or our peers think and that play makes a difference.*

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Playfulness, play, and games have been encouraged in many fields including business, marketing, engineering, and counseling. So why has stodgy old academia resisted the lure, the power, the incredible outcomes of play? There are many reasons why, but the real secret is that many of us have been enacting playfulness for a very long time, but we don't put it on our CVs or report at the end of the semester because for many of us, it is a way of being. For many of us, playfulness is a part of us in the same way that teaching is part and parcel of who we are.

You may even be employing aspects of playfulness without knowing it. Playfulness is regarded as “a state of mind, an internal predisposition that is composed of creativity, curiosity, a sense of humor, pleasure, and spontaneity” (Guitard et al., 2005, p. 19). Playfulness also refers to an attitude towards learning – a way of learning through play and games.

Playfulness research shows that it has positive effects on achievement at various school levels as well as on learning in adult working life (Dannells & Pyle, 2018; Sawyer, 2006a). There are many reasons why we should take a risk and become more playful. Playful teaching makes learning more memorable and has the potential to increase connection, trust, ownership, willingness to risk, and a drive to put the work in. It helps students build stamina and helps them to engage in classwork to learn for the sake of learning...not just for a grade.

Playfulness asks teachers to be open and to see the opportunity for play. Some argue that it doesn't matter which method or program a teacher uses, the effectiveness of the instruction comes down to the individual teacher (Allington, 2002). Using a playful approach does require teachers to actively create a space conducive for learning, to model, to engage and share ideas, and to respond in a playful manner. This playful shift in teacher stance can transform the whole classroom experience. It welcomes engagement that isn't forced or inauthentic. And, it is much more rewarding for both students and the teacher.

Still too vague? Playfulness centers around creating connections with students that are built through flexibility, humor, discovery, and experimentation. Sometimes it's taking the time to share that pun or "dad joke" at the beginning of class. Sometimes it's engaging your students in role-play so they can embody the abstract concepts you are intending to convey. Other times it's making the classroom a place of joy through your responses to students and your connections with students.

And, if you start chatting with your colleagues across the campus, you may find out that they are enacting many aspects of playfulness. We have a chemistry professor who gets his students up and moving to demonstrate the different attributes of atoms. Another frequently enacts four square activities – inviting students into a corner based on their understandings, and then corner groups present their view to the whole class. Another professor stops periodically to have students strike a pose depicting various vocabulary terms. Others use contests, like having students come up to the board in pairs. It allows for a powerful process and valuing the human connection with your students. And we know that students will be more active in class and apply themselves at a higher level when they know their teacher believes in them (Hammond, 2015). And we must remind ourselves that just because something is fun, doesn't mean it's not academic.

How do you get started? You can start by building playfulness into your syllabus. Or your online platform or MOOC, it can be fun to play with your content vocabulary to creatively label folders and modules. One theater professor labeled folders as: The Journey Begins: The Path Ahead, Meet Your Guide (rather than meet your professor), Main Quest, Side Quests, and Legend. A literature professor uses Prologue and Chapter One, rather than Week One. Even little movements lead your students to see you as playful.

I strive to find playful ways to engage students to help them develop proficiency in required areas of their future jobs. We role-play the parent teacher conference so they can feel the discomfort of the parent who is often minimized in the conversation. We role-play how to defend your curricular choices. And we create TikToks, podcasts, and Insta posts, (all related to the content) which my students may want to bring into their own classrooms. Maybe it is in the way that when you can see that the whole class is drifting off you insist on everyone getting up for a game of pantomime freeze tag, where students must strike the pose of a favorite character, or a pose that represents a characteristic you are studying.

Maybe it is the classroom rituals that you enact – I tend to use read alouds and engaging students in actual gameplay to model the ways they can employ games in the future teaching. Each class starts with a game and an active connection-builder follows the lecture. When we share parts of ourselves with our students, they have something to connect with. When my students learned that I am a professional clown and balloon twister – they insisted that I teach them to make a balloon animal. That led to each student sharing a special skill they held. We learned many hidden skills and that sparked into knowing ourselves better and how we learn and teach.

In some of my courses, students arrive to find board games at their table. They spend the first minutes of class time playing games. Why? It isn't a waste of time, in fact, after we play, we have a quick 'so what' discussion. What did we notice during game play? Students start to consider ways to use the game within their teaching or to apply it to their curriculum. I do this because I want teachers to understand the various mechanics and themes in game design. And when I don't have enough time for board game play, I will give each student an object that they need to work into their tutoring. It could be dice, a

fuzzy sock, an egg carton. Students love being asked to be creative, and it has led to some wonderful applications that others were excited to use.

The sad part of this story is that I always feel that my “performer role” wasn’t valued by my college. It could have been that I assumed that value. But, I’m over it now and have so much more fun when I share my playful side with my students. I encourage you to pick one playful thing that you can do in class tomorrow. See how it makes you feel. See how it improves your classroom dynamic. Then strive for two! Here are some more ideas to consider:

- Use improvisation games, games for drama.
- Try some riddles and mind benders.
- Utilize content related puzzles – make a word search with your vocabulary.
- Challenge your students to find games that connect with your content.
- Let them do a digital scavenger hunt to take photos of items that exemplify your lessons.
- Use a magic trick to motivate students! My sons and I studied magic during quarantine. And my students loved seeing us perform a trick each week. These little rituals build community. They can make learning memorable, pleasant, and long lasting. It is the little things.
- Use board games or aspects of them. Name Five can be easily customized to any content.
- Try problem solving together – let them create or solve a content-based escape room.
- Tell stories, bring in surprise guests through zoom. Let them interview the guests.
- Bring your ukulele! In one course I challenged students to learn a new skill during the semester. One chose the uke. By the end of the semester, she was proficient and uses it in her classroom still (ten years later).
- Allow students to create things, play with puppets, write postcards, try anything a little bit different that is novel, hands-on, and pushes them beyond comfort zones – just a bit. It will enhance the learning experience.
- Own your playfulness. Academia is changing and we can be a part of that. We can model how being playful and bringing yourself to the classroom supports learning no matter what your content area is.

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## Chapter Two: The Playful Professor

Before we get started, we must talk about something. It's something to do with you, me, us...all the instructors in the world, really.

Before we bring playful ideas and techniques into the classroom, we have to acknowledge that the efficacy of any technique starts with the instructor. If you don't embody playfulness, if you are rigid, or overly serious, the playful approaches will not be congruent or genuine and they will fall flat. Think about it like this: There's playfulness and then there is play. Without playfulness, play events lose their authenticity and credibility. Playfulness is important but is often seen as being at odds with professionalism. In this chapter, the playful professor examples will demonstrate how playfulness is embodied within a classroom and how it *can* coincide with "professionalism." We often find professionalism to be a dirty word but, whatever.

In Lisa's study on play in learning in higher education, the student participants described an important aspect of the experience of learning through play—that the faculty *embodied* playfulness. Students described that the playfulness within the individual faculty member was an important aspect of making play in learning so effective. The students reported that they've had other faculty in the past attempt to use play in learning but it was awkward or didn't land well because the play didn't feel genuine and congruent to the faculty's way of being.

"Embodying playfulness" is about your way of being and about having an unwavering belief in the power of play. We have to commit to the power of play to receive all the benefits it has to offer. Embodying playfulness is also about congruence, genuineness, and simply not taking ourselves so seriously. A big part of being playful is being human and authentic. If you struggle to know your own authenticity, consider exploring that with a counselor (there Lisa goes again). Embodying playfulness is not always the same thing as being wild, wacky, or unremittingly silly. For some, an outrageous character could show a real congruence. But the main point is, there is no one "right" way to be playful. Your style of play will most definitely reflect your taste, your level of comfort, or considerations regarding the unique identities you hold (e.g., gender, academic rank, race, age, etc.). We acknowledge that our unique socio-political identities sometimes impact how playful we've been told that we are "allowed" to be (communicated implicitly or explicitly). Not that those societal messages *should* dictate how you allow yourself to play, but we want to be honest that sometimes those messages can hinder our playfulness and our use of play—and we can be hindered differently based on who we are.

But our argument is fairly simple. You can't use playful techniques effectively if you try to apply them scientifically and rigidly. To play and to encourage play is to *become* playful. Who wants to play with someone who isn't really that playful themselves? Not us.

Being playful, genuine, and authentic is important because the power of play in learning is, in large part, created from establishing safe and trusting relationships within the classroom. From the safety of those relationships, students are freer and more confident to speak up, take risks, make mistakes, and freely engage in the learning. The stronger the relationships, the higher the buy-in and investment in the learning process which makes students more engaged and motivated to learn.

But here's the rub...culture and academia tend to communicate a narrative that says:

- To be a serious academic, you must be serious.
- Play is childish, trivial, and a waste of time.
- Being playful is at odds with being professional.

...and other untrue and misguided statements. We think the first step to anyone embodying playfulness is to deconstruct the societal narratives around play and playfulness so that you can re-story “professionalism” and invite more play into your way of being and your classrooms. If you believe any of the above untrue narratives about play, embodying playfulness will not happen and or it will be incongruent because it is at odds (or partly at odds) with the narrative you currently live by. So, in the process of becoming a playful professor, we encourage you to examine the dominant narratives about play in adulthood and academia that currently guide your professional practice. Might they be hindering your playfulness or your ability to cultivate relational safety in the classroom? If so, perhaps first changing the narrative is needed.

### A World of Play

Breaking societal narratives can be tough. We hear this all the time from professors who want to bring their natural playfulness to their classroom but don't feel like they know how or aren't sure what being playful can even look like in a professional setting where you are “supposed” to be the “all-knowing expert.” (Phew, these air quotes are getting exhausting). But it is important to remember that we don't only impact students because of what we know. We are even more impactful for students based on what we do and what we model. We can't expect students to be open, creative, flexible, vulnerable, take risks, be authentic and genuine if we ourselves aren't also willing to do those things. When we model those stances, students are more likely and more willing to do them too. That's what play does. Being playful can feel like a vulnerable risk at times because it's typically out of the norm of higher education. But remember, Brené Brown taught us that vulnerability in us feels like weakness but when we see vulnerability in others it's perceived as strength. So, get out of your own way and play! Play helps us be flexible, open, and authentic. Play allows us to demonstrate a creative approach to our work and if done enough, it exercises our creative and innovative brain. Our playfulness as an instructor creates an environment where a playful approach to learning is accepted and effective.

Because we have seen the power of modeling, we asked the Professors at Play community to tell us what they do to embody playfulness as instructors. Their responses are exciting, heartening, and useful. Below are several examples of how your peers are bringing their playful selves to the professional world of higher education. Maybe some of these examples will click with you so that you can find a little play (or a little more play) in your own approach to teaching.

To collect examples of what playful faculty can look like, we asked our Professors at Play community this prompt: “I embody playfulness with my students by \_\_\_\_\_. ” Here’s what they said:

### Examples of Professors Being Playful

Karl Koehle  
Lecturer  
Game Design & Development  
University of Wisconsin – Stout  
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I embody playfulness with my students by presenting assignments with the enthusiasm of a gameshow host.

Wendy Murphy, BA, AE  
Instructor  
Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology  
[wendy.murphy@mitt.ca](mailto:wendy.murphy@mitt.ca)

I embody playfulness by moving to Dance Grove and Shaking their Sillies Out.

Ileya Grosman, MEd, PhD Candidate  
Student Development & Support Leader | Community Builder | Educational Strategist  
Graduate School of Leadership and Change  
PhD candidate, Antioch University  
[ileyagrosman@gmail.com](mailto:ileyagrosman@gmail.com)

I embody playfulness by starting class with a body shake or wiggle. Sometimes we dance to music. Sometimes it's just a deep pause and collective breath. Whatever we can do to connect what's above the neck to what's below it!

Nicky Didicher, PhD  
University Lecturer  
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Simon Fraser University  
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I embody playfulness with my students by dressing up. This can be as simple as a hat or a tie that links to the course content or course activities. For example, wearing a top hat when we're discussing qualities of formal academic English. Sometimes, though, I go all out. When I was teaching a course about computer games and computer games that tell stories, one day, I did cosplay with an outfit I'd

made for a convention. Another example was when teaching Terry Pratchett's *The Wee Free Men*, in which the narrator makes fun of traveling teachers in ragged robes, I wore my regalia to class. I also have a number of historical reproduction outfits that I've made, so when I'm teaching literature from a particular time period, I can wear an outfit to class and have the students not only ask questions but also make inferences about a culture from its clothing design. See one example below:

SFU ENGLISH  
SFU English Department  
@SFUenglish

How's this for **#ThrowbackThursdays**? Professor Nicky Didicher adds some 1770s flair to our hallway by wearing a costume she made herself!  
**#sfuenglish #Costume**



SFU Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences and 2 others  
3:37 PM · Jan 27, 2022 · Twitter Web App

Peggy Holzweiss, PhD  
Associate Professor  
Department of Educational Leadership  
Higher Education Administration Program  
Sam Houston State University  
pholzweiss@shsu.edu

I embody playfulness with my students by modeling what I am inviting them to do. If I ask them to make a silly face in an image of themselves, I first post mine so they see I am playing too.

I also embody playfulness with my students by humanizing the environment. They learn about me as a person, and I encourage them to share about themselves as individuals. I recognize them as learners who should be given space to learn without the pressure of high stakes grades. When we know each other in a more relaxed environment, opportunities for play emerge.

**Joan T. Bihun, PhD**  
**Associate Professor, Clinical Teaching Track**  
**Psychology**  
**University of Colorado Denver**  
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I embody playfulness by having my students write microfiction (4 line “Once upon a time” stories), we play class concept Bingo and Head’s Up in the classroom! We also do dances to illustrate the different levels of non-social & social play in children and adults! 😊

**Cooper Wakefield, PhD**  
**Associate Professor**  
**Communication**  
**Marian University**  
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I embody playfulness with my students by laughing at myself in class.

**Edralin A. Lucas, PhD**  
**Regents Professor & Jim and Lynn Williams Professor**  
**Nutritional Sciences Department**  
**College of Education and Human Sciences**  
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In the beginning of the semester, I ask the students: “*if a song is played every time they enter a room, what song would it be?*” I choose from their songs for our song of the day and play it as they enter the classroom. I also have a quote of the day.

**Naftali Rottenstreich**  
**Professor**  
**English Remedial Specialist**  
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I embody playfulness with my students by humorously calling attention to my own mistakes and errors (e.g., typos, lapses in memory, misremembered facts) and inviting the razzing.

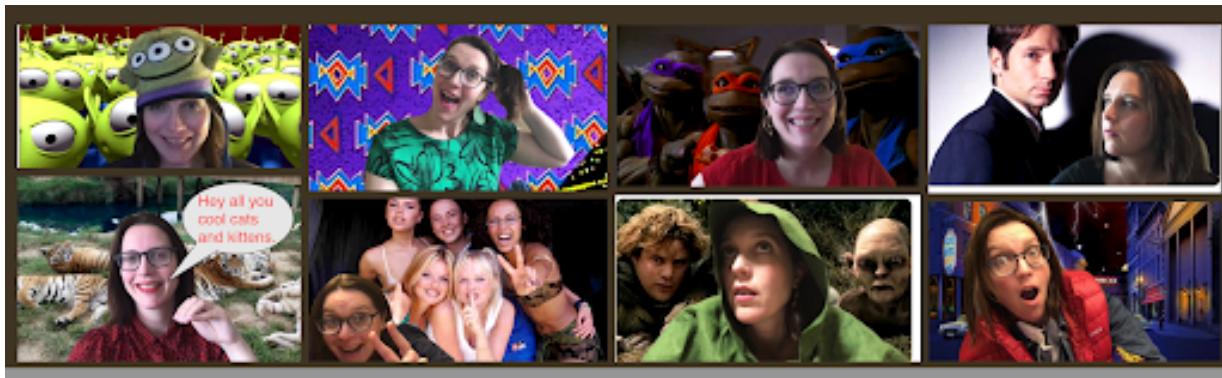
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I embody playfulness by giving each student a secret mission that encourages engagement. If they complete their secret mission, they can enter themselves into a raffle. (There are other ways to earn more raffle tickets throughout the session). I randomly pick three winners of the raffle at the end of class.

Lindsey Hamilton, PhD  
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At the beginning of the pandemic when universities quickly pivoted to remote learning, I wanted to create some levity for my students and give them something to look forward to when logging in each day. I began dressing up in silly costumes that matched my virtual Zoom backdrops. I would send my class a cryptic message 15 minutes before class started with a clue about my outfit and then the game of “Where/Who in the world is Dr. Hamilton?” was afoot. Some personal and class favorites are included below. From top left and going clockwise: an alien from Toy Story, living my best life as a Saved by the Bell extra, a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle, Scully from the X-Files, Marty McFly from Back to the Future, Frodo Baggins, joining the group as the 6th Spice Girl, and Carol Baskins from the popular Tiger King show. Having these regular opportunities to start the class in a playful manner helped me cultivate a supportive relationship with my students during a very stressful time.



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I try to create an environment where humor and laughter are welcome—it puts students at ease and they are more forthcoming with their questions.

Recently, I tried something I have been wanting to try for a long time: Ping Pong Office hours! Basically, I told students that my office hours will be in the Rec Center Lobby (where there is a ping pong table, climbing wall, among other fun things). Students can ask questions, practice for an upcoming exam and more importantly play Ping Pong! Those who showed up played Ping Pong, asked questions and generally left feeling like “they can do it.” I was able to connect with students more informally and that helped them to see the “human side” of their professor. Overall, it was fun and I plan on doing this regularly.

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I embody playfulness with my students by having a theme for each of our learning events. (This is a blended format meeting in person one Saturday a month and the rest is online). Our March theme was Spring Training—everything connected to baseball. We have done other themes like internet challenges, snow day, I love to read month, Star Wars, words, and decades. It’s fun to connect EVERYTHING back to the theme (Down to how I dress for the day!) It opens opportunities for play and helps my learners remember the content too! Super brain-friendly.

**Alison James, PhD**  
Professor Emerita  
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I embody playfulness with others by my manner, with warmth, curiosity, outreach, a spot of gentle teasing, by treating my material with lighthearted seriousness and with a twinkle in my eye.

**Elizabeth Pacioles, PhD**  
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I embody playfulness with my students by playing music in class.

I originally played music when teaching a Sport Psychology class and I played a few “pump up” songs as we were discussing motivational techniques. After I noticed the energy and positive dynamic that the addition of music created, I started playing music in more of my classes. Over half of the students mentioned music when responding to an end-of-the-semester feedback form, “*What was one thing that stands out to you as something you really liked in the course?*” Here are few student responses to the question:

- *I really like that the class was relaxed. I liked that we started with “warm up” music. It always got us started off with a positive, uplifting vibe.*
- *I really enjoyed the beginning pep talk/music videos that were played to get us pumped up for class.*
- *Starting the class with the upbeat music that got the adrenaline going.*
- *The pump up/motivational music really helped me get out of my head and got me ready to learn in this course.*
- *I loved how at the beginning of every class you played a song or clip. It just really made me excited for class, especially because the class was fairly early.*
- *I think the pump-up songs at the beginning of class really stood out and prepared me for class each day.*

I used music in both virtual and in-person classes. I sometimes selected the “pump up” song, but also encouraged student requests. Especially when I chose the song, I think the students were able to visibly observe my excitement and this created a more relaxed atmosphere encouraging discussion and positivity in the classroom. When the students chose the song, I think they appreciated my willingness to be embarrassed and uncomfortable with their song choices (I got some dirty looks from colleagues who passed by). Although I allowed explicit lyrics (which the students thought was hilarious), I did not permit songs that could be perceived as offensive or disparaging toward any particular group.

If you haven’t already, please consider including music (and willingness to show our emotional reaction to the music) as an easy way that professors can embody playfulness in the classroom!

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I embody playfulness with my students by opening myself up to fun. I’m sharing parts of myself with my students while getting to know them better and creating a learning community where we can all feel respected, heard, and engaged together in a playful way. When we have fun through play, the challenging learning feels less arduous and we are more internally motivated to persist—especially when mistakes aren’t seen as failure, but rather a natural part of the learning process.

Kristi Girdharry, PhD  
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Arts and Humanities

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I embody playfulness with my students by using relevant memes in my weekly updates. It's very basic, but I think it models taking risks in writing, which is the basis of the writing courses I teach and offers a casual reminder that learning can still be fun.

Charla Lorenzen, PhD  
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Modern Languages  
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Elizabethtown College  
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I embody playfulness with my students by exuding enthusiasm for the Spanish language, the cultures in which it is spoken, and all the fun ways to learn and practice language skills and intercultural competence.

Maha Bali, PhD  
Associate Professor of Practice  
Center for Learning and Teaching  
American University in Cairo  
bali@aucegypt.edu

I embody playfulness in my class in many ways but mostly by tackling difficult topics through play: By using role play, imagery, and metaphor to unpack complex social phenomena. By inviting students to hack things like digital tools and existing models and frameworks. By learning about difficult topics through games. By using our bodies to express ourselves with Theater of the Oppressed techniques. By making spaces in between class sessions where we intentionally and playfully share GIFs and memes. Most of all, I embody playfulness by seeking to create an atmosphere where humor and laughter are welcomed and part of how our learning community grows closer together.

Laura Alfano, JD, MEd  
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Instructionally Speaking  
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I embody playfulness in my classrooms by making the environment itself playful. I bring games and toys to engage students beyond the common expectations of the traditional classroom. I have found that students love the play and respond well to it.

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I embody playfulness with my students through building authentic conversations with them. Learning who they are and what they privilege affords the chance to tailor play opportunities that will engage and support them. It takes a lot of community building and norming at the beginning of the semester and checking in throughout the semester, and it is 100% worth it.

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I embody playfulness with my students by being their spymaster! We have a spy theme throughout the course, and their mission (should they decide to accept it) is to become a more competent communicator when faced with conflict. We have mini-missions (i.e., ungraded, formative assessments), missions (i.e., assignments/papers), and critical missions (i.e., exams). They work in agent cells (small groups), submit weekly briefings, and visit the safe house (office hours) if they need to check in with the spymaster (me!). Agents know that if they complete their missions and follow operation protocols, they will be successful. They receive a weekly briefing from me that always begins with the phrase, “Good Day Agents...Your mission this week, should you decide to accept it is....” Their final mission requires them to make their way through a digital escape room using all they know about what we’ve learned in the course. I have even worn my spy gear during briefings:



This message will self-destruct at some point...

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I use Boal Theater of the Oppressed (1985) techniques as one way to be playful and embody learning. It can be as simple as getting everybody up to strike a pose representing the concept we are discussing, or more involved such as a tableau where students one by one join in creating an image of a concept, place, or event. Boal techniques are helpful for developing a team mindset, getting students to take risks, to look closely at possible interpretations, and to understand the power we have within different roles we take on. If you aren't familiar with this resource—you may want to explore it. I've used it for content instruction, developing awareness of multiple perspectives, and team building. So many ideas and improvisational techniques are quick and easy to implement and really change the dynamic of the classroom in exciting ways.

Other playful things I do include using a meme of how I am feeling today to start online classes. There are many scales of one to nine in Harry Potter, Grumpy Cat, or other recognizable cultural identities easily found online. I end each online class with "the last word"—usually, everyone answers the same question (e.g., favorite Superbowl commercial or a content-related question). This strengthens our connections and helps us see each other as peers.

For online discussions, I'll ask students some weeks to add a meme or related pop song that reflects the reading. Students really enjoy this. Asking for a voice-over, meme, or gif breaks up the tone of an online discussion.

I see so much value in having students play games as a way to start the class—then we stop to debunk the experience. For my early undergraduate classes, it helps to break the ice so they feel more comfortable taking risks and responding in class.

I use dice, cards, or other game mechanics to pick which group shares first or which topic we tackle first—it's quick and fun. There are many ways to use simple game mechanics like dice, spinners, cards, timers, or random wheels in college instruction. I also have a squishy collection—so if the foam squishy is on your table, that is the name of the group. Then I can easily call on the school bus or globe group to share first. It is a small thing that adds to the culture of the class. And I've learned that with play, small things are big things.

Boal, A. (1985) *Theatre of the Oppressed* NY, NY: Theater Communications Group.

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I embody playfulness with my students by starting every session with some good music. I love to channel my DJ days and pick a couple of fun songs (that match the audience or the subject) to play while people are coming in or joining the Zoom!

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One year, I made a Halloween photo booth equipped with fun props as a surprise for my students on Halloween. My students loved it and took a ton of pictures and posted to their social media accounts! To protect students' identities, here is a lonely ol' picture of me in the photo booth right before class. I like having random bits of fun to surprise students to break up the routine of going to class each week.



Then, after class I left the photo booth up and posted signs all around the building for some mystery fun for everyone! The next day, my mystery photo booth had made it into the School of Education and Human Development's newsletter! A bunch of random people had taken Halloween photo booth pictures. A little unexpected joy is always what people need!



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I embody playfulness with my students by using peppy music interludes for transitions in live classes.

I embody playfulness with my students in online classes by theme-a-fying the course with sounds, graphics, and metaphors (e.g., superheroes, pirates, secret agents, zombies).

I also embody playfulness with my students with laughter, non-sarcastic humor, and smiles. I use playfulness with my students by starting off all hybrid classes with a fun kick-off (e.g., virtual reality, a scavenger hunt, a costume, a party-themed jigsaw).

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I embody playfulness with my students by allowing playful elements and games in the classroom. Music, childlike crafts, beach balls, Jenga, photo collages, etc.

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I embody playfulness with my students by making my last class of each semester optional and packing it with fun activities. I am playful by making space for play. Past classes have included activities such as digital escape rooms, visual journaling, sharing a favorite book, movie, song, or podcast, trying to guess movie titles from “bad descriptions” (plenty of these can be found online), trying to guess classic children’s book titles from the first paragraph, and mirroring exercises. And I always end the last class with a chill and chat session where students can just talk about what’s on their mind.

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I use emojis A LOT in email, course materials, etc. One of my favorites is the heart emoji for when I want to express how much I love a particular comment/response.

I create memes to support content, address common questions/misconceptions, etc. and I have students create their own, too.

I share a “Cartoon of the Week” in each class. I have found that this really helps keep interest high, especially in an asynchronous online course.

I incorporate multi-purpose toys (like Play-Doh) into class sessions. For example, I might have students create a statue with Play-Doh that represents their favorite educational philosophy.

I participate in the activities that students create for their peers. So, when they’re playing a game of 7-Up during a brain break, I join in.

### **Additional Examples and Deeper Reflections of a Playful Professor**

What we have noticed in this work is that most instructors demonstrate some sort of play. Maybe it’s a joke or a certain casual style they bring to the classroom. In the previous section, we collected many of these ideas, activities, dispositions, actions, and approaches which help bring play to the classroom. These examples might seem silly or frivolous but this playfulness is key, this is where the playful process begins.

Some professors from the P@P community shared some longer, more detailed examples of their playfulness for a more complex understanding. The following submissions take these authentic moments of play and turn the scholar’s eye toward them. We hope this deeper dive in the examples below will further aid your understanding of what it means to be a playful Professor!

### **Resisting Deification of Words**

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#### **Technique Summary Description**

If play is about the emotions one feels (Eberle, 2014) or a state of mind (Gray, 2013) rather than the activity, then being playful is about adapting a way of being that creates space for and perhaps even encourages these emotional and mental approaches. Play states can be challenging to achieve when

facing content that feels serious, high stakes, straight forward, or even monotonous. Such a challenge may be further heightened with content known superficially or very deeply outside the teaching context, and for content that one has taught many times.

By focusing on resisting the lure of productivity and the deification of words, this technique poses one possible answer to the question, “How do I shake myself out of a serious or resigned state of mind related to a particular set of content I have to get to teach?” In other words, “How might I adapt playfulness with my teaching content?” These activities happen outside of teaching and may or may not become specifically reflected in direct work with students.

### Technique Detailed Instructions

My first step is to give myself permission to engage in work with no promise of a usable product. Read that last sentence again. No usable product. Full stop. This can be incredibly challenging, but I find this much easier when I set aside a specific amount of time for it—akin to the idea of setting aside time for timeless time as recommended by Berg and Seeber (2017). This sort of scheduling frees time from the burdens of creating a usable product. I find it also feels freeing because I know my productive time is still protected: I am not fully jumping off the productivity train—just taking a brief stop at a station.

Primed to become more playful with time set aside free of productivity, I aim to disrupt my thinking about a particular set of content by exploring it and translating it through different symbolic systems, or engaging in *symbolic translation* (Falter, 2018). The nature of life in academia means that I have usually read, spoken, and perhaps written about the content I need to teach, so I seek to shake myself out of my comfort zone, resisting this deification of words by exploring the content through non-verbal symbolic systems. I try representing content through movement (e.g., dancing, leaving patterns of footprints), two-dimensional visuals (e.g., painting, arranging cut pieces of paper), three-dimensional visuals (e.g., creating with play dough, building in Minecraft), and sounds (e.g., using vocables, electronics, or acoustic musical instruments to evoke a setting, mood, or specific relationships).

Below are steps to *Resisting Deification of Words*, followed by a narrative description of an example:

1. Resist Productivity:
  1. Commit to being process-driven (no promise of a usable product).
  2. Set aside some time.
2. Choose a small body of content or a singular concept/skill.
3. Resist Words: Explore/represent content using a symbolic system without words.
4. Self-Check-In Questions:
  1. Am I creating in a way to meet my needs (e.g., process-oriented, stretch thinking, desired level of comfortability with symbolic system)?
  2. Do I want to use this symbolic system to represent the idea in a new way or try a different symbolic system?
5. Explore or represent content in new ways.
6. Repeat Steps 4 & 5.

In my role as a teacher educator, I facilitate my students' awareness and use of proximity to their students when teaching. I have engaged in and taught this teaching technique a great deal. Below is a narrative describing some possible ways to use the *Resisting Deification of Words* technique to foster playfulness specifically with this particular skill.

First, I set aside time committed to being outside productivity expectations so that I can explore the concept and skill of proximity in teaching. I wonder what symbolic system I might use to think about or represent this concept. Sketching sounds reasonable and low risk for me. I am a little nervous about my ability to explore this skill through different symbolic systems, so beginning with a lower-risk option feels kind to myself. But how do I make a static drawing of shifting proximity?

I begin to draw stick figures on the page to represent students across a classroom, and this reminds me that the feeling of proximity changes from student to student. I draw a circle around each stick figure. Some are smaller or larger than the others. Some overlap. Then I wonder: *Where is the teacher?* I draw myself near the front of the room and think about how I might move through the classroom to implement intentional use of proximity with students. My drawn path starts as I weave through the class before returning to the front of the room to linger a bit until I make another sweep through the classroom. As I move my pen on the paper along my drawn teacher path, I begin to connect with the feeling of movement. I wonder at exploring this concept through movement.

I let my hand wave back and forth in one small spot for a little while before letting it wave back and forth in a different spot. I begin to play with my hand's proximity to different areas. What does it feel like when my hand mostly stays in one spot? What if that spot is like a home base and my hand darts out for short periods but keeps coming back home? What if my hand moves around in such a way that there is no feeling of a home position? As I'm moving, I sometimes let myself get a little lost in the exploration of the movement, but other times I bring my attention back to connecting this exploration with the idea of proximity in teaching.

Perhaps because I feel warm from moving, I then imagine how I could explore this concept with ice cubes. What if the teacher is a sponge who needs to connect now and then to avoid a mess from ice-cubes-as-students melting? But not all students need attention with the same frequency. I could put salt on some of the ice cubes so they melt at different rates!

I continue my self-chosen and self-directed exploration through a few other symbolic systems. My state of mind feels focused, alert, and active, yet relatively un-stressed: all key components of Gray's (2016) definition of play. At times, I also experience each emotion-based play element described by Eberle (2014). Regarding proximity in teaching, I feel both more grounded and more fluid in my thinking about the concept, as well as ready to greet student responses and inquiries in ways I hope are helpful while perhaps being unexpected and varied. In short, I have tapped into my playfulness specifically regarding this set of content.

One last thought on *Resisting Deification of Words*. Planning the symbolic systems to use may be helpful but allowing space to deviate from the plan in the moment is a necessity. Gray (2013) wrote: to be fully engaged in play, one needs to be able to choose how to self-direct the play or to quit. This technique began with permission to resist expectation of a usable product, so *calling an audible*—changing it up in the middle—and trying out a different symbolic system is fair game.

## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

Engaging in content this way fosters my own playfulness with the material. Whether or not I planned a play-based lesson with students, this playfulness shows up in my teaching. It helps keep my interest in and delivery of the material fresh and adaptable rather than static or stale. I have more modes of responses to student inquiry or misconceptions at my fingertips, and my responses often reveal themselves in ways that renew the class's energy, focus, and commitment to the content.

### Reflection on Wider Use

This technique can be used for a wide range of content, though some forms might require greater intellectual or emotional flexibility when beginning to represent key ideas through different symbolic systems. The individual playful professor engaging in the technique has the agency to choose symbolic systems that meet their personal needs and interests. Due to the technique's process orientation, one's engagement in this technique is not to be judged by the quality of the product. Therefore, anyone—no matter their skill with a particular symbolic system—can be successful in developing their understanding and engendering a more playful attitude to a set of content through using this technique. Sometimes, the ridiculous nature of "bad" representations can best aid the search for playfulness.

### Other

The goal of this technique is to foster playfulness. Engaging with content through different symbolic systems is one key to unlocking playfulness. This key was developed in the context of supporting student understanding and communication through many symbolic systems within the Reggio Emilia Approach to early childhood education (Edwards et al., 1998). Reggio Emilia inspired teaching has been successfully adapted to a wide variety of settings around the world, including working with secondary and post-secondary students (Soble & Hogue, 2010; Wolfe, 2020). A parallel source of inspiration for *Resisting Deifying Words* comes from some of Saldaña's (2016) recommendations for researchers to deepen their own understanding of qualitative data by engaging in movement, drawing, or music as forms of coding. In the former, teachers help others (students) deepen their understanding by making exploration through multiple symbolic systems available. In the latter, Saldaña describes engaging in meaning-making with qualitative data through symbolic systems beyond words.

## Playfulness in Online Spaces

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To help students learn more about their instructor in an online asynchronous higher education course, the technology tool, Canvas Studio is used to create a “playful” way to build community in the course and deepen connections amongst course members. This introduction activity sets the stage for authentic, fun interaction with the instructor, which will be enhanced by a second course game that involves peers introducing themselves using images and voice.

### Technique Detailed Instructions

#### Activity: Instructor Welcome Video

Consistent with online quality standards (such as Quality Matters), the first activity involves the instructor creating a short welcome video to introduce herself to the class. To make watching the video more interactive, engaging, and playful, I used Canvas Studio to insert and “sprinkle” a few fun, easy quiz questions into the video. For example, at the end of the 5-minute introduction video, a question appears that asks which statement about “Shelli,” your instructor, is true; essentially, it’s three truths and a lie game in a quiz question format such that students need to recognize which statement about their instructor is not true. And the three true answer choices are fun facts about the instructor which have been shared throughout the short video. The incorrect answer is the misrepresentation of something fun the instructor shared in the video about herself. For example, in my introduction video, I share that one of my favorite places to visit rescues abandoned and abused animals and lets the public visit on certain days to feed and love those animals (this video has images of me and my son visiting some of those animals). Thus, my incorrect answer choice says: “Shelli owns a farm that rescues abused animals.”

### Results, Impact, & Outcomes

Although students get two attempts for the built-in quiz in the introduction video, typically it’s 100% correct on the first try for all students per the item analysis results. And students have commented that the activity was “fun” to learn more about me and check that they paid attention!

### Reflection on Wider Use

The intro activity is applicable to any discipline. Canvas Studio, if purchased by one’s campus, has auto-captioning features built in that permit editing of captions to ensure accuracy. Other free tools may be substituted for these types of activities, but modifications may need to be made.

## Moments Matter: Using Metaphor to Maximize Meaning & Motivation

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## Technique Summary Description

During virtual teaching, I found that having a costume or tableau ready when I turned on my camera helped motivate my students to attend, be on time, and most importantly, make connections to the reading and their own emerging teacher identities.

### **Facilitation, Gathering, and Invitational Learning**

In their book, *The Power of Moments: Why Certain Experiences Have Extraordinary Impact*, Chip and Dan Heath (2017) champion the idea that we can intentionally create or engineer experiences that are memorable and meaningful. Further, they cite multiple research studies providing evidence that people remember flagship moments: the peaks, the pits, and the transitions. From their work, I have been challenged to engineer more flagship moments in my courses, particularly at the beginning of class sessions. I try to avoid beginning with general greetings or announcements. Rather, I try to initiate moments that engage students immediately in learning and connection. Chip and Dan Heath further indicate that the key components of defining moments are as follows:

- **Elevation:** Defining moments rise above the everyday and ordinary.
- **Insight:** Defining moments rewire our understanding of ourselves or the world.
- **Pride:** Defining moments capture us at our best.
- **Connection:** Defining moments are social. They are strengthened because they are shared with others.

Similarly, in *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters*, Priya Parker (2018) highlights the importance of setting a purpose for every gathering – and for being an engaged host. During the pandemic, I have wanted to think about class times as gatherings to which I have warmly invited my students. Parker suggests that hosts should not be “chill,” but should intentionally direct and preserve the purpose of gatherings. One way she suggests for “seasoning [a] gathering more deeply” is to “design a world that will only exist once” (p. 112).

### **Metaphorical Thinking**

In poetry as well as cognitive science, metaphorical thinking is a way to deepen knowledge. Leon (2020) has asserted that “memories are associative and metaphorical and that the brain stores information with a complex system of remembered sensations and associations and not as linear film stories” (para. 13). “Metaphors,” he continues, “add a depth of understanding and meaning and enrich the thinking process. Thinking creatively is based on how the mind works, by sensation, perception, association, and metaphor” (para. 19).

### **Theory**

Further, I am influenced by the democratic ethos and optimism of invitational theory (Purkey, 1978) and appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005), philosophies and processes that value the strengths and contributions of social learning and change.

### **Experience and Thrifty Inspiration**

As a middle grade teacher, I was always looking to capture my students' attention in ways that are both meaningful and fun. When I would go to thrift stores or yard sales, I always had an eye out for items I could use to both ignite my students' interest and help them connect to course content. Now that I teach undergraduate students who aspire to be teachers, I try to model this practice for them. Middle grades education majors are often surveyed with suspicion by other education majors and the general public. *Why on earth would you want to teach middle school?* Generally, this question is leveled as an accusation, not a curiosity. My program colleagues and I spend a lot of time trying to help students overcome the negative stereotypes perpetrated by the media and the public about young adolescents.

When my traditional undergraduate seminar went online because of the coronavirus pandemic, I reached back to those days of "dollar store teaching" to try to make my synchronous online seminars more dynamic. I was inspired when I saw a university lab coat for sale on Facebook Marketplace. I had an idea!

I first used this technique to engage undergraduate middle grades education majors, but then I used it with graduate students as well. I am sure I am not the first to use improvisation and creative performance with students. Two decades ago, in *Never a Dull Moment: Teaching and the Art of Performance*, Jyl Lynn Felman (2001) wrote about her experiences using improvisation to interrogate women's studies with her students. While Felman challenged students to explore some of the most sensitive gender and racial issues they were likely to confront in the college classroom, students left the experience reflecting not just on what they learned but how they felt. Like Felman, I seek to use play to create a learning environment where my students can creatively demonstrate what they know about teaching while also affirming their fears, curiosities, and hesitations as emerging professionals.

Rather than steps or sequences, this technique is a mindset. At times, a first step might be finding an inspiration item (the lab coat was mine). Other times, it might be that a teacher is looking for a way to help students understand a difficult concept.

In this description, I am also providing the "slide" I used to summarize the metaphor for the day.

The first time I planned to use this strategy to begin class, the students and I would be discussing a reading about young adolescent development and how teachers and schools can be responsive to the needs of young adolescent students. I put on the lab coat, previously used by a medical intern on campus, (with our university logo on the breast pocket) and stood in view of my students when I turned on the camera. I asked them what kind of "coat" they thought I was wearing. One of them guessed, "a lab coat"?

A day in the life continued...  
**Suit up!**  
**Be ready!**

"Right!" I exclaimed, and I reached for my exaggerated laboratory safety goggles. I put them on and got close to the camera for them to see. They laughed as I continued my ad lib, "Sometimes when you are teaching middle school, you have to mix things up. It can be a dangerous business working with young adolescents, so you should proceed cautiously."

Then, I asked again, “But who else might use a coat like this, maybe not in a lab?” Silence. Then, tentatively someone said, “Like in medicine, maybe a doctor?”

“Yes!” I exclaimed, and I reached for my daughter’s toy stethoscope which I put around my neck. “Sometimes, when we teach middle school, the most important thing is the heart. We need to lead with our hearts, and we need to see and hear the hearts of our students.” More big smiles from the students.

“But I’ve seen others wear coats like this. Have you?”

“How about a chef?” a student ventured.

“Oh yeah!” I agreed. I reached for the child’s chef hat, a mixing bowl and measuring cups and spoons I had assembled off camera. “What are the ingredients for teaching young adolescents well?” I asked them, hoping they’d recall some details from the reading. They did! I asked them how much of each, and they decided the measures of knowledge, compassion, advocacy, flexibility, attentiveness, humor, enthusiasm, and positive risk-taking that teachers need to “bake” into their teaching.

**Culture and  
Community have to  
be Cultivated**



After this first attempt with teaching in costume and structured improvisation, I added a metaphorical opening to each of the subsequent reading discussions. In the second week, our focus was on cultivating a school culture that recognizes the developmental and cultural needs of students, so I put on a gardening apron and gloves and prepared a table with soil, plants, and seeds. I talked the students through some of the ideas in the reading by asking them how teachers and school leaders can cultivate an inviting

school environment for young adolescent students and their families. Together, and led by the gardeners in our class, we worked through how landscape artists tend to their plants and designs with water, soil, and exposure to light—and then invited them to work through this metaphor to consider how they might grow a healthy classroom community for their students.

In our discussion about leadership, I wore a toy crown and white gloves, and turned on the camera, greeting the students with a royal wave. Immediately, they offered curtsies and called me Queen. Then, we examined the principles of middle level education leadership and organization articulated in our reading and compared them to those of monarchies



To add to the playful invitations for each class meeting, I delivered unicorn birthday hats and noisemakers to my students so that students could engage in the play, too, but this time it was for my birthday. We had class on the day of my birthday, and I invited students to my Zoom birthday party. Really, it was just a continuation of play, a reason for students to show up on time and enjoy being together. We all turned on our cameras at the same time to show our party hats and blow our noisemakers. One student had even made a party hat for her cat who was reluctantly dragged on screen for my party.



### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

In contrast to the poor attendance reports across our campus and at other higher education institutions, my students had nearly perfect attendance! Attendance in my class was better than it had ever been with face-to-face offerings, and it was better than many of my colleagues reported for their classes. I believe students longed for connection and engagement with their online classes and during the pandemic.

The online course afforded an element of surprise and anticipation that would have been difficult to pull off in the face-to-face class. I could keep my camera off until the “unveiling” at the start of class time. I could have the materials set up or the costume ready but wait until “go time” to begin. Students began thinking about the meaning of my costume or set up immediately.

My students are in a cohort in their major, and one sign that they appreciated this approach was that they used a photo of me from the first costume lesson as the profile photo for their GroupMe messaging through the rest of their year in the program. Somehow that element of surprise and play was what they wanted to capture as their collective identity.

### Reflection on Wider Use

Anyone can use this technique to help students deepen their connection to content by engaging in metaphorical thinking. As more teaching and learning experiences happen online, it is important to help students engage in those first moments of class. In fact, no matter the delivery method of the class, it is important to engage students from the first moment.

Furthermore, using metaphors also helps academics who are very steeped in their disciplines to think about their content in imaginative ways so that they can provide multiple points of access to the content knowledge of the discipline. In his book *Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World*, David Epstein (2019) says defines deep analogical thinking as “the practice of recognizing conceptual similarities in multiple domains or scenarios that may seem to have little in common on the surface” (pp. 102-103). Furthermore, he and others whose stories he tells in his book, illustrate that metaphorical thinking is a powerful tool for solving wicked problems as well as reasoning through problems they encounter in unfamiliar contexts. Teaching, especially teaching middle school students, brings surprises almost daily. By having students exercise metaphorical and analogical thinking, I hope I am preparing them to meet novel classroom challenges with creative thinking and solutions.

More and more disciplines and jobs require agile thinking and skills. Epstein (2019) asserts, “In a wicked world, relying upon experience from a single domain is not only limiting, it can be disastrous” (p. 107). Using metaphor, improvisation, analogies, and play can teach students to summon multiple domains to solve the problems they face, and in the meantime, they can have fun in class.

### Silly Martian Mission (to start a serious discussion)

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I demonstrate playfulness by being super weird. I like to bring goofiness and humor to typical discussions or assignments. One example is in one of my classes, we talk about counseling children and adolescents but a big part of that is working with the parents since the client is a minor and is so entrenched in a system. One quick warm up discussion I have my students engage in is answering how or why many parents somehow lose empathy for their kids. For the discussion I tell them: “We have all been kids before but somehow as we age, we sometimes forget what it’s like to be a child and sometimes that lack of empathy can turn into misunderstandings or poor treatment of children.” I split them into small groups to

discuss this idea and then I have each group generate a 2-5 sentence theory for why they think adults sometimes lose empathy for kids. A fairly good discussion, right?

BUT, to make this warm-up discussion more playful, I turned it into a Martian mission and to introduce this mission, I created a super silly video to show them before getting into small groups to discuss. Scan the QR code below to view the video but the jest of it is, they are Martians sent to Earth to solve some of the Earthlings biggest problems. This first mission is where they have to solve the poor treatment of children by figuring out how the “full-sized Earthlings” lose empathy for their mini-Earthlings. The students find it hilarious and I have found that being playful like this gets students more invested in the learning and the discussion feels livelier. Scan the QR code below to view the video:

Weird, right? But maybe you don't teach counseling children, adolescents, and their parents and maybe you are not that into Martian culture or aliens like I am. However, you might consider how you can create your own fun and playful video to introduce a concept, begin a discussion, or send feedback on an assignment. To create this video, I wrote out a script then I recorded a series of videos on Snapchat and used a Snap filter that distorted my head. I uploaded those short Snapchat videos to iMovie to string them together to make the longer video. In iMovie, I was able to add music and “cartoon” the videos to make it more, well, Martian-y. I created a guide describing how I made this video if you want to check it out, scan this QR code:



## From Monotone to Play-tone

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### Technique Summary Description

Teaching year after year can become boring. Bland syllabi share expectations and schedules while plain text assignments build the task list, setting the monotone of academic life. What if you re-imagined what the syllabus, assignment instructions, and other course materials could look and feel like with colors and images? Taking this one step can reinvigorate your creativity and set a *play*-tone for the learning environment.

### Technique Detailed Instructions

Many institutions provide instructors with a syllabus template—a text document with important policies already filled in along with blocks of space for specific course information. Assignment details often follow a similar text-only pattern. This uninteresting approach to communication fails to engage students who are used to watching videos, playing online games, and interacting on social media. Injecting color and images into course materials can liven up the learning environment and capture their attention.

One great way to begin infusing color and images into course materials is by using familiar software. Microsoft Word®, for instance, has newsletter templates that can turn your dull syllabus into a brightly colored document with photos of your campus, images of the textbooks, fun clipart related to the course topic, and even your own smiling photo alongside your contact information. There are also flier templates that can help you communicate assignment information in different styles. Simply choose the templates you like best, begin adding information, and replace stock images with more relevant selections (see YouTube for instructional videos).

When you are ready to increase design options and develop personal creations, Canva (<https://www.canva.com>) offers a variety of templates for different purposes from flyers to postcards to infographics. Select a template then choose from a long list of fonts, shapes, images, and elements to personalize the design. Canva® provides some of these options for free while others require modest fees. Once the design is finished, Canva® stores the result online and creates an image for download.

For finding images, using Creative Commons options can help you avoid inadvertently violating copyright laws. Several internet search engines have image options along with filters so you only see images with a Creative Commons license. In addition to Creative Commons, Unsplash (<https://unsplash.com/>) offers free-to-use images from photographers all over the world. All they ask in return is that you credit the photographer when you use the image and consider publicly thanking them for sharing the image. And, if you prefer the truly personal touch, Bitmoji

(<https://www.bitmoji.com/>) allows you to create a cartoon likeness of yourself then places that likeness in a wide variety of scenes. You can download these images and place them in course materials.

If you are technically or graphically challenged, create an extra credit competition that asks students to design a new syllabus or assignment document using the same information as the original. You will be amazed at what students can come up with, especially when they know their creation could be used in future courses and put on their resumés.

Text document metamorphosis into unique works of art helps courses stand out from their dull counterparts across campus. And when students notice the difference, their curiosity grows about the course.

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

The first time I shared a colorful syllabus, students immediately commented that they had never seen a syllabus like it before. One student even said she knew it was going to be “a different kind of course” based on the look of the syllabus. The simple change in presentation engaged students from the very first meeting of the course. It has now been multiple years since I started adding color and images to course materials. Students still comment on how inviting the course is—even when I have not changed any content or instructional approaches. They appreciate being invited into the academic experience through color and images, and in return, students are more open to learning and participating. The effort to add some color and images into course materials also started my journey into play. The more my students noticed the changes, the more I tried to keep their attention by doing new things with class presentations, activities, and instructional techniques.

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

Adding color and images to course materials is applicable to any discipline or course topic. However, it should be noted that syllabus policies vary by campus and deviating from a standard such as a template may not be possible. Ask what the limits are of such documents before adding new elements. If campus leaders are only concerned about communicating necessary information, they may not care what package it comes in. If you cannot deviate from the syllabus template, you may be able to create two versions—one for the institution and one for the students. Verify what is possible for all course materials you would like to change before moving forward.

Selection of all colors and images should be made with care. Individuals with color blindness cannot see red and green so those colors should be avoided or used sparingly. Individuals with vision challenges may not be able to view images so alt-text should be added for accessibility purposes. Images should also be reviewed for cultural sensitivity. What we may think is playful could be viewed as offensive to others. Finally, double-check where images come from to avoid copyright violations, and cite or credit the image creators.

## Garfinkel: Playing with the “Teacher” Role

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### **Technique Summary Description**

As responsible educators, we generally conform to specific expectations of dress and demeanor expected of professional people in the classroom. Our roles may no longer be formally distinguished by archaic gowns from the students we teach, but in many classroom settings the infrastructure continues to pose an environment in which students sit side-by-side, awaiting ‘instruction’ from the knowledgeable teacher. In more enlightened environments, students might cluster together in groups or be centered around an object of activity. Nonetheless, the instructor’s role is often encoded in the setting to be apart from the student group, as knowledge-provider, demonstrator, or observant facilitator.

My techniques of playfulness in teaching draw from a research technique from ethnomethodology sometimes termed ‘Garfinkel’ from its originator, Harold Gafinkel. Garfinkel’s (1967) ‘breach experiments’ were educational exercises in which he encouraged students to intentionally act against a known social norm in order to make common ‘understandings or expectations about the social world visible’. At its core, it is about breaking social rules in order to learn about them. This classroom technique employs similar deviations from expected roles; we might do this either by requiring students to act in a different role (when we already do this, we usually just call it role play or simulation), or breaching the expectations around our own roles as instructors. Sometimes the easiest way to break these rules is to engage in some classroom role play ourselves.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

#### **General Process**

Implementing Garfinkel relies on assessing what existing norms of behavior are important for your student’s learning objectives, either norms they do not know that they need to learn, or norms they already adhere to that they need to move away from. In the second stage you need to identify whether tutor action or student action is required to breach those norms. These activities are good for building cognitive awareness, identifying and critiquing existing practices, and provoking affective or emotional engagement with knowledge content.

#### **Attempt One: Dress Like a Student**

My work is in a management school, and while the stringent uniform of shirt and tie is not enforced, there is an expected dress code of ‘business casual’ in which a brightly colored collarless blouse or an open toed sandal is about as deviant as most colleagues will go. This is not the same for other faculties, who mix with different people and industries, some with more stringent dress codes (medicine), others less so (performing arts).

For the very first introductory class I gave on professionalism, I took special care with my appearance to avoid ‘professional’ attire. I wore a t-shirt and jeans, alongside an old, ripped jacket and carried a sports-style bag instead of a rucksack or satchel (the sports bag contained a blazer though, I had other classes that day). I was co-delivering the class with a colleague from careers who I had told I would be a few minutes late. I waited outside the classroom until other students began to enter. When I entered, I sat at the back of the classroom. After the ten-minute introduction from my colleague, I went up to the front of the class and took over the lecture; while the gasp wasn’t audible, the students were clearly surprised to see what initially looked like a student takeover.

## Results

This ‘teachable moment’ served two purposes. My main intention was to ask students to reflect on their awareness of where knowledge comes from, and for them to begin to realize that it was not safe to assume someone located in a position of authority (i.e., at the front of the class) or dressed in a particular way that meets their preconceived notions of ‘a teacher’ (as my colleague did) would be their main source of credible information. Instead, I hoped to bring them around to realizing that they could learn substantially from their existing knowledge and expectations. My second purpose was directly pertinent to the subject matter; first impressions can have a significant impact on what and who you pay attention to!

## Attempt Two: An Unreliable Authority

For my class on Business Ethics I frequently find students stumble over the distinction between the abstraction of theory and the reality of everyday practice. Like in the example above I aim to use playfulness to encourage them to trust their own existing knowledge *and* to employ a healthy skepticism about what others say or do. Students expect their instructor to be a reliable and legitimate authority; to turn up (mostly) on time, to be a coherent and reliable communicator, to deliver content relevant to the class, to give correct information about assignment deadlines and so on.

While it is important that students are given correct information, I will often warn my students that any small class or seminar could include up to three lies. I either challenge them to spot the lies, or I present them with multiple possible truths which they have to check against the written syllabus or course documentation. Occasionally I will also apply this principle to knowledge content on the course. The crucial part of engaging this tactic without causing uproar is to admit the lie before you tell it! Here are some examples of the type of actions I employ:

- Will I give an extra 10% credit to students who wear glasses; or will I penalize students by 5% for late submission? What criteria does the university insist I use to assess your work? What information will I have about your assignment?
- In this explanation of Aristotle’s virtues, one of the listed virtues is \*not\* from Aristotle but instead is one I have added based on how managers might want employees to behave – see if you can spot it.

## Results

This activity was tied to the learning outcome on the course regarding critical thinking. Students are heavily socialized into perceiving ‘teachers’ as either competent or incompetent; the proposition that I might *intentionally* mislead them provokes some discomfort among students. Provided they are reassured that they will be provided with accurate information when it matters (i.e., in response to serious enquiries, such as in the lead-up to assignments) they generally engage in the playful attitude in class, and it encourages them to contribute to discussions with greater confidence in their own view and apply some criticisms to academic texts where they otherwise feel inadequately informed.

### **Attempt Three: Effort Bargains**

The classic undergraduate latecomer can sometimes disrupt the class. Yet the usual ‘classroom’ approach to timetabling is that start and finish times (for the tutor at least) are non-negotiable. Student perceptions are usually that while the lecturer is an employee of the university, paid to deliver content at certain times, students benefit from the freedom of being a ‘consumer’ who may decide to attend or not. Student attendance is a concern of many different disciplines, and I have previously introduced this playful process in learning sessions concentrating on teaching analysis of the industrial production process. In a business or management school it is possible to contrast the expectations of the workplace for self-control and participation expectations with the freedoms of the student lifestyle. So, this intervention also aims to illustrate the rewards of self-discipline and who they benefit:

- Students seated in a classroom row are specified as a production ‘line’ for the next session with the student nearest the aisle cast as the ‘supervisor.’ All students in the class are to compete to be the highest producing line in my lecture ‘factory’ (with a small reward for the winners, usually candy or similar). Their task is to produce the greatest quantity of lecture notes during the session, by hand. Obviously, this task is more easily completed by those who arrive early.

### **Results**

This activity aims to enroll the students as the ‘producers’ of work in a lecture, rather than the professor. The activity was linked to a learning objective regarding the impacts of different types of supervision of work. This intervention transforms the hierarchy of power and responsibility and removes any evaluation of the quality of student work by the professor. While this playful intervention is a simplified version of many peer-learning projects, the fact that it is characterized by the ‘factory assembly line’ metaphor encourages some students in the ‘supervisor’ role to really embrace the delegated authority and push their peers for more output and more commitment to attendance! This activity generally encouraged students to think a bit differently about their attendance and their activity in lectures, but did sometimes have to be carefully reconsidered in the light of accessibility concerns (e.g., where students with dyslexia had note-takers accompanying them to lectures).

### **Attempt Four: Who do the Rules Apply To?**

Student’s property is private property, yet they are familiar with the idea that some items (such as mobile phones) might be confiscated for the duration of the class under authority of the instructor. This activity in a business ethics class simulates law-breaking by the instructor to encourage students to question the way in which authority influences action in the classroom or other settings, and

particularly (in the context of their knowledge learning) to get them to reflect on the stakeholders and processes involved in implementing regulation of business.

- During the class, with minimal explanation, the professor or tutor removes an item of student property (e.g., laptop, mobile phone) without asking for permission, and expressing clearly that it will not be returned with no justification given. Alternatively, an illegitimate justification may be given (e.g., that the item looks expensive), and a fair reward to the professor for their teaching efforts. Sometimes this is accompanied with heavily acted villainous gloating.

## Results

Students are hard to convince with this playful interjection. They generally assume those who teach in the classroom or lecture theater to be in secure, well-rewarded employment and legitimate positions of moral responsibility. They find it difficult to assign a ‘criminal’ role to professors. The students are also often not willing to position themselves as a victim of crime. However, the intervention does not require all students to adopt the role, simply one or two. When this occurs, students quickly realize that social position has a significant impact on their ability to recruit or convince others about their interpretation of events.

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

While some of these techniques can be planned, their subversive affect can leave you feeling illicit and mischievous. It’s a great state for playful learning! This can really inform further improvised playful modes of teaching and delivery that bring instructors and students closer together. I have found it an enjoyable state in which the delivery of teaching becomes more exciting, and engagement with students more present.

This play effect is not only relevant in the classroom, but I have also found it highly motivating in producing study materials and documentation that are more engaging for readers, integrating boundary breaking ‘thought experiments’ or asking readers to take on an alternative role in order to promote self-discovery. These activities are not quite as complex as role played simulations sometimes may be, they do not require as much exhaustive detail and they mainly promote learning through getting students to reflect on their own expectations or existing knowledge, rather than on their application of knowledge to a role play simulation.

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

Beyond the context of a business school, different rules of behavior will apply to your student cohort. Perhaps wearing a bikini and bringing a beach ball to a chemistry lab would be a good teachable moment but introduces far too many physical risks! These experiments are not ‘safe’, they can be provocative, but they need to be so to encourage students to respond. It is important to recognize what the norms are in your faculty community and consider how far it is possible to go without negative impacts on staff or student confidence. However, I suspect there are also many professors for whom this is normal, who often use activities of this type already, but have never thought to label them as ‘playful’ in nature!

These activities can be unintentionally exclusive of minority students or students with accessibility needs. For this reason, they are sometimes better adapted to small classroom groups where the needs of the student cohort are well known. In planning activities like this the main thing to be careful of is having a ‘stereotypical’ student (in terms of background or capability) in mind; this can often lead to neglecting the needs of your specific student cohort. However, where diversity and accessibility needs are known, this informs a better awareness of student’s norms and expectations and your own Garfinkel experiments as a playful professor can flourish.



# Focus On: Fun Objects

*One way to kickstart your play and playfulness is by grabbing a few playful objects and see what emerges. This following is a list of game elements, prompts, and ideas that came directly from the Professors at Play listserv—a post that was shared by Laura Alfano lcalfano@bellsouth.net.*

## Dice

- To assign points – If a group is the first to get a hand up to answer a question and answers it correctly, a representative rolls a die or dice to get points for the team. You can change it up by ruling that if they roll snake eyes, the team loses their points and starts over.
- To group students – If 6 groups are needed, the number rolled determines which group the students are in. Once a group becomes full, that number is no longer available and students must continue rolling until they get a number of a group with open slots. If there are 2 groups, 1, 2, and 3 would go to group 1. Then numbers 4, 5, and 6 would go to group 2.
- To determine which question(s) students will answer – Once students are grouped, have them roll a die or the dice to determine the question they will answer. You could have as many as twelve questions.
- To determine order of presentations – Students roll die or dice to determine which order in which their presentation will be given.
- To determine roles – In group work, determine roles students will take (e.g., facilitator, recorder, presenter, etc.) by having them roll a die. For debates or other activities that need a leader, have students roll the dice. The lowest number (or highest number) is the leader. Or they roll twice and the average score is what they use to determine who fills the role.
- NOTE: I always carry dice in my pocket for spontaneous play.

## Playing Cards

- To assign points – Can be used in the same way as dice listed above. Also, you can have the teams draw cards to get the best “hand.” Determine what that will be (e.g., 4 of a kind, 4 in a row, the 5 lowest numbers, whatever—you might want to avoid the appearance of gambling, so it’s best not to call these by poker names). You can build in discard rules.
- To group students – Use the same way as dice. To pair students, use two decks and have students find their partner (use only as many cards as needed for the number of students in class).
- To determine which question(s) students will answer – Use the same way as dice.
- To determine order of presentations – Use the same way as dice.
- To determine roles – Use the same way as dice.

## Spinners

- Spinner that only has colors on it – Make cards that corresponded with the spinner colors with review questions on them. When students spin the wheel, they pull a card from that color stack to answer. To keep from embarrassing students, give them 5 minutes with their notes to answer. Then go over all the answers as a group. You could do the same thing with playing card suits and have only black and red question cards.
- Spinners with numbers (or monetary amounts) could be used in all the ways dice and playing cards are used.
- Spinners take time to prepare and are harder to transport. Plus, you could do the same thing with dice or playing cards.

## Timers

- To determine who will answer a question – Set the timer for 5, 8, 10, 12 seconds, whatever, but keep the time short and vary it so that students don't know when the timer will go off. Have them pass an object around, either from person to person in seating order or by throwing a nerf ball around. When the timer goes off, whoever has the ball must answer a question. Use a "pass" option so that students who don't know an answer can pass the question to someone whose name they know. If a question is passed twice, the third student can "pass" the question to the instructor so that the activity moves on.
- Name That Tune type of activity – Give groups or pairs a question to answer. They determine how long it will take to answer the questions correctly. If they do so, they win points. If not, another group gets the opportunity to answer.

## Receptionist Bells

- To determine who answers a question – Much like family feud, groups send a representative to the front of the room where an equal number of "ding" bells (my name for them) await. Ask a question. The ringer group in the front can't ring the bell until a hand goes up from their team or group. Choose that team to answer the question immediately. If they answer incorrectly, the next team has an opportunity to do so.
- To indicate a group is done – Have students work on questions in a group. When they are done, someone runs to the front to ring the bell. Go over the questions. Anyone in the class can answer questions in the class discussion.

## Game Boards

- Any game board or game can be adapted for use. It's also easy to make your own game board. Your institution may have a lamination machine so that you can make it withstand wear and tear.
- Some classic game boards you can use or modify:
  - Monopoly: For moving around across a bunch of different options
  - Clue: Explore the space! See what you discover
  - Chutes and Ladders: Try to progress while you keep facing setbacks
  - Life: Pick your favorite path toward the goal

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# Chapter Three: Playful Connection-Formers

How do you start a new class? With your bio? Talking through the syllabus? In a smaller class, do you have everyone go around and say their name, major, and why they took the class?

Sorry, but—boring!

And we wonder why students seem to taper off, lose interest, and lack engagement. Some of our usual approaches to starting a course set the table with low expectations for anything new, interesting, or meaningful. But, of course, it doesn't have to be that way. We can change how we approach, not just the first class, but every class and the entire course!

We think (good) icebreakers are severely underutilized in higher education. You don't start playing a sport without stretching (well, at least you shouldn't) so why do we expect students to jump straight into learning and without a warm-up? The goal of a good icebreaker is to help people lower their barriers, open up through play and fun, test a little vulnerability, and create connections among the people in the room. That's why we prefer to call icebreaker activities "connection-formers" because that's what they really do—connect people.

There's something else—icebreakers have a mixed reputation. Too often the idea of an "icebreaker" is the cliché predictable activity usually poorly executed at professional development retreats where unenthusiastic professionals are forced to engage with their colleagues. At their worst, icebreakers are the opposite of connection-formers. They are embarrassing, compulsory, and even worse—boring. (There's that word again).

This chapter presents a collection of playful connection-forming activities to use at the start of class time. Some of the techniques might feel safe and easy and others might seem...well, a little "out there." In all cases, the goal of a connection-former activity should be novelty, surprise, laughter, and the presence of vulnerability that comes from playing together. Sure, some of these might seem cliché to you—that's why you get to design your own courses and determine for yourself what is meaningful and fits for you. Don't forget the necessary congruence with your own playfulness because without it, all of these will surely come off as cheesy. Personally, we have had better luck with novel activities that we created and that are not expected. Think fly swatters and balloons or sticky hands and wacky questions. We believe that most of the examples you will find on Google, if you search "icebreaker activities," are typically too predictable and boring, in our opinion. So, get creative! Make your own!

While this type of play (connection-formers) is often only used on the very first day of a course, the power of the connection-former grows as you use them consistently throughout the term. Giving students ample chance to unwind from their days (or gear up!) and playfully engage and connect with their peers is as important on the first day of class as it is on the last.

This type of play might not always be connected or relevant to the content of the course. That makes some instructors reluctant to invest the time when there is “so much material to cover.” Some may be resistant to this type of seemingly useless play in learning because they might believe it is a waste of time and merely for entertainment purposes. Others might not implement play for the purpose of joy and fun because they believe that play should be utilized only when it directly connects to course objectives. But what we need to remember is in order to unlock the potential and power of play in learning, we have to get the students connected and in a centered place to learn. Play at the start of class time has a valuable place in the learning process that ignites motivation and engagement. Remember Image 1 back in chapter one—the Powerful Process of Learning? If we want students to learn, and we want them to be engaged, and we want them to be intrigued by the course and the content—we first we have to get them to feel interpersonally safe in the learning environment and we have to—to the best of our ability, reduce their stress and anxiety. All this comes from joy and laughter and we get that from play. So, seemingly useless silly play at the start of class is more than it appears on the surface—it generates important internal work and increases those vital neurotransmitters necessary for learning.

Fun and play at the start of each class session helps to build a sense of community and it allows students to decompress from their stressful days which opens them up for learning (Forbes, 2021). Once students are able to relax, ease into class, and feel a sense of connection and belonging, they will be more active and engaged in the learning. These connection-forming activities don’t have to take up substantial class time (i.e., 3-15 minutes), but they have a huge impact on the learning community and the level of active engagement of students. Therefore, we must trust the process of play and perhaps take a leap of faith when the activity doesn’t overtly seem to relate to the content that day. Still nervous? Be transparent with your students and let them know why you are including play—that it has a real purpose for real learning. Let’s check out some examples of connection-formers, maybe there’s some that strike a playful nerve with you.

The techniques in this chapter come from a broad variety of perspectives, institution types, disciplines, and levels of experience. Some might seem “too basic” or “too easy” for you. Others might seem too daunting or you worry they simply won’t work in your class. Maybe some just seem flat out scary for where you’re at in your playful professor development. That’s okay! The good news is, there’s no “right” way to run a connection-former. But there are few things to keep in mind:

- **Surprise your students.** Try to be a bit more novel and creative than the usual and predictable openers. Asking them to go around the room and give their name and favorite superhero might not get students all that excited. But having them act out their favorite superhero while their classmates guess who it is, might get them out of their comfort zone and open the benefits of play.
- **Participate.** The cardinal sin of the connection-former is for the teacher to sit out of the play. You don’t have to go first but make sure you are playing along too.
- **Get out of your comfort zone.** Again, connection-formers ask people to be vulnerable. And sometimes that is the hardest thing in the world for a professor to do. But remember, if you

feel nervous about the play you are designing for your students, you might be on the right track! Lisa always knows she's on the right track when thinking of applying her playful ideas to class time if it makes her get all sweaty.

- **Expect to fail.** Vulnerability means risk and risk means a potential for “failure.” We’ve all been there. The connection-former that sounded good on paper might flop—it happens. But, “failure” in this sense usually isn’t detrimental or career-ending. Failure in this case is a result of tinkering, trying, and pushing yourself beyond your current abilities. That’s how we grow and resist staying stagnant. So, in this sense, failure is kind of the point, it’s it? “Failure” is information. We often reflect on our semesters and ask ourselves: *“Did I fail enough this semester?”* And if we did not “fail” enough, we know we didn’t push ourselves enough.
- **Utilize trial and error.** Laughter or interest is how students inadvertently vote on quality connection-formers. When you hear students laughing, you can be sure they are playing, and if they are playing, they are connecting. Well done! Some connection-formers are brilliant, others are mundane—that’s okay! Keep what works and throw away or fine tune what doesn’t. (See the above point).
- **Don’t be boring!** There it is again. Connection-formers are surprising, delightful, scary, weird, provocative, and more. But they are never boring!

### Selfie-Scavenger Hunt

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#### **Technique Summary Description**

To successfully complete this activity, students should take photos of themselves in the locations indicated by the clues provided. Some of the clues allow for personal preference. Most often, “place” is the desired element. All photos should be taken on campus and should be as specific as possible. Most of all, students are encouraged to have fun and be creative.

#### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

Students are provided a list of clues that lead them to specific places on campus. Students then take photos of themselves in these places and return to the designated location (e.g., classroom, instructor’s office, etc.) to show their photos to the instructor for credit. As an added element of fun and motivation, I offered the following awards for each class who participated in the activity: “Fastest Time,” “Most Creative,” and “Best Photography.” The students who “won” these awards each received an “Oops! Token”—a coupon that allows them to turn in one assignment late without point deductions.

Sample Clues:

- If you’re missing a required textbook or need a Scantron...

- If you need to pay your tuition or meal account...
- If you lose your photo ID, lock your keys in your car, or need to report suspicious activity...
- If you need to clear your head or want to complete your work in the great outdoors...
- If you are quarantined but really need to use the campus wi-fi...
- If you need to visit with your instructor (for this class) ...
- If you need to print an assignment before class...
- If you need to check out a book...
- If you need a “study buddy” (for this class) ...
- If you need to speak with your adviser...

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

Each semester, I set out to create engaging activities for the first week of class. Since I teach college freshmen courses, I find that many of my students do not know where to go for specific tasks and services. This activity forces the students to become acquainted with the resources available on campus, and it gets them up and moving. In all honesty, the “awards”—without the “Oops! Token”—are likely enough motivation to get them excited. However, by providing students with this opportunity, students quickly learn that I am a realist and that the “Oops! Token” is an act of compassion and understanding.

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

This activity was designed as an ice breaker activity but could certainly be adapted for any scavenger hunt-based activity. I could easily see it working for history or science courses. It would also work well for an activity based on print resources in the campus library (e.g., periodicals, primary and secondary sources, reference books, maps, etc.).

Many students take photos of themselves constantly. There is no reason why we shouldn’t capitalize on this.

### **Beach Ball Buzz**

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### **Technique Summary Description**

I created a beach ball with several icebreaker questions on it. For the first three weeks or so, we take half of our Friday’s class to play games to get to know one another.

The materials needed for this ice breaker are simple—one inflated beach ball, a sharpie, and a list of questions:

## Sample Questions

- What is your favorite ice cream flavor?
- How many siblings do you have?
- What would you do with a million dollars?
- What is your best childhood memory?
- What are you excited about this year?
- What are you nervous about this year?
- What do you want to do when you grow up?
- What are you passionate about?

## Technique Detailed Instruction

The group will stand in a circle (take them outside if you have to!). Give them the instructions that the beach ball has questions or prompts and participants will answer the question under their right thumb when they catch the ball. Before answering the question, they remind the group of their name. Once they have gone, they have to “popcorn” it to another person by saying their name and tossing the ball to that person. They cannot give it to the person on either side of them or someone who has already gone.

## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

The beach ball buzz is an effortless act of getting to know one another more deeply. It's great for energizing a class (we all know how tired they are) and it can be a fun de-stress activity.

Some of my favorite questions are what they would do with a million dollars and favorite ice cream flavors. There is a lot of laughter with this game and so many commonalities arise! Students have bonded more quickly because of this game. It has made getting into groups, later in the semester, much more accessible. I pair this activity with a discussion about making sure they continue the classroom friendships outside of class when they see each other to greet them by name.

## Reflection on Wider Use

This can be used for any course for any reason, especially if you have difficulty, like I do, remembering students' names. I find that connecting exciting facts about students helps me remember their names. You can modify the questions based on your course outcomes. Questions could include what they learned from that week's lesson and they can be used as quiz questions.

## Walk & Flop

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## Technique Summary Description

The tool used in this activity is a Flop Ball which is played with on the back of the hand instead of thrown and caught in the palm like most balls (see picture of a Flop Ball in the image below and this video for a demo of how to make your own: (<http://flowcircus.com/diy>)).

The Walk & Flop activity evolved from a need to mix up groups and create new connections in a playful way. We've all facilitated groups where people want to partner with the people they came with and no one else. It happens with all ages.

Think musical chairs but without anyone getting eliminated. When the music plays, people should walk around focusing on their own individual play and when the music stops, they pass the Flop Ball with someone near them. While passing, they are given a question to answer. Depending on the group (age, how well they know each other, etc.), the questions range from icebreaker type questions like favorite movie/tv show to more reflective questions such as in which ways you like to replenish, something you're working on, or areas of course content you're struggling with.

This activity sometimes comes after they've been playing with the Flop Ball for about 10 minutes so we also like to ask them to share with a partner, "while playing with the Flop Ball, I noticed or was reminded..." People often share observations about how they reacted to dropping the Flop Ball or describing things that helped them perform better. We typically do this last because we then have them stay with that partner to do more complex passing activities. This shared awareness about their partner can help them adjust so they can both be successful.

## Technique Detailed Instructions

Traditionally known as a hand sack, the Flop Ball has taken many shapes and has been played with in many cultures. Otedama, a traditional Japanese game, and Native American shuttlecocks both use the back of the hand in play. When developing the current design, we named it "Flop Ball" first because of the floppy feel of it, but also, to draw attention to the fact that before you can be good at something you have to spend time in that space of messy learning—or "flopping." If we can get comfortable with and have a "growthful" attitude toward flopping, we can improve performance and well-being at the same time. Here's what you do:

- Put on music and have them walk around an open area of the room tossing and catching the Flop Ball on the back of their hand as they walk.
- When the music stops, have them turn to someone near them and pass the Flop Balls back and forth.
- Start the music again and let them move around.
- Each time the music stops, encourage them to find a new partner. While they exchange Flop Balls, you can have them answer a question to get to know each other (e.g., favorite song, TV show, movie, ice cream flavor, etc).
- Or use it as a content review in which you ask a question and they can consult with their partner before having one of the pairs volunteer to answer.
- 3-4 times is a good number of rotations to serve as a good energizer or transition to an activity requiring pairs.

## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

This activity gets students moving around the classroom in a focused way. They need to be paying attention to the Flop Ball in their hands so the movement is almost meditative. They need to be aware of their tosses/catches and of their immediate surroundings so they don't bump into anyone/thing. Then the music stops and the energy shifts as people talk, laugh, and feel silly passing (and dropping) with each other. The back and forth between these two energies plus the movement creates a new dynamic for sharing. Out of their seats and engaging in play, students feel more relaxed, open, and comfortable interacting with each other.

### Reflection on Wider Use

This activity is a fun, quick activity to do check-ins or review content at the beginning of class, to change up energy in the room mid-way through class, or to partner students up for a new activity in a playful way. Another variation: select different styles of music on different days or change up the music on the same day and challenge them to walk and flop to match the music.



## Balloon Feelings

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### Technique Summary Description

In a large group, provide Sharpie markers and balloons. Have the audience blow up the balloons and then answer a prompt question by writing on the balloon. On the word "go," all the balloons are thrown into the air and have them bat them around for a while. Finally, people collect a random balloon and read out the answer written on the balloon.

## Technique Detailed Instructions

This technique arose as a solution to a simple problem of quickly engaging a large audience or lecture hall class. Often, clicker questions or word clouds are used to solicit this kind of participation. But with Balloon Feelings, the effect is much more interactive, kinetic, and playful.

In one version, I asked my audience this question:

- *When I was a kid, I loved to \_\_\_\_\_ for fun.*
- *And it made me feel \_\_\_\_\_.*
- A response to the question might be:
- *When I was a kid, I loved to CLIMB TREES for fun.*
- *And it made me feel FREE.*

Instead of having the participants write their answers on paper, I have them blow up balloons and then write just the feeling answer on the balloon. On a count of three, I have the audience launch the balloons into the air to playfully bat around. For several minutes, the room erupts in a bouncing, playful mass of balloons flying through the air.

After a few minutes, I ask everyone to grab a balloon. Because of the chaos, no one ends up with their original balloon. At this point, I solicit feedback from the audience: “*Okay, what’s on your balloon!?*” People gladly shoot out answers. This activity simultaneously gets a large group or class up and moving and interacting as well as engaging in a topic.

### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

This technique was designed for large audiences or classes. In a sense, it works to break down barriers in a large crowd by leveraging the anonymity of a large group. At the same time, it brings out child-like wonder, creates a shared space of interaction, invites engagement with others in the room, and provides a large-scale shared experience.

Used as a large-group icebreaker, it changes the “energy” in a room from less of a lecture and more of a group event. It encourages participation in other interactive opportunities from additional play to simple Q&A. What is most noticeable about this technique is how a large room of people goes from total silence to erupting in laughter, shouts, and a joyful mood. This tangible shift in the audience’s demeanor is always noticeable and inspiring.

### Reflection on Wider Use

Because this technique is content-neutral, it can be used in any setting with a large number of people. In terms of accommodations, I usually encourage those who need help inflating their balloon to ask for help. Keep in mind, some people have latex allergies so be sure you ask the group before bringing the balloons out. I’d come prepared with an alternative activity, just in case, because some have severe latex allergies. If it’s more of a mild allergy, they don’t have to bat the balloons around—a person next to them can help them blow up a balloon, write on it, then collect two balloons so they can still participate. And while people often stand up, this activity works just as well with a seated group.

## **Jamboard Presentation**

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### **Technique Summary Description**

Presentations can be a source of anxiety for students. In my course, students have five presentations, two individual, two groups, plus one symposium for the entire campus. Students come to campus with varying degrees of presentation skills. Therefore, I take a scaffolding approach. I have found that Jamboards support collaborative learning as it simultaneously scaffolds application, integration, human dimension, and caring. Students' first presentation in my course is the second week of class. It is a two-minute discussion on a photo collage of themselves and what makes them who they are. They give a speech just talking about each photo, who is in it, and why it is unique or meaningful.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

Jamboard is a fun whiteboard-style tool that instructors and students can use virtually. It works on laptops and phones, so it is a very accessible tool. Our campus is a Google campus, so Jamboard is easily accessible. I create the Jamboards using each student's name as the title of each page of the Jamboard. I am the first person on the Jamboard to give students an example of what I am looking for. I'm also the first to provide the presentation.

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

Equity, communication, and participation become the three objectives of incorporating the use of the Jamboard. The use of collaborative technology provides in-class equity. In a student-centered environment, aided by technology, participation becomes virtual and supports students of all abilities, motivations, and languages. Collaborative technology builds supportive communities for learners to take ownership of their shared learning experience (Reiser & Dempsey, 2018). I gained a lot of insight from this assignment and they get prepared for presentations. Students get used to being in front of the classroom, speaking in person, and using new technology.

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

I enjoy using Jamboard with student projects as well. I have found that collaborative technology moves students from silence and self-doubt to a space of confidence. But this requires me to be comfortable giving up control of the classroom. The students can work on projects within class time, but I rely on them to meet as teams outside of class. Students can manage projects and think creatively as they connect new ideas from collaborative interaction. They can also learn about others and make deep and meaningful interpersonal connections.

## Name Toss

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*I've been using this technique for decades. Sadly, I do not know the originator of the game.*

### **Technique Summary Description**

This technique is an icebreaker activity that I use on the first day of class to help students get to know each other's names. By the end of the activity, students know every person in the class (up to 32) and can call them by their first name.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

For this activity, bring 3-4 soft objects that students can throw to each other without getting hurt (e.g., "koosh" balls, stuffed animals, plastic squishies, etc.).

#### **Instructions:**

1. Have students form a circle in front of the room, in the hallway, or even outside if the weather permits. The circle should be somewhat tight, with no gaps, so that students can throw the soft objects to each other easily.
2. Go around the circle having each student state their first name slowly, clearly, and loud enough for all to hear. Tell students that the goal of this portion of the activity is for them to remember at least one name of a person in class whom they don't know.
3. Explain to the students that we are going to learn names and practice civility. The facilitator starts the activity by saying the name of the person to whom they would like to throw the ball. This gets the person's attention and also reinforces their name for those who are trying to remember it. When the person catches the object, the catcher replies, "Thank you, (thrower's name),"—again, loud enough for all to hear. And the process begins again.
4. Add additional objects so that 3-4 are being tossed at the same time.
5. When the students can state each student's name (or at least close to everyone's name), I quit the game by calling "Time out!" Then, I go around the circle and state each person's name on my own. After I have done it individually, I invite the rest of the class to join me and say everyone's name as I move around the circle.

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

By the end of the game, you, as the teacher, know the names of every (or almost every) student in your class. Also, the students know each other's names. In an end-of-semester anonymous survey about community building in the course, students provided the following feedback about this activity:

- (The activity was) “an excellent way to learn the names of other students in the class.”
- “I liked going outside for the ice breakers. I knew the other students from day one by doing the name game where we threw the stuffed animals to each other.”

### Reflection on Wider Use

This technique can be used in any discipline in any setting. It is a way to help students learn each other's names in an effort to build a supportive classroom community. In terms of accessibility, I have had students in wheelchairs who have participated and students on crutches who have played. The other students have just given the objects to those students in wheelchairs, and then helped the wheelchair-bound students throw it to someone else. The one hearing impaired student I had always had an interpreter to help her. I have not had a seeing impaired student in my classes, but I would have the students standing next to them help them negotiate the game. This game is best used on the first day of class rather than waiting until later.

## Wacky Questions & Sticky Hands

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### Technique Summary Description

This is a connection-former activity that I use on the very first night of class. It serves as a way to get to know each other and lighten the mood of a serious and anxiety-provoking experience like starting a new class with a new instructor and peers. This activity is more fun and engaging than the typical first night of class introductions (e.g., everyone say your name, major, and one fun fact about you). Instead, Wacky Questions is more playful and creative. The questions are intentionally silly and some of them don't even have legit answers. Half the fun is coming up with a wacky answer! But in terms of building camaraderie and rapport in the classroom, nothing unsticks the class like a bag of sticky hands and a pile of Wacky Questions!

### Technique Detailed Instructions

Before class, you will use a desk to set out various note cards that you lay face down. Each note card has a wacky question written on the other side. As students enter the room, give each of them a sticky hand that they will use for this activity (which they get to keep as a fidget toy! An example of sticky hands here: (<https://amzn.to/2JCxKTh>). Once the activity starts, have students come up one at a time to the note card table for their turn. Instruct them to introduce themselves (e.g., name/pronouns) then they will use their sticky hand to slap at the note cards. Whichever note card they randomly collect with their sticky hand, they answer the question written on the back. Have them read the question out loud and provide an answer. The sample wacky questions below are to help you get started. But half the fun

is coming up with your own questions! What makes a good Wacky Question? Some tips for writing Wacky Questions include:

- Make it unexpected.
- Don't ask people questions that might be embarrassing or inappropriate.
- Ask questions that don't have an obvious answer.
- Make sure your questions make you smile or laugh.

### Sample Wacky Questions:

1. Where were you during the Balloon Boy Hoax?
2. What do you know about Teddy Roosevelt?
3. Name five things that rhyme with sword.
4. Name everything you've done in a sink.
5. If you were getting a cannonball shot at your stomach, what would you rather have to protect you? 100 LBS of Jell-O or 100 LBS of Cheese Whiz?
6. Do your best impression of a pig.
7. Are clowns born to be clowns or is that a learned trait? Explain.
8. Who has more control? A toddler or its parents? Explain.
9. Would you rather fight 100 toddlers or face your deepest darkest pain on the hour, every hour?
10. How many tots can you make from one tater?
11. Is April O'Neil an irresponsible TV reporter? Explain why or why not.
12. Create a question for the class involving a pool ball.
13. What does a Push Pop remind you of?
14. Describe the sound of an elephant only using real words.
15. Would you rather have no teeth or have dentures made out of your mother's teeth?
16. You know how after you read a paperback novel, you kind of don't need it anymore? What if they made edible novels! What flavor novel would you want?
17. You dropped your new phone in a giant vat of chili. What do you do?
18. What is worse, flying spiders or snakes with legs?
19. What cartoon character would you like to meet in real life?
20. What would you like to throw off a skyscraper, just to watch it smash?
21. If you had to give up one, for the rest of your life, which would it be: ketchup, mayo or mustard?

### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

Students are used to the static and passive first night introductions so some are a bit uncertain about this at first. But if you provide context for why you are using play in your classrooms, students usually are more open and willing to play along. Once students engage and start reading and hearing the wacky questions and answers, they slowly open up to each other and the classroom environment. One of my first times using this activity a student said: "*This is more fun than I thought it would be!*" This allows students to get to know each other in a more playful and authentic way that breaks the ice of the first night of class. It sets the tone that while class and the subject is serious, we can also be playful and enjoy our time together.

## Reflection on Wider Use

This technique can be used in any class with any group of people. It is important to consider students with limited mobility—if that is of concern, determine how you can adjust the activity to where students don’t have to get up out of their seat. If having students walk to the front of the classroom is an accessibility issue, place the Wacky Question note cards face down on a serving tray that you hold and walk around to each student to take their turn. Another consideration is potential language barriers. It might be extremely anxiety provoking for a student whose primary language is not English to read a question in front of the entire class. To adjust for this, once the student slapped a card, you could read it for each student to answer. Or you could run this activity in small groups so the vulnerability feels more manageable.

## Improv Games

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### Technique Credits

The improvisational or “improv” theater movement is generally credited to Viola Spolin (Spolin, 1999). A wealth of games has been created by the improv community (Haroldson, 2022; and references within). A number of instructors from various disciplines have utilized improv games in their classroom (Haroldson, 2022).

### Technique Summary Description

Improv theater is a live form where the elements of a scene are made up during the performance. Research in various academic disciplines has found the use of improv in classrooms beneficial. In my usage, I play improv theater games in the first 3-5 minutes of class throughout the semester. This typically involves the students and instructor playing in a group circle, but has been adapted to various classroom spaces and on field trips. Various improv games operate on different levels. Some games are simple icebreakers to get the students to know each other. Other games promote thinking on your feet (improvising).

### Technique Detailed Instructions

The games can seem a little “silly” for a classroom environment. To overcome this barrier, it is important to explain the goals to everyone. In improv, the actors learn how to work together, this in turn works to foster community and develop transferable skills, which in turn benefits learning in the course. While improv is generally about being creative and making it up as you go along, there are important rules that keep the action going. Two important tenets of improv are acceptance and

contribution. These are commonly referred to as the “yes, and...” rule. No matter how strange or off your partner’s suggestion, you need to reaffirm it and add to it.

The general strategy to utilize these games in the classroom is to reserve the first 3-5 minutes at the beginning of class for playing improv games. If possible, it is useful if there is a space in the room where a group circle can be formed. It is possible to incorporate course content into the games, but not necessary, as this may happen naturally on its own.

A simple icebreaker game is called “*cross-circle*” in which the players take turns identifying each other by name. A volunteer starts by pointing to somebody across from them, saying their name (and if they don’t know it, ask) and then move to take their place in the circle. Once there, the person places their hand on their head marking them as no longer selectable. The selected person then selects somebody else and takes their place, and so on. Once everyone has been selected, it’s another challenge to reverse the order.

A simple game that gets everyone to think on their feet is “*one word story*” in which the participants take turns in order around the circle, each adding a single word to an evolving story. The story can have an agreed upon prompt, or it can be made up entirely on the spot. Ask students not to steer the story, but instead listen and try to anticipate where the story is going.

Another game that works on the skill of thinking on your feet is “*firing squad*.” In this game, players line up shoulder to shoulder. One player is selected to be the “victim.” The victim will face the first person in line standing in front of them. That person says a word to the victim, the victim then has to repeat back the first word that comes to mind. The victim then moves down the line to the next person and so-on.

In the game “*yes, let’s...*” players work on their ability to accept their partner’s offer. The game starts with one player shouting “*let’s...*” describing an action which they begin to perform (e.g., pretending to mow a lawn). Then the next player joins the scene by shouting “*let’s...*” and describes a new action (e.g., pretending to wash windows). With the new prompt, the group of actors say, “*yes, let’s*” and begin to do that new action. Then a third player joins the same way the second player did, and so on.

There are a multitude of other improv games that exist, and there are many websites that contain a collection of game descriptions. Haroldson (2022) contains a supplemental section with many suggestions of where to look for ideas.

### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

In Haroldson (2022), a student perception survey indicated agreement in the usage of these games toward: 1) fostering a community of practice and 2) developing students’ transferable skills. The former benefits learning in the course and may increase retention of a more diverse student body. The latter prepares students to be adaptable in dynamic industries. Improv games may also improve engagement in a classroom that employs active learning strategies. Furthermore, the author believes that playing improv promotes a more inclusive community in the classroom, working to break up cliques, etc.

## Reflection on Wider Use

The usage of improv theater strategies or the playing of improv games in the classroom has been documented in various disciplines (Haroldson, 2022; and references within). However, these usage instances are likely not all that common within some disciplines and completely unitized in others. Haroldson (2022) also described the usage in informal education settings, like in scientific lab groups, at field camps, or on field trips.

## Class Playlist

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### Technique Summary Description

Developing a community in the classroom offers a safe and supportive space to decrease anxiety, build confidence and increase productivity. Making the class playlist is an activity that I use during the first week of class. The class playlist helps to bridge the generation gap between faculty and students, find a common interest between classmates, and sets the tone for the course that focuses on social justice, DEIB, and civil rights. The additional benefit of this activity is that it incorporates soft research skills. Because the course is research-heavy, and research can be an intimidating topic, I attempt to make it more accessible with each assignment.

### Technique Detailed Instructions

During course development, I add a few songs that embody the spirit of the course—in my case; it's a community-based social justice course on food dignity. I invite the students in the class to collaborate on the playlist via the share function of the streaming app. I have found that Spotify is the preferred app many students use and are familiar with. Students are encouraged to add a minimum of five songs to the playlist with social justice themes. Students need to research social justice and see where those themes emerge in popular music. I play the list at the beginning of every class and quietly during group time.

#### Sample of Playlist Songs:

- Glory – Common and John Legend
- Who Run the World (Girls) – Beyoncé
- War – Edwin Starr
- Mercy, Mercy Me – Marvin Gaye
- Fight the Power – Public Enemy
- If I Ruled the World (Imagine That) – N.A.S. & Lauren Hill
- I Can't Breathe – H.E.R.

## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

The constant influence of music throughout my class is felt by all. An aspect of creating this atmosphere is to subtly indicate that the classroom is a safe space for marginalized students. Cross-cultural communication through music is a non-threatening means of conveying support for a more liberal (i.e., liberal arts) learning outcome. It is exciting to see students mouthing the words or bopping their heads to the music. As songs play, I ask who added that song and why. The more profound connection to the students' choices gives educators a glimpse into the students' lived experiences. Students are surprised I like *their* music and that, in some cases, they like mine too! We find commonality in discovering what awakens our passion.

### Reflection on Wider Use

Through my many years in the H.E. classroom, I've noticed that students usually have earbuds or air pods throughout the class. Music is a constant companion for many of these students. Increasingly pens and notebooks have been replaced by tablets or laptops. Unfortunately, those can also serve as a distraction, so many faculty have prohibited the use of mobile devices and music.

However, mobile learning (m-learning) offers students ease of usage, instant connection, and instant access to content. My focus is to incorporate those devices students currently use with set parameters. Rather than prohibiting the devices in my class, I encourage their use. I offer our playlist as an antidote to disengagement. A constant presence informs social justice of "isms" that permeate American culture. A consideration to be mindful of is this impact on BIPOC students, like their experiences with DEIB. It is essential not to have your BIPOC students in the spotlight when discussing social justice (or choosing for them to be in the spotlight). In addition, this may be challenging for international students. However, international students' contributions to the playlist make the whole experience fuller as students get to experience culture unexpectedly.

## Unboxing Pedagogy

### **Building Community in Online Spaces Through the Mail**

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Originally the idea was inspired by the work of Kim Jaxon (California State University, Chico), who uses boxes in her in-person courses—they are co-created with students. This idea inspired us to consider this box idea within online-only spaces. Then we (Andrea Laser & Dennis DeBay) prototyped this in the Fall of 2019 by sending boxes through the mail. We would be remiss to not say that we were also inspired by the general unboxing trend.

### **Technique Summary Description**

Unboxing Pedagogy is where the instructor mails out a mystery box full of collaborative, tangible projects to online learners to increase a sense of community. Boxes can include many different items, but ours generally include: 1) university/school branded shirts, lanyards, pens, stickers, etc. in order for students to have something that connects them to the university, 2) a concrete, tangible activity that they will complete (like a mission, if they choose to accept), and 3) fun, random items like a small toy, candy, or another treat. The boxes are a fun surprise to ignite a different way to build engagement within any course.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

Instructors should start by asking students if they are interested in receiving a box, and if so, identify their best mailing address. After the instructor collects responses, they plan for the box content. In our experience, the university often has recruitment “swag” that they are willing to donate to the cause. We have experimented with boxes that have inexpensive materials and others that are more complex, material heavy boxes that are funded by the university or professional development funds. After curating the box, the instructor should include a note that explains what’s in the box and what to do with it. Then the instructor should wait patiently for students to engage and hear about the fun!

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

Overall, we have received great feedback from students and faculty who have participated. We are planning to complete a formal study by the end of the school year and are excited to share those results. Here is a sampling of what students have said about the boxes:

- “I loved getting boxes, it felt like Christmas.”
- “I enjoyed not having to drive down to Denver. I got the materials right at my doorstep.”
- “I saw the package and thought “did I order something? I don’t think I did” then I saw that it was from [my instructor] and remembered about the package and opened it right away! I was SO excited and I’m hoping we get to use them soon in the class!”
- “It felt like opening a care package.”
- “This is actually pretty cool. Even though you’re all online it’s like you’re in a floating classroom.”
- “My favorite assignment was the mail-in assignment. I thought it was a creative way to keep students engaged during this difficult time.”
- “I can’t say enough how refreshing it is interacting with all of you. The conversations are so energetic and enthusiastic—not like teaching is something you have to figure out how to manage, or what you do when you aren’t doing your ‘actual job’—researching.”
- “I loved the box on my door! It was silly fun to get a present and be excited for a project = aka your whole goal of these boxes works!”

As an impact of this work, when polled 25% of students said that they felt connected to the class through this activity while the additional 75% of the class said that they felt VERY connected to the class through this activity.

### Reflection on Wider Use

The goal is to create a university-wide community of practice to allow other faculty from all schools to collaborate and think of ways to build community in their online spaces. Our campus needs to adapt to different learning environments and as we think about how to engage and retain students in their program of study, the way we build community in these different formats will be of importance.

## **Scattergories**

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### **Technique Summary Description**

This technique is an icebreaker activity that is based on the Parker Brothers game Scattergories. I use this activity on the first day of class to help students get to know about their classmates. I use this immediately following the Name Toss Game (also presented in this chapter) to reinforce knowing everyone's name and to learn about the similarities and differences of student experiences.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

Prepare a list of questions that require students to get in different categories based on their own characteristics or experiences. (See attached list). Then do the following:

1. Explain to students that you will call out some categories and their job is to communicate with other students in the class to find their classmates who share the same characteristics, likes, and experiences that they have had.
2. For example, if I had you get in groups based on year in school, all the Freshman would get together, the Sophomores, etc. It is the students' responsibility to be sure that everyone who belongs in that category be included in the group.
3. While students are in groups, they should review and/or learn the names of each person in the group.
4. As the facilitator, randomly call upon one person in a group to name everyone in the group.

## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

By the end of the game, students have interacted with other students in the class and identified similar characteristics between themselves and others in the class. One major outcome of this game is that students start to create a sense of community with their classmates because they're finding people who have things in common with them. In an end-of-semester anonymous survey about community building in the course, students provided the following feedback about this activity:

- *"I liked the icebreakers we did at the beginning of the semester because they built a sense of community that we had throughout the rest of the class."*
- *"I usually hate icebreakers, but the ones we did helped me know the other students in the class and I was able to find things I had in common with other students."*

### Reflection on Wider Use

This technique can be used in any class with any number of people. I have done this activity with hearing impaired and physically disabled students with no problem. This game is best used on the first day of class rather than waiting until later. I usually use this game as a follow-up to the Name Toss. The key to making this work is to make sure that students are in distinct groups, so that the facilitator can easily identify the groups.

#### **Scattergories Categories List**

Have students get in groups based on:

- Year in school
- Eye color
- Age
- Shoe size
- Birth month
- Favorite movie genre
- Hair color
- Favorite fast-food restaurant
- # of siblings
- Favorite color
- Make of car they drive
- Astrological sign
- Favorite season
- Relationship status

Have students line up based on:

- Alphabetical order by first or last names
- Birthdays (from Jan 1 – Dec 31)
- Years of experience with “X”
- How far they travel to school each day
- Oldest to youngest

## Collaging in Class

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### **Technique Summary Description**

I like using collage in class because it is a fun and expressive activity that doesn't require artistic talent. I use collage in all of my social work classes, especially my play therapy class, but even in research methods, human development, and theory classes. I use both individual and whole class collage. In play therapy class I have students make a collage about what play therapy means to them. I often use collage at the end of the semester when I ask the students to make a collage about themselves before and after the course. When a class has been particularly connected, I will ask them to make one group collage about saying goodbye to one another. When students are graduating, I ask them to make individual collages about saying goodbye to school and saying hello to their future. In research classes I have the student collage about their feelings about research pre and post-course. In theory and human development courses, I have students create individual or group collages about specific theories or stages of human development. I will often play music of the class's choosing in the background while they collage, which adds to the more relaxed and playful atmosphere.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

1. Provide scissors, glue, printer or poster paper, and magazines. Having magazines that the students are familiar with and enjoy can make it more fun, but any magazines can work. Magazines can be expensive to purchase in bulk for this purpose, you may want to ask friends, family and neighbors, doctor's offices and libraries to save their old magazines for you.
2. Ask the students to cut out words, shapes and/or images and glue them on paper to create a collage. This can be an individual, group, or whole class task. The theme can be anything at all, including make a collage about yourself, what you hope to gain this semester, how you feel about taking this course, the topic we are learning about today, your reaction to the course materials or class discussion, yourself before and after the course, what you learned this semester, or how you feel about saying goodbye.
3. When the collages are complete, or when we are finishing up our time, I ask students to share as much or as little as they want about their work. If the group is small enough, I will ask students to volunteer to share with the group. If it's a large class I will have them share in small groups.

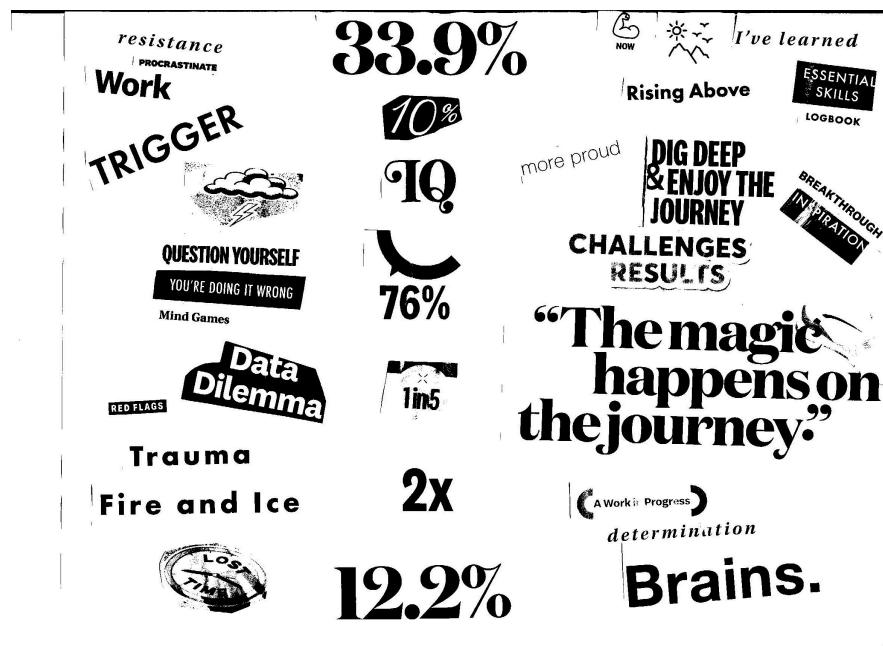
### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

Students are not as self-conscious or anxious about engaging in collage as they might be if I were to ask them to draw or paint. The process of engaging in collage is usually stress free and relaxing. Students are generally enthusiastic because cutting and gluing are often nostalgic activities that they have not

engaged in for a long time. Students enjoy perusing the magazines, sometimes stopping to read, often sharing images and articles with their classmates. Lots of casual conversation and laughter happens, as well as conversations about the theme of the collage. Students make connections between the collage theme, the course material, and the words, shapes, and images in the magazines. Student collages are often quite expressive. As students share their creations, they frequently will develop insights about themes and issues that came up for them while creating the collage and in their finished product. Students can usually relate to each other's themes and ideas, which builds connection among students. Students often share deeper insights about course material and their reflections on their learning process when they discuss their collages.

### Reflection on Wider Use

This technique can be used in all disciplines. If there are concerns about cutting abilities, I will bring bags of precut words and images. I always bring right and left-handed scissors. I make an effort to collect and/or purchase magazines that reflect my students' identities and various cultures. I also inform students in advance that we will be using magazines and I invite them to bring in unwanted magazines to add to my collection if they would like. When using this activity in an online format, I have students create digital collages using Google Slides and image searches. For groups in the online format, I use breakout rooms and Google Slides.



The above image is a collage that reflects on the student's feelings about research before and after a graduate research methods course.

## Playing with Paper Airplanes

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### **Technique Credits**

I attended an event called the Retrospectacle through a group called Immersive Denver. They had audience members fly paper airplanes up to the stage with questions written on them.

### **Technique Summary Description**

I was inspired by the use of paper airplanes in the Immersive Denver event so I wanted to use paper airplanes in my class. One of my classes is an active and applied format where students are engaging in several role plays practicing their counseling skills. It's important to process the role plays to allow students space to reflect on what they found challenging, what successes or breakthroughs they had regarding their development, or bring up questions about the skills or the therapeutic process. My typical approach to this reflection was to just ask students in a large group: "*What questions do you have? What did you find challenging? What did you wonder about? What was an ah-ha moment?*" This approach sometimes works but with some groups of students, they don't have much to say—[crickets]. I decided I could incorporate paper airplanes to make it more fun and to allow students to submit anonymous questions/statements to then process together as a group.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

1. When the students entered class, I gave everyone a piece of paper and I said: "*you have 4 minutes to make the best paper airplane you can WITHOUT Googling or YouTubing directions.*" (Note: I used this as a fun beginning-of-class connection-former).
2. Once the timer went off, I said that we will get to fly their planes soon. Then, I said, "*Last week, you all engaged in your 30-minute role plays and I wanted to provide an opportunity to process how that went and answer questions that might have come up. But instead of raising your hands to speak, I want you to write your reflection or question on your paper airplane and throw it at me.*" Students get a sinister smile on their face at the opportunity to throw an object at the professor. Someone once hit me square in the forehead—it was a good laugh!
3. Students write their reflections/questions and then I collect them off the floor (or my face!) as they throw them to the front of the room. This is a humorous process because most of the paper airplanes fly a bit wonky so I am sent running all over the room to pick them up.
4. Once back at the front of the room, I read aloud the questions/reflections and individually answer or comment on each one. Some ended with my comment and some generated more conversation.

## **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

This activity was a fun and playful way to start the class as students took their seats and a more productive way to get students to share their insights or lingering questions from a previous activity/role play. Students experienced joy and laughter as they made their airplanes, often poking fun at themselves for their lack of paper airplane making skills. They also found joy and laughter when they got to throw them to me and see me run all over collecting their planes. The fun and joy was paired with a deeper, more productive conversation about their development as a professional counselor. I believe novelty added to the success of this activity but also submitting an anonymous question or reflection allowed students to be more open than if they had to ask their question in front of the entire class.

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

This paper airplane activity can obviously be used in any class with any topic. It can be used similarly as I did, asking for questions/reflections regarding an activity that the students did. It could be questions about a concept or assigned reading. It could even be used to poll something that is irrelevant to the class such as one feeling word that best describes their current mood. The possibilities are endless.

## **What We Have in Common**

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### **Technique Summary Description**

This is a fun activity to use as a warm-up at the beginning of the semester or at the start of any class. It is reminiscent of the game musical chairs because in each round, there is one person left without a spot. Students stand in a circle, with the professor in the middle. The professor shares something that students may have in common, such as “I am an only child,” or “I have two cats.” Everyone in the circle who shares that thing in common must step into the circle and then try to step back out, but not into the same place they were initially standing. The professor also steps out, filling up one space, so the last student will be left in the middle. That student must then share something that students and professor might have in common, such as “I can ice-skate backward.” Again, everyone who shares that thing in common steps in and then out of the circle and into a new spot. The last person in the circle shares another statement. Students learn about what they have in common with the professor and with their classmates. The game continues until each person has had a chance to step into the common circle or until you run out of time. The group learns that they all have some things in common.

## Technique Detailed Instructions

1. Have the students stand in a circle around the professor.
2. Share something that students may have in common. These can be facts about the person's features, such as "I have brown eyes," or interests, such as, "I like to paint landscapes," or accomplishments such as "I have run a marathon," or feelings such as, "I'm nervous to be in research methods class this semester."
3. Keep going until everyone has stepped into the circle at least once, indicating that everyone in the class has something in common.

### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

Students enjoy this activity. They find commonalities and differences, they share things about themselves that they might not in typical introductions, and they enjoy learning about each other and the professor. This is a particularly helpful activity when students are apprehensive, quiet or nervous because students can share about themselves without having to talk too much. Students have commented on their "opinion surveys" at the end of my classes that "the games" were their favorite part of their class experience.

### Reflection on Wider Use

This technique can be used in all disciplines. If the group has a hard time finding something for everyone to connect with, I may interject with suggestions, such as "*Maybe try the statement: I live alone, or I live with other people.*" If mobility is an issue in the class, this activity could also be done from their seats and raising their hands when they have something in common. The last person to raise and lower their hand makes the next statement.

### Value Agreement

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### Technique Summary Description

My course is designed to get students out of their comfort zones. It shakes the foundation of what students think they know about hunger and food insecurity. We learn about complex topics and the underpinning of "isms" that perpetuate the need for food dignity programs. Students have the opportunity to confront their privilege, which can be painful for some. The first two weeks of my course are filled with community-building activities to create a safe place for students to participate in this journey. We make our full-value agreement on the third or fourth day of class.

A full-value agreement sets the norms of the class, focusing on how we will behave with one another. It is a democratic practice where students have ownership over the class culture. The contract also serves to develop shared responsibility and accountability. The agreement is a living document...should we have conflict in the course, I can refer back to the contract. Bringing the agreement back into the conversation helps modify some self-sabotaging behaviors like missing class or misuse of technology.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

To begin the process, I asked the class, “*What do you need from one another, and me as the instructor, to feel valued in this class?*” I bring construction paper, markers, a large self-stick wall pad, tape, and scissors. As a class, we trace our hands onto construction paper. Students select five words or phrases that indicate their needs. They are encouraged to doodle on the drawing of their hand. Over the past decade, the top five words have been: respect, sharing, paying attention, no judgment, and kindness. Each student shares what is written on their hand. Then I ask the group what one or two of the words means to them. For example, “*what does respect look like to you?*” This activity gets them to begin talking and sharing and reinforces the discussion aspect of my course. I create a word cloud with all the words and phrases and I post it in our class L.M.S. (D2L). Once in a while, I bring it to class to remind them they are under strict contract to be respectful and present.

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

I modeled this process based on the work of Becky Bailey. Her Conscious Discipline framework for building connection also builds empathy. I've found that educators must create a way to rebuild our human attachment during our time of disconnect. Having to develop a relationship during a time of disconnect (two years of COVID) necessitates creativity but must share four essential components: “eye contact, touch, presence, and a playful setting” (Ruffo, 2020). A statement from Becky Bailey informs my practice, specifically when working with first-year students. She noted that when a child experiences distress, “ideally the attachment figure provides attuned empathy and comfort that relieves the child’s distress and offers a felt sense of safety” (Ruffo, 2012, p. 225). I attempt to be mindful that first-year students are experiencing distress and are looking for safety. Those who have worked with students know that it is a tumultuous time. There are seasons of distress (e.g., first exams, mid-terms, first speeches, finals, labs, etc.). The agreement is another experiential learning framework I incorporate to encourage buy-in from my students to travel with me on this journey. It engages learners through multiple avenues to learning and well-defined outcomes bring about a sense of belonging and safety.

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

I believe that after two years of disengagement, it is vital to acknowledge the need for students to have a safe space to work through their distress. Developing the full-value agreement honors a trauma-sensitive approach that allows each group member to feel safe in the classroom by empowering them to name what is most important to them. This process can be used in any course, co-curricular program, meeting, or leadership program. Giving up control over the classroom can be a challenge for some instructors. A potential modification is to have the instructor predetermine the agreement.

Adapted—Be present, be honest but not hurtful, be open to outcomes, and become a safe space for exploration. Then invite the class to contribute modifications or additions to the predetermined framework above.

Full Group—Rather than having each person develop a hand, you can create one agreement.

### Birthday Lineup

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### **Technique Credits**

The Theraplay Institute® offers clinical services to families, training to mental health professionals on therapeutic interventions, and training to school personnel on interactive groups called Sunshine Circles®, all of which are play-based and designed to build positive attachment relationships (Schieffer, 2019). As a psychotherapist, I have received training and supervision from The Theraplay Institute, and as professor I have been using their Sunshine Circles activities in my classroom for years. These simple games and activities facilitate connection, playfulness, and joy and encourage the development of positive relationships within the classroom. While their activities are generally designed for children, adolescents, and families, I use them in my undergraduate and graduate level classes.

### **Technique Summary Description**

This is a fun activity to use as a warmup at the beginning of the semester or at the start of any class. The task requires students to engage with one another nonverbally, use eye contact, and cooperate to reach a common goal. Students are directed to line up in order of their birthdays, but they must do so without speaking. The group is almost always 100% successful in getting themselves into the correct order, and the experience of working together and accomplishing the challenging task results in a feeling of camaraderie.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

1. Have the students stand in an area of the classroom where there is space to comfortably move around.
2. Tell the students that their challenge is to arrange themselves in birthday order without speaking. If the students ask for clarification, advise them to arrange themselves by month and day of birth, but not year. Students may only use eye contact and gestures to arrange themselves in the line.
3. When they are done, go down the line and ask them to call out their birthdays to see if they

were successful.

### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

Students enjoy this activity. They focus on the task and develop their own gestures to communicate. There are often a few students that take the leadership role in coming up with a system. There are often laughs, always lots of eye contact and smiles, and a sense of accomplishment when the group is successful. Students have commented on their opinion surveys at the end of my classes that “the games” were their favorite part of their class experience. Google search “Theraplay activities” or “Sunshine Circles activities” for many more ideas.

### Reflection on Wider Use

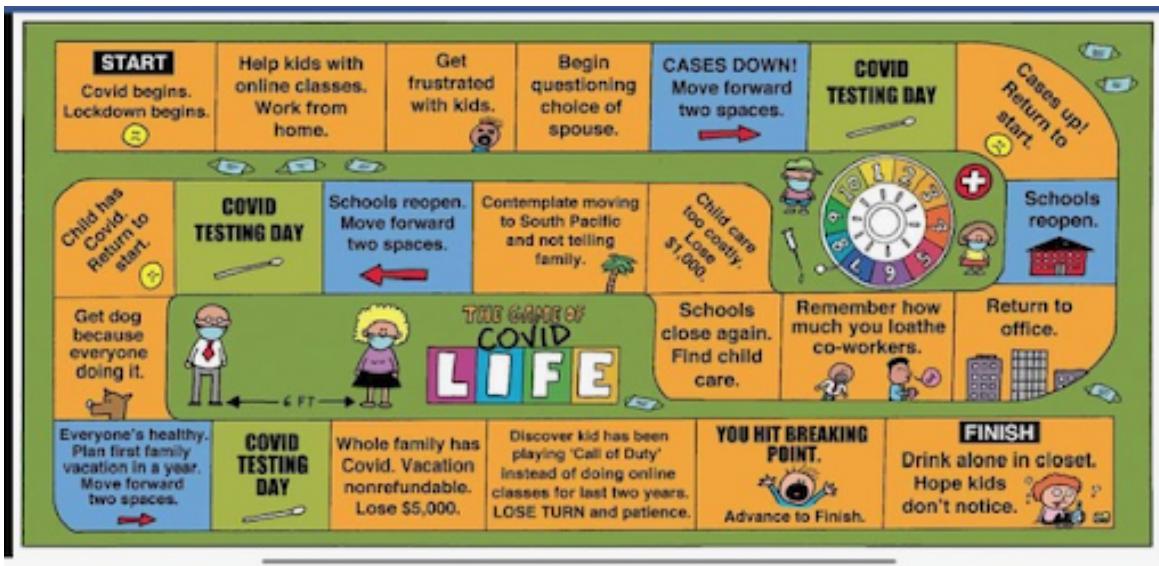
This technique can be used in all disciplines. If any students struggle to be successful in the group process, I may interject with tips, such as “*You are allowed to use gestures,*” or I might make process comments like, “*It seems like we need some more teamwork over here.*” If mobility is an issue for anyone in the class, this could also be done by arranging a line of post-it notes with each student’s name on them on the wall or board.

### LIFE Comic Creation

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### Technique Summary Description

This connection-former allows students to work in groups, be creative, laugh a little and “compete” for mini certificate awards. The students are tasked with creating their own comic strip based on a Pearls Before Swine comic by the American cartoonist Stephan Pastis. The instructor provides a blank comic strip and a simple twist of the comic’s context for students’ imaginations to playfully run wild! I came across the Pearls Before Swine comic—which played on the game of LIFE and it gave me a good chuckle. It’s a humorous, funny-cuz-it’s-true look at life during COVID quarantine and lock down.



As soon as I saw this comic, I knew I had to figure out how to incorporate something like this into my classes! So, I decided to adjust this idea a bit to have my students make their own comics as a fun warm-up. For instructors, all you need to do is create your own blank LIFE board (see my example in the photo below) and decide on the contextual focus of the comic strip.

### Technique Detailed Instructions

1. Welcome students to the class and say something along the lines of “we are going to do a fun activity that will warm-up our creative brains and have a little fun while we are at it. Before I tell you what we will be doing, I wanted to show you this comic that I saw that I thought was funny.” (Show them the Pearls Before Swine comic and let them read it through).
2. Show them the blank copy of the comic board (that you made) that they will work with to make their own comic—and tell them: “your task in small groups is to create your own comic strip about \_\_\_\_\_ (the topic or context you are focusing on for your class). You will only have 10 minutes to complete your board. This is not enough time but that’s a part of the fun! Some things to remember: take off your serious adult thinking cap and put on your wacky, fun, creative brain. It’s in there. Do not approach this from a serious academic stance. Have fun with this. Think of funny-but-true ideas to make up your comic strip. There is no “right” answer but there ARE awards!” I don’t tell them what the awards are ahead of time but my awards were: 1) the group that had the most fun, 2) the group that bent the rules without breaking the game, and 3) the group with the most creative or funniest final product.” (Note: I created tiny 3-inch by 4-inch certificates (see example below) for the three awards—DO this! Students loved them!).
3. You can choose how much structure you give them to complete their comics. Some directions you might provide: a) Fill in each square from “start” to “finish.” You can refer back to the Pearls Before Swine comic strip for an example, b) each space (situation) must be focused on \_\_\_\_\_ (the topic or context you are focusing on for your class), c) be sure there’s a mix of positives/ successes and struggles/barriers.
4. Set a timer and set them free to create! Be sure you are walking around so you can make a determination which group was having the most fun and bending the rules without breaking the game. \*You will decide the last award, the most creative final product at the end.

5. When the timer goes off, I made sure I was ready to declare which groups won which award. I had only 12 students so I knew I was going to have 3 small groups so I made it so each group would win an award. You can enthusiastically say: "Group X was clearly having the most fun! They were laughing and, look at all the different colors they used! Um, group Y bent the rules without breaking the game by \_\_\_\_\_. And as I walked around and read your comics, I believe group Z completed the entire comic and showed creativity by \_\_\_\_\_. Then you give out the certificate awards. You can have them share their comics or simply have them do a "gallery walk" where they go around and look at each other's comics at the break.
6. You can use this as just a fun activity or you can tie it into something you want to highlight in that class period. I mentioned that it's a practice in creative thinking and engaged them in a discussion about how this type of thinking can assist them in their future work as a mental health counselor.



## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

Students really loved this activity. They were engaged, motivated, and joyful while they completed their comics. Besides a fun and playful activity, I think three things really helped the students want to engage in this activity. First, they were provided a clear example (Pearls Before Swine comic) for some scaffolding and inspiration. Second, with only 10 minutes to complete this comic, they had to work quickly and couldn't ruminate over their ideas. It set a bit of a "fire" under their you-know-whats. And third, there were "awards." I know some people don't like competitions in classrooms but I find that silly, meaningless, and fun competitions make things more fun. So, students learned that I was going to award groups one of three prizes so they were more eager to create. And when they saw the teeny tiny certificate awards, they were so excited! Below is an example of one group's final product!

## Reflection on Wider Use

This activity can be used with any topic or context. All you need to do is create your own blank LIFE board and give it a theme/context. For my example above, I chose the theme of "The Day in The LIFE of a Telehealth Counselor" because that day in class we were discussing Telehealth counseling. Your context can be anything!

## Designing Instruction to Help Your Students Soar

### Paper Airplane Style

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### Technique Summary Description

This is the culminating activity for my Human Growth and Learning course. For these pre-service teachers, it represents the individualism of each of their future students—the process it takes to form, test, assess, and modify instruction to help each student achieve their best.

With no indication of what it will be used for, students are asked to bring a "piece of paper" to class along with scissors, tape, and paper clips. Using their chosen piece of paper, they each will create an airplane, with the objective of getting it to fly successfully. After the initial "test," students will then work in collaboration with their group members to determine how to modify each plane so that they all not only can fly but can also "go the distance."

### Objectives to Share with Students in the Beginning:

1. Discuss the diversity of learners.
2. Identify the modifying techniques necessary to meet the needs of learners.

3. Practice collaboration with peers to support the success of learners.
4. List strategies used to help all learners soar to meet their potential.

### **Techniques Detailed Directions**

1. Students are told that the piece of paper they brought to class represents one of their students (perhaps a challenging one) on the first day of the new school year.
2. Individually, the students create paper airplanes. Taking the materials they brought to class, each student turns their piece of paper into an airplane.
3. The students attempt to fly their airplanes.
4. Each student will then consult with group members and proceed to “modify” their airplanes, according to advice from the “community resources.” (The group members represent the “community resources,” i.e., teacher colleagues, parents, counselors, principal, special programs, etc.).
5. Students are also encouraged to use their devices (cell phones, laptops, etc. to access online resources – YouTube, etc.) to research techniques for creating paper airplanes that can fly further.
6. After modifications are made, they will once again fly their planes to test for improvements in distance.
7. Repeat the process as long as students choose or as long as the time permits.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. How were all the “students” (i.e., paper airplanes) different in the beginning? What made each one unique?
2. How many times did you need to modify your “student”(i.e., plane) before you could get it to fly a distance you were happy with?
3. What resources did you use? (e.g., peers, group members, YouTube, online resources, etc.). What do these resources represent when you anticipate your own classroom? (e.g., Teacher colleagues, school counselor, parents, etc.).
4. Note: You are not expected to be alone in making your students successful. You must use your resource for the benefit of your students.

### **Final Discussion Question:**

While the planes were all different in the beginning, with varying potential, what did it take to have them perform similarly (such as flying the same distance)?

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

This activity provides a physical form of learning. The movement around the room and playful conversation/discussion with peers establishes an environment where relaxed consultation and helps them understand that they are not expected to work independently to help their students achieve their potential. Teachers learn to use their resources for the benefit of their students.

## Reflection on Wider Use

This activity can be used for many disciplines/subjects. Although this example focuses on collaboration for the benefit of their future students, some may use this to model how effective collaboration and teamwork can lead to better products or even a more efficient work environment.

### **Human Growth and Learning: Setting the Stage**

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#### **Technique Summary Description**

To set the stage for a different approach to a traditional “sit-and-get” class, this first-day intro creates discourse in students’ minds as to what the course will be like. The goal is to get the students’ attention from the beginning. This activity was done the first class of the semester in a Human Growth and Learning course for pre-service teachers. There was no discussion of the course expectations on this day. No review of syllabus, no attendance discussion, no classroom expectation. Just, simple, effective play! Using random pieces of paper, this intro activity and ensuing discussion establishes the foundation for the course that teaches theories, cognition, and the neuroscience of learning.

#### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

**First Day Intro Activity:**

1. Preparation—Collect or create random scraps of paper in various shapes and with various characteristics (shapes, colors, straight edges, fringed edges, holes, angled corners, etc.).
2. Place them on a table near the door by the entrance of the classroom.
3. As students enter the room, they each choose one.
4. Once class starts, you invite them to place their pieces of paper on the board as they “see” they should go.

**Once completed, ask three questions:**

1. Why did you choose the piece of paper you did when you entered the room?
2. Why did you place it where you did on the board?
3. What do you think about the overall design you created as a group?

#### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

**Sample Answers to the Questions:**

1. Why did you choose the piece of paper you did when you entered the room?

- Closest proximity to my hand
  - The color
  - The shape
  - The fringe on edge
  - It looks like a house
2. Why did you place it where you did on the board?
- I tried to “match” with similar characteristics
  - To match colors
  - “I was the only guy in the class so I put mine outside of the grouping”
  - “Mine looks like a house, so I set it on the bottom of the board near the tray like it was on the ground”
3. What do you think about the overall design you created as a group?
- It’s random
  - It’s confusing
  - There are some matching things—color, a corner connected, etc.

Observation of this course—Having students select and work with varied shapes and sizes of papers help introduce the concepts of assimilation and accommodation as well as the notion of schemas—key course concepts.

Providing focus for this course—This activity models the individuality of each learner. Just as we are different physically, we also differ cognitively. As teachers, we must not assume that students are all in the same place cognitively. This helps prepare my students to approach their future students with an open mind and an awareness of individual learning characteristics.

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

First, this approach catches students off guard. Students expect a traditional sit down, take attendance, review-the-syllabus type of activity. Instead, they experience disequilibrium. It is not traditional first-day-of-class behaviors. This sets the stage for them to think differently and to be accepting of change throughout the course.

Secondly, this course teaches the importance of attention in the information processing stage in the cognitive learning process. This activity models this concept. It allows students to experience how a different approach from the “ordinary” can get and keep learners’ attention.

Thirdly, it caused them to wonder what the rest of the semester would bring. It was an unconventional first-day-of-class college. I never called attendance. I never addressed the syllabus. I never gave classroom expectations. I saved that for the next class. But they left class anticipating what was to come for the entire course.

## Reflection on Wider Use

While I used this activity to focus on the creation of schema and cognition, it would be an excellent activity to visualize diversity, equity, collaboration, and collective creation.

### **Music in the Teaching of Executive Coaching**

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#### **Technique Summary Description**

The technique depends on engaging participants in exercises seeking to allow the exploration of topic areas that are common in management, leadership, and the more specialist fields of coaching and mentoring. The use of music is often an unexpected deviation from the formal teaching of topics of using PowerPoint slides or didactic lecturing. Music provides a feeling of play, almost like the difference between study time and playtime in a school. So, during ‘this break,’ music can be used to communicate with participants on a different plane or from a complementary angle.

#### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

Over the past few years, I have used music as a playful intervention in many developmental settings and have identified eight different ways in which music can be incorporated in playful sets of exercises. Here I describe just one of them called: “Replaying your favorite song.” This technique works well in both online and face-to-face modalities.

Without any warning and by using personal phones with internet access, ask the participants to identify and choose their favorite piece of music. This is best as a piece of music three to four minutes long so either a complete track or part of a longer piece of music. In the first instance, the participants are asked to listen to their chosen song. The facilitator then asks each participant to reveal their choice and the reason for their choice. Then, the group is asked to take some brief notes.

For the second round, the participants are asked to listen to the song again, this time listening by focusing on the backing track, chorus, or on a particular instrument or facet of the music. Then ask them to reflect on what they noticed. The third round, after a period of quiet reflection, asks the participants to listen to the track again, this time, opening themselves to the meaning of the track and/or the reflection of the purpose of the lyricist or the melody creator. So, the basic principle of the technique is:

1. Ask participants to identify their favorite song. It is then played three times and in each ‘round’ the participants are asked to look more closely at various elements behind the song. Firstly, the song as a whole, then, secondly the lyrics, then finally listening closely to the

structure and instruments (including the human voice) which contributes, as a whole, to the meaning of the song.

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

Whenever I use music, it brings some very interesting reactions both on an individual basis and in collective responses. I have used this with groups learning about leadership, coaching, and mentoring as well as in action learning and in individual coaching sessions. Often people experiencing this have gone on to adopt or adapt musical approaches in their work.

Here is an example of the sort of feedback I have received:

- *"...this 'new way' of learning was a challenge, but it's been enjoyable looking for echoes and demonstrations of leadership in music, poetry etc. I think that music on its own in education would clearly be flawed, but when used in a blended learning manner, it gives us as students an insight into the fact that there is education to be had in all mediums/areas of life and that if you are willing to examine and search for deeper meaning, everyday can truly be a school day."*
- *"As a personal learning objective for myself, I wanted to use a variety of creative coaching approaches and techniques whilst studying the ILM. I realized that this would take me out of my comfort zone whilst learning. I recently incorporated coaching cards and music into recent executive coaching sessions. The initial feedback from clients in relation to music has been extremely positive, clients have particularly enjoyed focusing on the words within the music and whether it resonates with them either in a positive or negative way. For example, one client reflected on egos within the song, this was excellent to explore further during the coaching session with the client."*

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

This has much wider use than just coaching and leadership and, as a method, it has ways of being more inclusive particularly when students are asked to select their own music. Care needs to be taken to make sure that everyone has access to the technology to hear their music. Care also needs to be taken to make this exercise accessible to people who are hearing impaired. Sharing music enables groups to hear other cultural aspects of music as experienced by individuals through their lives and for them to speak confidently to the rest of the group about something that means something to them. I recently played *Everything is Changing* by the British jazz artist Jo Harrup and this was a track that nobody knew. But, the words and their carriage through the melody and harmony enable greater insights into the topic of change. It also led to greater animation in the group as they moved and 'played' to the music.

### **Interactive Polling**

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## Technique Credits

I went to the Arizona Science Center and they had an exhibit on “Blood Suckers.” They had some cool interactive polling centers that I found fun and creative so I took pictures of the exhibit so I could figure out how to recreate it to fit for my classroom.



## Technique Summary Description

Students get to respond to an interactive poll on a certain topic. Students read the board and provide a response to make an in-the-moment polling or hypothesis testing come alive.

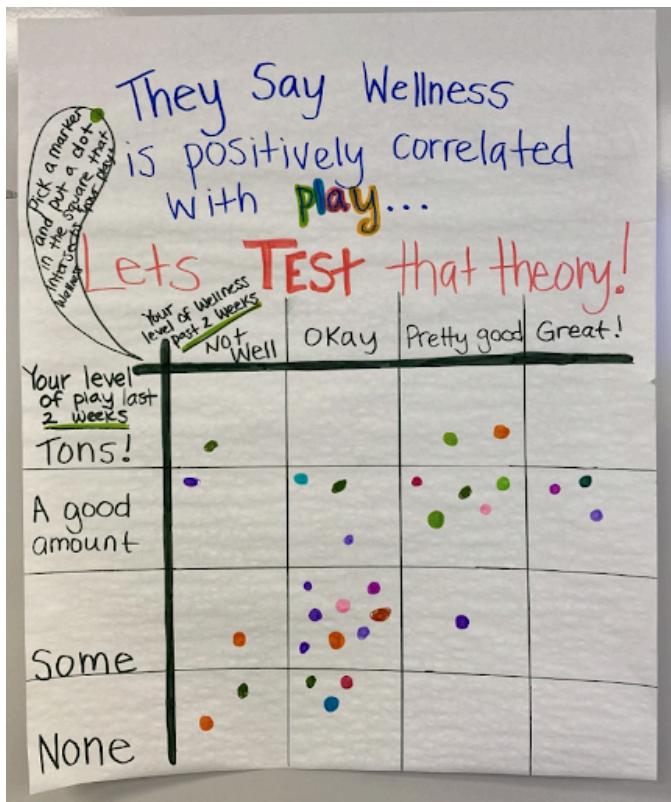
## Technique Detailed Instructions

1. Decide on a topic to poll students about. I chose to poll students on the literature that states that there is a positive correlation between one's level of well-being and their frequency of play. I got a large sheet of paper and drew out the hypothesis testing graph.
2. At the start of class, I had the board hanging on the side of the classroom with an array of colorful markers. As students entered the room, I directed them to take the poll (completely optional). I also told them that to see a clearer visual representation of the graph and possible correlation, having a lot of answers is important so I encouraged them to “text-a-friend” a picture of the board so they could also record their friend/family member’s response.
3. At the end of class, I returned to looking at this board with the class (because I wanted to give time for their “text-a-friend” responses to come in and get recorded). I highlighted that our responses seemed to support this correlation that the more one plays, the better their well-being.

## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

The results were fun to see come alive as more colorful dots got recorded on the board. All the students participated and most texted a friend to record more answers. This also provided a check in for the students on their friends and family. One person said after getting responses from their family/friends: “*my friends need more play!*” A fun anecdote about this activity: on the day that I ran this interactive poll, we had technical difficulties with the projection system. The IT worker came into the classroom to fix the projector and before he left one of the students said: “*Hey! You want to fill out our poll?!*” He did and it

became this warm, fun, and interpersonally connecting moment with my class and a random IT person that we didn't know.



### Reflection on Wider Use

This polling activity can be used for any type of topic or discipline. It can be used as a simple check-in as students enter the class or it can be used to teach a topic in an interactive way. This activity can provoke students' critical thinking skills. Discussions regarding the correlation of play and wellness were things like: *How are we defining play? What does being "well" mean? Wellness might look different for different people. What is a limitation of this hypothesis test?* The level of one's playing isn't the only factor contributing to well-being. The topic of my poll (wellness and play) also expanded on a conversation of care of self and how as graduate students or people living in a capitalistic culture, there is often a lack of play or barriers to people playing more. This activity could be harnessed in so many different ways! Try it out!

### In and Out

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I've been using this technique for decades. Sadly, I do not know the originator of the game.

### Technique Summary Description

This technique is an icebreaker activity that I use on the first day of class to help students get to know about their classmates. I use this immediately following the Name Toss Game (see previous entry) and Scattergories (see below) to reinforce knowing everyone's name and to learn about student experiences.

## Technique Detailed Instructions

1. Prepare a list of experiences that students may or may not have had in their lifetimes.
2. Have students form a circle, relatively tight, so that everyone can see each other.
3. Tell students that you will be stating a number of different experiences that they may have had in their lifetimes.
4. If the students have had the experience stated, they will take one step into the circle, pause, and then they will step back out.
5. After each round, identify another experience that students might have done.
6. Repeat as time permits.
7. Occasionally, I will ask students to elaborate on the experience they had. For example, if students have stepped in for having a broken bone, I ask each student to name the bone(s) they broke.
8. At the end, you can also have students identify other experiences that they are curious about.
9. At the end of the activity, you can also have a student volunteer to say everyone's name again. Prizes could be awarded!

## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

By the end of the game, students have interacted with other students in the class and identified similar experiences that they share. One major outcome of this game is that students start to create a sense of community with their classmates because they're finding people who have things in common with them. In an end-of-semester anonymous survey about community building in the course, students provided the following feedback about this activity:

- *"I liked the icebreakers we did at the beginning of the semester because they built a sense of community that we had throughout the rest of the class."*
- *"I usually hate ice breakers, but the ones we did helped me know the other students in the class and I was able to find things I had in common with other students."*

## Reflection on Wider Use

This technique can be used in any class with any number of people. I have done this activity with hearing impaired and physically disabled students with no problem. This game is best used on the first day of class rather than waiting until later. I usually use this game as a follow-up to Name Toss and Scattergories. See a list of experiences below.

**In and Out Experiences List—Step inside the circle if you (have):**

- Been bungee-jumping (skydiving, scuba-diving, rock climbing, etc.)
- Been to a Broadway play
- Broken a bone
- Been in a car accident
- Are an only child
- Failed a class
- Been issued a ticket besides parking or speeding
- Speak more than one language

- Never traveled outside of (your state)
- Traveled abroad
- Are adopted
- Are married
- Have children
- Play an instrument
- Never been drunk
- Been on television
- Talked to a movie-star

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# Chapter Four: Playful Pedagogy to Teach Content

We hope by now, you are starting to (or maybe you already did) understand the value of play in learning. However, we need to address a common criticism of a playful pedagogy: play in learning is like chocolate covered broccoli. This critique, often from uninformed perspectives, says that play is the sweet chocolate that covers up the gross and boring broccoli. First, you can't just cover something up with chocolate to make it better. Second, if there is something wrong with learning, that makes it in need of sweetening, it's related to how we inflict rigid power structures and devolve the joy of learning into something truly distasteful—much worse than broccoli. This chocolate covered broccoli analogy fails for us in both directions because play is not covering up anything and learning shouldn't be repulsive in the first place. Playful pedagogy doesn't disguise boring things to make it more fun, it transforms the learning so instead of chocolate covered broccoli, it becomes an ice cream sundae with sprinkles that also happens to be really good for you. The content and the learning become something worthwhile and intriguing so there's no need to cover it up with something sweet. Play is not a cover or a Band-Aid—play is a flexible, novel, and creative approach that changes the students' engagement and relationship to learning.

In the previous chapters of this book, we explored how embodying playfulness as an instructor and utilizing icebreakers can quickly create connections with students and establish a ripe learning environment. Being playful and encouraging play, even when it's not connected directly to the learning, can provide missing ingredients that are lacking in a more traditional and rigid classroom. But what about the content? What about the knowledge, skills, and abilities we are asked to develop in our students? Do we stop playing so we can move straight to PowerPoint lectures for the “real” learning?

Do we have to stop playing to get to the core of what we teach? Or can learning continue to be fun and playful past the connection-formers?

In the opening chapter, we revisited the fact that the brain is the organ that is responsible for all learning through a process called neuroplasticity. Brain science has demonstrated that having fun, playing, and engaging in novel activities ignites neurotransmitters in the brain that are responsible for learning by strengthening neuroplasticity (Brown, 2009; Jansen & McConchie, 2020; Tang, 2017, Taylor & Marineau, 2016; Wang & Aamodt, 2012). Play also connects people, encourages hands-on learning, and fosters adaptability, flexibility, and innovation (Brown, 2009). So, the idea that content would sit outside of play does not make much sense. Experience and research show that play and learning *do* go together and *should* go together. The trick relies on first believing in the power of play. Then it requires

discovering or inventing new techniques to make content playful, and then it's about taking a risk to teach content through play.

However, this is a challenging endeavor for many. For one, very few instructors were actually taught how to use play in teaching. We would be willing to bet that very few of us had playful pedagogy modeled to us back when we were students. The tradition and norm in education seem to mostly be dry and extensive lectures to teach content. But, in our heart of hearts, we believe that marching through 100 content-heavy slides in 50 minutes isn't the best way to teach content or ignite learning. We believe that type of pedagogy typically leads to learners being bored, disengaged, and unmotivated.

Stepping outside of the norm, inventing novel approaches, and taking risks to try out new ways of teaching can be nerve-racking for some. Fortunately, plenty of professors have been creating and implementing playful approaches to teaching content that might provide you direction or a head of steam. This section highlights tested approaches to using play to create fun, flexible, and creative pedagogical approaches. The following playful techniques demonstrate how to merge play into learning in order to achieve the serious learning outcomes of a course. Therefore, each technique can be assessed not just on whether or not it's fun, but also whether it allows students to learn and master the content.

When we asked our Professors at Play community to submit proposals for our four technique chapters (i.e., playful professors, connection-formers, play to teach content, and whole course design), we overwhelmingly received the most proposals for this chapter: Play to Teach Content. Instructors often feel considerable pressure to cover more content and demonstrate their students' learning so it makes sense that a book about play in higher education would attract many playful teaching techniques aimed at teaching content. At the same time, we want to reiterate that while play to teach content has many benefits to the teaching and learning environment, we cannot simply begin here. The power of play is a process and in order for our attempts at utilizing play to teach our content to be truly effective, we must have already established the right classroom environment. That is, we can't forget about the importance of being playful ourselves and allowing time for playful connection-formers because those foundational components are what fuel the powerful process of play in learning. Think of play to teach content as step three. That said, it's awfully fun to see so many instructors getting outside of the traditional and rigid forms of pedagogy and playing with creativity and innovation in the classroom!

*Note: I (Lisa) think it's important to state that I don't teach all content through play and games. Sometimes my play to teach content is fun. Sometimes it's a game or competition. And, sometimes it's playful in that I allow for student choice, flexibility, or it's simply because my approach breaks the norms and status quo of traditional teaching. But, I am very careful not to use play to make light of serious topics. For example, it's important that I train my students how to conduct a suicide assessment—we use role-play to learn that process—that's "play" but it's very serious play. I don't make light of that serious topic through use of silly play. Instead, I do a fun and silly connection-former before a "heavy" class to help students approach the seriousness from a more centered place. So, pick and choose your moments but always be thoughtful when designing.*

*Last note: As you read, you might consider how you could modify the technique for it to work in your classroom and unique discipline. At the end of some of the techniques, you may see a note in italics marked "ed." These are editorial notes that we added to help further contextualize the technique and to better connect the wide range*

of ideas to some of the central concepts in this book. All of these “ed” notes were reviewed by the author of the technique and, we hope, provide valuable context to the ideas presented! — eds.

### **Cards Against Case Law!**

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### **Technique Summary Description**

This activity was designed for a law school Advanced Legal Research course, which offers an in-depth analysis of legal research methods and sources. For the course module on case law and judicial materials, students frequently default to using a Google-like search, despite instruction on a variety of research strategies and tools. In addition, students often have difficulty using their creativity to come up with effective search terms and connecting them appropriately. In order to address both issues, we decided to create a game that would require students to practice these skills in a fun and engaging way. Being fans of the original *Cards Against Humanity*, and the unofficial adaptation *Cards Against Lawyers*, we modified the gameplay to account for our learning objectives.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

Based on the popular game, *Cards Against Humanity*, this technique allows students to practice multiple legal research skills and tools. In the original game, each player is dealt several answer cards containing words or phrases. One by one, the players choose, and read out loud, a question prompt for the others to respond to with one of their answer cards containing a word or phrase. The other players (who didn’t read the question card) each submit one answer card (face down) that best matches the question. The player that read the question card collects all face down answer cards and chooses which answer is the funniest or best. The player who submitted the chosen answer card wins the round and is given the question card of that round to keep track of the number of wins. Play continues as long as desired, or until all question cards are used.

In our modification of this game, students are placed in small groups and then presented with a question prompt and a research technique. Rather than having pre-selected answers, students are given 5 minutes to use the designated legal research technique to locate a case or judicial opinion that responds to the prompt in the funniest or best way. Then, they answer the prompt question and correctly cite the source. To anonymize the responses, we used Poll Everywhere, which is an online

engagement tool that's available for free for up to 25 participants. This activity was not intended to be a substantive evaluation. To facilitate more student-led learning, our teaching assistants served as judges when possible, and each student in the winning group in each round received a small prize. Following each round, the students in the winning group had to describe exactly how they found the winning case. The professors would then guide the class in a short discussion of the research technique and creative ways that it might be utilized.

**Example Question Prompt:**

- \_\_\_\_ counts as a weapon or dangerous instrument. Designated legal research technique: Westlaw Key Numbers.

**Example Answers:**

- Teeth. In re D.T., 977 A.2d 346 (D.C. 2009).
- Potted plants. State v. Holsinger, 2017-Ohio-1378, 16CA48.
- Fork. Connor v. Powell, 162 N.J. 397, 744 A.2d 1158 (N.J. 2000).
- A door. People v. Burns, 122 A.D.3d 1435 (2014).
- Boot. Commonwealth v. Rosa, 94 Mass.App.Ct. 458 (2018).

An alternative version of this technique can be used as a review exercise—we call it *Cards Against Legal Research*. Answer cards are prepared using words and phrases that have been discussed over the course of the semester. Question prompt cards are prepared to guide the students' conversations into making connections between different research sources, strategies, and methods, as well as how they might use the content as practicing lawyers. This version is played using rules similar to the original *Cards Against Humanity* game. Students are divided into small groups and each dealt five answer cards. Then, one by one, each student draws a question prompt to read out loud. The other students in the group each submit one answer card face down, and the student questioner selects the answer to their question card that they believe to be the best, funniest, or most creative. Students then discuss why they chose their answer cards. After a few rounds, the professors lead a full-class discussion to illustrate the variety of ways in which legal research will be important to their future work.

**Example Question Prompts:**

- I will never use \_\_\_\_ as a real lawyer.
- \_\_\_\_ will be the most useful for a lawyer representing the plaintiff in an employment discrimination case.

**Example Answers:**

- Statutory annotations
- Casemaker (database)
- Boolean (terms and connectors) searching
- Parallel citations
- Lexis Practical Guidance

## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

We have played this game in five sections of Advanced Legal Research so far. All the students and professors have had a lot of fun with this activity, which was evident from the noise level and laughter in the classroom. Students were very invested in their responses and seemed to particularly enjoy debating the way in which specific research techniques were used for each question. As professors, we noticed that even quieter students were participating fully and actively contributing to the small group work.

We conducted some informal surveys that included students' thoughts about *Cards Against Case Law*. In one survey, 92% of students found this game to be "fun" or "extremely fun," and 85% of students believed that they had learned a lot from playing this game. Students described the game as "fun," "awesome," and "exciting." In course evaluations, many students commented on this game, and other games that we played in class. One student said, "*The small games and in class assignments we did were incredibly helpful. It was a very useful and creative way to cement our knowledge.*"

From the professors' perspective, the game clearly had a great impact on students' later work. Students not only utilized the research methods from the game in later assignments, but they also exercised greater creativity in their approach to research, the methods they used, and their selection of search terms. Anecdotally, students have credited the game with helping them to remember specific research skills months and even years after they graduate.

### Reflection on Wider Use

This technique can be used to teach or reinforce just about any kind of online research skill. While we have found, within the realm of legal research, that it works best with case law, we imagine that it could be used to teach topics from information literacy (e.g., \_\_ is a very reliable source about unicorn birds) to literature reviews for the sciences (e.g., There are [number] studies that mention [mythical creature]). The review exercise version could potentially be used with any content area, particularly if there are larger, connecting concepts that can form the basis for the prompts (similar themes across different stories read in a literature course, perhaps).

The most difficult part of this technique, however, is drafting the prompts and/or answers. While it is certainly important to portray the content correctly, it is equally vital to be mindful of diverse perspectives when creating prompts and answers. We strive to ensure that our classroom is a welcoming, inclusive space for all students, so we intentionally review all game content to further this goal. We found it helpful to have research or teaching assistants try out the different prompts to see which ones worked best in terms of the content and to check that we are not being exclusionary. Similarly, if professors are acting as judges, it is important to be mindful and not impose implicit biases in our judgments.

Another concern that we have encountered is that some students, particularly international students, are not familiar with the original *Cards Against Humanity* game, so it is very important to provide detailed instructions. We have found that showing students an example of how the game is played is also helpful. Once all of the students understand what we are asking them to do, students who have never played the original game often provide some of the most interesting answers and are rewarded for that creativity. Students for whom English is not their first language often bring up questions

around the terminology and word structure used to conduct keyword searches and in indexes, which is beneficial for the entire class.

We have not encountered any accessibility concerns beyond typical issues encountered when using computers for research. We strive to build our games using universal design principles to account for students needing accommodations. As a result, we would strongly encourage all educators to use survey platforms that are accessible via screen-readers (such as Poll Everywhere) or other platforms that enable students who need various learning accommodations to participate (e.g., voice-to-text or uploading screenshots in lieu of typing in responses).

*One thing that we noted in this technique is how the play activates creativity later in the course. Not only does the play create fun, connection, and help students engage in learning the material at hand, it also reminds them to “play”—to use what they know creatively, later in the course! — eds.*

### **Make the Hamburger Fun!**

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#### **Technique Summary Description**

I have run this activity in the masters-level architecture course, “The Architecture of Fun,” at the University of Colorado Denver. This was a face-to-face course of approximately 20 students. Most of the students were pursuing their Masters of Architecture. Despite the course title, I struggled to get architecture students to set aside their expectations and to “play” with design. The issue I came across was that they were afraid to “break the rules” of design in architecture. Turns out, the solution was to provide them with a playful and novel design problem outside of the discipline of architecture. This freed them from concern about doing it “right” and allowed them to freely experiment with the various playful design techniques offered within the class.

#### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

In this scenario, imagine that I am the owner of a mom-and-pop hamburger shop in town. Sales have been declining and I want to generate business by making my hamburgers more fun.

1. In your group, come up with a 3 to 5-minute pitch for turning my boring old hamburger into something fun.
2. Be sure that your idea:
  1. Is doable. I need to be able to make these hamburgers!
  2. Is original. I don’t want to get sued!
  3. Is fun. Make sure that most people will think the idea is fun, intriguing, clever or novel.

## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

I set out to create an assignment that would allow my students to feel free to play with the course concepts and to design something quite unlike anything they had designed before. An architecture degree relies on a long sequence of studio courses that emphasize a variety of classic design principles. Getting students to set aside these principles proved to be difficult at the beginning of course.

However, the use of the Make the Hamburger Fun activity gave them the freedom to play. And play they did! The ideas ranged from an inside-out burger ball (with the bun in the middle and meat on the outside) to brightly colored rainbow burgers with eye-popping colors. Not only did the activity help to inspire them to test their limits, in discussion it allowed me to point out how their training, to-date, could be limiting their creativity.

As a result of the activity, I found the students were more engaged in the core objectives of the course, had a better understanding of and utilized more playful aesthetics in their designs. The approach increased engagement, encouraged reflection, and actively involved the students in testing out course concepts.

### Reflection on Wider Use

Although I use this activity as a playful technique to teach content, this hamburger activity would work as a creative icebreaker in any course. It does not rely on any special design approach unique to architecture. However, I do think it's particularly valuable in design disciplines to get students thinking more broadly. Any "design X" in a course where "design of Y" is studied, will achieve similar positive outcomes. As an extension, giving students any weird or unusual situation to problem-solve, whether it is administration of health care, application of business principles and more, can benefit from the setting aside of the normal and the encouragement of play.

## LEGO Manuals

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### Technique Summary Description

I run this activity with my Composition II students. The goal is to get them engaged with visual rhetoric beyond their assumption that it's just about "flair." This class usually enrolled 18-24 students, specifically students interested in going on to engineering majors. I found that students were struggling to analyze things like hierarchy and figure/ground contrast and wanted to give them a playful way to explore these topics from the perspective of the creator. This activity was generally completed with two 50-minute classes.

## Technique Detailed Instructions

**Materials:** LEGOS; plastic sandwich storage containers; one camera or smartphone per group; one computer per group; something to label the containers with.

### For Instructor:

1. Separate your Legos into the storage containers so that each group gets one.
  1. Be sure to label each container!
2. Give each group one container of LEGOS.
3. Allow free play! I give 15 minutes.
4. Give students the following instructions:
  1. The next class period, groups swap manuals and containers.
  2. This is why labelling the containers is important! You want to make sure that Group 2 gets the exact same LEGOS pile that Group 3 was working with, for example.
5. Once they've swapped, give them about 10 minutes to try to build each other's creations.

You will have the rest of class to build something with your set of LEGOS and make an instructional manual on how to build it. Another group will get your set of LEGOS next class and will use your manual to build your structure. The catch: You may only use pictures, icons, and numeric symbols for your manual—there should be no text explaining the steps.

## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

I designed this assignment to give my students space to play with creator choice when it comes to designing visuals. Getting them past the “well, because it looks cool,” answers of why designers make certain choices is an important first step in our visual rhetoric discussions.

### Example questions:

1. When you put together Group 1’s model, what was challenging?
  1. Follow up for Group 1: If you had to do this again, what visual aspects would you add to meet that challenge?
2. Where did you decide to stage your model for the pictures? Floor? Desk? Counter? Other?
  1. How did the location help with what you were trying to communicate? How would it have been different (e.g., lighting, style, etc.) if you had chosen a different setting?
3. When making sense of the other groups’ directions, what was one big question or realization you had?

Using LEGOS gave them a sense of the familiar (as most of them at least knew what LEGO bricks are) and a low-stakes way of creating something “useful”—an important motivator for students who assumed they would never need to analyze visuals in “real life.” The free play aspect of this activity is important, as it allows them to begin the creative process and not get stuck in the “I’ve never done this before” or “I’m not creative” rut. Students created everything from simple “towers,” cowboys, and windmills.

As an outcome, students engaged more analytically with design choices—particularly those relating to hierarchy and positioning. They found that sometimes the simple towers were the hardest, as the ease of the project was deceptive and the instructions were not always positioned so that the user could replicate the building steps.

### Reflection on Wider Use

I can see this activity working well in STEM courses that require the use of visuals to reflect data. I can also see it working well in digital literacy courses in terms of adding interactivity to instructions. One consideration for this activity in terms of accessibility is that of its highly visual nature. In later iterations, I changed the assignment so that it could incorporate audio instructions, as well as different sized blocks. Having the students describe by the feel of the blocks as well as their visual aspects can make for good collaborative audio instructions. For students with disabilities affecting vision and/or fine motor skills, this is a simple modification that allows participation for everyone.

## Timeline Card Sorting Game

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### Technique Summary Description

This activity was inspired by Kent State's Jigsaw Active Learning Tactic. I've implemented this activity in an in-person or virtual classroom setting with a typical size of 18 sophomore-level students. The activity is meant to introduce the students to the history portion of my Introduction to Typography course. Before discussing the timeline, I have the students arrange cards representing each milestone into what they think is the correct order. It's irrelevant how accurate their attempts are, as the real benefit of the activity is to get students thinking and sharing what they know about the material. The competition primes their attention for the ensuing lecture as they listen to see how close their group came to the correct sequence.

### Technique Detailed Instructions

I assign each student a particular typeface to research before the day of the game. They're responsible for finding out key characteristics of the typeface, most importantly when it was created. On the day of the class, students are split into groups, each group is given a set of cards representing each typeface and tasked with arranging them in chronological order based on when they were invented. Each student only has a piece of the knowledge necessary to create an accurate timeline. So, the activity fosters discussion within the groups as they share what they know to get the timeline done. It's irrelevant whether the groups get it correct since the point is to get the students interacting with each other and the material. When the time is up, I take the class through the timeline in chronological order, checking to see how close each group got to the correct timeline. In addition to the opening activity, students

are called on to share what they researched about their assigned typeface when it comes up in the discussion. This means students aren't just listening to my voice for the whole lecture, they're hearing from, and sharing with their classmates.



(Figure 1: Students rearranging cards in the in-person version of my card sorting game)

For the remote version of the game, I use a shared Google Slides document with movable images as the cards. Each group is sent to their own breakout room and given their own doc to complete (see Figure 2).

A composite image showing a Google Slides presentation on the left and a Zoom video conference interface on the right. The Google Slides slide is titled 'A Brief History of TYPE' and features a timeline of typefaces from the 1400s to the 1900s. The timeline is represented by a yellow line with circular markers. Labels along the line include 'Blackletter' (1450s), 'Humanist serif' (1460s), 'Old Style' (1490s), '1690s' (with a blue triangle marker), '1815', '1815', '1780s', '1915', '1920s', '1950s', and '—'. The Zoom interface shows a 4x3 grid of participant video feeds. The top row contains three feeds, the second row contains four feeds, the third row contains three feeds, and the bottom row contains two feeds. Each feed shows a different student's face. The Google Slides navigation bar is visible at the bottom of the slide, and the Zoom control bar is visible at the bottom of the video grid.

(Figure 2. A view of the remote version of the card sort game using Google slides and Zoom)

## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

Students reported feeling more engaged with the subject matter after implementing this game. Students are more interested in the ensuing lecture about the milestones as they're listening to see how close their group came to the correct sequence, as well as when it's their time to share what they've learned about their assigned typeface. This card sorting game would be useful in any module where items need to be learned in a specific order (e.g., historical timeline, or steps in a process).

## **Early Biological Theories Activity Stations**

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### **Technique Summary Description**

I created this activity because I was committed to providing some sort of hands-on or application assignment for the theories taught in Criminology. The students I teach are mostly first-generation students and, in my experience, they do not want to just be lectured to. They want to do something with the information they are learning. The creation of activity stations was my way of giving students hands-on experience with early biological theories in criminology. Many of these theories have been disproven and are no longer accepted by the scientific community. However, they are still important to understand as building blocks of current biosocial theories in criminology.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

For this activity, I try to set up the classroom ahead of time. There are four separate stations—I split the class into four groups so they can help each other at the stations (my class is usually around 20 students; for larger classes you could have multiples of the same station to have smaller groups).

- **Station #1: Craniometry Practice (Volume)**—Students are given two plastic skulls, a bowl of rice, a funnel, and a scale. They use the funnel to fill each skull with rice and then measure the amount of rice with the scale. I filled one skull with paper or another material to decrease the volume of rice it can hold (i.e., so that the volume amounts are different). They write down the volume for each skull and then decide which one is more likely to be the skull of a criminal.
- **Station #2: Craniometry Practice (Measurements)**—Students are given one skull and a skull measurement guide. They are tasked with taking measurements using the guide. Because the skull given is not “to scale,” I give instructions on how to convert the measurements to actual skull measurements. Then they compare their measurements to the average measurements of a human skull to determine if the skull is average, larger than average, or smaller than average. Finally, based on the measurements, they decide whether or not the skull is that of a criminal.
- **Station #3: Phrenology Practice**—For this station, there are six skulls. On each one, I used a

hot glue gun to put random bumps at various locations on the skull (I sometimes leave one alone, with no bumps, to see if they “find” any). The students look at each skull and compare it to the phrenology chart provided, making notes about what sections of the skull (and corresponding behaviors/characteristics) are impacted by the bumps. They then rank the skulls from 1-6 (1=most likely to be a criminal; 6=least likely to be a criminal).

- **Station #4: Atavistic Traits Practice**—Students are given a list of atavistic traits, as originally developed by criminologists of the time. I then give them pictures of various people (some criminals, some not) and tell them to make note of atavistic traits of each person. They then rank the people from 1-6 (1=most likely to be a criminal; 6=least likely to be a criminal) based on the number of atavistic traits for each person. Depending on the class time (50 versus 75 minutes) I will use 3-4 pictures or 5-6. I also try to vary them each semester so students do not always use the same ones.

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

I did not collect outcome data but my students reported really enjoying the activity. Beyond just enjoying it, they reported understanding how subjective these theories were even though they purported to be objective, scientific measures in their time. The rankings of skulls and pictures varied between groups and we were able to discuss why that was, based on the flaws in the theories. From my perspective, it encouraged students to critically look at the early biological theories which then gave them the tools to do the same for other theories throughout the semester (I usually do this activity early in the semester).

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

This activity could be used in Psychology or Sociology—possibly medicine (but I don’t know if biology/medical classes teach this type of history). From a cultural standpoint, this activity also helped us discuss how certain people (i.e., African-Americans) would be more likely and inaccurately to be labeled as criminal and the consequences of that labeling. We also talk about how this stereotyping and prejudice impacted the field of criminology as a whole and how those assumptions can still be harmful to various groups in society. For accessibility considerations, I put the students in groups so they could help each other. The only accessibility issue I could see is moving from station to station for someone with mobility issues. But in that case, you could easily make extra copies of instructions/stations or have students help move materials around instead of all students switching stations. Also, from a grading standpoint, I tell students that there are no right or wrong answers, it is graded on completion (did you answer all of the questions and follow the instructions? etc.).

*This activity hinges on having students practice what is now considered pseudoscience. This reversal of normal classroom practice embodies the play. Rather than simply lecture students about debunked approaches from the past, having them enact this kind of hands-on research is a playful way to enact the mistakes of the past and create a safe and playful moment in the classroom to talk about how science has progressed – eds.*

## Go Fish to 5 Card Draw: Card Games for Health Sciences

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### Technique Summary Description

I created a deck of cards that can be used to play multiple games. These cards can be used to create stories, identify diagnostic images, discuss possible disease causes, challenge knowledge, compare/contrast diagnostics and disorders, problem-solve and practice communication.

Color coded cards are easy to sort and pull out of the master deck for different games. Words and pictures keep the design simple and flexible. I have used all these games successfully with my veterinary students. They are a fun form of retrieval practice and lead to rich discussions. If the students don't like my games, I encourage them to create their own. They have fun and still meet my goal of engaging with the material. Plus, I get new ideas each time!

### Technique Detailed Instructions

Create a card deck that includes names or pictures representing different parts of a medical case or problem such as patient characteristics (e.g., age, sex, occupation, etc.), historical findings or conditions, diagnostic test results (e.g., physical examination, laboratory work, etc.), diagnoses, etc. Color code each type of card. Signalment cards might be green, diagnostic tests purple. You should check color codes against tools for color blindness and ensure good contrast.



### Game Play Examples

- *Build a Disorder*
  - Divide students into teams (2-4 players per team).
  - Draw a case descriptor card (age, occupation, history).
    - e.g., 2-day old horse
  - List as many causes for the disorder as you can.
  - Draw diagnostic finding cards and cross off potential causes that no longer fit.
    - e.g., draw a card that says diarrhea, cross off the causes on your list that would not lead to diarrhea.

- Ignore any cards that contradict previous cards (e.g., constipation would contradict diarrhea).
- Continue drawing diagnostic finding cards until only one team has any causes remaining on their list. They win if their answers check out.
- *Cards Against Diseases*
  - Use diagnosis (e.g., parasites) and case information cards (e.g., endurance horse).
  - Play like the game *Apples to Apples* or *Cards Against Humanity*.
  - Take turns playing a diagnosis card as the card to match.
  - Other players submit case information cards they think would fit the diagnosis.
  - The player who played the diagnosis card picks the winner for the best match.
  - The winner is the one with the most sets when time is called.
- *5-Card Draw*
  - Each player is dealt 5 cards (i.e., combination of diagnosis, case information, diagnostic tests, etc.).
  - Players compete to create the best story possible using just the cards in their hand.
  - Players can trade cards with the ‘draw pile’ once, replacing 1-5 cards in their hand.
  - Everyone wins or players can vote on the best story.
- *What Am I or 20 Questions*
  - A player puts a diagnosis card on their forehead without looking at it, Headbandz style.
  - The player asks the others yes/no questions to determine what diagnosis is on the card.
  - OR the player looks at the card and other players must guess what it is by asking only yes/no questions.
  - The winner is the one the guesses correctly with the fewest questions required.
  - This game can also be played with steps of a procedure. Place the steps of a procedure on cards. Each player puts one card on their forehead without looking at it. By conversations with other players, players must line up so that the steps proceed in proper order.
- *Concentration or Go Fish*
  - This game works well with images (e.g., ultrasound, MRI, CT, radiographs).
  - Use diagnostic images or results and related answer cards. Beginners may want a cheat sheet that shows the correct matches.
  - Concentration style – place all cards face down in a grid and try to find matching cards.
  - Go fish – ask for the diagnosis card you need to match your image.
- *Challenge Games*
  - Recruit your learners to help you design a new game.
  - Give them the decks and have them play.
  - You will learn new games and they are working with the content. Win-win!

## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

These games have been very useful for retrieval practice, interpretation of diagnostics, and for learning patterns (e.g., illness scripts). Official looking cards add a level to the student enjoyment and participation. A touch of randomness makes failure easier to take and encourages repeat play.

### Reflection on Wider Use

The games listed are focused on illness and medical conditions but could likely be used with any field that has similar patterns and connections among factors. Several companies will print card decks for you. I used [thegamecrafter.com](http://thegamecrafter.com). I do recommend testing the card design and game play by first using index cards. When designing your index cards, remember that playing cards are held vertically and that the card labels are printed on the upper left and lower right to maximize visibility when held in the hand!

*This technique is a great example of modifying known and existing games to make them more content relevant in the classroom. Modification is a powerful approach to adding games to your classroom – eds.*

## Children's Book Case Study – Gerald the Giraffe

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### Technique Summary Description

Theory application, case conceptualization, and treatment planning are vital aspects to becoming a competent mental health counselor. Many times, case conceptualization is taught through theoretical lectures (i.e., explaining how to do it) followed by a serious and typical case study for students to apply their learning. Case studies are a great way for students to practice these skills but even case studies that are more applied and hands-on learning can become expected and mundane. When things are typical or expected, students approach it with a sense of lackluster obligation. Another issue with case studies is that sometimes students get in their head about the application because they often feel like there's a specific answer that I am looking for or that there is a "right" way to treat the client. I want my students to conceptualize cases flexibly and freely because it will help them develop the necessary skills to become effective counselors. Quality counseling is a lot about creativity and thinking outside of the box but, the approaches to teaching case conceptualization in training programs often don't support the kind of exploration and experimentation necessary to teach students how to *think* like a counselor. I created this novel and playful type of case study because it's more fun but also because students can apply theory and conceptualize this "client" from a creative and freer place because as far as I know, no one has ever counseled a giraffe before. When I remove the pressures of a serious case study, students are able to think more outside of the box.

## Technique Detailed Instructions

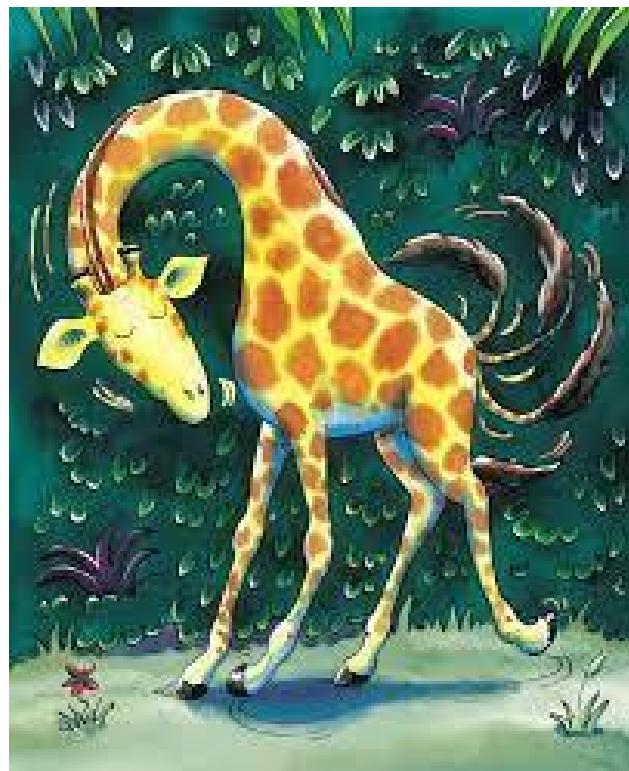
I start by reading to the students the children's book *Giraffes Can't Dance* by Giles Andreae which is a story of a giraffe named Gerald and he gets made fun of by the other animals for being different and subsequently experiencing low self-esteem, alienation, and sadness. After I read the book, I provide students with a handout (see below) that I created from actual facts about giraffes and turned the facts into reasons that Gerald might seek counseling services. In groups, students then discuss this client and apply their theoretical orientations to conceptualize this case. The theories that students use become the lens to understand the client and the presenting problem in order to develop a treatment approach and interventions to treat this client. I typically have classes of 15-20 so I make three to four groups and each group represents a different theory to use as a lens. When we share out, the students can see how you can conceptualize one case from many different angles.

### Case Information — Gerald the Giraffe

Gerald is a 23-year-old, cis-gender male mammal who lives in Africa. Gerald's father was never in the picture. His mother was in Gerald's life until he was about 18 months old and then Gerald went to live with a group of other male giraffes. In addition to his dad not being around as a young calf, he constantly lived in fear as baby giraffes are often easy prey for lions, spotted hyenas, leopards, and African wild dogs. Many giraffes are killed in their first few months of life and only have a life expectancy of 25.

Gerald feels like an outcast because he's the tallest mammal on Earth. His neck is too short to reach the ground so he has to awkwardly spread his front legs to drink water. He tries to do this when no other animals are looking to avoid ridicule. He has had a pattern in his life of getting made fun of because his body type makes it hard for him to do what other animals can do. Gerald is tired because as a giraffe, he spends most of his life standing up, he doesn't have the time to rest like other animals. Gerald reports feeling low self-esteem, being self-conscious, and experiencing bouts of depression and anxiety.

Based on this background information and Gerald's story in the book *Giraffes Can't Dance*, use your theoretical lens to conceptualize this client. Use the language of your theory to describe the problems that Gerald is experiencing. Then, using your theory as a road map to write a treatment plan of how you might think about working with this client to relieve his symptoms.



## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

My students really loved this playful case study. Their attention was captured right away during the reading of the children's book—something you don't expect in a graduate level course. Reading the book in class is fun and novel but also helps the client, Gerald, come to life in a way a typical case study isn't able to do. As the students worked in groups, there was more excitement and eager engagement as they worked through this activity. I have also used more typical and serious case studies and I never felt the same level of engagement from students as I did when it was more playful. Students are used to dry and straightforward case studies but students' brains are not excited by old and typical. When students' brains are bored, they are unexcited and then disengage. This approach uses play to make the case study activity more fun and interesting. I believe students felt freer to apply their theory and interventions in creative ways because since no one has counseled a giraffe before, there's less pressure to "get it right."

### Reflection on Wider Use

While this example is specific to mental health counseling, I believe almost any discipline can use children's books to teach necessary skills. Maybe the book that would fit your discipline isn't *Giraffes Can't Dance*, but a plethora of children's books exist that can set the stage for theory application, case studies, or problem solving. You can get creative in how you use children's books in your classroom, maybe it's a simple activity as I presented here. Maybe it's the foundation to their final project. Maybe you have students write their own children's book as a unique way to demonstrate learning on a certain topic. Whatever it is, it will captivate your students' attention and interest in the material.

## Iron Chef

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I learned about this playful pedagogy at a teaching conference about four years ago. I was unable to determine who presented the idea, but the activity is great. Thanks so much to the unknown presenters.

### Technique Summary Description

The Iron Chef Challenge is patterned after the television show, *Iron Chef* which airs on the Food Network in the United States. Each episode features a new challenger chef who competes against one of the "Iron Chefs" in a cooking competition based on secret ingredients and/or a theme.

The classroom version of the game show provides students with an opportunity to work in small groups to synthesize, apply, and create a presentation using a theme and secret ingredients tied to the course content. The game can be used to review information from a previous unit, review information

for an exam, or any other use for synthesizing information in a new way. The activity can be used in any discipline, especially those that require students to put together information in creative ways.

### Technique Detailed Instructions

1. Create a Google Doc with two pages for each team. Student teams will use this document to share what they have created. Alternatively, if you have students create something with 3-D objects, provide whatever supplies you need for them to make their creation.
2. Create menus outlining the exercise. You should have at least one copy for each group so that they can reference it as needed. The menu will include the following information (See sample below):
  1. Describe the purpose of the activity.
  2. Provide instructions for the activity.
  3. Communicate the scenario (for biology, the scenario might include scientists who have to solve a plant problem; for business, the scenario might involve marketing specialists who have to design a marketing plan, etc.).
  4. Present standard ingredients (could be the model or topic you have been covering).
  5. Present secret ingredients — Ingredients that will give a different “flavor” to the end product. (e.g., For public speaking, the secret ingredients might be the type of speech and three different types of evidence. For teaching, the secret ingredients might be evidence-based teaching practices and a teaching context).
3. Decide on a way to randomly assign secret ingredients. I have used dice or spinning wheels created online (see this Wheel of Names example).
4. Create an Iron Chef Scoring Rubric for each team (See sample below).
5. Have prizes for members of the winning team. I have used aprons, oven mitts, hot pads, wooden spoons, etc., purchased from the dollar store.

### Activity Instructions:

1. Put students into small groups of three or four. Avoid using teams of more than four since it is highly likely that some students will be less involved in the process.
2. Give each team a “Menu.”
3. Give students 20 minutes to collaborate with their team to develop a solution that includes the theme and secret ingredients. They will use either the Google Docs or the materials that you have provided to share their ideas with the class.
4. Give teams 3-5 minutes to present their “recipes” to the rest of the class. As students listen to other groups’ ideas, have them assess their “recipes” using the Iron Chef Scoring Rubric. Each group will submit team scores for each section of the rubric.
5. Quickly tally the points for each team to determine the winner. The winning team comes to the front of the class to accept their prizes!

### Results, Impact, & Outcomes

Students can “play” with all the information relevant to the topic. They gain experience looking at different ways to use information and put information together in new and creative ways. This activity is an excellent way for students to review information and take it to the next level of Bloom’s Taxonomy

by creating something with it. Additionally, it serves as an excellent method of formative assessment for the instructor. Anecdotally, students shared the following information about the activity in their end-of-course evaluations:

- “It really made me think about what I had learned and how everything fit together.”
- “I thought I understood how to put a lesson plan together, but that Iron Chef activity we did helped me see that I need to think more broadly about my own teaching strategies.”
- “I was on the winning team, and I loved our prizes. My oven mitt hangs proudly in my kitchen!”

### Reflections on Wider Use

The activity can be used in any discipline, especially those that require students to put together information in creative ways, as mentioned above. See the table below for examples:

For cultural and accessibility considerations—be mindful of the experiences of your students overall. I had an international student who had never seen *Iron Chef* and was unfamiliar with its premise. As such, it may be useful to include a short description at the beginning of the activity (in Iron Chef format, however, meaning that you become the announcer and explain the show as if you had new viewers!).

Discipline/Scenario	Standard Ingredient	Secret Ingredients
Communication: Create a speech for a specific audience	Informative Speaking	Methods of organization Types of evidence
Education: Create a lesson plan for a specific audience	4-MAT Instructional Sequencing Model	Topic to teach Teaching methods
Business: Create a marketing plan for a specific client	Marketing Theory (SWOT, Porter's 5 Forces, etc.)	Social media platforms Social media strategies
Art: Create an exhibit that focuses on a specific topic	GIFs (Students use Photoshop to create a GIF)	Elements of art Principles of design

Below is a sample menu and an Iron Chef Scoring Rubric. Please revise this to reflect your own variation on the game. For the menu, I suggest using a brochure template from Canva.com.



<b>The Iron Chef Contest</b>	<b>Scenario</b>	<b>Secret Ingredients</b>
<p>The Iron Chef Contest challenges you and your team to develop a lesson plan that responds to a scenario complicated by secret ingredients.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We present you with a theme - how to design effective instruction for adult learners.</li> <li>Next, we complicate the theme with "secret ingredients."</li> <li>Your team will have 20 minutes to collaborate on a solution that includes the theme and secret ingredients.</li> <li>Your cooking tools include blank slides where you can capture key points and cite research. You can also use your own ingredients from the Internet, books, etc.</li> <li>As you listen to other group's ideas, assess their work using the Iron Chef Contest Team Scoring Rubric. Submit your team score for each section of the rubric.</li> <li>Winners receive prizes.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Focus on Instructional Sequencing!</b> How can you design instruction that follows a logical sequence? You and your colleagues have experienced with instructional sequencing in your MPC 6500 course. This design model values multiple learning preferences while helping learners internalize challenging concepts. Your job is to share your instructional design with colleagues who are new to training and teaching. Make it easy for them to use the 4-MAT instructional design model in their own training and teaching efforts.</p> <p><b>Add the Secret Ingredients</b> Evidence-based Teaching Practices (5) Topic (1)</p> <p><b>Create Your Team's Recipe</b> Work with your team to create a simple learning sequence using the 4-MAT model. Your recipe should combine the standard ingredients with the secret ingredients. Test your recipe with the Iron Chef Contest Rubric, then present to your cohort.</p>	<p>Spin for your evidence-based teaching practices (3).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lecture</li> <li>Discussion</li> <li>Reciprocal Peer Review</li> <li>Writing/Speaking: to Learn</li> <li>Metacognitive Reflection</li> <li>Academic Games</li> <li>Graphic Organizers</li> <li>Reading Strategies</li> </ul> <p>Spin for your topic (1).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership</li> <li>Self-Concept</li> <li>Perception</li> <li>Conflict</li> <li>Audience Analysis</li> <li>Using Evidence</li> <li>Persuasion</li> <li>Speech Organization</li> </ul> <p><b>Standard Ingredient</b> 4-MAT Instructional Sequencing Model</p>

Use the scale below to score each team: 1 = criterion not met 2 = developing expectations 3 = meets expectations 4 = exceeds expectations					
Criteria	Teams >	Green	Yellow	Orange	Red
Learning Outcome	Team creates a learning outcome that guides instructional sequencing. Outcome identifies audience, behavior, conditions under which the learning outcome will be met and degree of proficiency.				
Use of Standard Ingredient: 4MAT Model of Instructional Sequencing	Each 4MAT section is well-prepared and functions appropriately. All learning preferences are addressed effectively. Describes how activities meet the preferences of learners.				
Use of Secret Ingredient: Evidence-based learning strategies	Applies the given evidence-based teaching strategies or techniques within the model, referring to sources as appropriate.				
Use of Secrete Ingredient: Focus on Topic	Integrates topic seamlessly into the 4MAT model.				
Creativity	Creatively synthesizes the challenge of sequencing learning activities in ways that promote the achievement of LOs.				
<b>TEAM TOTALS</b>					

By using the theme of the show *Iron Chef*, this technique demonstrates the power of shifting the context. Without the show context, this activity still works as a form of active learning. By adding the show context, students are freed to play, both with the content and with each other. The addition of the game show-like elements of prizes and points simultaneously encourages engagement as teams try to win while simultaneously lowering the stakes on the assignment. In the frame of play, students can take the game seriously even as they play with the content during their learning — eds.

### **Leadership Island: A Leadership-Learning Role-Playing Game**

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## Technique Summary Description

Leadership Island is a one-shot exercise I designed and facilitated for my Leadership and Change course to be run in the last class session before finals week. The activity served as a fun game to review and revisit some of the most important topics covered throughout the course, practice leadership behaviors and theories in a simulated learning environment and provide students with an engaging opportunity to win extra credit points. While the brief description given is simply to illustrate how the role-playing game played out and is not meant to serve as a step-by-step guide, the activity can easily be adapted to any course by following the included guidelines on creating a personalized RPG system that works for your needs and learning objectives.

## Technique Detailed Instructions

The setting of Leadership Island followed the story of a group of six leadership learners (played by students) and a non-playable character (controlled by me) whose plane had crashed on a deserted island on their way back from a leadership conference. The game narrated a journey of cooperation and survival in the hope of being rescued. Players would have to organize themselves to get essential resources needed to survive, use scarce tools to explore a hazardous environment filled with wildlife and dangers, and solve the many mysteries hidden inside an island that maybe was not as uninhabited as they initially believed it to be.

To prepare for the role-playing game (RPG), I used PowerPoint and selected images from around the internet to draw a map with several locations to set the story up. Initially, I hid all areas from participants except for the coast, which depicted a beach and a plane crash. However, some of these locations included a communications tower with signs of people living in it, a freshwater lake with a clue hidden in its bottom and access to fresh water and food, and a cave with a carved door covering the entrance. Each location could be visited by clicking on the correct slide. Additionally, during the gameplay, I updated the map to show a complete picture with all the available locations to visit as the participants discovered each available zone.

Each area included a unique element contributing to the story's narration. The lake had access to water and food, which players needed to survive in the game, but it also had hidden clues that could aid during the final puzzles of the game if spotted and successfully obtained. The communications tower informed students that whoever lived there was aware of their presence and had even written all their names down in a list (spooky!). The list also had a red circle around my character's name; this was intentionally designed to spark conflict and controversy between participants. Lastly, the cave had a prerecorded message with a puzzle. When solved correctly, the door had an animation that revealed the entrance and led players to the area where the final part of the game was resolved. The cave consisted of three rooms, each referencing a different model seen in class. However, not all were as obvious, and all required cooperation and discussion to be solved successfully.

Participants performed dice-rolls with a twenty-sided die throughout the game to determine whether some of their decisions were successful. The more difficult the task at hand, the higher their roll needed to be. This mechanic was implemented solely to decide the effectiveness of narrative actions, such as their search efforts, fishing attempts, or breaking open a lock. However, no rolls were performed to perform actions such as walking, talking between them, or solving puzzles. Lastly, each participant

had three life points available, which could be depleted with incorrect guesses to puzzles or drastically failing on a narrative action, e.g., trying to bash a door open and only getting yourself hurt in the process. Participants were informed that all players had to survive the game to ensure the maximum amount of extra-credit points possible.

Now, it makes little sense for me to narrate the entire journey of my students because you did not take the same class, and it would be pointless without the proper context. However, to start the game, I selected six volunteers to role play the game and act in a fish-bowl environment (the remaining students of the class sat around the role play and had the job to listen and identify leadership themes covered in the course as these came up). Then, I narrated the intro all the way to the crash. Participants were told they had just woken and were given two objectives, to organize themselves and find essential supplies—water, food, and wood to make a fire. They were then let to make their own decisions in a turn-based fashion, and I let the story play organically.

Following the conclusion, we had a brief reflection activity where we discussed the covered topics throughout the role-play and made meaning out of the experienced events. This part of the activity also served as their chance to get extra credit. There were two ways in which students could score extra credit points. The first relied on the player's ability to survive the island successfully. For every player that made it out alive, the entire class would take home 0.2 extra points for a total maximum of 1.20 points. The second option relied on the observing students' ability to identify and name leadership themes and concepts that surfaced from the participants' interactions and the game itself. For each valid argument students presented, they could all take home 0.10 points for a maximum of 2.00 points. Whichever score was greater would be given to all present students, players, and observers. This decision ensured an investment from those observing and kept them engaged throughout the game. Most importantly, though, it allowed a space for students to reflect on how leadership came up organically throughout the scenario and further analyze the consequences of their actions in an interactive yet safe environment.

### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

At the end of the session, I asked the players and a few observers to stay if they had a few minutes to reflect on the experience as a classroom activity. They described the activity as a unique and interactive experience that allowed them to visualize the theories and concepts discussed in class. None of them had ever played a role playing game. However, those who participated in it had a fun and intellectually challenging time, and everyone enjoyed observing the story develop and tying it to our covered content. A student made the parallel to their weekly written reflection assignment by describing the RPG as a “live-action” version of their written reflection. Further, the game had provided a space for them to put things into practice and live them first-hand. One of them referenced how the phases of team development (i.e., forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning) came to light naturally as the participants were forced to work together to beat the game.

Additionally, the inclusion of luck elements, such as dice-rolling, made the possibility of failure real, encouraging participants to collaborate, think critically, and adapt as needed to succeed. Similarly, successful rolls were often followed by cheers and excitement. This effect ensured that the story continued to be interesting for everyone and helped maintain players' investment.

## Reflection on Wider Use

The purpose of me sharing this technique is not for you to go out and implement the exact same activity (though you are more than welcome to do so) but to provide you with an illustration of how you can utilize role-playing games in a classroom environment and to give you the tools to do it successfully, regardless of the discipline or setting. As Dickey (2006) described, integrating narrative into an educational setting presents students with a playful opportunity for “reflection, evaluation, illustration, exemplification, and inquiry” of the content (p. 248). And RPGs provide an excellent vehicle for narrative and experiential learning when paired with guided reflection (Ruiz-Ezquerro, 2021). Traditional RPGs, such as *Dungeons & Dragons*, are often complex and filled with many rules. Learning a game system and implementing it can be a task of many hours and intense planning. Using a simplified RPG ruleset provides many more opportunities for using role-playing games in the classroom. (For more, see section of this book: *Focus On: Using Role-Playing Games as Motivational Pedagogy*).

## **Games Disguised as Research Papers!**

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### **Technique Summary Description**

The prospect of conducting original research often scares and intimidates students first coming to college or university. Unfortunately, for many of our students, their high school educations have not effectively prepared them to formulate novel arguments and defend those arguments with concrete evidence, and when they’re asked to perform these tasks, many panic, freeze up, even plagiarize. This exercise is designed to model the (stressful) research process in (hopefully comfortable) miniature by having students, in small groups, construct a new, playable game from a set of existing parts. (In case it isn’t obvious, the new game serves as the argument in the model and the existing parts are the pieces of evidence that they collect to support their claims). By removing the anxiety-inducing aspects of research and turning it into a game, I find that this activity opens many possibilities for my students to be creative and playful—approaches that I then emphasize should be maintained when they work on their more formal assignments. I have used it very successfully in my first-year writing courses for the last four years.

I have used the exercise successfully across two 50-minute class sessions. With some minor modifications, it also fits comfortably in a single 75-minute session and can be lengthened to accommodate three 50-minute sessions if desired.

## Technique Detailed Instructions

Before class, collect a group of small games. These games should have a variety of specific pieces and rules that are complex enough that the game can't easily be "reverse engineered" from those pieces. When I use a game that relies just on a bespoke deck of cards, I always add a polyhedral die or two to make things more interesting. The games I usually use are *Alienation* (Chris & Coryn Lombardi, 2016), *Control* (Keymaster Games, 2015), *Grave Robbers from Outer Space* (Z-Man Games, 2001), *H.M.S. Dolores* (Asmodee, 2016), *Monster Cafe* (Gamewright, 2013), *Tell Tale Fairy Tales* (Blue Orange, 2012), and *Throw Throw Burrito* (Exploding Kittens, 2019). The key here is to choose games that your students are unlikely to have played before, games that have several different sorts of pieces (i.e., cards, counters, tiles, etc.), and games that have a small physical footprint. Board games won't work, since they're just too large and usually the board is too beholden to the original rules to allow the students to exercise their creativity. You need enough games that you can give each small group their own. Since my classes typically have around 24 students, I always bring in at least six games, and it's a good idea to bring in more in case one of the games you've chosen is already known to your students.

Before passing out the games, remove the instructions to each of the games.

The activity is as follows, assuming two 50-minute class sessions. At the beginning of the first session, break up students into small groups of 3 to 4 and give each group one of the games you've selected (again, withholding all of the instructions). Make sure that none of the games you distribute are familiar to any of your students.

Each group has until the end of the class to design a game that:

- Makes use of all of the pieces they were given, at least potentially.
- Has a clear and unambiguous win condition or end state.
- Can be played by four people in about 15-20 minutes.
- Is fun (this last one is very important).

The game produced can be cooperative or competitive, strategic or chance-based, and as intricate as they desire. Emphasize to them that they need to write clear, complete rules for their new games by the end of the class.

In the second class session, re-form the same small groups as before and give each one a game and new instruction set that a different group made in the class period before. Have them play the game (without assistance from its inventors!) and write up a short critique of it answering the following questions:

- Is the game easy to learn?
- Are the rules clear about how to play, what the goals are, how to win, etc.?
- Are the rules ambiguous or problems that might reasonably come up in gameplay that the rules do not account for?
- Does the game make interesting and creative use of all of the game pieces?

These critiques can be written individually, but it's faster to have the members of a group write together.

You might have time to have two different play sessions in a 50-minute period, but in my experience, you probably won't as it is very difficult to judge how long a game will take to play if you've never made one before. This is fine.

Once everyone is done playing, initiate a whole-class discussion about the games and the creative processes each group used. Some useful questions to ask include:

- What mattered more in designing your game—game play or the win condition?
- Was it difficult to include all the pieces from the original game?
- How did you go about coming up with the gameplay? Did you impose it on the pieces or use the pieces as the starting point?
- How did the game (or games) you played from other groups differ from yours in design? Do you think you'd go about making your game differently now that you've seen how others approached the problem?
- Did you approach making your game playfully or seriously? Did your approach affect how pleasurable the game was for other people to play?

Finally, talk a bit about how this activity models the research process. The new rules they wrote are a kind of research paper. The game pieces they were given are pieces of evidence, facts about the 'world' that they need to take into account as they needed and desired. The playability of their game serves in analogy as the persuasiveness of their research project. Emphasize that the point of research is not to discover facts and summarize them but rather to make use of evidence to defend your own, creative and original, claims. Any number of games could have been made with the pieces they were given. Similarly, any number of arguments can be made from just a list of facts. What matters is how those bits of evidence hold together, support one another, and contribute to a greater whole.

If you are running this activity over a single 75-minute session, limit the game design period to 40 minutes so you have enough time to play and discuss afterwards.

If you are running this activity over three 50-minute sessions, you should easily have time for each group to play at least three of the games made by the other groups during the second session, allowing you to devote the whole of the third session to discussion and critique of the various games. If you have time for each group to play all the games (other than their own), consider holding a friendly competition with a prize for the group that created the best game voted on by the class as a whole. Personally, I use sparkly plastic tiaras from CVS as prizes. Each one costs about a dollar.

### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

I have used variations of this activity many times over the last four years, refining it as I go. While I cannot provide quantitative proof of its efficacy, my own observations and the reports from my students afterwards convince me that it can be a powerful way to motivate students to approach research paper assignments with less stress and anxiety and more enthusiasm and playfulness.

### Reflection on Wider Use

I do not teach in the hard sciences, but I imagine that with only small changes, this activity could be useful for modeling research in the laboratory. There are some clear risks involved in this activity as far as cultural and accessibility considerations are concerned. Different cultures can have radically different understandings of games, fun, and so on, and it is possible for those differences to result in groups failing to cohere. Be on the lookout for groups in which some members seem not to be heard or allowed to fully participate. A very serious concern is with visually disabled students. I have not had occasion to use this activity in a classroom with a student or students who had limited sight and, unfortunately, can offer no advice on how it might work with such a population.

Be aware, also, that when you remove the original instructions for a game, you remove context from the game pieces. It may well be that a card or figure that is unproblematic within the frame of the game as published is, without that frame, offensive. For instance, there are cards in *Grave Robbers from Outer Space* that I remove before distributing the game. Understood within the original ruleset, they are clearly satirical, but without that context, present merely as misogynistic. Because this activity is designed to make research paper assignments easier, I always use it before any such papers are due.

### Who is Better?

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#### Technique Summary Description

Research methods can sometimes be intimidating, difficult, or even boring for students. In order to make research and statistical concepts more fun (and less scary), I wanted a way to increase student interest and create some excitement (rather than dread) in the classroom. This activity was conducted in both face-to-face and synchronous virtual undergraduate research methods classes for health professions students at Marshall University with approximately 20-25 students. This technique was used to promote interest and motivation in understanding research concepts, such as hypothesis testing and statistical significance. Prior to any instructional content on finding differences between groups, students (and the instructor) participated in a selected competitive game (such as cornhole/bean bag toss) for a “best in class” prize. Students then came up with any “Who is better?” question (the more creative or wacky, the better) to assess group differences in game performance. Students were then guided in how to select a statistical test, conduct analysis, and find statistical support for their “Who is better?” question to share with the class.

#### Technique Detailed Instructions

The instructor selected a game for all members of the class to play. Games were selected that allowed for an objective measurement of performance, consisted of multiple attempts that could be completed within 15 minutes or less, and that posed a fair chance for anyone in the class to potentially win. Games

for the face-to-face sections were cornhole/bean bag toss or basketball shots (using a Little Tikes or tennis ball into a bucket or clean garbage can) measured by shots made out of 30 attempts. The game in the virtual sections was “Can You Draw a Perfect Circle?” (<https://vole.wtf/perfect-circle/> courtesy of suggestion by Lisa Forbes) measured by average percent accuracy during 20 trials.

Students recorded their game performance results in a class data set on a shared Microsoft Excel document. Following the competition, students were verbally instructed to come up with a research question to compare groups on game performance to determine which group was better at the game. Rather than a serious or typical comparison (men vs women; juniors vs seniors), students were encouraged to come up with a comparison that was creative, novel, or even just silly.

#### Example questions from students:

- Who is better at drawing a perfect circle, breakfast eaters or non-breakfast eaters?
- Who is better at drawing a perfect circle, Lord of the Rings fans or non-fans??
- Who is better at shooting a ball in a bucket, freckles or no freckles?
- Who is better at shooting a ball in a bucket, showered or not showered today?
- Who is better at beanbag toss accuracy, Nike wearers or non-Nike wearers?
- Who is better at beanbag toss accuracy, students with cheese, pepperoni, or other pizza topping preferences?

Students compiled their questions (such as “Did you eat breakfast today?”) into a class survey via Microsoft Forms. Prior to the next class all students completed the Microsoft Forms survey and the data were added to the Microsoft Excel game performance class data set. Students were then guided during class in developing a hypothesis, selecting a statistical test (such as independent samples t-test or ANOVA), and conducting analysis to test their hypothesis. Students verbally presented their research question to the class (and everyone in the class took a guess on the results) and then presented their analysis and results.

Following the excitement of the competitive game, and the humor and enjoyment of question development and sharing the results with the class, students participated in class discussion and reflection on concepts such as statistical vs. clinical significance, generalizability of results, and the usefulness and drawbacks of utilizing statistical tests in determining “who is better?” Students also discussed how to apply the research and statistical concepts to health care in regard to determining the better treatment recommendations for patients.

### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

A purpose of the class activity was to make the research methods more approachable, fun, and manageable for undergraduate students that were being newly introduced to research and statistical concepts. The activity also temporarily freed students from the theory and research driven hypothesis development that we had strongly emphasized during the first half of the semester. Rather than being overwhelmed by the more serious and complex research questions in health care, this activity allowed these undergraduate students to focus more on initially understanding the concepts.

Based on observations during class and student comments, students were engaged and enjoying themselves throughout the activity. They were very eager to find the results using the statistical tests to see if their predictions were correct. We also had fun guessing/predicting the results as a class. Students were more participatory and interested in the discussion of research concepts following the activity compared to prior semesters without the “Who is Better?” activity. Following the activity, students were debating the usefulness and meaning of statistical tests compared to very few comments about the concepts in prior semesters.

On final projects using health-related data later in the semester, students seemed more comfortable and used terms such as “statistically significant differences between groups” more appropriately compared to students in prior semesters who did not participate on the “Who is Better?” activity. In addition, on end-of-the-semester feedback forms, students remembered playing the game and a few students noted that this was their favorite class activity from the entire semester.

### Reflection on Wider Use

The “Who is Better?” activity could work in any research or statistics course, but the competitive games utilized could also serve as a fun start or as a “Brain Break” in any class. Other games with measurable performance outcomes could also be used to introduce other research or statistical concepts, such as types of data or measurement of variables. Even more useful than the competitive games were the students generated creative or even silly comparisons in development of their research questions. The strategy of giving permission for students to be creative or silly could be used in any course to increase engagement, but also to shift the focus from “Am I doing it right?” to a focus on understanding the course material in a more meaningful way.

*As the author notes, any kind of play can stimulate positive benefits in a class. But her use of a seemingly trivial activity combined with a non-serious research question actually led to a better understanding and use of the serious course concepts. This is a wonderful example of how play inspires learning in serious ways, even though the technique allows for play – eds.*

### Choose Your Own Adventure

#### Insulin Pharmacotherapy Style

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### Technique Summary Description

Choose Your Own Adventure® (CYOA) activities have been played by learners of all stages in both traditional and virtual classrooms (Kiles, 2021; Stewart, 2021; Morningstar-Kywi, 2021; Beckoff, 2019). Based on books from the 1970s, CYOA uses a model of non-linear storytelling (Choose Your Own Adventure, 2021) and can be appealing for educational settings that require decision-making as it allows additional practice for students having difficulty with a topic, while letting other students move on if they have mastered that topic. A simplified example of this concept is shown in the figure below.

This educational CYOA activity was conducted as part of a 2-hour, synchronous, virtual class in a 10-week summer 2021 diabetes elective course offered to third-year Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) students. During the first hour of the class session, students received a traditional in-class lecture reviewing insulin management, leaving the second hour available for students to complete the CYOA activity either independently or in groups of two.

### Technique Detailed Instructions

A faculty member created an online activity using TypeForm, a form-building software with templates (<https://www.typeform.com/templates/t/interactive-fiction/>) for interactive, unfolding stories. The activity featured a virtual simulation story of a student on an ambulatory care rotation and included six unique diabetes mellitus patients with diverse clinical pictures. The faculty member wrote the cases and created questions for students to answer regarding the patient's care. Depending on students' answer choices, they would be led through a successful patient encounter resulting in positive outcomes. If answer choices were not appropriate, students would be led down a pathway that may create extra clinic visits or negative outcomes for the patient. Students were instructed to use critical thinking skills to make decisions in the simulated patients' care.

### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

Faculty wanted to determine if this type of activity increased knowledge, improved confidence in making clinical decisions, and if students were satisfied with the activity. A pre-post survey was administered before and after the CYOA activity to evaluate these outcomes. All seven students in the course who participated in the activity completed the pre-survey and six completed the post-survey. The knowledge portion of the survey included five multiple choice questions about insulin management based upon the objectives of the class session. Students were asked to grade their confidence in nine aspects of insulin management on a 5-point Likert scale (very low to very high confidence). Students rate their satisfaction with the activity in eight different aspects again using a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree).

The students' knowledge scores improved from 40 to 60% on the post-survey. Confidence scores improved in all areas/objectives of the activity from an average low to moderate confidence to post survey scores between moderate and very high. High satisfaction scores were recorded for each item. Overall, students strongly agreed the activity was engaging, enjoyable, and desired more activities

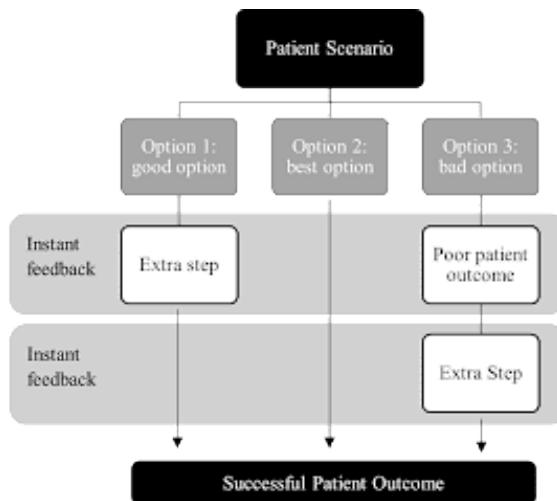
of this nature in other courses. In addition, students verbalized their satisfaction with comments including:

- “It was a lot of fun.”
- “I would come up with an answer and then [the game gave me feedback on] what I forgot.””
- “It gave us the confidence to do the math.”
- “It taught me to be cautious but also have confidence.””

We believe this technique is very useful to the learning process because it involves enjoyable active learning where students can practice clinical decision-making skills in a low-stakes environment. They receive immediate feedback on their decision and can view the consequences of certain actions or decisions through the simulated patients. The activity was not timed and can be completed at a student’s own pace. This is appealing because it allows time for students having difficulty with a topic to slow down, while letting other students move on quicker if they have mastered that topic. Students have continued access to the game so they could even practice more on their own time after class.

### Reflection on Wider Use

This technique can easily be utilized for other topics. Faculty expanded upon this project and have created cases for hypertension and heart failure. CYOA can be applied to any area of learning where decisions are required to be made. It has been used for in person and virtual learning environments. There are potential barriers to its implementation. One barrier is the amount of time it takes to create the cases and input them into the online software. Typeform was easy to use which helped quicken the process, however, an accessibility barrier is the cost of the Typeform software which is listed on their website (<https://www.typeform.com/pricing/>). Other software can be utilized with varying price points and technology skill level needed such as Twine, QuestionPro, Moodle, DecisionSim, vpSim, and Google Forms, the latter of which is free to use. Lastly, this type of activity does require students to have a computer/smart device with reliable internet access.



This technique is a good reminder about the context of play. In some cases, a Choose Your Own Adventure story should include robots, vampires, and hidden treasure to ignite a playful mindset. But inside the frame of learning about medical science, the active learning, exploration and problem-solving can easily focus on real world facts and issues while still feeling like play. This technique perfectly illustrates how play is always found in context! – eds.

## The Question Game

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### Technique Summary Description

I first encountered this game in an internet fan community for the show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, though I've since encountered it in many other internet forums built around fandom for all sorts of media. Using my initial experience with Buffy as an example, the game is to ask the forum a (usually esoteric) question about something that occurred in one of the show's episodes like "When the apocalypse comes, who should get beeped?" The members of the community then need to go out and find something related to that exact phrase. When they do, they answer the question (i.e., "Buffy") and provide the specific source for the answer (i.e., "Season 1 episode 4–Never Kill a Boy on the First Date"). Then, having answered the question, and having provided the source, the person must then ask a different question so that the game can continue.

In the forums, the idea was to show off your knowledge of the media and stump the community. When I adapted it to teaching, I made it less about trying to get people to find esoteric points related to the class and more to encourage textbook reading in a fun way. Since reading a textbook is not the most interesting way to learn, the "game" can provide people with a bit of a detective hunt to help them get a little more engaged with it as they read.

### Technique Detailed Instructions

For this assignment, the students must read the textbook and have access to a course discussion forum. For each textbook chapter, I create a thread within the forum that asks an "initial question" that starts the game. Students are encouraged to check the forum before reading the chapter. This way, they know what question to answer. If, as they read, they find the answer, then they're encouraged to post the answer, specific source, and a new question. The next "participant" in the game should look to answer the newly written question instead of the "initial" question. As each person participates, they should look to answer the newest question in the forum. I have generally graded the assignment with:

- 20% for correct answer: There is no guessing. The answer must be unambiguously correct. The way you will know that it is unambiguously correct is often that the exact words used in the question are in the text followed by something that provides a clear answer to the question (e.g., When the apocalypse comes, who should get beeped? Buffy stated: "When the

apocalypse comes, beep me").

- *40% for providing the correct citation:* This isn't just "the textbook" or even "page 200." You must clearly show where you found the exact answer to the question. For instance, page 214 on the left side under the picture of the exploding space shuttle. If you're using an eBook, then provide the page header as it appears in the navigation frame along with more specific identifying information.
- *40% for asking another question:* The game must go on! If you don't ask a question, then the next player can't play. Your questions must come from the textbook and should be specific enough that there is a clear location within the textbook to find the answer. There should be no outside of class interpretation required and everything must be answered within the textbook.

### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

Because the students are providing citations, the assignment practically grades itself. So, this is also an easy activity to implement. In the rare instances of someone answering a question incorrectly, the student's peers are as likely as I am to notice it and make a correction. I have used this in traditional, hybrid, and online classes. The more of an online component the class has, the more successful the game has been. I feel this is because online and hybrid classes are more likely to have students naturally checking the forum anyway. This means it's not an extra step for them to do before reading. I have had students in traditional classes like it as well, but it's been a little less successful there.

This also has a big cohort effect. If the cohort gets into the game, it can be lively and productive. If only one or two people are interested, then it may fizzle and die quickly. Even in my most successful cohorts, I've never seen someone go back and attempt to answer questions posted by later players of the game. I do allow students to do infinite submissions at this game (and earn infinite credit), but nobody has tried to play at that level. I do not know if this is because people don't believe I'd follow through or because they don't want to do another close reading of the text to answer a second question.

However, I have had students mention their enjoyment of the game after the class was over. Students have discussed how it makes reading more like a search than just a boring reading of the textbook. They also like anything that adds "extra credit" to the class.

### Reflection on Wider Use

The more students who play this game in more contexts, the better. Any course that has a textbook will be able to implement this because it just requires a textbook. In fact, it could easily be implemented in the way I originally encountered it by opening the game to alternative media sources that were present in the class as well. This may be especially useful in online classes where students are reading textbooks and/or watching video lectures. Opening the game to the video lectures and requiring time stamps as citations could both encourage students to watch the video and help others in the class find when specific topics are mentioned. Just be careful to ensure that students don't start asking questions like "What was the professor talking about when he picked his nose?"

## Chopped

### A Hands-on Recipe for Thinking Creatively About Content

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#### Technique Summary Description

The Chopped technique is modeled after the reality cooking show of the same name. In the show, each contestant is given a basket of items with which they must make either an appetizer, main course, or dessert using those items. (They may also use other ingredients as well). In order to be successful on the show, the contestant must make the best use of the required ingredients as determined by a panel of judges who are professional chefs.

I developed the Chopped teaching technique to help prospective K-12 teachers “think on their feet” in terms of creating an educational activity on the spot since there are often unexpected disruptions to the school day (i.e., a guest speaker being sick or a field trip being canceled). However, it could be adapted for any content area in which problem-solving and critical thinking are necessary. This counts as play because a) it is ungraded, b) students must be creative and collaborative, and c) the element of surprise is paramount.

#### Technique Detailed Instructions

The ideal content for Chopped allows for a) at least three variables and b) that there are multiple possibilities for each variable. For example, in teacher education, the variables could be: 1) time limit, 2) content area, and 3) grade level; the multiple possibilities for each could be: 1) for 5 minutes, 10 minutes, etc.; 2) for art, science, etc.; and 3) for kindergarten, 11th grade, etc.

Each variable should be represented by some sort of container (e.g., basket, Ziploc bag, etc.) in which the different possibilities are available to be drawn by the student. The student draws one possibility from each container. Once drawn, each student immediately begins creating a lesson incorporating those variables. Following the *Chopped* TV show, students can also incorporate other “ingredients” they might have on hand (e.g., paper, highlighters, etc.) Once the allotted time has passed, the student shares their lesson with their peers and receives feedback from the instructor.

#### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

The best data I have for demonstrating the technique’s efficacy at encouraging critical thinking skills and fostering creativity are the comments students make about it on course evaluations. Invariably, they will indicate that the Chopped class was their favorite—even alumni mention it when I see them! Not only that, many students talk about adapting the technique for use in their own classrooms.

## Reflection on Wider Use

This technique could be generalized to any other discipline, topic, setting, etc. that would allow for a) at least three variables and b) multiple possibilities for each variable. For example, Chopped could be used in a history, communications, or literature class for role playing/debate, public speaking practice, creative writing prompt, etc. There don't seem to be any cultural or accessibility concerns with this technique. Some possible variations:

- The number of possibilities to be drawn can be the same as the number of students participating, or they can be “recycled” and drawn by more than one student.
- The process can be repeated multiple times in an elimination round approach.
- Students can work in pairs or small groups.
- The allotted time for lesson completion can vary from boil (5-10 minutes) to simmer (30 or more minutes).

### **This is Apple Juice. I Promise**

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### **Technique Summary Description**

This technique was adopted from an in-class experiment devised by Latasha Green and Michael Greenstein at Saint Peter's University. Humans make all sorts of “irrational” decisions. One category of such decisions is the way that people add meaning to something based upon context. For example, a football is an object that can be thrown. When that football is the one Tom Brady threw his 600th touchdown pass with, it is suddenly imbued with additional meaning and value (i.e., \$500,000 in 2021). One way to think about how objects gain this kind of value is through the laws of sympathetic magic (Rozin & Nemeroff, 1990). The first law, contagion, states once connected always connected. The second law, similarity, states that things that look alike must share other properties as well. Contagion explains why Tom Brady’s 600th touchdown pass football is more valuable than other footballs (even those used in the same game).

This demonstration was one that I started using in my judgment and decision-making classes to demonstrate the concept of sympathetic magic, but I soon adapted it to fit within a research methods class as well. I found that extensive discussion of sympathetic magic was not necessary for using this demonstration unless I wanted the class to be about testing theoretical predictions. I usually use it within research methods to memorably demonstrate the power of within-subject experimental designs. It can also be adapted to discuss many other research methods concepts such as experimental control, methods of measurement, or designing experiments to test theories.

## Technique Detailed Instructions

This demonstration uses food to help show, among other things, how context matters the enjoyment of what we eat. Students are asked to drink apple juice that had been poured into a plastic cup and/or drink apple juice poured into a specimen collection container. After the drink, they rate their enjoyment of the experience(s). This can then be used to discuss research methods and/or judgment and decision-making principles.

To prepare for this demonstration, you must purchase enough apple juice, plastic cups, and specimen collection containers to give some to everyone in the class. The apple juice being warm only helps the demonstration work, so it is not necessary to refrigerate it prior to class.

I like to mark the plastic cups with a line halfway up the cup before the class. This is to allow me to have the students pour the apple juice into the specimen cup themselves, but you can prepare the specimen cups rather than having the students be responsible for pouring it.

Create a rating form where people are asked to rate their enjoyment of the experience on whatever type of scale you prefer. I usually use a 7-point Likert scale.

Bring the above materials to class. Have the students aid you in pouring apple juice to fill and hand out the cups. Tell the students not to drink the apple juice until told to do so. Once everyone has apple juice, hand out the specimen collection containers (there is usually a reaction to their appearance).

If you purchased higher quality specimen containers, they come pre-sealed and the students will have to break the seal on them. Once they have broken the seals, have them pour apple juice from their plastic cup into the specimen collection cup until the plastic cup has reached the line you draw on it. This ensures that they have half a cup of apple juice in each cup.

Have the students drink one cup of juice and rate their enjoyment of it. Shortly thereafter, have the students drink the other cup of juice and rate their enjoyment of it.

Depending on your goals, you have half the class drink from each cup type first to demonstrate balancing or have participants only drink from one type of cup (if you prefer to design it between rather than within-participants). I have also used this to demonstrate operational definitions by giving people different measurement questions (e.g., being asked which they preferred, versus being asked to answer yes or no about whether they liked the drink, versus timing how long it took them to drink the apple juice).

## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

This is a very strong effect. I've had students adamantly refuse to drink the apple juice that was in the specimen jar even though they poured it into the sterile container themselves.

The discussion is always lively. Students pick up on even somewhat subtle experimental design elements like the fact that they were in charge of pouring it into the specimen cups themselves so it's clear that it was the exact same juice in both cups. We've had lively discussions about whether the effect would be similar with a liquid that didn't resemble what is normally in specimen cups or whether

the quality of the plastic cups mattered as I once bought relatively high-quality specimen cups and the regular plastic cups were cheap, weak, plastic.

The demonstration is always discussed by students for a while afterwards. I've been told by students that they had heard about it from others and didn't believe it was real. I've had people come to me and tell me they took my class because they had heard about this demonstration. There is no question about whether students find it memorable.

### Reflection on Wider Use

If being used to demonstrate sympathetic magic, this may have limited use as those topics come up in relatively fewer classes. However, when used to demonstrate experiment design, especially within-subjects experimental design, this activity can be widely adopted. If you want to introduce sympathetic magic, it can help ground the study within theory and testing a hypothesis from a theory, but even that is not necessary. The demonstration works even when not paying homage to the theoretical underpinnings and focusing on the experimental design aspects. The biggest concern with adopting this is having students who are allergic to apples. I have had a few over the years and have learned to ask classes ahead of time about apple allergies (warm iced tea works well as a substitute). But even if a student is allergic to apple juice, they can still get the experience through watching their classmates' responses.

*One doorway to play is through the unexpected. This technique pushes students into unfamiliar territory and asks them to confront some deeply embedded feelings. Is it play? It certainly seems playful in its honesty about its meaning and purpose. And it's close to the kind of social play we see in daily life, where friends try to outdo one another by testing hot sauce or jumping into an icy stream. The fact that this technique is shared by the class makes it a form of community play that certainly brings play benefits to bear. Is disgust an appropriate play avenue for everyone's class? Maybe not. But it's certainly memorable! But the idea of challenging assumptions and using play to make it safe is the critical element here – eds.*

### Create Your Own Feeling Wheel Competition

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### Technique Summary Description

In the field of mental health counseling, it is vital for therapists to have an extensive feeling word vocabulary because clients' emotional worlds are complex. Beginning counselors tend to use a relatively limited feeling vocabulary when reflecting emotions to clients, which limits their efficacy and accuracy. A common handout provided in counseling training programs is the Feeling Wheel (see an example at [feelingswheel.com](http://feelingswheel.com)). There are a handful of core feelings (i.e., disgust, anger, sadness, joy, fear, etc.) but there is a plethora of synonyms to those core feelings that provide a wider array

of emotional experiences. For example, instead of simply saying “you feel sad” (which could be true but not quite pinpointing the emotional experience for the client), it could be more accurate and emotionally impactful to reflect to a client “you feel abandoned.” The Feeling Wheel provides more accurate and deepened feeling words for each core feeling category. Students are expected to study the Feeling Wheel to deepen their feeling vocabulary. It’s been my experience that students simply tuck the handout somewhere in their binder or class folder and forget all about it. Given the importance of an extensive feeling vocabulary and the less than effective and passive learning of simply handing out a Feeling Wheel, it’s vital to make this learning process more involved, engaging, and playful!

### Technique Detailed Instructions

Instead of handing out a Feeling Wheel, students will make their own (I also hand out an actual feeling wheel-just after they make their own). Divide the class into smaller working groups (3-5 per group) then provide each group with a blank feeling wheel concentric circles image or have them create their own (see example below) with only the core feelings listed in the inner circle. Larger working spaces are better so it’s best to use a large piece of paper on the desks or to hang on walls. In their groups, students will work as quickly as possible to brainstorm as many synonyms to the core feeling categories as they can. Tell the students they have 10 minutes to brainstorm the largest list of synonyms for each core feeling category. The group that ends with the most words, and most accurate words wins! Start the timer and give two or so time warnings along the way.

When the timer goes off, ask the groups to count their total number of words across all categories and circle their favorite and most descriptive two words in each core feeling category to share out to the larger group. If you have more time, you could have groups cross reference their lists to add missing words to their list from the lists of other groups. With limited time, simply have each group share the total number of words they generated and their top two favorite words from each category. The team with the most words, wins a prize. I have really cool stickers that students put on their water bottles or computers that they love trying to win throughout the semester. After the students complete their own feeling wheels, I also handout a colorful and pre-made Feeling Wheel (see example below) for the official copy.

Added learning bonus! To practice feeling empathy and communicating empathy through reflections of feeling, in their groups, one student can pick a feeling word on the outer edge of the feeling wheel and then tell a story about a time they or someone they know felt that emotion. The story can be theirs or someone else’s but they have to tell the story in enough detail so others in the group can have a chance and practice at experiencing empathy for the person in the story. The students who are listening to the story, can close their eyes if they prefer but they are not to respond at all as the story is being told. The listeners should simply listen and attempt to put themselves in that person’s shoes in order to feel the feelings associated with that story. After the story concludes, the group opens up for the listeners to take turns reflecting the feeling words within the story. For example a students’ reflection of feeling could be, “*You felt used and abandoned because you always helped him but the second you needed him, he wasn’t there.*” After the listeners have a chance to reflect the feelings they heard in the story, the group can engage in a discussion regarding their experiences of trying to feel empathy. Potential prompts to the discussion: What was that experience like? When did your empathy stray? What gets in your way of developing empathy? How did you know that you were experiencing empathy and what told you that you were straying from empathy?

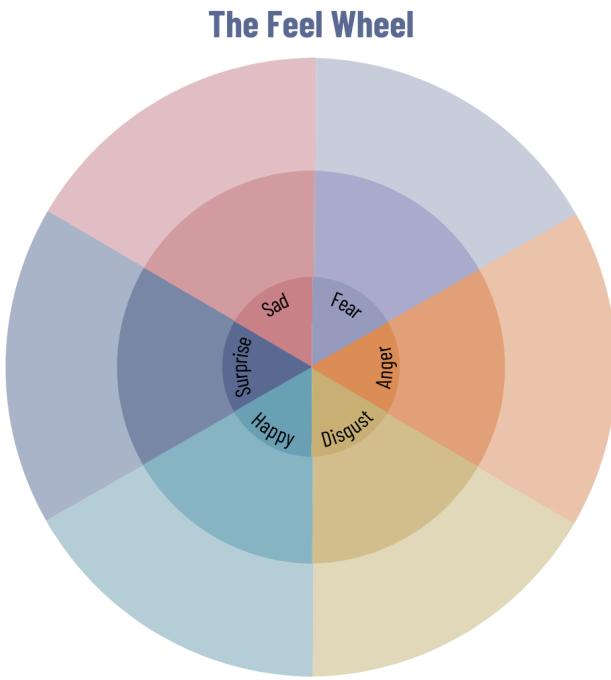
## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

This activity has proven to be more engaging and more impactful for students than simply talking about empathy and handing out a completed version of a feeling wheel. During the brainstorming portion of the Create Your Own Feeling Wheel competition, students are excited, loud, and energized. The process of having to brainstorm feeling words to create your own feeling wheel allows students to deepen their feeling word vocabulary and it is also validating for students that they already have a strong base to their emotional vocabulary. This is important because a common struggle counselors-in-training have when doing their first role plays or counseling sessions is that they claim they cannot think of other feeling words outside of the core generic words. Last, this activity allows students to have a discussion about feelings and share emotionally laden stories for others to practice feeling empathy and then communicating empathy to another person. Overall, students report enjoying this activity and it requires them to be more playful and engaged in the learning process.

## Reflection on Wider Use

Core counseling skills such as empathy, reflections of feeling, summarization, etc. are vital for almost any profession where you engage or interact with people. I believe that approaching any job through an empathic lens, makes employees more effective in their work. For other disciplines outside of mental health counseling, the professor could have a discussion with the students about the place of empathy and feelings in their particular profession. How would empathy and reflecting feelings to customers, colleagues, students, etc. be beneficial for your discipline? Empathy and reflecting feelings are vital for any profession where you would need to develop relationships with another person. This activity could be useful as a fun activity but also a discussion starter about the place of emotions and empathy in any field.

In addition, the basic premise of a “create your own” competition could be adapted for a plethora of other topics. Consider any idea or visual within your discipline that has the need for or potential for brainstorming multiple ideas. You could transform an old lecture or handout into a brainstorming competition for students to engage in! Students can be seated for this activity so physical accessibility should not be a concern. For students whose primary language is not English, you may encourage them to list feeling words from their first language. In addition, there are feeling wheels of languages other than English that you can share post-activity.



Create Your Own Feeling Wheel Blank Template

### Tell Me What It Memes to You: Using Memes to Teach Course Concepts

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#### **Technique Summary Description**

This technique was also written about in a 2018 Faculty Focus article by Marc Reyes, Kristi Kaeppl, and Emma Bjorngard-Basayne. This is a small assignment that students can complete throughout the entire semester. For any unit, students have the option to create a meme that exemplifies or explains a concept covered in the course. Using found images or images they create themselves, students write text and create a meme that relates to a course concept. This assignment gives students the opportunity to be creative, connect what they are learning to their lives or popular culture, and explain concepts in their own words. While seemingly simple, it takes a sophisticated level of understanding to make a joke or meme about a concept, and at the same time, it is something that students enjoy doing. By engaging with the material in this way, students spend time thinking about the material in new, fun, and memorable ways, and produce assignments that the entire class can enjoy. It is fun for students to do, and fun to grade.

## Technique Detailed Instructions

The idea of this assignment is to get the students to creatively make something new with the content of the course. Memes are things that students are very familiar with and creating them is not easy. This is especially the case if they're funny since making a joke about something requires complex knowledge of the thing you're joking about. Thus, the student has to learn about a concept at a high level to be able to make an amusing meme about it. Memes can be submitted using online discussion boards, regular turn-in materials, or their natural environment (e.g., social media). Once submitted, they can be simply graded or integrated into the course at a greater level (e.g., discussing them and their relevance in class).

The below rubric is one that I have used to grade memes in the past.

### Rubric

	<b>Novice (0%)</b>	<b>Competent (50%)</b>	<b>Proficient (100%)</b>
<b>Educational (50%)</b>	No connection to course material	Connected to course material, but no specific term used or term used without content relation	Uses a <b>specific course term</b> and relates the term to concept, definition, or application.
<b>Formatting (30%)</b>	Picture is absent or picture is seemingly random	Picture is relevant to meme's content but not to the course material being focused on	The text and picture together create a <b>meaningful connection</b> to course material
<b>Humor (20%)</b>	Meme is not humorous	Humor is unrelated to the meme'd concept's meaning	Meme's <b>requires knowledge of course content</b> to be amusing

The bulk of the points are associated with the educational component of the meme. The purpose of this is to try to get students to use course terms in a way that shows their understanding of the term rather than just their ability to pluck a random term from the course and attach it to a picture.

The formatting points focus on the picture and text being connected in a way that helps with the understanding the meaning of the meme's content.

The "humor points" exist to try and get the students to create humorous memes. Creating something funny does require more work than simply pasting a concept's definition onto an image.



This example meme shows an image of McGyver—he is well known as a character who can use random objects in odd ways to get interesting results. The top text names the concept from the course, functional fixedness. The bottom text “Never heard of him” made it clear that the character has no idea what the concept is. This nicely ties the concept, image, and text together because if you know who the character is, then you know his most famous trait is his ability to break functional fixedness. Thus, the humor of the meme requires knowledge of the course content.

### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

The memes have served a lot of purposes outside of just being an assignment. I share them during class and give students the opportunity to see what their classmates have created. I've had students judge them for the funniest meme and given people small rewards for being voted the “best” meme by their classmates. I've gotten permission from students to share their memes more broadly and sent them to the people who run our department's Instagram account. This spreads the meme to all of our department's followers and potentially teaches all of them a little about the content being discussed in our classes. I've also gotten permission from students to put memes into my slides to help teach the content related to the memes.

The meme (to the right) is one that I've gotten permission from a student (Nahir Paez) to use to help teach the content it's related to. The Proust Effect is unlikely to be something that students are familiar with, and it's often difficult for them to remember it. However, the scene from the movie Ratatouille where the taste and smell of the ratatouille brings the critic character back to his childhood is something that most of my students have seen. Since the effect is perfectly shown in that scene, the meme's connecting the two really helps the students to remember the class concept.

The memes have also been helpful as a feedback tool on what students are learning. While the vast majority of memes are factually correct, I have received a few over the years with factual errors in them. When I see this, I can make a point in class to correct misconceptions. Also, I've noticed that students tend not to create memes for content that is unclear to them. If there are few or no meme submissions for a topic, I take this as a signal that I might need to clarify the content.

Perhaps my favorite moment with the meme assignment came from a conversation with a student. We were discussing the recent reading about a theory in the field of memory. One of the components of this was a principle known as the "generation effect." This is the idea that creating something leads to better memory than reading the same content. For example, coming up with a meme leads to better memory than just listening to your professor explain it. The student realized this mid conversation and "accused" me of using this in my homework assignments.

### Reflection on Wider Use

This activity can be used in any course or any discipline, as a one-time assignment, extra credit, or a repeated assignment throughout the semester. You might also adapt the assignment to have students find course-relevant memes that already exist and have students explain the humor and how they related to the course.

This assignment also has broader impacts, to the extent that student memes are shared beyond the context of the course. While it may be unlikely for a class assignment to reach viral levels of humor, it would be spectacular if that could occur. Even if a meme becomes popular within a smaller campus community, it means that educational content and humor are being shared, and that in itself is a positive outcome. The more classes that adopt this assignment, the more likely it will be that there are scientifically accurate memes that exist in the world.

*The use of memes is a great example of deploying popular culture in the classroom. People tend to perceive pop culture as fun and playful. So, any use of elements from popular music, movies, comic books, and popular Internet fads can create an environment for play. In this case, the meme signals that play is present alongside serious learning as student creatively merge text and images together to make meaning – eds.*



## **Mission: Write!**

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### **Technique Summary Description**

In this activity, students have just been introduced to a short piece of writing, a précis. They have taken notes on the form, have been provided a template for writing, and have been given an example précis. Their mission is to write a group précis on one of the texts we have covered this semester, usually a notable speech from history. The instructor prepares and distributes kits to groups of students who then begin their mission—to write. The entire “mission” takes two class periods. The content of each class period is outlined in the next section.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

The bulk of the work in this technique involves gathering the contents for the kits. Inside these kits, students receive everything they need to successfully complete their missions. Additionally, they receive an envelope that outlines their “mission” and an envelope that contains their “evidence.” Their mission is a letter that outlines their task and lists a few reminders. Their evidence envelope includes clues that lead them to the text on which I would like them to write. These “clues” might include photos, trinkets, QR codes that provide textual clues, etc. Combined, these clues allow the students to arrive at the appropriate text for their respective groups. The clues should not be too difficult; after all, the goal is to write. Students then use remaining items from the kit to complete their work. Once completed, they submit their compositions in the format deemed most appropriate by their instructor. I chose Google Docs for its sharing capabilities. It also allowed me to collect their responses in a single document and project them on the DocCam for review during the next class session.

#### **Day 1:**

1. Introduce the class to their mission.
2. Provide them with the tools to complete the mission.
3. Allow them time to work.
4. Have students submit their work prior to the next class.

#### **Day 2:**

1. Project the students’ compositions on the whiteboard/DocCam.
2. Discuss the goals of the peer review session and provide guidance on how to conduct peer review tasks.
3. Have students engage in peer review activities and share their comments.
4. Offer instructor feedback for each group and have students revise their submissions.
5. Assign the same type of writing as an individual assignment.

## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

This activity was hugely successful. The students helped each other to compose a written assignment using the items provided to them in the kits. They used their time wisely and enjoyed the process (as much as students can enjoy writing). The feedback session helped students see the various ways writers can discuss the same pieces of writing, and by looking at the work of others, they were able to see where their own compositions could improve. The bulk of the items in the kit helped them to review their work before submitting, while the remainder of the items were simply for entertainment value or were appropriate for the theme.

All of the group compositions received passing scores. The students' individual assignments improved upon those drafted by the groups. Additionally, every student completed a survey regarding the activity, its usefulness, and its enjoyment. EVERY student suggested that I keep the activity for future classes, and several offered some suggestions for additional items to be included in the kits. The students felt that the activity helped prepare them for the individual assignment and how to be successful when completing it.

### Reflection on Wider Use

This activity could work for any subject or group task. It does not have to be a writing task, but I would encourage instructors to use it for more difficult or group tasks. It should not be overused, or the enjoyment factor may suffer. Any project-based assignments could benefit from this approach. Any time students need to refer to course materials or need a variety of supplies, this "kit" approach will work.

My précis kits were assembled in Post Office boxes commonly referred to as "shoeboxes." They were closed with large rubber bands for stacking and transport. The rubber bands also allowed me to replenish some of the items in the kit.

Items in my précis kits included:

- Mission letters.
- Evidence envelopes with clues (there were 8 different sets of clues).
- QR codes for their list of tone words.
- A verb bank.
- A proofreading checklist (designed as a bookmark and laminated).
- A key ring that included the laminated précis notes.
- A pen.
- A highlighter.
- A pad of post-its.
- Three different colored eyeballs (it was the week of Halloween).
- A legend that outlined what task was associated with each color eyeball (this aided in equal distribution of work).
- Halloween candy.
- Sunglasses (spy gear!).
- A "confidential/top secret" sticker.
- A Google Doc logo (to remind them where to submit their writing).

- A timer.
- Shredded paper for filler.
- A reading chip (for students to note their progress/stage of completion).
- A playing card (all from the same suit) that determined the order for Day 2 activities.
- A laminated triangle to remind them of the task's connections to the Rhetorical Triangle.
- Scented Play-Doh (for fun or to relieve stress).

*This technique layers multiple ideas into a playful whole. By structuring the group work as a “mission,” students already know that the assignment will be different. And the framing offers some permission to play. The mission kits provide an apparatus and a variety of resources that not only provide students with the tools they need to complete the assignment, but also further the idea that this assignment is meant to embody some play. She also makes an important point—the unexpected framing of this activity as a mission helps its playfulness. But on its own, the play inherent in a mission could become mundane if overused. Play requires effort to sustain the play!—eds.*

### **The Not-Interview**

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#### **Technique Summary Description**

I developed this role play activity because I noticed that students had no idea that 98% of employers do background research on job candidates via online tools; 90% of employers factor a job candidate's social media accounts into their hiring decisions; and 79% have rejected a candidate based on their social media content (McKeon, 2020). This activity is well suited to social science courses that address issues such as personal identity, professionalism, ethics, or the effects of social media. It is also useful in marketing courses at the undergraduate level. I have conducted this activity both online and face-to-face—in both formats, this activity has generated much laughter and engagement. This can be conducted in a class with anywhere between 20 and 200 students.

#### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

I introduce this activity by describing a variety of social media blunders that have affected one's professionalism—a classic is Justine Sacco's problematic, seemingly racist tweet before she boarded a plane to South Africa. I also search for the most recent and high-profile issues (and there are always plenty!).

1. Then, I break students into groups of 5; if the class is face-to-face, students can count off, arrange by major, or any way you choose to arrange students into groups. If the class is online, breakout rooms work perfectly for this activity.
2. Have students exchange at least one social media profile of their choice with one another (it could be Instagram, Snapchat, VSCO, TikTok, etc.). Students now have 4 additional

followers/friends on their social media accounts. If a student does not use social media at all, this is fine! The absence of social media will be part of the debrief and discussion. It is helpful to tell students that if they have a strong aversion to sharing their social media coordinates, that they can opt-out and observe the activity. The key here is for everyone to be comfortable. Generally, students will want to be able to connect with their colleagues, but in the event that they do not want to, the opt-out option is a helpful escape hatch.

3. Have the students elect one “captain” of the group.
4. Once each group has a captain, share with students that this person has the role of a hiring manager at a firm relative to the course that you’re teaching (e.g., Communication, Marketing, Ethics, HR, etc.). The remaining students are the job candidates. Now the laughter really begins as students realize that—in a safe and supportive environment—their social media accounts will undergo friendly observation.
5. Ask the hiring manager to search the social media profiles of each candidate, noting anything that is helpful to an application and anything that might be objectionable. Fellow candidates can play along by looking at their “competitors” in this fictional job search. This doesn’t take long – 3 to 4 minutes of superficial investigation should do it.
6. When students return to the large group, invite a discussion about desirable or positive aspects of social media profiles. Answers may include volunteer work, animals, nature, sports, social justice, etc. Also discuss what problematic aspects might have been noticed—they are generally associated with alcohol and partying (which students obviously find amusing and is typical of undergraduate life). Note that this discussion should avoid calling out individuals by name or revealing the identity of any student whose accounts may contain questionable content. Encourage students to use phrases such as “someone” or “we saw a post about” so as not to embarrass anyone. If the student wishes to add more information (such as a situation was a joke, was fake, etc.), this can also be an option.

### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

This activity allows for a playful way of considering the important issue of personal identity and professionalism. The activity gives students space and time to play with their social media accounts and consider how they reflect their identity before too much is at stake for them in a professional setting.

Another benefit of this activity is that students appreciate being able to do something fun with their phones/tablets/laptops during class. The activity demonstrates that technology and what is generally considered verboten in class is meaningful and relevant to course concepts. We also engage in a helpful discussion around what social media channels are for what purpose. For example, Instagram is generally a “highlight reel” of someone’s life, in which only the good parts are featured. By contrast, TikTok is where many people go for humor or to share complaints. If students do not have any social media accounts, we discuss why they made that decision (or the decision was made for them), and how the potential construction of a professional profile may be helpful for some career paths. A discussion of usernames and searchability is also helpful in the debrief.

The outcome of this activity is that students become much more aware of the potential interpretations of their social media accounts. They are inspired to clean up their social media profiles, or to make a separate, visible, searchable account for their professional persona. Another benefit is that they connect with other members of the class via social media, thus facilitating connections between and amongst

students. I find that after this activity, the cohesion in class is enhanced in that students have an outside connection and can refer to this activity as a meaningful connecting moment.

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

This activity helps students to understand that they function as their own first marketing client and gives students a fun and playful introduction to the concept of personal and professional identity. Students gain a clearer understanding that they construct their own social media identity whether they do so consciously or not. It is also helpful in introducing students to one another, for without this activity they may not have felt comfortable approaching other students or making a social media connection. The activity is not limited to online or face-to-face meetings and can function as a playful and fun way of familiarizing students and inviting a conversation about future goals and desired identities.

*The key to the playfulness in this activity stems from taking social media, something usually forbidden in class settings, and fore fronting it as a tool to stimulate discussion. This kind of reversal of expectations is always a good doorway to ignite play. In this case, there's also the opportunity for meaningful discussion. The role play aspects of pretending to be a hiring manager is enhanced using real social media information. One caution, as the author noted: Share social media in class could lead to embarrassment or a violation of privacy. This is why, in all cases, play should be voluntary and not compulsory! Another aspect that could be explored in an activity like this is the idea of "professionalism" all together. Who decides what is "professional" and who is left outside of that box? We believe being "unprofessional" is usually more clear cut but what "professionalism" looks like can and should be a broader representation than what we sometimes make it – eds.*

### **Collecting Data Using a Ball and Cup Toy**

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#### **Technique Summary Description**

The Ball and Cup toy is used to collect data for analysis by occupational therapy students in a Scholarship of Practice course. Students try to catch a small ball that is attached by a string to a cup on a handle. Students are typically given one minute to catch the ball in the cup as many times as they can. Several variations are possible—allowing for within and between-group comparisons, pre and post-intervention comparisons, and data at different levels of measurement.

#### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

This activity is used within a Scholarship of Practice course taught to fourth-year undergraduate occupational therapy students. The course teaches students to incorporate research methods into their clinical practice, analyzing the outcomes of interventions. The emphasis is on using single-subject and

quasi-experimental designs as part of “regular” clinical practice, rather than conducting randomized clinical trials “outside” or “on top” of clinical work.

Several in-class activities require students to use null hypothesis statistical testing or confidence intervals to compare the outcomes of an intervention to a target value, pre-intervention data or outcomes data from a group that received a different intervention. Data for these exercises could come from simulations or actual clinical data. Instead, the need for data created the opportunity to incorporate playful connection-forming activities at the beginning of class sessions to collect real data from students.

Ball and Cup toys are inexpensive and widely available at toy stores and on the Internet. Different versions of the toy exist in different sizes and levels of difficulty. In a typical exercise, students are given one minute to catch the ball in the cup as many times as possible. Data can be collected at different levels of measurement:

- **Ratio** – The number of times the ball is caught in the cup in one minute.
- **Ordinal** – Break the results into categories (e.g., 0 to 3; 4 to 7; 8 to 12...).
- **Nominal** – Divide students based on something like whether the number of times they caught the ball was odd or even or whether they caught the ball at least five times.

More than one “intervention” can be created by wrapping the string around the handle to shorten the string or using two different types of Ball and Cup toys (I have traditional wooden versions and larger plastic versions intended for young children). Google Forms and Google Sheets are used to collect data from the students and make it instantly available to the entire class. In a class of 30 students, with 8 Ball and Cup toys, the entire exercise takes about 10 minutes.

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

I have successfully incorporated this activity into three class sessions in one semester. Most students enjoyed the activity and were motivated to catch the ball in the cup as many times as possible. Some things that I think are true (but cannot prove):

- Students have an easier time understanding the analysis of the data because they clearly understand how the data was collected (e.g., what “pre-intervention” means).
- The Ball and Cup exercise raises the energy level in the room, which is important because Scholarship of Practice is the third class of the day for the students.
- The Ball and Cup exercise puts the students in a relaxed, playful state of mind that is conducive to learning.
- The Ball and Cup exercise features many failures (not catching the ball in the cup) and successes (catching the ball in the cup), which reinforces an attitude of failure as a part of learning.

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

The Ball and Cup exercise is an inexpensive way to collect integer data that ranges from zero to fifteen. It could be suitable for an online course environment if students made their own Ball and Cup toy. A shortcoming of the activity is that it is not universally accessible. Students with visual or motor

impairments may be unable to use a Ball and Cup toy. I am not aware of any accommodations that could be made to the activity.

### **NGO Funding Proposal Simulation**

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#### **Technique Summary Description**

This technique has been used for five years at Vancouver Island University in Nanaimo, BC, Canada for a course I co-taught with Mary Anne. This exercise is completed half way through a course on Global Issues in Health for a 3rd year nursing course for the BSN degree. It is run for 64-72 students over a three-hour class. Prior to doing this activity, learners must have been introduced to the concepts of: NGOs (non-governmental organizations), SDOHs (social determinants of health), community development, inter-sectoral collaboration, sustainability, and upstream vs downstream solutions. This is important so that the students have a solid foundation upon which to build their presentations. It involves groups pretending to be an NGO and competing for one of five, one-million-dollar funding opportunities through the fictional JiGGI (Justice Guild Global Initiative) awards.

#### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

Students are given the choice between two worthy Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). These are all real NGOs whose names have been changed to include the word 'Justice' in the name in honor of the awards. All the NGOs have been paired to offer one that does more concrete, downstream work (like giving limbs to child amputees) to more upstream work (such as finding and removing land mines for safety and to restore arable land).

Students are put into groups of six or eight (for our class, we end up with around eight groups). They are competing to successfully obtain one of five, one-million-dollar prizes to fund their NGO. Once they have chosen their NGO, they must do a three-minute infomercial using the application form as a guide for what to include. Things to include are: a) vision and mission statements, b) how they engage their community, and c) how are they sustainable, etc. Since these are real NGOs, if they can find the original NGO, they are given permission to borrow anything they want from the website. They may use any presentation method they wish.

The two co-instructors act as the judges. The winners, with an explanation for the choices, are announced in class the following week during a debrief.

To increase student engagement for those not presenting, each person is given a fictitious \$100 they can bestow on any group other than their own, keeping in mind both the completeness of the information given and the creativity used in the presentation. These are added up and announced as well.

## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

### Lessons Learned

- Lesson 1 — We originally did this class live, but always ended up having a hard time finding rooms for so many groups to prepare their presentations. During COVID, we had to refine this for an online environment and found that it actually worked better in an online format. We will continue with it online once we are face-to-face because: 1) breakout rooms are embedded; 2) there is little time lost loading up the presentations, etc. ‘share screen’ was easy and quick; 3) we can record all the presentations for review after class; and 4) using ‘polls,’ learners could choose their \$100 award winner at the same time right at the end of class. Nobody can tell who has the most votes and it is recorded for the judges to easily tally the extra money going to those groups.
- Lesson 2 — We originally had the students fill out the application form as well as doing the presentation. It usually meant that the group split in half: one half to do the infomercial and one half to do the form. Groups had a tough time completing both in the allotted time and often the two did not jibe.
- Lesson 3 — We originally had one group play the funding organization. While the rest of the class were preparing their infomercials, the funding organization group had to come up with a rubric for how they were going to determine who gets the funds. This worked very well.
- Lesson 4 — Originally there was a reflection assignment associated with activity. Learners had to describe what they thought was the point of the activity and what they learned as both a nurse and a global citizen. Students mostly reported learning around teamwork and group work, rather than the principles of international development which was the actual aim. The two instructors could not agree on the validity of this focus, so we did away with the assignment and just made it a fun class activity.
- Lesson 5 — During the debrief, students show that they understand why we do this activity. At this point during the term, learners are in the middle of writing their major, scholarly paper for this course. This activity is the subject of their paper. For their papers, they must be able to succinctly outline how their chosen NGO is successfully addressing a particular sustainable development goal for one particular health challenge in a particular country with a particular program. All the same elements like sustainability, community engagement, etc. must be present in both.

### Reflection on Wider Use

This technique could be easily generalized to other disciplines, topics, and settings. As long as one keeps the elements of what is needed for the funding the same as what would be needed for that discipline (e.g., writers are vying for a prize for an idea for a novel, marketing students using the same elements that would be needed in a real-life marketing project, etc.). Learners have commented that this is a fun activity but can be quite stressful as they try to be productive in such a large group. Groups of four would be better but with a class of 72, needs must.

Role plays like this are quite common in many disciplines. As a result, the idea of putting students into a role play situation might not, at first glance, seem like novel play. However, consider how in this technique, the roles given to the students are not the roles they are being trained in. That is, here they role play NGOs to get a better sense of how this world works and how it might be relevant to their field of study. This subtlety is important! If you do teach in a discipline with routine role plays, consider putting the students into novel roles that test their understanding from a position other than the one they usually expect – eds.

### **This Is Not Cherry: Research Methods with Jellybeans**

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#### **Technique Summary Description**

Additional credit is due to Sarah Pociask, Wellesley College, for her exceptional jellybean flavor memory and inspiration for designing and implementing this activity. In this activity, students eat jellybeans without knowing the flavor ahead of time and then are asked to guess what the flavor is. I run this activity in my research methods course to reinforce the concepts of experiment design, to give students the opportunity to generate data, and to interpret findings in class. I also use it in my cognitive psychology class to demonstrate how top-down processing (i.e., the use of one's knowledge to inform perceptual experiences) is not limited to visual or auditory experiences. It is usable in both classes because it combines teaching of psychological concepts (e.g., bottom-up and top-down processing) with research methods (e.g., experiment design, data analysis, statistics, and interpretation), all in a fun and easily digestible way.

Research methods, in particular, is often a course that students find challenging. Other times, students just don't see the value of learning about research because they do not intend to be a researcher. This activity helps break down these barriers of difficulty and motivation and make doing and learning about research fun. By applying research methods to something fun (tasting jellybeans), students not only learn about important research concepts, but also can be inspired to apply the scientific method to other areas of their lives.

#### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

I've learned that a significant amount of the taste of many jellybean flavors comes from knowing what the flavor is supposed to be. That flavor expectation is, in part, created by the jellybean's color and the listed flavor on the back of the box. When you don't know what the flavor is, it can be very difficult to tell what the flavor was. This is related to the psychological phenomena of top-down and bottom-up processing. Top-down processing occurs when your knowledge of the flavor impacts your experience of eating the jellybean. Bottom-up processing is involved in using your senses to extract information about the jellybean to guess its flavor.

Students work with partners tasting jellybeans. They do this with their eyes closed so they don't have the ability to create the visual expectation. Instead, an expectation is created by their partner telling them what flavor they are about to eat. Their partner tells them the correct flavor, an incorrect flavor, or tells them that they do not know what the flavor is. This creates three expectation conditions: correct expectation, incorrect expectation, and no expectation. After eating each jellybean, the students guess its flavor and rate how confident they are in their guess.

I organize the jellybeans into "flights" using segmented pill containers. Ideally, you want to have multiple sets with the exact same flavors. You should also avoid using distinctive flavors like cinnamon and licorice that will be easy to identify even without the visual expectation.

When setting up the "flights" it's important to record what jellybean flavor is in which pill box location. This way you can create the instruction sets and data recording sheets to give to your students (see sample below).

Jellybean	Tell your partner it's	Your partner's flavor guess	Confidence 0 (low) – 10 (high)
Morning	Unknown		
Noon	Correct flavor		
Evening	Incorrect flavor		

In the class, you want to have the students pair up. Then have one half of the pair come and pick up a set of pills and a data recording sheet. Instruct them to make sure that their partner cannot see the jellybeans. Repeat the process with the other half of the pairs so that everyone has a set of jellybeans for their partners to try and where they can record the responses.

Explain to your students what they will be doing. Then instruct them to take turns trying the jellybeans with their eyes closed. This is where pill boxes work well. The person trying the jellybean can close their eyes and hold out their hand while their partner can open one of the pill containers and drop the jellybean into their hand without touching it. They should be instructed to tell their partner their guess at the flavor and their confidence rating immediately thereafter.

Once they have each gone through the three guesses, have your students turn in their responses and reflect upon the experience of eating each of the jelly beans.

Depending on the concepts you are planning to teach with this activity, you can use the remaining class time to discuss students' experience and the content you would like to cover. I have used this to discuss, among other things, top-down processing, Analysis of Variance, and many different aspects of experimental design.

### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

Students generally find this to be a fun activity. The experience of eating the jellybeans is something they enjoy. There's always a lively discussion about it during the experiment and after the reflection. They especially enjoy learning when they were right and wrong about their jellybean guesses. This helps make discussion of usually dry statistical topics like ANOVA more interesting.

I have the students spend at least five minutes writing a reflection on the experience after finishing their third taste. This lets me have time to input the flavor ratings and confidence data into excel to generate a graph of the class's responses. They have found this to be fun because they like seeing their own data.

### Reflection on Wider Use

This activity could be useful in a variety of disciplines that teach students about research methods. For example, I generally make it a within-subjects study and demonstrate counterbalancing, but you could set it up so that people only get one level (all flavors unknown, correct, or incorrect). As with most experiments, you can set the discussion to focus on any of the experimental design elements that you want. Because there are so many options to choose from it is up to the instructor what they want to discuss with this demonstration.

I implement this activity in-class, but you could also invite students to do more of the experimental design with you. You could even have the student's collect data by running the experiment outside of class with their friends or families. This would also help to avoid potential issues of a student's being allergic to jellybeans, though I have not yet encountered this.

This activity was inspired by a game I played, where we were questioning whether the jellybeans actually tasted like the flavors that they were labeled as. You could challenge the students to think about how they might use the scientific method to investigate some other "everyday" questions they have in their lives by proposing their own research projects.

### How A Bill Becomes a Law Debate Activity

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### Technique Summary Description

This technique was adapted from a template shared by a K-12 educator named Dani Theresa in a Facebook Group called Bitmoji Craze for Educators. Her template described a game where students learned about how a bill becomes a law. This activity provided students with an opportunity to engage in the health policy process by learning more about how a bill becomes a law. Students were placed into groups of four and then each group selected a controversial topic to debate related to healthcare or health policy. All other students in the class were made legislative representatives and had to cast a vote for either the Pro or Con side of the debate depending on who made the better argument. If the Con side of the debate received more votes, the Bill (i.e., the topic being debated) died and no further action was taken. If the Pro side received more votes, the Bill moved on to the Senate for voting. The Senate was made up of two elected representatives from each group (including the debating group). If the Con side of the debate received more votes, the Bill died and no further action was taken. If the Pro side received more votes, the Bill became a law barring a veto from the class President (the course Instructor). By going through this process students began to see how difficult it was to get a law passed.

The results of the debate did NOT impact student grades for this assignment. The project was graded based on a rubric.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

Before beginning the activity, I created a module in the learning management system (LMS) that included video instructions of the activity and an overview of each step of the process. I included information and resources for students to learn more about how a bill becomes a law and included resources on how to develop a good debate and how to make a convincing argument. I provided students with a Debate Planning Worksheet to develop their arguments and counterarguments. Since this was an asynchronous online class, I also provided students with links to the tool VoiceThread which was where the debate took place. The first level of voting took place on VoiceThread and the second round took place in the LMS Discussion Board in a Forum developed just for Class Senators. Groups were prompted on when to elect their group Senators and submitted their names to the instructor once elected.

Previously, I had students do this debate activity in VoiceThread and had the rest of the class vote on the debate. With the added playful aspects of role playing where students take on the role of congressional legislators, makes the activity more fun and allows students to understand better how Congress functions and how laws are passed. Having the rest of the class (non-debaters) function as the House of Representatives and two “elected” students from each group represent the class Senators, really helps students understand the workings of our legislative branch.

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

Students enjoyed this activity a lot and stated they learned a great deal about the legislative process. They also identified that there was much more difficulty included in the process than they originally thought and they could now understand why so many Bills do not successfully become laws.

Many students thought this activity was fun because it allows them to role play and pretend to be in Congress. They also like the competitive aspect of trying to get their bill passed. This activity works as a playful intervention because it allows students who normally do not enjoy class to have a lot of fun while learning about the legislative process. Many students imagined that they were going to win their debate and be able to pass their bill into law, but only one out of the four groups successfully moved through all phases of the process.

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

This technique can be used in any course where the content reflects a real-life process. In this activity, students got the opportunity to be legislative officials and act out the process of how a bill becomes a law. Other courses where students learn about a variety of processes can be developed into a game where students act out each part of the process. One thing that helped me to plan this activity out and keep it playful was thinking about the game of *LIFE*. This might be a fun starting point for others interested in developing a similar game. Consider the landmarks and different points in the game that correlate with different aspects of life. Then apply it to your course. How can you break an idea down into a process and develop a step-by-step game to help students understand that concept better?

## Hidden Items in the Classroom

**Something is under my desk! In the book! In the soda can! In the clock!  
What's the code?**

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### **Technique Summary Description**

Harness the power of surprise and the unexpected! Capitalize on the joy of discovering something. Break up a longer class with a diversion, start class with a puzzle, direct students to think about a question at the end of class, celebrate someone's birthday, award a random prize, or offer a free answer to a test question. Students use course content to find the hidden item, or the hidden item or message can serve as a springboard to content exploration and learning.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

This activity can be done in an in-person class. The instructor hides something somewhere in the classroom. Students need to recognize, recall, or produce information relevant to the course in order to find the hidden item. The hidden item can also contain something that spurs further practice with course material, or it can be a prize, joke, question to ponder etc. Where to put the message or item?

**Tape a piece of paper with a message (of any kind) under a student desk, before the class starts.**

There are several math tricks that always end with a particular answer 2, 3, 4, 5 etc. One of those tricks can be used to make the class identify the person seated at a particular desk. If you do a math problem that always ends in 3, you can count three desks over from the beginning of the first row, for example, and call that desk number 3. That person is told to look under their desk. The information can be a question or clue to get an activity started. The class experience of finding something taped under a desk is inherently attention getting and intriguing, partially because it never happens in their educational experience! It's a novel event, and as such it can produce positive learning emotions. That message can be anything. A well wish, a question, a puzzle, an award, a clue, food for thought, a reminder, an important term, a free answer on an upcoming exam, a course content mystery etc.

**Place a diversion device/safe (which is a household item that contains a secret compartment) somewhere in the classroom.**

Example diversion devices, or "diversion safes," are a can of soda, books that look like a dictionary but have no pages, shaving cream, a brush, a can of soup, a shampoo bottle, a clock, ChapStick, canned fruit etc. The items are not what they seem to be on the surface and have an opening of some sort where something can be hidden.



Generally, the object does not draw students' attention initially, especially something like a book that can be left somewhere in the room, perhaps "staged" around other books. But, even a random item like a can of soda or a bottle of shampoo can be left out in the open. Often the presence of the unusual item is not noticed if it's surrounded by other items.

There are many ways to get students to find this object. For example, you can cover or review course material. Letters can be circled or in some way highlighted in a reading, activity, worksheet, PowerPoint, diagram etc. Those letters, when unscrambled, spell the name of the diversion safe.

Another option is to take a photo of the classroom before the device is placed, somewhat inconspicuously, in the room. Post the photo on the screen during class and ask students to "find the difference" between the current room they are in and the photo of the room.

#### **Get cryptic! Use letter or number locks to expand the challenge.**

A number or letter lock can be placed in the room. In addition to traditional padlocks, you can also find "Da Vinci cryptex puzzles" that use letters. Other items or messages can be hidden inside the lock itself. Since the instructor sets the password, it can be tied to course material in some way. Additionally, half the class or a subset of the class can receive a problem, question, puzzle related to the course content. When they solve it, they will receive half of the letters necessary to open the lock. The other half or subset of the class does a similar task but receives additional letters needed to open the lock. The two halves or groups can then work together to figure out what the word is.

#### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

This approach helps create different paradigms or patterns of thinking and problem solving. Students can become quite accustomed to one way of processing class input. Even when active learning measures are used in a class, they may often fit within traditional frameworks. By integrating messages, information, or questions into a diversion safe or puzzle lock, professors have the potential to disrupt and reshape traditional learning paths and problem-solving strategies. Finding hidden objects is

inherently experiential and since experiences in the classroom tend to be predictable and banal, this strategy allows instructors to inject a bit of playfulness and fun into their course.

## **In Pursuit of the Golden Swatter: An Engaging Concept Review Activity**

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### **Technique Summary Description**

Students often struggle with ascertaining where and when to incorporate supporting materials into their speech preparation outlines. Learners are uncertain which parts of an outline should contain their own writing versus using and citing the evidence of others. For example, some students insert supporting material into inappropriate places, such as, in connectives, main points, and conclusions. This learning activity was created to enhance students' comprehension and identification of the use of the concepts of main points, supporting materials, and connectives, in order, to assemble more coherent speeches.

By employing a game to solidify the understanding of fundamental concepts, students will be better equipped to perform at a higher level of critical thinking when writing and constructing their speeches.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

The first 20 minutes of class should be used to discuss constructing a speech outline and the next 20 minutes of class should be used to conduct the learning activity.

1. First, split students into groups of 4 or 5 students per table, where the course concept identification cards have been taped to the center of the table, in a row. If tables are not available, the instructor can tape identification cards to the walls. Make sure that the course concept identification cards are within reach of all group members and that each student has a fly swatter.
2. Next, explain the objectives of the game to the class:
  1. Students need to slap the correct identification card that matches the example displayed on the PowerPoint with their fly swatter (The instructor should conduct a few practice rounds to extend the time of the game and/or to allow all students to participate in identifying a sufficient number of course concept examples).
  2. (For a class of 25 students) Then, when conducting the competitive rounds of the game, the last student to slap the correct card is eliminated from the game until one person on each table remains.

OR

1. (For a class with 15 or less Students) If the instructor has a smaller class size, they can have the

first student who slaps the card earn one point. Then, the first student to earn three points at the table wins the round and is entered into the final round.

2. During the activity, the instructor should ask follow-up questions during the competition about the samples displayed on the PowerPoint, instead of conducting a debrief at the end of the activity. These questions could include:
  1. Which type of supporting material is being displayed (e.g., testimony, fact, statistic, etc.)?
  2. Which type of connective is being displayed (e.g., Rhetorical question, restate-forecast form transition, etc.).
  3. If you were to write a main point using parallel structure to match the one displayed on the screen, how would you write it?
3. Next, the remaining or winning students at each table will gather around the same table to compete in the final showdown round of the game.
4. The overall winner of the game is awarded the “golden fly swatter” (a fly swatter that is spray painted gold with plastic flies super glued to the swatter).

This activity typically requires 40-45 minutes to complete. Prior to the activity, the instructor will need to purchase 25-30 fly swatters and will need to construct course concept identification cards (Main Point, Supporting Point, Connective). In addition, the instructor will need to construct a PowerPoint with samples of the course concepts students will need to identify. Finally, on the day of the activity, the instructor will need access to a computer, projector, and screen to display the PowerPoint for the activity.

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

This learning activity can be used after discussing how to build a preparation outline or after students have given informative speeches, in order, to solidify and review successful speech construction. Students enjoy the competition with their fellow classmates and the game increases their understanding of outline construction. They have fun getting to use the fly swatters to slap the correct answers and find the golden fly swatter to be a hilarious, fun prize. Students have enjoyed this short activity and the construction of speech preparation outlines has improved. This activity can easily be modified to have students identify a variety of course concepts, including the elements of an effective introduction, types of reasoning, types of evidence, fallacies, or types of figurative language.

### **Reflections on Wider Use**

This activity could be easily modified to utilize concepts from a variety of disciplines. For instance, this activity could be modified to identify the lobes in the human brain. Each slide could contain a specific function found in each lobe and students would then slap the card representing the correct lobe in the brain.

*In many cases, teachers avoid class competitions. Why? It turns out that some students don't find competitive play all that fun. How to work around this? This technique demonstrates two features which minimize the downside of competition while encouraging students to win. The use of the flyswatter provides an absurd interaction interface. By making the competition feel silly, the players are invited to play at the idea of winning, rather than taking it too seriously. (Imagine this game if the winner was to earn more points, to understand the difference). Likewise, the winner receives a silly prize which honors their victory but reminds the class the point was learning and fun! – eds.*

## Fungus Among Us

**A live action, social deduction game reviewing skills within a pharmacy practice laboratory course**

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### **Technique Summary Description**

This activity's game design is based on the online game—*Among Us*. Pharmacy skills competency is a vital part of pharmacy education ensuring prepared and successful practitioners. *Fungus Among Us* is an innovative game in which pharmacy students are given the opportunity to review skills while engaging in a fun and interactive live social deduction game. This game was played in a second-year pharmacy practice laboratory course during the Spring semester of 2021. This course is divided into three sections, with 20-30 students in each section. Approximately 80 students participated in this activity. The game was played over a two-hour period, with additional time used for instructions. Students in each section were divided into two groups—to play as either fungus or cells. While completing hospital-based pharmacy skills, cells, and fungus competed against each other to reach stated goals and be the first to win the game. But amid the fungus were a pair of students that were imposters! These imposters posed as an anti-fungal medication working to sabotage the fungus and help the cells to win the game. Unlike the online version, in *Fungus Among Us*, the imposter cured people instead of killing them. Twelve skills stations were located throughout all three floors of the pharmacy building and outside. The skills included sterile compounding, gowning and garbing, pharmaceutical calculations, antibiotic coverage, electrolyte matching, and medication knowledge games. The lab was completed as a final review to prepare students for their institutional Introductory Pharmacy Practice Experience (IPPE) rotations.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

All students chose a partner before the start of the game. They were required to stay with their partner for the entire game. Students were given a five-minute time limit at each skill station but could repeat each skill station as many times as needed to pass that skill.

- *Cell Instructions*—Each pair of cells were given matching-colored masks (red, blue, etc.). As a pair, they completed skill stations located throughout the building. These stations were found by scanning a QR code that was provided the day of the lab. If students were successful at completing the skill station, they received a reward. This reward was either a card that had a letter of the alphabet on it or an alternative card that could be used during the game that had

specific instructions for its use. Ultimately, all the cells needed to work together to spell out the name of the anti-fungal using the alphabet cards. To do that, the letters needed to be brought to the “hospital” to be deciphered. Here’s the twist, only the imposter knew the location of the hospital at the start of the game. As students were playing, the fungus had the ability to infect cells and put them in quarantine. When this happened, cells could get out of quarantine by making a 100% on a drug quiz or by being released by the anti-fungal.

- *Fungus Instructions*—All fungus, including the imposters, wore a green mask. Each pair of fungus completed these same skill stations located throughout the building. If students were successful at the skill station, they received a reward in the form of a quarantine card. They were able to use these cards to capture cells and place them in quarantine (which was in the pharmacy practice lab). To capture cells, fungus must possess a quarantine card. When fungus saw a team that they wanted to capture, they would call out that team’s color and say “STOP” to capture that team. Fungus then accompanied the cells to the quarantine room and turned in their quarantine card. They then continued completing skills stations to earn more quarantine cards.
- *Imposter (Anti-fungal) Instructions*—Each of the pairs of Fungus drew a card at the beginning of the game. The card told them if they were the imposter or if they were not the imposter. The pair of students that drew the imposter card played the game as a fungus in disguise. The imposter pair was responsible for communicating the location of the hospital to the cells (they were given this information at the start of the game). They also completed skills stations to earn quarantine release cards (cure cards). These cards were used to release cells from quarantine. When the imposter pair brought this card to the quarantine room, all the cells currently in quarantine were released! But they had to be careful to not let the fungus find out their identity.

**How to win the game:** Whichever team completed their objective first was the winner!

- *Cells*—For the cells to win, they were required to gather all 12 letters of the anti-fungal’s name from the skills stations. The name was predetermined by the course instructor. All cells in the game worked together to complete this task. The letters had to be brought to the hospital and then deciphered to spell out the name of the anti-fungal.
- *Fungus*—Fungus could win in one of two ways. The first way was to get all the cells in quarantine at the same time. The second way to win was to determine the identity of the imposter. The fungus had two tries to debate and make a guess at the identity of the imposter. Two scheduled meetings were held during the game in which they had a chance to vote on the identity of the imposter.

### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

The skills tested and challenged during the Fungus Among Us lab prepared second-year pharmacy students to be successful in a hospital setting. Competency in the areas tested will help ensure future pharmacists are well prepared to provide safe and effective pharmaceutical care. A study of this activity was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Louisiana Monroe. Our study shows that providing this creative game activity in a pharmacy practice laboratory setting resulted in positive student perceptions, as well as increased engagement, more effective teamwork, and enhanced information retrieval.

Using a chi-square test, student pre and post lab engagement levels were analyzed based on Schlechty's levels of engagement, then grouped into authentically engaged or not authentically engaged groups. This data yielded a p-value of .005 ( $\chi^2(1,128) = 7.87$ ) which showed a significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) increase in engagement for the gamification activity, concluding that students were more likely to report being authentically engaged in the game lab as compared to non-game labs. Likert-based surveys also showed that 93% ( $n = 58$ ) of students positively responded (strongly agreed/agreed) that playing a game in conjunction with lab exercises increased their level of engagement compared to lab activities without a game. Benefits were also seen with a gamification lab with teamwork, 98% ( $n = 58$ ) of students reported working as a team helped them understand and apply the material covered. Ninety-five percent ( $n = 58$ ) of students positively responded that the gamification lab helped them think about the material covered in a new way while 100% ( $n = 58$ ) of students stated the game helped them understand and apply the material.

#### Representative Student Comments:

- “This was honestly my favorite lab! Please continue to do this activity during the future because it really helps you realize what you know/don’t know and what topics you need to work on. Great job and thank you for all your hard work going into the lab! You should make a lab like this for P3s as well.”
- “It sounded silly at first, but it was very fun and engaging. All of the exercises helped give me an idea of how much I’ve actually retained through the coursework, and even the challenging exercises were a nice break from traditional teaching methods.”
- “I really enjoyed this lab! It helped me review material that we have already learned this semester, and it helped reinforce some material that I wasn’t too confident on, especially the antibacterial coverage section. After having that little section, I feel as if more information stuck with me. But all sections were very enjoyable! It was also nice to have the IV preparation sections so we could practice. Overall, I really enjoyed this, and I really liked that we could pick our own partners.”
- “It was super nice having a relaxed environment to learn vs the normal lab setting where it can be a little overwhelming at times. I felt really engaged in all the activities and actually learned a lot more than I thought I would. There was definitely a lot of practice with teamwork and how to work well with others. It’s very rare when we get to be silly with everyone and bond as classmates, but I think that is so important. Big thanks to Dr. Barbo for setting this up and going above and beyond for our class! I had so much fun! She is such an amazing professor and you can tell she loves what she does.”

#### Reflection on Wider Use

Skills stations in this activity can be substituted with any skill needing to be reviewed, therefore this game can be used outside of pharmacy education. While intensive to set up initially, the game can be used multiple times in different settings within the same program or different programs. Students with mobility issues may encounter difficulty in navigating to each skill station. This could be addressed by locating the skills station in closer proximity to each other on one floor of a building.

## What's in a Name?

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### **Technique Summary Description**

This technique is really helpful for undergraduate and graduate students studying literacy instruction. I've used this many times to provoke a rich conversation about alphabetics, letter patterns, and meaning, three key aspects of spelling and word work (Bear et al., 2007). I've also used it with first graders. We all love our names. And we all need to hear our names and be recognized (no matter how old we are). Playing with names also helps everyone get to know each other, make names memorable, and lets you see how your students engage in problem solving.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

1. On the first day of class provide 5X8 cards and markers. Ask them to write their first name only on the card. They should aim to take up all the space on the card. They can embellish the text of their name in any way that they want, using any colors they want (Markers are most effective).
2. Collect all the cards. Then, study them. Look for a rule or characteristic to sort the cards by. The challenge is that you can only choose one characteristic at a time to form two or more groups of names.
3. When you have decided on the characteristic, lay the cards out on the floor or tabletop in two groups. Invite students to gather around as you read aloud each name within each group. Then invite students to notice the pattern.
4. Here you will find that students are either stumped or very observant. And the suggestions that they come up with are often part of the curriculum later in the semester (e.g., double letters, y as a vowel, digraphs, diphthongs, short vowel sounds).
5. The student who noticed the pattern then takes the cards home to decide on a characteristic for the next week.
6. Begin each class session with the name game. There are so many options and alternatives. Or you could play it all in one or two days.
7. Playing with words and creating a culture of playing with words is central for lifelong learners and language users, and teachers.
8. Ultimately, the characteristics chosen will lead to related discussions of content material. And sometimes, they are related to characteristics such as use of more than one color, use of capital letters, additional decoration beyond letters. The key is that they are sorting by one characteristic.

## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

The students are very skeptical at first. Then, after a few rounds they really begin to see the possibilities of how they could use it in their own classrooms or other educational settings. They make strong connections to the texts that we read addressing alphabetics and word patterns later in the semester. So, it prepares them for upcoming vocabulary, all through play.

### Reflection on Wider Use

This technique could be generalized to other topics. Instead of names it could be done with content vocabulary that students need to know. Give each student a word rather than a name. They will still have ownership of their word and the way that they recorded and decorated it. It could be used with multisyllabic words and sort by prefix, suffix, and base or root words. Students could then pick a word to work with, creating an image, act out the word, or provide instances where their word might be used. This method could also be used with any content to help bring out the family of themes, and to understand, identify and name characteristics. Accessibility could require students to create online rather by hand, or to display them on a table, table tent, or project them. In the cases where a student is struggling to note a pattern, they can be paired with another student to provide additional support. Also, this could be made into a movable bulletin board so the names are left posted, for other students to connect to, and to make it even more tactile.

Examples of characteristics they might choose to sort by:

- Uppercase or lowercase letters
- Double letters
- Digraphs
- Diphthongs
- Long or short vowels
- Little words within a big word
- Colors used
- Illustrations or embellishments
- Schwa sounds
- Number of letters
- Number of vowels
- Number of syllables

*This technique works by playing visually with a concept. But turning names into something tangible, and decorative, the idea of the word is transported into something that can be played with both in your mind and in your hands. We see much opportunity for turning ideas into objects to put them into play – eds.*

## APA Empirical Study Bingo

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### **Technique Summary Description**

Teaching the use of American Psychological Association (APA) style for research writing in a college classroom is not typically “fun”—students are challenged by all the “rules” to learn and find the information dry. However, because APA style is a critical learning outcome in the social science research methods course that I teach, it is essential for students to understand the common components of the format. APA format understanding also aids them in reading journal articles in the field and writing an empirical study, which is a required component of the course. After trying several ways to help students review the information about APA style to be ready to write their empirical research papers, I found that making a collaborative activity for students to complete in teams got them engaged and resulted in an enjoyable learning experience for all. This activity has served as a wonderful review prior to library instruction and the start of their empirical study project.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

This activity is very easy to put together in terms of materials and is reusable across classes. All you need is a set of 8.5 X 11 manilla folders, pages with the major APA empirical section headings labeled (e.g., Abstract, Introduction, Results), and a set of post-it notes with key elements you would like students to associate with each APA section (e.g., summary of past research findings on the topic, participant demographics). Each manilla envelope should contain the major APA section heading pages and the set of post-it notes scrambled. Each team/group of students is given one manilla envelope and told not to open the envelope until the instructor says “Go!” Students are told that the goal is for each group/team to put the 8.5” papers, representing the major APA sections of an empirical study, in the correct order they would appear in a manuscript from the earliest on the top/left side to the last section on the bottom/right side of table/floor. And then they are to use all the post-it notes and place each one on the section paper in which that component occurs (e.g., describes participants in the study post-it would go on the method section page).

The groups are encouraged to use their “collective” brainpower to discuss the ordering and sorting, and when their group agrees that all pages are in the correct order of the sections of the manuscript and all the post-it notes are attached to the correct sections, they are to shout out “APA Bingo!” The instructor keeps track of the order in which the teams declare APA Bingo. Once a team/group has called “APA Bingo” they can no longer make any changes. Once all groups have declared APA Bingo, the instructor will start with the first group/team that finished and have them read off the order of the sections. If correct, then the group begins to read the post-it notes placed on the first section page. If the group gets all correct, they win! If, however, they miss something, the instructor stops and moves to the second finishing group to see if they have things placed correctly. The team/group that wins is the group that finished the fastest and was the most accurate! The instructor can choose if the winning

team gets pride or prize. I typically bring a small goodie (like a set of \$1 pens or mechanical pencils or something students in the class will use for class) and give those away to the winning team members.



### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

Since implementing APA Bingo, I have found that the major sections and components of the APA style stick, resulting in fewer formatting errors in students' research papers and better understanding of the components that make up an empirical study article. I've also found it benefits students in doing their library article searching because they are well-equipped to read the article abstracts to determine relevancy of the studies for their literature review portion of the empirical study paper. Because students work together in groups to solve the APA Bingo, their lively and active discussions contribute meaningful ways to remember key components of APA formatting and work to solidify deeper learning than doing a review activity individually. And all this learning goes on within the context of a game, which makes the whole process so much more fun!

### Reflection on Wider Use

This type of activity can be used for any type of writing style review, not just APA, for example, MLA, Chicago Style, etc. The materials needed for this activity are simple and inexpensive and can be used many times before needing to fix a ripped page or post-it note that has lost its stickiness. Because this activity is completed in groups, students can read the information aloud which includes all group members, even those who may have sight limitations. And because all the elements are written, any students with hearing impairments can also fully participate. Although this activity was designed for a face-to-face course, there are online applications that could be used to have students complete this in a synchronous online course. For example, if students are gathered online in a platform such as Zoom, students could be placed in breakout rooms to create the groups and each group would have its own Google document/Jamboard to move pieces around to put the sections in order and move the list of written components under the section title they apply. And students could leave their breakout room and return to the main room to shout "APA Bingo" when their group is done. Once all groups are back in the main room, the instructor can proceed with the rest of the game by starting with the group that finished first and going over correct answers.

Not only is this an authentic game-based on relevant class content, it's also a demonstration of how adding a little competition to an activity can make it more playful. Oftentimes we avoid competition because the idea of competing for grades sends the wrong message. But making an activity lightly competitive but free of consequences can help stimulate the play that leads to better engagement and learning. And, any time you can get the learning away from "your mouth to their brains" and more "in their hands to experience," it's a win! – eds.

## **Break Out of the Monotony with Virtual Escape Rooms**

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### **Technique Summary Description**

A virtual escape room (VER) is an interactive online activity where students find hidden clues and solve puzzles. Each step is "locked" and students need a secret word, phrase, or answer to unlock the next puzzle. When they solve the last puzzle, they have *escaped*. A VER is a content delivery tool that can be used in any discipline and with any topic. It is a fun, engaging, and flexible instructional technique.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

There are two VER creation steps—content and technical. First, the VER needs content. Once the content is ready, the technical VER can be designed using a Google Form, Google Slides, and a variety of free online tools.

#### **Content**

VERs begin with content that students need to learn. The content is turned into a series of puzzles for students to solve or tasks to perform. Each completed puzzle or task leads to another puzzle or task until the content has been exhausted.

As an example, one common course activity is to provide an introduction to the course at the beginning of an academic term. A VER version of the introductory activity, turning the same information into puzzles, could include the following:

- Students are given a link to the course syllabus with instructions to find a stated policy. Students must enter the first three words of the policy to unlock that step and move forward to the next activity.
- Students solve a math equation which asks them to add the month and day of the project due date to how many points that project is worth. The correct answer moves them to the next activity.
- A Cryptogram word puzzle (created on Puzzle Maker from <https://www.discoveryeducation.com/>) hides the title of the course textbook. Once solved, several circled letters in the course textbook title are then unscrambled to reveal the name of

an upcoming assignment. Students enter this name to receive the next activity.

- Students are directed to a Flip link (<https://info.flip.com/>) where they record an introduction about themselves. Then they must watch the instructor's introduction video and listen for a secret word. That secret word moves them to the next activity.
- Students go to a Jigsaw Planet (<https://www.jigsawplanet.com/>) link to solve an online jigsaw puzzle. The puzzle results in a clue to look in the first course module and find the title of an article they need to read. They must enter the article title to move to the next activity.
- A final activity directs students to a Padlet link (<https://padlet.com/>) so they can share what they are most looking forward to learning in the course. They must find a secret word in the instructor's post to escape.

To increase the sense of play and further engage students in the course topic, the VER content could emphasize a relevant theme or storyline. For instance, a story from a literary work in an English course could tie each activity together. Or each activity could share a theme through images and vocabulary such as "Things the Hubble Telescope Found" in an Astronomy course. Using a variety of activities such as word puzzles, picture puzzles, jigsaw puzzles, trivia questions, map locations, video clues, audio clues, or math problems can further challenge students and keep them engaged.

Playing free VERs can increase the list of story and puzzle ideas. Here are a few free VERs to start with:

- StudentAffairs.Com Escape Room Quest – <https://www.studentaffairs.com/escape-room/>
- Higher Education VER collection – <https://sites.google.com/view/hiedshowcase/projects/escape-rooms>
- Who Stole the Tony Awards – <https://tinyurl.com/WhoStoletheTonys>

## Technical

Once the content has been created, the technical VER can be designed using Google Forms and Slides. A free instructional video can be found at <https://youtu.be/NXvLgLLzXCE>. It is a companion video to the StudentAffairs.Com Escape Room Quest (link above) so you can play the VER then learn how it was developed.

## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

For an introductory VER activity in an online course, I sent a cryptic email on the first day of class. The email directed students to log in to the course and help me find the course materials. Only the VER link was accessible within the online course so they had to complete the VER to access the syllabus and other course information. The entire class of 15 students logged in and completed the activity within 48 hours, which is the first time in 10 years of teaching online that students did not wait until the due date six days later to complete an introductory activity.

The most ambitious activity I tried was to replace a research project with a team-created VER. Here is what some of the students said about the project:

- *"I loved the project! I thoroughly enjoyed diving deep into a topic, but presenting it in an out of the ordinary way! Since I consider myself way more technical than creative, it was absolutely a must to have someone in the group that did have that creative mind to make the Escape Room fun! I can build*

*Google forms and slides all day long, but I absolutely need help with the ideas!"*

- *"In creating the escape room, I was able to use new technology skills that I could possibly use if I start teaching in higher education."*
- *"Creating an escape room taught me more on how to utilize google forms, drive, etc., to make learning fun! Overall, I prefer this to the traditional lectures and paper assignments."*
- *"The tech tools highlighted in the escape room challenge can be useful both in personal and professional settings. There were some tools (like the jigsaw puzzles) that I knew about before-hand, and some that were brand new to me. I think that anyone going into a teaching field can definitely incorporate these into their classroom. Outside of that, though, they can definitely be used as a fun interactive training tool for departments even for something as simple as a retreat or group bonding activity."*
- *"I like to learn new things, and this course has taught me that I am capable of making a complex digital escape room. I mostly enjoyed creating games and locks for our escape room and incorporating them into my google slides. How cool is it to say we created a Pac-Man game for our escape room? We now know how to embed games into a QR code! It has been an exciting class, and I am glad that I have learned so much. I am able now to offer so much more in my field. Thank you for the opportunity to learn."*

Students gained the same content knowledge compared to a paper or presentation assignment but the VER project generated more long-term engagement, incorporated more higher-order thinking skills, and increased technical competencies.

### Reflection on Wider Use

VERs can be used in any discipline because it is a platform for delivering content. They could be used for introductory activities, review sessions, quizzes or tests, training on a specific topic, or even as a fun distraction. While they are designed as asynchronous individual activities, VERs can also be used synchronously as a small group activity. For the most effective experience, use video conferencing breakout rooms with two or three students per group. The groups can compete against each other to be the first to finish line. To make it more interactive, incorporate check-ins with the instructor. For instance, instead of entering a secret word in Google Forms, the group could invite the instructor into their breakout room and verbally state the secret word. If the secret word is correct, the instructor provides a different secret word to enter into Google Forms so the group can continue. The one limitation of the breakout room approach is that only one student could enter the answers for the group.

To increase the sense of play, award certificates of completion or virtual badges to all finishers and/or a first-place certificate or badge to the fastest finisher. In addition, including the instructor's Bitmoji throughout the VER can provide a playful online presence.

Once VER materials are created, they can also serve as a foundation for a physical "Escape Room Kit." Puzzles can be printed off and stashed in inexpensive and lockable items such as a toy pirate chest, a lunch bag or tote bag with zippers or eyelets, or a money box. Online stores have a variety of escape room items such as word and number locks, small key locks, and even scratch off stickers so you can make your own lottery tickets and hide QR codes for accessing online clues. The one drawback of VERs is accessibility. Some information and puzzles may not be accessible to students with disabilities. Instructional designers and staff who serve students with disabilities could provide expertise in designing accessible VERs or creating alternatives for specific VER activities.

## **You Picked the Right Word!**

### **A Card Trick to Introduce, Practice or Review Terms, Ideas, Concepts, or Items in a course**

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#### **Technique Summary Description**

Years ago, I saw the Australian magician, Julian Mather, do a related trick online. It was called: Magic Bob Trick. Here is a video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jGd5O9UZO8>—I expanded the idea to include course content. The instructor brings a regular 52-card deck to class. On the back of each card write an important idea, concept, item, or term for the class. The instructor casually discusses the various items written on the cards, shows them to students, and engages them in answering questions. Eventually, the instructor steers students toward one of the ideas or terms. Next, the instructor asks a student in the class to name any card in the deck. The instructor looks through the deck until that card is found. That card is then turned over to reveal the word on the other side. The word will (amazingly!) be the term, idea, or item the professor just highlighted or was the answer to a question.

#### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

##### **Description of Card Trick**

1. The instructor takes a regular deck of cards and with a marker writes words on the backs of the cards (one word per card). These words should be relevant to something in the class—terms, ideas, concepts, events etc. that have or will be learned. If possible, try to come up with 52 different items, though occasional repetition is okay. Or, if you do not have 52 different terms, feel free to throw random irrelevant words into the mix.
2. The instructor fans out the cards so students can see it is a regular deck with suits, numbers, and face cards. The cards are in no particular order.
3. Then the instructor shows the backsides of the cards so the students can see there are words written on them. The instructor reads some of the words out loud and says something like “Oh, remember we studied this word/term/idea. It’s important because...” Or, if the course material has not yet been covered, the instructor might say: “This word/term/idea is something we’re going to cover in this next unit. It’s important because...” The instructor talks briefly about 5-10 of the terms.
4. Then the instructor either identifies one of the words or steers students to pick one of the words. If the students have not yet studied the material, the instructor can say: “I think the word/term/idea XYZ is particularly important to what we’re learning because...”
5. Alternatively, students can be directed (aka, tricked!) to pick a word if one of the items is a clear answer to a course question. For example, in a biology class, say you are studying

microorganisms and you ask the question, “Which kind of microorganism is eukaryotic and can move independently?” The answer you are looking for is “protozoa.” An instructor in an art history class might have the names of Renaissance artists on the cards and ask students: “Who painted XYZ work of art?” and the answer is the painter, Raphael.

6. Whether the instructor or the student picks one of the terms does not matter to the trick. The idea is to identify that word/term/idea before you do the next step. You might write it on the board or put it on the screen.
7. Next, choose someone in the class, say, the person whose birthday is next and ask that person to say any card in the deck. The person might say “4 of clubs,” “ace of hearts,” “ten of spades” etc.
8. Turn the deck over so you can find the card the student selected. When you find it, hold it up and ask, “is this the card you want?” The student will say “yes.” Place the card on the bottom of the deck and hold up the deck to the students so they can see the chosen card on the bottom of the deck. Then say, “I wonder what word is on the back of the XYZ card that student chose.” Or you might say, “wouldn’t it be quite a coincidence if the word on the back of that card was the item we were just talking about?” In other words, you wonder aloud if “protozoa” or “Raphael” will just happen to be the term on the back of the card.
9. You turn the chosen card around so students can see the card and lo and behold it is the word/term/idea you just talked about. The students are amazed!

### How the Trick is Done

1. All you need is a regular deck of playing cards. Identify a card, any card, to put on the bottom of the deck. I like to pick a card that doesn’t seem to get chosen by the students. (As if you can really guess beforehand?). But, even if they happen to choose it, it works great. Say I choose the “king of clubs,” on the back of the “king of clubs,” I write the word I want to be the “special word of the day.” That is the word/term/idea I want to highlight or draw students’ attention to, because either it’s important or maybe particularly difficult. This gives the instructor the opportunity to stress its relevance to the course.
2. Next, use double stick tape and put a few small pieces of tape in the four corners on the side of the card where you can see the “king of clubs,” in other words, face up. The tape is generally not visible so if students do happen to pick the “king of clubs,” they won’t notice anything unusual about it. Keep that card on the bottom of the deck when you show the deck to the students.
3. When the student picks a card, probably not the “king of clubs,” find it in the deck. Say the student picks the “3 of diamonds.” The instructor locates it, holds it up and then puts it on the bottom of the deck so it’s under the “king of clubs.” You should push on it a bit to get it to adhere to the “king of clubs.” You might also tap (inconspicuously) on the entire deck a bit to make sure that the cards are all lined up with one another in an orthogonal way (so the “3 of diamonds” is completely flush with the “king of clubs”).
4. At this point, you wonder aloud about the word that might be on the back of the “3 of diamonds.” While you’re rambling on, you can use that bit of time to make sure the “3 of diamonds” is securely pressed against the “king of clubs.” The double stick tape is pretty sticky, so you won’t have to work on it too hard.
5. Now the reveal: Hold up the “3 of diamonds” so students see the face of the card. Then turn it around to reveal the word on the back. They’re really seeing the back of the “king of clubs”

where you wrote the special word. But it won't look like that to them. It will look as if that word is on the back of the card that they chose.

6. What if someone picks the "king of clubs"? No problem! The special word is already written on it. So, you can just hold it up and turn it around.

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

Students are always baffled by this trick. A magic trick adds interest and suspense to a classroom. Since magic feels very out of place in a classroom environment, it immediately captures student attention. Use it when you need a break or to begin or end a class. It's also a great intro or review activity to get students thinking about or reviewing key course material. You may choose to enhance their curiosity and surprise by explaining how the trick is done.

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

This card trick can be used in almost any discipline. For courses with a lot of right/wrong answers, the pre-selected card can be the correct answer to a particularly vexing question. In courses where the focus is on exploring ideas and less on right/wrong answers, instructors can still put ideas or key words on the cards. The pre-selected card in this case, can be anything the instructor wants to highlight. In most courses, there are discrete pieces of information that students must memorize or understand. Often, they receive insufficient practice and content with them. The card trick offers additional exposure to those items.

No sleight of hand necessary!

## **Scrabble as Entry Point: Student-Designed Board Games Using Google Slides**

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### **Technique Summary Description**

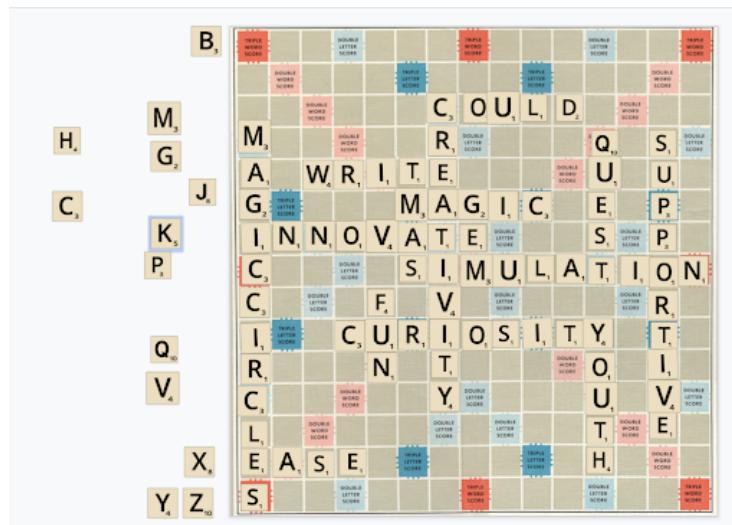
I have used this activity and assignment in a Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) methods course for pre and in-service teachers. The Scrabble activity can be used as a quick stand-alone icebreaker in person in a classroom, online in a synchronous videoconference, or also completed asynchronously. It can also serve as a precursor to an assignment which asks students to create their own digital board game using only Google Slides. The Scrabble task essentially invites students to think more playfully and creatively about the core ideas in the concepts we are studying by coming up with a word or two that then links to their classmates. The limitation of needing to attach their word to others' words, to create unique words, and to understand how others see the same concept through different words creates a game-like feel quickly. After the initial Scrabble task,

students can also be assigned to groups or work independently to create their own digital board game on the topics being studied, only using the moveable pieces they create in a Google Slides. These can then be shared back to the whole class and played by classmates. This creates an authentic audience when asking students to review or explore key course content.

### Technique Detailed Instructions

#### Part One. Play “Scrabble”

1. Access Scrabble Board in Google Slides. (<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1KzQjMmvATyr4gbLZ7oKhbJDxZ4YpPoeVldk2rMl5saQ/edit?usp=sharing>)
2. With your classmates, lay out as many words as possible following scrabble rules (no diagonal words, all vertical and horizontal tiles must form words, all words must connect to other words on board, start on center star first, no repeated words).
3. Click on a letter tile and copy/paste it before bringing it to the board. You can use letters as many times as you want!
4. Make sure your word relates to the concepts we are studying in this week’s module.
5. All of the words should be placed on the board on Slide 2!



#### Part Two. Create a digital game for students using Google Slides

1. Your task is to create a digital game using some of the capacities of Google Slides. This game can be your version of a well-known board game, and you can also get inspiration from a variety of online game platforms.
2. You might create a game that has a focus on vocabulary, listening, reading, or drawing. You might set up an interactive game or one that can be done solo.
3. Your game does not have to be competitive.
4. Your game should focus on a particular content area.

**Creative Use of Google Slides** – In the spirit of playing around in order to learn, I would love for you to try a feature within Google Slides that is new for you. However, if you have one that you know a bit about and this provides you the chance to get to know it better, I welcome you to do that, too.

Some of the features that you could use in Google Slides as you create your game include:

- Setting background image (so it can't be moved by user).
- Changing the size of the page layout (so you can make a larger or different size slide).
- Creating click-and-drag game pieces (so the user can move items around).
- Creating open text boxes (so the user can add in their own words).
- Internal links (so if user clicks on an image in the slide, it brings them to another page in the slide deck).
- External links (if the user clicks, it brings them to a website).

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

I was amazed at how helpful it was to students to have the simple Scrabble warm-up activity to do as a jumping off point for their game creations. At first, students actually struggled a little to figure out that they could duplicate the letter tiles as much as they wanted, in order to create any words that they wanted to, as long as they connected to the board. In that sense, the game is played differently than traditional Scrabble, where you can only form words with the tiles you are given. This makes it more of a playful technique than a game.

Students got the feel for what they could do with Google Slides and took off in a number of directions. Some built their own version of traditional classroom games like Jeopardy and Concentration, while others used the linking power of multiple slides to build more Choose your Own Adventure or Digital Escape Rooms. I found that by creating the Scrabble game myself first, I modeled what I was asking my students to do and realized how hard and time-consuming it actually is to build a game that is truly reusable from lesson to lesson.

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

While this play-based approach is designed for student teachers to encourage them to feel confident in designing and creating games for their own students, it can readily be used beyond education majors. The Scrabble warm-up could be used to open a session, as a check on reading, or to get students to interact around content concepts. Asking students to design a board game recycling or previewing content can also be a more playful approach that engages them in creative thinking within the constraints of the options available on Google Slides.

### **The Comfort Zone Challenge**

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## Technique Summary Description

This game is based on *Taskmaster*—a celebrity game show from the BBC in the UK. In this activity, the Comfort Zone Challenge, participants are divided into teams and compete against each other for points by completing challenges. These challenges are designed to be fun, playful, and intentionally vague so that the contestants can decide how to complete the challenge according to their comfort zone, skillset, creativity, or teamwork. The facilitator will rank the teams in order of most outside their comfort zone during their successful completion of the challenge. The first-place team gets the most points with fewer points cascading down to the other teams. After a series of challenges, one team is declared the winner and wins the title of Comfort Zone Champion.

You can teach lessons about communication, teamwork, creativity, leadership, and the value of pushing your limits. This simple framework can help you make any task, assignment, or activity more playful. By gamifying classic activities in this manner, with the instructions vague but the definition of success clear, you will find that even basic homework or group activities become more playful. The participants will surprise you with their solutions, as they approach with a more creative and team-based effort.

The most useful thing about this activity is that it is extremely flexible for a variety of disciplines, length of time, and the number of participants. You can have people compete individually or in teams as large as you see fit. Typically, teams of three to five are best for facilitating the most interaction and teamwork. Also, challenges can be designed for virtual environments or live participation. Typically, about five quick challenges will fill a 60-90-minute class. You can also spread out the challenges with one in each class throughout the semester and crown a grand champion at the end of the year.

## Technique Detailed Instructions

The basic structure of the game is simple. You will need teams, a series of challenges, and a way for each challenge to be scored. Playful professors will add their own style with costumes, props, scoreboards, music, and lights. The most successful events are where the facilitator can role-model the playful attitude desired by getting outside of their comfort zone.

Treat the Comfort Zone Challenge like a mini-gameshow, similar to *Taskmaster*, Ellen’s Game of Games, or Hollywood Game Night. You can play game show music to start the show, make up fake sponsors for commercial breaks between challenges, or create a fun trophy or prizes for the winner. One of the most fun ways to get prizes is to encourage the participants to bring in something from home that they no longer want, but that someone else might. This can be one of the challenges, and the winner of the show can keep all of the prizes!

## Timing

When designing your game, timing is one of the most crucial aspects of keeping it fun and engaging for the participants. In this game, the less setup, the better. You simply need to clarify three things: the challenge, the time allotted to solve it, and the judging criteria.

Be careful when deciding how long the participants will have to complete the challenge. The less time spent on the challenge, the more excited the game will be. However, if it is too short, you might not get the most creative or unique solutions. Make sure there is just enough time for everyone to collaborate and design a solution, but not so much that any team is waiting around for the others.

This activity is great for up to 90-minutes, but longer events should have breaks or other pattern interrupts to change the pace, reset the energy levels, and keep the scoring competitive.

### Challenges

The first challenge for team games should always be to pick a captain and a team name. The most creative team name gets the first points. From there, challenges should be designed to fit your subject matter or outcomes. Or, you can have teams make a big surprise, make the best sound, make themselves look like a celebrity, or throw a piece of paper into a bin from the furthest distance.

A great comfort zone challenge can be measured by a most or least qualifier. For example, the facilitator can judge who was the fastest, furthest, most fun, or least messy. Whatever encourages the teams to get out of their comfort zone and push the limits compared to the other teams will drive the playful spirit in this game. If you start with easy challenges and work up to more adventurous and playful challenges, you will see the participants getting more excited about the points and opening their comfort zones.

### Scoring

Scoring should be addressed in a light-hearted manner. Scoring is largely arbitrary at the discretion of the facilitator. (*Think “Whose Line Is It Anyway” scoring*). You can encourage this by giving bonus points for team spirit, having ties, disqualifying teams for breaking rules, or awarding different numbers of points based on the difficulty of the challenges. Sometimes, it is even fun in later rounds to award more points to the teams behind to keep things close and everyone interested. DO NOT tie scoring to grades for the course or you will have students become too competitive and lose the playful nature of the activities.

Basic scoring is done based on the number of teams. For example, if you have five teams, first place would earn five points. Second place would get four, and so on... The last team gets one point. Keep score on a scoreboard or electronic spreadsheet so everyone can see them and you can make a big deal about the leaders.

### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

The Comfort Zone Challenge is always one of my students’ favorite classes, regardless of age. I have used this framework with all ages from 5 to 90, and everyone loves to play along. It is one of the most requested activities for repeat students, too! I use this game day in several different ways. It is great as a very first class to get to know each other and set a playful atmosphere for the rest of the course. However, it always works well to break up the middle of a long course or as a culmination and summary class at the end. When using it at the end of the course, you can design activities to test their application of the subject matter and drive home the lessons.

The amount of clear and actionable takeaways is up to you and your goals for the activity. Sometimes, my sole outcome is communication and classroom engagement during a team-building event. Other times, I will include lectures between the challenges and debrief each challenge as we complete them and tie the learning back to the subject matter. I recommend designing your class with a fun-first mindset and then highlighting the lessons learned along the way. We all want a balanced, valuable lesson plan, but I have found that the creativity, confidence, and connection generated in the students during the Comfort Zone challenge amplify the other lessons beyond measure.

### Reflection on Wider Use

You can also design challenges to feature subject matter topics. For example, in STEM classes, you could have the teams build the tallest towers, solve problems fastest, or engineer a way around a problem in the most efficient way possible. The flexibility in challenges allows you to adapt the game to any group or situation. You can make it accessible to all and choose challenges that work in the live classroom or virtual or hybrid classrooms. It is important to keep in mind when you are designing your activities and dividing up teams, that everyone participates, and the game is competitive for all. The closest scoring possible will keep everyone happy and engaged for the whole lesson.

## Playing with Finger Puppets

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### Technique Summary Description

This is a technique used in leadership development and executive coaching. It involves using or introducing small cloth finger puppets (which are the size of an average index finger). The puppets are introduced as a “third party” to a conversation about leadership or as a way of shedding a different light on a subject or topic under discussion. The number of puppets required depends on the size of group you are working with but at least one per person is optimal. These puppets can be selected at random or allocated by the tutor at a juncture in the program or workshop which feels suitable. As a passive aid they can be ‘called’ to assist the students in their thought process. However, they also work well when encouraged to be used as animated characters played on individuals’ fingers.

### Technique Detailed Instructions

The puppets I use are mainly made by the unemployed Philosophers group (although I have had some Welsh/Cymreig versions commissioned for use with groups when I work in Cymru/Wales where I live). These puppets are for use on fingers and are often well decorated and include historical, multi-ethnic, famous figures as well as characters from science (Schrödinger’s cat), art (Munch’s Scream) and fiction (Alice in Wonderland). The figures can be utilized in many ways, both in groups and with individuals during, for instance, leadership development, action learning and group coaching. They

are usually kept in reserve for exercises with groups that have already built some rapport and who are easier with experiential processes. The puppets are easy to slip onto fingers and therefore engage the participant on a physical level. However, the characters come with a small, attached book which explains the character and their thoughts on life. There are a number of activities for which they have been particularly successful:

1. As a guide and a mentor to the participant in a way that offers different perspectives.
2. Pairs of puppets can be given to the participant and the participant can be asked to eavesdrop on a hypothetical conversation between the two puppets about a participants specific challenge or issue.
3. The puppet's character can ask a question 'via' the participant as if they were a coach or mentor.
4. The puppet can 'travel' with the participants in the gaps between workshops and offer advice, a reference point or a critical friend.

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

This technique has not been officially reviewed in any quantitative way although there have been many observations and anecdotal evidence of their unique support for learning. The students are often intrigued by the puppets and usually surprised at the introduction of a three-D concept and (when able to pre and post-COVID-19) enjoy handling the puppets. Being able to fit the puppet on their fingers is fun and playful in the middle of a workshop or classroom session that has no obvious hint at the playfulness that follows. Finding the reflective time getting to know their puppet is usually very helpful as students often mimic the voice of the character or even take on the predominant feature of the puppet (a strutting walk or a facial expression).

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

I believe that the use of puppets has a great resonance for many topic areas particularly in the study of leadership, conflict, and other managerial forms of human interaction. As they are, in the configuration described above, presented as a multi-ethnic, diverse and complex set of characters all of which can be employed to open the windows of students' minds and attitudes. So, they could also perform the function of questioning attitudes and the production of creative ideas.

The concept of using puppets was achieved through experimentation based on the premise that humans need, require, and acquire objects that help with thinking and that these objects help to aid development of ideas and the reflections of the progress of these ideas.

### **Stuck at Home Science Project – Psychology Edition**

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## Technique Summary Description

The original concept was created by the Education Department at the California Science Center. The goal of this assignment is to create a fun and interactive activity using common household items to teach children and their families about concepts in Developmental Psychology. This project is an opportunity for students to learn more about a particular topic in Developmental Psychology and to share this knowledge with the public. The project consists of a 5-minute video demonstrating the activity, an accompanying instruction sheet and a paper explaining the scientific basis for the activity. I have used this as the final project in my Developmental Psychology and Lifespan Development classes (typical class sizes 20 – 30 students).

## Technique Detailed Instructions

Our world has changed very dramatically over the last few years as a result of COVID. However, some things have not changed. People are still interested in learning new things. During the pandemic, the California Science Center created an interactive learning opportunity for children called “Stuck at Home Science.”

“Welcome to Stuck at Home Science! When you’re stuck at home, come here to continue your child’s science learning with our easy-to-follow activities. This space is designed for families to explore, investigate, and learn together without ever needing to leave the house. All activities use easy to find household supplies and are appropriate for a variety of ages.” (<https://californiasciencecenter.org/stuck-at-home-science>)

Throughout this course, you have obtained a great deal of information about a variety of topics in Developmental Psychology. In this assignment, you will apply what you have learned to educate children about a topic of your choice that we have covered in class. For your final project, you will create activities for the “Stuck at Home Science – Psychology Edition” convention. Your group will choose a psychological phenomenon in consultation with the professor to explain through a fun and interactive activity.

Each group must create an activity that helps children and families learn about a psychological concept. This activity will include a) a video demonstration and b) an instruction sheet to walk “budding psychologists” through your activity. This activity should use commonly available household objects. You can also incorporate an app, but if you do so make sure that it is accessible to both iPhones and androids. For example, in a previous semester, one group designed an activity to help their classmates better understand fine motor skills. They provided a step-by-step video on how to create an origami fox and explained the distinction between fine and gross motor skills, including examples of both types of skills.

For ideas and inspiration, you can peruse these additional resources:

- The California Science Center “Stuck at Home Science” (<https://californiasciencecenter.org/stuck-at-home-science>).
- The Exploratorium has many excellent examples, visit it in its entirety (<https://www.exploratorium.edu/>).

Consider the multiple components of development, including language, motor and social development that can be encompassed in any topic. Of course, the relative contributions of various aspects of psychology (genetics, motor development, social development, etc.) will differ depending on your topic. In responding to the following specific questions, apply material from the textbook to aspects of the design of your activity. You may also choose to select a subset of development to cover within your topic. For example, you could choose to focus on motor development in infancy and childhood. Make sure that you can provide reasons for the major decisions that you make.

## Overview

Students will be assigned to a small group (4-5 students) to organize an educational, college-level presentation to explain an aspect of developmental psychology from one of the following categories: 1) Growth and Development, 2) Language and Cognition, 3) Emotions and Morality, 4) Relationships and 5) Social Identity.

- **Meeting Component**—Each group must meet with the teacher twice during the semester.
- **Video Component**—Each group must create a 5-minute video that explains and briefly demonstrates their psychology activity. All group members should be a part of the video (e.g., each person could demonstrate one step of the process). You will submit the final video to [Learning Management System] as a YouTube video.
- **Instruction Sheet**—Each group must create an instruction sheet that explains how to do your activity. The instruction sheet must contain the following components:
  - A catchy title for your activity.
  - Psychology Question of the Day: Your group should provide a simple description of the psychological concept your activity is trying to explain (generally 1 sentence). This is similar to the research question in a psychology or education journal.
  - A Grab This List: A list of the ingredients/equipment that “stuck at home psychologists” will need to complete your activity. These should be items that people are likely to have around the house. For example, if your activity is teaching people about conservation of liquid, your equipment list would include two tall glasses, one short and wide glass, and a container of juice (or some other liquid like milk or water).
  - Try This Instructions: A step-by-step set of instructions on how to perform this activity. Make sure you consider who your target audience is (i.e., children). Make sure to adjust the level of instructions to be appropriate to your target audience. No matter who your audience is though, you should never go too heavy on the jargon.
  - Talk About This: Come up with a minimum of three discussion questions for families to think about or discuss amongst themselves.
  - What’s Going On: You should provide a short (2 – 3 paragraph) description of the psychological phenomena that the activity is demonstrating. Again, keep your target audience in mind when deciding on the level of explanation.
  - The most important thing to remember is that this activity is meant to be fun, for you and the people doing your activity.
- **Presentation Component**—Each group gives a 10-minute presentation that includes: 1) a demonstration video, and 2) leading a 5-minute discussion with your classmates based on 1-2 questions from the “Talk about this” section of your instruction sheet.
- **Research Paper Component**—The research paper should be grounded in psychological

literature. The paper should provide the scientific background to complement the activity you will present to the class, including a description of the developmental stage for which it is designed. Make sure to discuss major components or milestones of your topic. For example, if your topic is language development, you could discuss different stages of language development (e.g., babbling, forming sentences, turn-taking). Make sure to relate the research to specific elements of your activity (e.g., providing an audio clip to go with the description of turn-taking). In addition to assigned course materials, you must also incorporate two to three additional empirical journal articles in Education and/or Psychology to construct a research paper that provides empirical support for your activity.

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

We are currently collecting data about the relationship between student perceptions of active learning projects and final project and class grades. However, anecdotally, students enjoy the project, reporting that it impacted their engagement with and enjoyment of the class. In addition, I have recently made connections with local elementary schools to share the completed projects and students are very excited about having a more meaningful and real-world component to the project (feeling like they are making a difference) compared to a more traditional research paper.

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

While I have used this project in Developmental psychology classes (Child Development, Lifespan) this project is easily adaptable to other psychology classes (or other disciplines) simply by changing the project categories. This project gives students the opportunity to learn more about their classmates, including more about their cultural background (e.g., one group had each group member create a flag that represented elements of their cultural background; e.g., food, symbols). I do not require students to use any particular equipment (e.g., cell phone, laptop) to make the video and I encourage them to visit the school library to borrow any technology (e.g., video camera) they may need to complete the project.

*Introducing play into the classroom is fundamentally connected to the idea of active learning. A large component of making something fun is in the engagement and meaning making required of the people playing. This technique embodies an active learning approach in a way that may not seem overly playful to some. But the structure does achieve taking the students out of an information-digesting frame of reference and puts them at play in their projects. In this sense, we agree that this is a playful approach to teaching! – eds.*

### **Lie Serum and Truth Detectors**

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## Technique Summary Description

Credit is due to The Divergent faction quiz: <https://www.epicreads.com/blog/divergent-quiz-factions/>. This task has been designed for a course on English language teaching in a master's degree in teacher training. The students are training to be teachers of secondary education; therefore, the syllabus includes awareness-raising activities about the importance of meeting learners' needs and interests, in their case, teenagers. Some of the activities, including this one, are intended to make teacher trainees depart from traditional, explicit grammar-based approaches towards more communicative, task-based approaches where grammar is implicitly taught and the content is meaningful. By using the theme of a well-known book trilogy and movies, *Divergent*, by Veronica Roth, I have tried to illustrate how we can motivate high school students and teach grammar and vocabulary in a more playful way. In addition to contributing to the development of linguistic and communicative skills, this task also aims at fostering their intrapersonal intelligence (being aware of their own feelings, character traits, strengths and weaknesses), their interpersonal abilities (getting to know their classmates) and some soft skills like decision-making, critical thinking and creative competencies.

## Technique Detailed Instructions

As a pre-task, I wrote the words: *Divergent*, *Insurgent* and *Allegiant* on the blackboard and they quickly identified them, as most of them had read these science fiction books, seen the movies or, at least, heard about them. Other similar dystopian series in this young adult literary genre are, for example, *The Hunger Games* or *Maze Runner*. The setting of the *Divergent* novel is a society whose inhabitants live in a devastated city, surrounded by a wall, and believe that no life is possible beyond that wall. This society is divided into five factions that classify citizens according to their capacities and values (the citizens voluntarily choose a faction when they come of age, in a choosing ceremony, but their choice is usually based on an aptitude test that shows their innate abilities and natural tendency). Each faction leads a life in accordance to their values:

1. Abnegation (the selfless) esteems the virtue of generosity most of all. They reject vanity, greed and selfishness. Their lives are dedicated to helping others, including the factionless; they are public servants and have been trusted to run the government. As physical characteristics, they wear simple, gray clothes, pin up their hair or have it cut short and avoid using mirrors, accessories or luxury products.
2. Amity (the peaceful) considers peace, kindness, freedom and friendship the most important values. They hate conflicts and fighting, so they remain neutral in times of war. They are in charge of farming and they live in close contact with Nature. Their clothes are bright and casual, mostly red and yellow.
3. Candor (the honest) believes in honesty, fairness and impartiality. They prefer the bitter truth to a sweet lie and they can't stand dishonesty or secrets. Their duties are related with keeping law and order and they wear black and white because things are either true or false.
4. Dauntless (the brave) is the faction that protects all others. They are the police, the soldiers. They value courage and toughness; they are fearless and always looking for action and thrill. They are very fit; they wear black clothes and many of them have piercings or tattoos.
5. Erudite (the intelligent) is dedicated to knowledge and wisdom. They are intelligent and despise ignorance. Most of them are scientists, doctors, teachers and librarians. Their main color is blue and many of them wear glasses to make them look smarter.

After activating their previous knowledge about these factions, I told them to take a quiz (<https://www.epicreads.com/blog/divergent-quiz-factions/>) in order to find out which faction they belong in. As they read the questions in the quiz, they practiced reading comprehension and revised or learned some vocabulary. Once they had found out what their faction was, they typed in their name in the corresponding table in a shared Google slide document that I had previously created.

Then, it was time to “administer the Candor serum,” the central task, but instead of a truth serum, it was a “lie serum,” which made them come up with four statements about themselves which were untrue and only one which was true. There were a couple of reasons for making them mostly lie instead of telling the truth: first, it feels more tactful to ask students to share just one fact about themselves than four (some of them might be uncomfortable to share too much personal information); second, lies are likely to be more extravagant and fun. They typed in their names in the first row of their table (each faction in a different table on a different slide) and underneath they had to write the five statements (4 lies and 1 truth). Next, their classmates (the truth detectors) had to guess which of the five statements was true. The document was projected on the screen so that all of us could read everybody’s contributions in real time. Each student’s statements were read out loud and one of them chosen as the truth by show of hands. Sometimes they guessed, some other times they didn’t.

Afterwards, as a post-task, a debate unfolded about the future, considering *Divergent*’s dystopian future: they were given cards face down with either a smile or a frown. If they were given a card with a smile, they had to argue that the world will be a better place in the future; if they were given a card with a frown, their arguments had to support the opposite view.

### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

This task proved to be motivating and fruitful in terms of learning outcomes related both to language targets and to didactic purposes. As far as language is concerned, they asked some questions about the vocabulary used in the quiz and spotted some difficult words for their prospective pupils and also, they were given immediate feedback when they were typing in their statements on the Google Slides document. Right afterwards, in the language focus stage, I drew their attention to the type of language used: present and past tenses, action verbs, adjectives used to describe personality features, frequency adverbs, etc. Regarding didactics, the teacher trainees actually ‘learned by doing’ about how to teach English following the TBLT approach and how to search for appropriate materials and techniques to cater for teenage students.

It was also interesting to observe the dynamics among students – which personality traits each student thinks they have, what kind of things they decided to reveal about themselves, how well some of the students were known, how sure they were about classifying their classmates’ statements as true or false, how readily they raised their hands or how much hesitation there was on some other occasions, etc. Another function of this kind of activity is to help build a rapport among students and between students and educators. I noticed that after a nice atmosphere and even some laughs with the lie serum and truth detectors activity, they felt more comfortable and open to speak in the debate.

## Reflection on Wider Use

Further ideas can be put into practice to enhance the setting of the *Divergent* theme or as variations for different levels. For example:

- A play syringe can be used to pretend to inject the serum.
- A choosing ceremony can be organized where the students pick a faction and explain the reasons for their choice.
- A tally chart, a pie chart, or any other sort of diagram where the number of members of each faction is displayed can be used.
- The students can be shown the trailers, teasers, some video clips of the movies or videos where English-speaking teenagers talk about their favorite faction.
- A summary or reviews of the books can be read in class or as homework.
- The students can wear clothes which are characteristic of their faction on the following day.
- They can write an essay about the virtues and defects of each faction.
- They can be asked to face a challenge, e.g., telling a joke in front of the class, solving a riddle or a brainteaser (nothing embarrassing or offensive) to make it through initiation, etc.

This technique or other similar activities can be adapted to be used in other disciplines and levels of instruction to serve other purposes, for instance, in the teaching of other languages, as a prompt to discuss political systems in History or Politics, or personality traits in psychology and in other social or human sciences.

## **Student Statistics**

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### **Technique Summary Description**

This real-time data collection exercise allows students to practice theories from a lecture covering a complex new concept. Juniors in a graphic design studio course were asked to follow a series of prompts to look for data and to visualize it using objects from the room. They must move around the room physically to both gather and demonstrate their findings. Because the exercises are not tied to a final assignment, they allow for practicing new concepts with little pressure. Further, the prompts require observing the classroom and having conversations with peers about their hobbies and interests, which builds a stronger classroom community.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

Students are told they will need to organize themselves into physical groups based on a series of provided prompts. They'll have to talk to their peers and move about the room. First, students are given an easy prompt as a warm-up: "Form a line from shortest to tallest." When they're satisfied, we discuss how

their heights are the data points on an imagined y-axis. Then they need to reorganize into a line based on birth months, with January on one end and December on the other. If students are still getting to know one another, they might be asked to line up in alphabetical order by their first name (or for more of a challenge, the last letter of their first name!).

Then, students are asked to take a piece of candy. Their final full-class prompt is to divide into groups based on the type of candy they've selected. This sets us up for a series of small group exercises. Sugary treats are not required for this to work; groups could also be formed by passing a deck of playing cards and sorting by suit drawn.

Now in smaller groups, students need to use the candy (or cards) to make a visualization of the data they gather in the classroom. We discuss how many other data points we could have pulled based on their personal information to get them thinking. How might we find a multitude of parameters within this room? Groups in the past have chosen to count the number of candies in a container or polled the other groups to find out how many colors of candy each team has. Some have mined their belongings: Number of pencils everyone in their group has, subdivided by color, for example. Then they decide as a group which type of visualization covered in the lecture is most appropriate given the number of data points and parameters their group has chosen. Finally, they make their graphs/charts using their candy against a blank sheet of printer paper.

When everyone's done, we walk the room to see what's been made and take photos for longevity!

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

Formal lectures are important for providing detailed context when covering new concepts. But what happens when students leave the classroom and need to implement those theories? With this exercise, students are given a break from a lecture to stand up, move around, and practice implementing the information together.

Students are engaged throughout, curious what prompt will come next. Lecture content is actively discussed as students share their notes with each other as they work. And perhaps most beneficial is the chance for the instructor to see in real time which concepts are understood, and which bear clarification before moving on to the next topic. In my experience, students are better able to recall the types of data visualizations in future classes when these playful exercises were included. They also explore a wider array of options when we begin data-based assignments.

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

At a glance, this exercise may seem specific to gathering and visualizing data. But the true power lies in allowing students to discuss new concepts as a lecture unfolds, testing the theories with others who are there to help them. Visualizing lecture materials in a small group using unconventional materials keeps the discussions lively and curious, relieving students of the pressure of having to provide a polished finished product.

When mobility is an issue, these exercises may still work depending on the space available in the classroom. If space is tight, simply run all the exercises in small groups organized by where students are already seated. Since many of the suggested prompts are based on color, make yourself available to help any students that may be color blind or visually impaired.

The content and number of prompts is up to you! It's best to avoid grouping by age, where students are from, farthest places they've traveled, etc., to avoid creating any discomfort based on demographic information. Otherwise, the prompts can be as neutral, funny, or serious as you'd like. Other ideas for how students can sort themselves physically, before dividing into small groups:

- Divide into groups with the same color shoes/hair/clothing
- Divide into groups with the same color of candy
- Divide into groups with the same number of letters in your first name
- Line up based on the number of letters in your last name: most letters on the left and most on the right
- Divide into groups with the same number of siblings

*Replacing sitting in a seat and listening to a lecture with standing up, moving around the classroom and exploring the things and knowledge students already have about themselves and others provides a surprisingly transformational approach. This is another technique that easily fits the active learning model of education. But it is also play. Playing with expectations, playing with the space, and playing with the content –eds.*

## Toy Narratives

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### Technique Summary Description

I run this activity with my Digital Storytelling students. This is a part of our 60-minute lab. The goal is to give them a chance to think about social media content creation, and how they can communicate their research outside of “traditional” mediums. The goal of this class is to give them a foundation in digital literacy. This activity (and its second iteration with research) allows them to practice evaluation of digital tools, conducting digital research, and exploring how platforms influence arguments. I divide them into two to three teams (depending on class size) and give each team a set of toys that is often used on social media. They then have to create a narrative using the toys. Repeat this once they have completed their research.

### Technique Detailed Instructions

Materials: LEGOS; Barbies; other toys as needed.

- [1st Iteration] You will have the full lab time to create a narrative using the toys I've given you.

Think about the Barbie and Lego Instagrams we've looked at such as @LegoGradStudent, @BarbieSavior, and @Lulu\_theBarbie. Each of these has a larger point they're trying to make using these toys. You don't have to design for Instagram—you may pick whichever social media platform is most comfortable for your group. You will upload these to the shared Google Slides, NOT the platform itself.

- [2nd Iteration] You will have the full lab time to create a narrative using the toys I've given you. This time, you will be explaining your research. Consider the different audiences of these platforms—what message are you trying to send? Which platform is best suited for that message? Think about the Barbie and Lego Instagram accounts we've looked at such as @LegoGradStudent, @BarbieSavior, and @Lulu.theBarbie. Each of these has a larger point they're trying to make using these toys. This time, you'll need to pick the platform that makes the most sense for your research and message. You may upload these to the shared Google Slides, or you can create a mock-up using Figma or the Social Dummy app.

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

I designed this assignment to be an immersive way for students to think about social media genres and platform affordances. Although the first 15-20 minutes usually looks like chaos, after that, the students begin talking about the content they are creating with specific references to the digital literacy concepts we have covered. For example, the teams will argue about the minute platform affordances in regard to how long a video is, and whether it's going to be received well. These conversations tie into our discussions about the audience.

Examples of these conversations include:

- TikTok allows for 3-minute videos, but do people really watch all the way?
- You can't fast forward on this platform, so do we need to make this shorter?
- This is a text-based platform, so do we need to redo our visuals to make them smaller? Will people even look at them?

We discuss narrative in terms of storylines, character or people of interest, and the design of how facts are presented. Generally, during the first iteration of this activity, they'll create a silly, fictionalized story. For example, a Barbie soap opera about a serial killer dentist, or a Lego TikTok that explains FOMO (fear of missing out). Allow for this! It gets them thinking about how to tell stories in various digital environments. On the second run of the activity, instruct the students to use the same toys to explain their research.

This assignment does require more connecting on the back end than others I've tried. Even though the students engage deeply with digital literacy concepts and tools, the playfulness of making, say, a Barbie soap opera, sometimes leaves them struggling to make the connection back to those concepts. This is why we have a reflective session at the beginning of the next class, and we repeat the activity once they have done some research and have data that they need to communicate in narrative form.

Examples of some connecting questions include:

1. When you decided on your platform, how did you pick it over the others? Which affordances did you decide were necessary? Why?

2. Did you choose the same platform as the first round? Why or why not?
3. What parts of your research got left on the cutting room floor? Why? Was this a message decision, an audience decision, or a platform decision? How might you incorporate it going forward.

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

I can see this activity working well for the social sciences as well. It's a humorous way of discussing sometimes serious topics, and the multiple literacies required to do it well and tastefully lend themselves to deeper discussions about class concepts.

Students WILL need a primer on social media practices. Often, we assume that all students are on all social media sites, but this is not the case. Also, if you plan on using serious profiles such as Barbie Savior as examples, you should prep the students up front about the concepts (in this case, white saviorism). The examples I've used here are all visual/textual. An accessibility addition that I plan on adding for the next class is highlighting how and which platforms emphasize audio.

### **Curiosity Filled the Chat**

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### **Technique Summary Description**

As part of their experiential learning from field education in social service settings, students attend faculty-led seminars where they are expected to participate in discussion of topics related to integration of theory and practice. This reflective engagement is critical to field learning and to the overall objective of developing professional competence. As David Kolb (1984) posited in Experiential Learning Theory, "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience." Specific to the social work discipline, this Integration of Theory and Practice (ITP) Loop similarly places such learning transformation at the heart of becoming a competent practitioner. To participate in this kind of collaborative discussion in the classroom setting, open communication and self-reflection are needed to support the learning.

Understandably, learners can be hesitant to share openly and possibly feel vulnerable in the discussion. Before jumping into these seminar discussions, I offer a low-risk opportunity for participation to help prime learners to engage in these conversations. Used as a playful invitation to participate in a warm-up activity, learners are eased into discussion participation. I facilitate this by viewing all student contributions with openness and curiosity. The goal is to promote free expression of ideas, issues, questions, and other contributions from learners.

## Technique Detailed Instructions

With a new group, class discussions typically develop at the professor's initiation through some kind of prompt or question posed to the group. For the sake of a pithy name, this strategy is titled as if meant for a web-based chat, but it works the same with or without the use of digital technologies in either in-person or remote learning. Before beginning any content-related discussion, present a simple and more whimsical prompt to the class. Share your own response to it to get the ball rolling and model the playfulness or divergent thinking that is welcomed. The exercise can be overtly goofy or just something basic and light-hearted. Some examples are Would You Rather-type questions or asking "How do you feel today?" offered with a rating scale of silly visuals (you can make your own or do a Google search to find a multitude of examples). The actual content of the activity can be anything, but the professor presents it with enthusiasm and genuine interest in the responses students share orally, in an online chat, or otherwise. This "curiosity" drives the facilitation of the activity. As learners share their answers, the professor reinforces the full range of responses by repeating them, validating their strengths, asking questions, or encouraging the interactions that emerge between students. All answers are accepted with grace, and this includes any negative disclosures or statements of self-exclusion by the student (e.g., saying "I would rather not choose" in response to a Would You Rather question). In these cases, you can invite further comments while validating that having negative feelings is a part of the human experience, or that tough choices may indeed lead a person to not choose anything. With this curiosity, all contributions are valid and respected.

## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

In an online class setting, the chat goes wild with student answers and peer-to-peer interactions as they share remarks about each other's responses. With other means of communication in both in-person and remote learning, the responses and interactions are equally vibrant and rich. Every student contributes an answer to the prompt and they often acknowledge each other's participation as well. Students often share additional elaboration on their answers, which provides more opportunities for curious facilitation. Used as a warm-up exercise, learners become more likely to engage in the content-related discussion after they have already contributed to the context of the learning community. In their feedback, students have shared that it was fun to share their own responses and feel more connected with each other. Students also reported a greater sense of comfort, authenticity, and engagement in the class.

## Reflection on Wider Use

The strategy can be used in other disciplines and teaching contexts as part of an icebreaker or simply as a mindful approach, where the playful professor responds to student participation with curiosity and inclusive facilitation. In any class where students are encouraged to bring their authentic selves to the learning, curiosity can help to foster the trust and community that sustains this.

When choosing the prompt or content of the activity, consider what will be culturally accessible to learners. Students from different generations, backgrounds, or experiences may not relate to the same cultural references. Pay attention to any leading questions and referential aspects in the activity that can be replaced with something more inclusive. When offering response options, you might use multiple means of engagement and expression so there is choice in how learners respond (e.g.,

alternatives to speaking aloud in the class) to support Universal Design for Learning and trauma-informed pedagogy. For larger groups, you might encourage text-based responses to increase participation and reduce any overlapping speech. When learners opt for different means of communication, you can acknowledge and engage with what they have shared to include it in the larger discussion. The professor's facilitation efforts are key to achieving this kind of equity in student voices.

*Here we have a great combination of the playful professor, connection-former, and playful pedagogy. Re-contextualizing a high stakes interaction in a less serious and more play format, a professor leading the play, and an emphasis on community building through interaction in the exercise, this technique shows how play can easily fit almost any teaching format – eds.*

## **Pizza Party**

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### **Technique Summary Description**

Having described organizing a literature review as similar to inviting guests to a dinner party, it seemed appropriate to create an activity that reflected this idea. To make the activity playful, the topic of discussion is 'pizzas' and there are no 'wrong' answers. Students are tasked to seat ten 'guests' around a maximum of three dinner tables, according to the guests' comments relating to pizza.

This activity is used in a range of workshops as a way to encourage students to think about how to synthesize ideas and present this information in written work. Learning Development workshops are open to all undergraduate and postgraduate students in the School of Area Studies, History, Politics and Literature (SASHPL) and therefore are not subject specific. This activity was initially designed for online delivery but can also be adapted for campus-based interaction.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

Students are presented with ten 'guests' and each of their views relating to pizza. For online delivery, these are listed on a PowerPoint slide shared with participants and for campus-based delivery can be cards distributed to the group. One (controversial!?) example is shown below:

Students are then tasked with seating the guests around different tables. There are multiple ways that the students can think about this: grouping guests who have similar views with the hope that they would get along; grouping guests with opposing views with a view to initiating an interesting debate; or, grouping guests based on a theme that is discussed. Maybe, there is a guest that they decide not to invite to the party at all.

Once the table plan is decided, students are asked to identify a theme that connects the guests around one particular table and there is no ‘wrong’ answer. Different groups of students are likely to produce different table plans, with different topics of conversation taking place. This mirrors different approaches to academic assignments. During online workshops, students are asked to share their table plans vocally and to explain the rationale of seating guests in this way. An extension of this could be to ask students to write a paragraph incorporating the statements from one group of guests and to think about how a topic sentence could be used to give an indication of the content of the paragraph.

Following the discussion, two example paragraphs are shared with the students. The first of these includes the three statements below, together with the Shesterkin example above:

Panarin (2019) –  
Pizza is great. It is  
difficult to make a  
bad pizza.

Gauthier (2020) – Pizza  
is ruined by using  
barbecue sauce instead  
of tomato sauce.

Kreider (2009) –  
Stuffed crusts sound  
like a good idea, but  
in reality, aren’t great.

**Shesterkin (2014) –  
Pineapple does not  
belong on a pizza, under  
any circumstances.**

The point of the paragraph is to state that whilst Panarin (2019) states that it is ‘difficult’ to make a bad pizza, the other guests offer examples of how this can, in fact, be achieved.

The second example also includes the Shesterkin example above, but this time it is presented with two different examples in order to create a paragraph about there being no agreement about what should—or should not—be included as pizza toppings:

**Lafrenière (2020) –  
It's best to only have  
two or three  
toppings on a pizza.**

**Fox (2019) – Pizza  
toppings of fruit or  
vegetables count as one  
of your ‘five a day’.**

By including the Shesterkin statement in both paragraphs it is possible to demonstrate to students how a statement could be used in different ways, depending on how the writer wishes to focus their point(s) or argument.

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

Students' response to this activity has, anecdotally, been positive, though no extensive feedback has been sought. The positive reaction to the first iteration of this activity resulted in it being used across a wider range of workshops.

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

This activity can be adapted by changing the topic and statements of the guests. This can include general topics—if presented to students from a range of disciplines—or, include quotations from academic literature if the activity is focused on discipline-specific themes.

The task can also be extended by asking students to create paragraphs in response to an example assignment question. This would then require the students to think about ensuring that the paragraph clearly relates back to the question.

Also, NHL fans might recognize the names of the guests at this dinner party—they are members of the New York Rangers (at the time of writing this) with their ‘publication dates’ mirroring the year that they joined the organization. Whilst this is not always evident to students participating in the activity (especially here in the UK), it adds a little extra playfulness for the facilitator—it amuses me to imagine players and coaching staff having a heated debate about pizzas! I also feel compelled to state that I do not agree with the ‘Shesterkin’ statement above—I am very much Team Pineapple!

### **The Playful Mocktail Competition**

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## Technique Summary Description

Aspiring business founders tend to have tightly constrained perspectives and prejudices when starting their businesses. The activity has been used with participants in entrepreneurship and family business modules on MBA and MA business programmes. I created this workshop using an activity-based and participatory approach, so that new business founders can act as an empathic team in a start-up business setting. Aspiring founders with no prior technical expertise, work in teams to design a new mocktail and set up a way to gather information from prospective customers. The resulting mocktail mock-up can subsequently be shared with prospective customers to gauge interest and be used as a starting point for insights-based learning.

It also serves to encourage new founders to “get-out-of-the-building” and empathize with real stakeholders (e.g., customers, etc.). The Playful Mocktail builds empathic competencies in new business founders’ by motivating participants to leverage the power of creative teams and real customer encounters by taking the ownership of learning out of the hands of the facilitator. It offers insights and resources into how ethical, entrepreneurial, and empathic education can be delivered in innovative and effective ways that mirror the ‘real world’ experience.

Over 100 participants have reported the joy and challenge of playful learning in this way.

## Technique Detailed Instructions

### 1. For Participants

- Form Founder teams of four to five members.
- Please place the ingredients that you have brought with you on your team’s table.
- Your Task: A client is about to launch her new cocktail bar in Barcelona. She has asked your team to help.
- The client wants to take full advantage of market trends and have a social impact through the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals.
- Your mission is: “*To make the world’s most ‘Instagrammable Mocktail’ to launch Barcelona Mocktail Week 20xx and put the new bar on the map.*“
- You have up to one hour to deliver your mocktail.
- The client has also shared their new Instagram and Twitter anchors with you @MocktailWeek & <https://www.instagram.com/mocktailweek/>.
- To take part, each team has to contribute one to help monitor competing teams’ finishing times throughout the exercise.

### 2. For Professors

- Participating students are invited to each bring one ingredient from a list prior to the workshop. An example of an ingredient list can be found here: <https://bit.ly/2CzIoKh>
- The use of stickies or notecards, a flipchart, chalkboard, or A/V setup are recommended.
- Slides for timing and keep the session on track can be found here: <https://bit.ly/2Y8bSF7>
- All of the above can be simulated using online whiteboards such as Miro board, etc in

conjunction with virtual meeting facilities (e.g., Zoom, etc.).

- Gamified Option: Here is a link to an example of how you can gamify the exercise: <https://bit.ly/3IX7YzW>
- We suggest that you do not reveal the performance criteria to participants in advance.
- You can use a Leaderboard or Scoreboard to motivate the participants to play a second round of the exercise. In the 2nd round you may reveal the scores to the participants alongside the performance criteria. We also suggest that you only reveal the Leaderboard or Scoreboard after your first learning debrief and not before.
- The instructor may remind participants:
  - Neither the best ideas nor most aesthetic mocktail guarantee success.
  - The role teamwork is critical to market success, often generating unexpected or entirely unpredictable outcomes.
  - The team does not have to be the same persons as the idea team: they can form alliances and oust members.
  - Some drivers of market success may be partly or entirely out of the team's or founders' control.
- Instructors are encouraged to make the full set of ideas available to participants after the activity for their own edification.

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

Most participants solely focus on their own ideas for a great mocktail and concentrate their entire time in the team and on designing the mocktail product. Rarely do they step out this comfort zone and get out of the classroom to ask customers what they'd like to experience—virtually or otherwise. Participants have reported moving from egocentric to eco-centric dialogues and conversations with customers and stakeholders after they realised that what they have produced is what they want but not what customers want. They have also reported being able to see how this energetic and interactive exercise helps build stronger teams and interpersonal confidence in how they communicate. This they contrasted to desk-based inquiry and learning.

In addition to gaining confidence in team-ship and their abilities, participants learn that prototypes do not have to be perfect, and that learning through empathy involves building increasingly more elaborate proto-types to capture more customer value. All these lessons can be used to introduce the tools and processes needed to develop a new product or service iteratively and using customer feedback.

Participants also reported connections that they could make with learnings from this exercise and other modules or different spheres in their lives including negotiation, market research and audience communications.

Samples of learning outcomes can be found here: <https://bit.ly/3H9ooc4>, here <https://bit.ly/2Y9NIKn>.

## Reflection on Wider Use

The focus in this game is deep listening skills and development of empathy with the ‘other’ (the customer). It allows learner teams to compete and recognise how listening and communicating with stakeholders increases the prospect of a start-up idea. For example, while in this version, the ‘other’ is the customer, we could transfer the game into user experience and design contexts.

Facilitators can reconfigure the game so that the emphasis is on inter-team cooperation and collaboration rather than purely about customer centricity. The game can also be flipped to focus on resource planning and negotiation in supplier-side contexts. This exercise has been used and therefore can be adapted by professors around to suit multiple contexts with a variety of skill developments in mind. The low cost of materials and nature of the activities allows professors to re-order sequences, materials or learning intentions to suit specific learning contexts and domains. For example, the activity could be used to develop team building skill sets and developing team leadership competences.

Professors can simplify, adapt, shorten, or lengthen most of the sub-activities presented in this exercise. The activities can be gamified or used as a rapid warm-up activity by reducing the number of ingredients, shortening the time allowed, and make the exercise easier. Most of the sub-activities can also be used for participants’ personal development. The number of members per team affects activity time and complexity – teams of four or more need a leader and tend to take longer than a pair or team of three. Increasing or reducing team size, and introducing or removing the team-leader requirement, are simple ideas for increasing or reducing game complexity and exercise duration.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

Below is a list of initial questions for learners to reflect on what they have learnt from the challenge and for facilitators to understand how effective the challenge was and what learning gaps appeared. This can also include take-away questions for participants to reflect on after the workshop, for homework, for example. You can also ask them to complete this Learning Form Template: <https://forms.gle/WZXCCcDw9jNwWEeHL9>.

- Did anyone step outside of the room?
- Did anyone speak to and learn from people outside of your team? Outside of the room?
- Did anyone do any research on the mocktail market?
- What did you do?
- What did you research?
- What time wastage did you experience?
- What resource duplication did you observe?
- Did you move beyond the room?
- What assumptions did you make about your customer?
- What assumptions did you make about what they want: package, place, price, moment, taste?
- What did you learn?
- What about the exercise surprised you the most?
- What do you think went wrong with your initial plan?
- What did you learn by interacting with your customers that you couldn’t have predicted in your business plan?

- What do you need to discover about your customer?
- How can you do that in 5 minutes and better understand customers qualitatively and quantitatively?

## Claymation

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### **Technique Summary Description**

This technique was adapted from the work of Carol Bauer, cdbauer@mac.com. This activity lets students build clay models and create images for use in assignment provides a creative and effective way to add multi-modal learning to an assignment.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

Claymation has virtually limitless possibilities in the classroom. Learners practice effective listening, communication, and organization skills, and have fun too! Claymation can be adapted to teach everything from nursery rhymes to neuroscience.

#### **Basic Steps:**

1. Provide students with possible topics (or let them choose their own).
2. Outline the how the topic will be “filmed” using a storyboard.
3. Create clay figures and background.
4. Take digital photos of figures “acting out” the story.
5. Download pictures.
6. Insert photos in PowerPoint or Google Slides.

#### **Steps:**

- Step 1: Select a topic (concept) that you want to use
- Step 2: Outline the topic (concept) using a storyboard
- Step 3: Create clay figures and background
  - Tip – Select clay that does not harden! (Playdough does not work well).
  - Tip – Use contrasting colors for figures/background.
- Step 4: Take digital photos of figures “acting out” the topic (concept). It is essential to take pictures in the order of the storyboard. This helps in the importing of pictures into the movie making software.
  - Tip – Think about lighting.
  - Tip – Use a tripod or chair to keep camera at same level for each shot.

- Step 5: Insert photos in Power Point or Google Slides and use transitions to create a smooth slide to slide (frame to frame) effect.
  - Tip = Typical transition time is about .25 seconds, but it can be adjusted it for effect.

#### Things to Think About:

- Each frame represents a different pose of the clay object/figure.
- Each frame represents one digital photo taken of the pose.
- Minimum is probably 12 shots. 16-24 shots is a good number for a short animation. More elaborate movies can have over 200 pictures. (A rule of thumb is 50 pictures/minute of film).
- Some students are not artists, and some students are perfectionists! This is not supposed to be final work. A simple illustration giving directions is all that is needed. In other words, give permission to use stick figures.
- Think about recording voices or narration. Write the narration as part of the storyboard if it is to be recorded. HOWEVER, the pictures typically move faster than the narration.
- While creating the storyboard, consider if music or sound effects will be needed. Add notes to the storyboard.
- Will there be an introduction or closing? (Title/Credit shots?)
- Other materials can be used for the characters and props; in other words, students are not limited to just using clay.

#### Questions to Consider:

- How many groups will you have and how many students will be in each group?
- Will you assign group roles? (For example: storyboard editor, director, music/sound effects, photographer, prop master, film editor, character development).
- How tech-savvy are your students?

### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

The best data I have for demonstrating the technique's efficacy at encouraging collaborative skills and fostering creativity are how engaged they are when working on their videos—and how excited they are to see their colleagues' work!

### Reflection On Wider Use

This technique could be generalized to any discipline, topic, setting, etc. There are no cultural or accessibility concerns with this technique. However, the instructor could adjust the number of frames required, length of video, etc. to differentiate.

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# Focus On: Using Role-Playing Games as Motivational Pedagogy

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*Interested in borrowing from role playing games such as Dungeons & Dragons to introduce or enhance role plays in your classroom? Antonio Ruiz-Ezquerro offers his experience in using role playing games (RPGs) in his classroom and provides a more detailed instructions for designing an activity that fits your classroom needs. As he writes:*

This essay covers my personal account of using role-playing games (RPGs) in the classroom as a substitute to the traditional role-play activity format. In my experience, and based on extensive research, the features inherent to RPGs make it a pedagogy that fosters student investment in the learning activity by increasing learners' intrinsic motivation through mechanics that support their autonomy, relatedness, and competence. At the same time, a follow-up reflective discussion helps them internalize the experience, making a powerful pedagogical duo.

During the first months of 2020, when people around the globe went into mandatory lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, like many others, the lack of social interaction made me feel a profound lack of connection to the outside world. At that moment, I had recently begun my Ph.D. program. Despite this incredible opportunity, having all classes held online made it hard for me to make meaningful bonds with my undergraduate students and my graduate cohort. Fortunately, it was not long before a close friend suggested starting an online *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D) campaign that would meet weekly. All invited members gladly welcomed the idea. It gave us all a way to socialize and pass the time alone – together.

Before this experience, I was a stranger to role-playing games (RPGs). Regardless, within a couple of sessions, I was able to see the educational potential of RPGs as pedagogical tools. I noticed that a typical play session shared many parallels with Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle, where players could have an experience, learn from it through reflection, and try new approaches based on what they learned. As it turns out, RPGs are not much different from a traditional role-play activity, a serious game, or a simulation, pedagogical tools often used for teaching and training purposes. All four approaches place learners in an environment that reacts to their actions to a certain degree. Additionally, learners embody characters that must work together or make individual decisions to solve a problem or address a situation. However, in my experience as a student and undergraduate

instructor, using traditional role-plays, serious games, and simulations as teaching methods presents significant limitations regarding simulated realism and learner immersion.

**Low Realism:** According to personal accounts shared by my students, when learners face opposing sides in a scenario, they feel a social incentive to cooperate towards the instructor's expected outcome. For example, suppose the exercise is meant to teach students about conflict resolution. Even if they act resistant at first, the participants feel a need to reach the intended outcome eventually. Neither student wants to be the reason the other fails. Therefore, they will almost always compromise or find a solution. If the activity, supposedly designed to prepare learners to solve a type of issue or to develop competence on a skill, almost always results in the same expected result, how transferable is the experience to a real-life situation where multiple variables may interfere and end with a non-optimal outcome (e.g., human emotions such as anxiety, frustration, and anger or environmental factors with an indirect influence like a global recession or a law). The worlds constructed by scenarios in a small paragraph often lack complexity and expecting students to simulate all existing factors is unrealistic.

**Immersion:** These issues are particularly present in scenarios where one person has all the power to negate the goals of the other (e.g., an employee negotiating for a raise). In these types of role-plays, the learner in power may feel like the "bad guy" if they are unwilling to give in to the employee's requests, and the other may feel hopeless in trying to succeed once it is clear they won't meet their goal. Further, as an instructor, one must ask themselves, what is the learning outcome of an activity like this, and who benefits from it? Is the activity's objective to teach students to negotiate for a raise or resist employees' bargaining attempts? Are both learners getting the same value out of the exercise?

The reasoning behind these claims can be sustained by Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory (SDT). At its core, SDT argues that learning motivated by intrinsic motivation leads to more significant learning benefits (Vansteenkiste et al., 2018). Intrinsic motivation is the self-determined desire of a learner to explore content out of personal interest, curiosity, and enjoyment (Vansteenkiste et al., 2018). SDT places autonomy, relatedness, and competence as the three key positive elements that affect intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Studies have suggested that intrinsic motivation positively influences academic achievement (Taylor et al., 2014) and student engagement (Lee, 2005).

The opposite is also true. Engaging with mechanics that give learners no genuine autonomy and ownership over the activity, interfering with the learner's ability to connect with their peers (relatedness), and diminishing the pleasure learners feel after engaging and being effective in their environment (competence) lowers the learner's chances of engaging in intrinsic/autonomous motivation (Proulx et al., 2017). These, in my experience, tend to be characteristics of simulations, serious games, and the traditional role-play activity given their natural high control of the scenario.

In contrast, RPGs have three unique features that lead towards a co-created narrative that increases learner immersion and allows instructors to adjust the activity to increase or decrease realism as needed. First, using a facilitator (also known as Game Master) helps bring life to an entirely reactive and customizable world filled with problems, personalities, and learning opportunities. Part of the facilitator's job is to perform secondary character roles in the scenario, such as an aid, obstacle, or even the antagonist to the scenario's goal. They may even play interactive support roles, like extras in a movie, that help give life to the story being created by the learners. By removing such responsibility from learners, students can focus on their own performance and even work together towards

achieving their goals without being fully responsible for their peers' success or failure. More importantly, it refocuses the activity on its learning outcomes and the student experience.

Second, the incorporation of luck mechanics, like dice-rolling, can bring realism to the consequences of players' decisions and make the experience unique and distinctively immersive. The facilitator may adjust the difficulty level to modify the role-play's realism as necessary. RPG's luck-based nature pushes students to "engage in dialogue, critical thinking, and concept co-exploration while encouraging them to adapt and practice democratic citizenship in the classroom" (Ruiz-Ezquerro, 2021, p. 51).

Lastly, learners get to create and bring life to their characters. Having a personal connection to their role allows them to emotionally invest themselves in the journey and their self-development through it. In other words, what they do matters, especially if they will be embodying the character again next session. Together, these RPG features bring game mechanics that promote autonomous motivation in the classroom, for example, co-creating a story, action and character ownership, and content discovery through experimentation (Proulx et al., 2017).

As a leadership educator, I believe experiential learning is an incredibly powerful tool for developing students' leadership identity, efficacy, and capacity. I have used and created RPGs designed to place learners in situations where they must work together to solve them (you can read more about a personal example of how I created a one-session role-playing game for my *Leadership and Change* course in the Playful Techniques section of the book, *Leadership Island*). These scenarios allow for leadership to emerge naturally, giving me two sources from which to analyze leadership with students, the concepts embedded in the RPG's design through game mechanics, like puzzles and narrative, and the practice of leadership by the students participating in the role-play.

When guided by a good facilitator and participative players, RPGs have the advantage of creating a unique story where learners can reflect and learn from the narrative regardless of the outcome. As the facilitator, I try to describe the role-play's setting and narrate the consequences of any action a player takes with as much detail as possible. I often create voices for different characters and use props, such as images, maps, or other aids to help students visualize and immerse themselves in the co-constructed world. The students and professionals I have created RPGs for have highlighted how the activity's flow felt more natural, which helped them feel more engaged in the exercise. They also express surprise and excitement when I start a class or presentation with a game. For many of them, it is their first time playing an RPG, which makes the novelty of the activity thrilling or at least intriguing. Since I substituted traditional role-plays for customized RPGs, voluntary student participation has increased. Additionally, the learning environment is often filled with laughter and curiosity, making the room feel more energized and increasing student investment in the topics covered over the course.

I started this essay by mentioning how I saw the similarities between Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle and RPGs. A crucial component of Kolb's (1984) theory is the use of reflection as a meaning-making tool for learners to transform the activity into experiential learning and apply the lessons in the future. Similarly, Vansteenkiste et al. (2018) argued that as part of intrinsic motivation, learners must also internalize the content, signifying that they must be able to take in external goals and guidelines and transform them into their own to make meaning of them. Because of this component, I always follow up on an RPG session with a classroom reflective discussion. In my

opinion, this is an essential part of the activity and where learning truly happens. Authors, such as Dewey (1933), McCarthy (1987), and Rodgers (2002), have all described reflection as a bridge to the cognitive processes that enhance experiential learning. In this stage, students make connections between the content covered, their peers' diverse perspectives, and between their lived experiences, often challenging them to think about their own held beliefs (Volpe White & Guthrie, 2016). In my experience, by wrapping up the activity with a class discussion, students often leave the room with new aha moments while building relationships with their peers.

Trying out new activities for the first time can be intimidating. However, I can share with you that the extra effort that goes into building worlds where students can actively engage with class concepts without leaving the classroom is rewarding for students' learning and me. Unlike many activities that rely on rote learning or busywork, students will continue to think about their role-played experience and course content throughout the day or week. At the same time, I get to go home having experienced a more enjoyable class session and knowing the extra effort ultimately benefits students' learning. I hope my account inspires you to try using RPGs in your own teaching, or at the very least pushes you to play an RPG if you have never tried one before.

Six rules to implement a customized role-playing game in the classroom (Adapted from Ruiz-Ezquerro, 2021).

**1) Develop well-written learning objectives** – What goals are students pursuing from this activity? How does an RPG enable those goals? Is using a role-playing game the best way to meet those objectives?

**2) Develop the parameters that will govern your role-play –**

1. How long do you want this role-play to be? Depending on your needs, this could be a single session as the Leadership Island example or take several sessions. Remember that the learning objectives should always justify the chosen length.
2. How big is the world for learners to explore? The larger the world, the more time and planning the role-play preparations will need to be. However, there are no limits to what you can create. The game could be contained within a single room or an entire realm. For reference, my island example took me about three hours of planning.
3. What are the Non-playable characters (NPCs) that will inhabit the role-play? NPCs are the characters that the facilitator will control with whom players can interact. They can be a great tool to provide guidance or plot development. I recommend going all-in with these characters and working on their personalities and voices to bring them to life and increase player engagement.
4. What rules must players abide by to ensure a fun learning environment for everyone? Facilitators should create ground rules players must follow to foster a fun yet respectful experience. This rule also means that facilitators must be careful and intentional with portraying cultural elements in the game. They should also consider any accessibility issues students may have and how they can adapt the activity to their needs?

**3) Develop a few prompts to get started, but be flexible** – Remember, the main goal of an RPG is to co-create a story. Player freedom is crucial to giving learners ownership of their actions and increasing engagement. While having a starting point is vital, there is no need to plan for every possible scenario.

Instead, allow learners to explore the setting and create original solutions to their problems. Doing so will increase players' sense of ownership of their actions and, therefore, their investment. More importantly, it lets them explore the world organically and draw the most out of the experience by relating to it in a way that makes sense to them. With this in mind, don't be afraid to let them experience failure. Failure can be a powerful teaching tool and will often result in moments of critical thinking, cooperation, and adaptability.

**4) Set up a difficulty level for the goals learners must accomplish** – You can achieve this effect by using a scale from 1-20, with 1 being a total miss and 20 an absolute success and assigning a difficulty value to actions that require a roll check. Whenever you need to determine the effectiveness of a player's action (e.g., persuading an NPC with an argument, make them roll a 20-sided die). Their rolled number will determine the direction of the narrative depending on how successful they were and their decision's ramifications, which the facilitator will narrate. Meeting or surpassing the required number will result in success, whereas failing to reach it will lead to a miss. Depending on how close to matching the required number their roll was, you may even allow for partial success at a certain cost.

Additionally, you may add bonuses or penalties that increase or decrease their odds of success if it makes sense thematically (e.g., a student trying to be sneaky while wearing wet clothes and squeaky shoes can be asked to roll twice and use the worse result to determine the story's direction). The inclusion of this feature can help you increase realism and balance the tables when needed to keep things interesting. Consider the following example from the Leadership Island RPG.

*A student finds the communications tower that shows signs that someone lives there. While no one seems to be home, the door is locked. The student decides to pick the door's lock with a bobby pin he found earlier in the game. Unknown to them, the difficulty of opening the door is set at a 12. The student is asked to roll the die and gets an 11. While the number is not enough to succeed at the task without issues, the facilitator grants them a partial success at a cost. The student is able to open the door. However, the bobby pin breaks in the process, and they are now unable to use it again in future doors.*

I have two additional comments on the topic of dice. First, you can use any number of dice with as many or few sides as you want. I personally prefer 20-sided dice because they are traditionally used in RPGs. Second, Google lets you roll several virtual dice if you search for “roll die”).

**5) Increase engagement by anticipating questions from learners and having fun** – Facilitators must be ready to answer questions regarding the characters, the world, and the role-play scenario. As a role-play facilitator, one of your jobs is to narrate the world's details and bring life to it to help learners get immersed in it. Thus, facilitators must anticipate what things might be unclear to learners, especially the first few times playing, and be able to respond to those inquiries accurately. However, this also means that facilitators have a responsibility to set be role models of behavior that increase engagement, such as giving different voices to the NPCs they control and providing any aids that might enhance the game's experience (e.g., music, maps, rich descriptions, etc.).

**6) Allow time for guided reflection after the activity** – Whether players successfully accomplish the scenario's objectives or not, they should still have a space for guided reflection following the activity. Reflection pushes learners to benefit from experiential learning by engaging them in the cognitive processes that allow them to make meaning from the scenario (Volpe White & Guthrie, 2016). This

moment serves as an excellent opportunity to discuss how some of the experienced circumstances may come up in a real-life setting or how they might differ. Additionally, this moment provides students who were observing during the role-play to participate and contribute to the discussion.

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# Chapter Five: Playful Whole-Course Design

Have you ever been to a Renaissance festival or faire? Summer weekends in the woods surrounded by knights and minstrels, royalty, and roasted turkey legs. A good Renfair liberally mixes history and fantasy and borrows props and ideas from across antiquity. Over there in that direction is an 11th century joust and yonder strolls Celtic bard from the 17th. And, oh look, what do we have here? A dragon slayer drinking Bud Light with a Germanic barbarian? At least we know it's all in good fun. And while you might only visit the fair for one day, it's comforting to know the festival runs for an entire season. It's easy to imagine this polyglot of history as a living breathing world that exists long after you leave and will be there whenever you dare to return.

From a historian's perspective, the Renaissance festival might not be the best place to teach about the past. After all, the purpose of the fest is to entertain people and no niggling historical detail is going to get in the way of things like the difference between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance proper. Then again, if you watch the families learning about blacksmithing, or enjoying a performance on an ancient instrument, or even pausing to listen to some actual history, you see that the immersive play and learning can go together.

As a thought experiment, what if you could spend a summer learning history at a Renaissance festival – enjoying the spectacle and fantasy but also digging into the reality? And how different would that be in fact from a visit to Colonial Williamsburg, where tourists flock to enjoy a simulacrum of Colonial America?

Or, what about the traditional collegiate study abroad? Isn't half the fun of learning overseas covering the same domestic material in a brand-new place? Math is math. But learning to use the London public transportation is an education in and of itself!

Pulling these threads together, we would ask: What if our learning environments were as much fun and immersive as festivals, as immersive as Williamsburg, and as educationally transformative as study abroad?

Reacting to the Past (<https://reacting.barnard.edu/>) provides a mature model for conducting complex, engaging and highly educational role-playing games in higher education setting. And it provides a fascinating model of how to implement and scale play across the higher education landscape. And while it does point toward the potentials of transforming the entire semester or quarter into an educational playground, we have found a diverse and growing field of experiments and interventions that look to change our perspective on what a college class should be.

Two of our favorite examples of Whole-Course Playful Design come from two University of Denver professors who, without anyone egging them on, turned their course into highly effective learning playgrounds. Roberto Corrada is a law professor who decided it would be fun, and meaningful, to turn his administrative law class into a musing on Michael Crichton *Jurassic Park*. He has his students read the book *Jurassic Park* and then challenges his students to work in legal teams to write laws and policies governing extinct animal parks. The brilliance of this is, dinosaur parks don't exist so there are no laws that the students can copy—they have to think like lawyers to design these laws and policies. This semester-long role play simulation ignites creativity while diving deep into a potentially dry legal topic. Another University of Denver professor, Keith Miller, took his background as an analytic chemist and brought science to life in a freshman seminar completely dedicated to pirates. Not only did students study the history and political background of piracy during the golden age of sail, but they also learned about optics, the chemistry of explosions, and concluded their semester sending Captain Miller (yep, the professor), in full pirate regalia, across the university's pool in homemade, but nautically sound, cardboard boats. I mean, come on!! Learning from these exceptionally playful professors' adventures, we figure if you can turn law and science into dinosaurs and pirates, then whole course play is a fertile frontier we have only begun to explore.

In this chapter, we share examples of professors who have committed to making play an immersive experience throughout the entire course. This chapter describes how a playful theme has been designed into an entire course that goes beyond isolated or siloed activities or connection formers.

While examples of whole-course design are less common than the examples in the other chapters, we find these demonstrations of immersive learning to be thrilling and inspiring. These examples demonstrate how a course can be one giant canvas for instructors to playfully design holistically around a concept or theme that can immerse students in a complex and detailed made-up world to deepen their learning. Certainly, the more play that is involved in the course might seem like more risk. We understand a level of hesitance in the professoriate around play and how this translates into fewer examples of whole-course play. At the same time, more risk equals more reward and these examples demonstrate positive learning outcomes for students and a more positive teaching environment for the professor. These examples show that whole course play works.

But let's not stop there.

As you read through these techniques and find your own inspiration, think about the next step in the future of the Playvolution: whole curriculum play. While we don't have any examples of this (yet!), just imagine, what a higher ed degree could look like if it was all based on play? How would it work? Would it look like a year-round Renaissance fest or maybe it would work along the lines of Harry Potter-style school of wizardry or Star Trek's Starfleet Academy. We are getting all sweaty just thinking of that!

But for now, the examples we have in this chapter present wonderful ideas of whole-course design – maybe these ideas won't apply to your course specifically but we hope that as you read the examples, you begin to see the endless possibilities of teaching and learning. Part of our passion in advocating for a playful pedagogy is to question the status quo and norms of academia. These creative and thoughtful examples help us imagine ways that we can create a more dynamic and flexible approach to our teaching. Maybe it will spark something in you also!

## Building a Wizard College

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### **Technique Summary Description**

With a little help from popular culture, one college course was transformed through the creation of a story shell. Existing projects and assignments remained while a wizard college was constructed around them for whole course play. The process could be replicated for other disciplines and subjects.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

I have long been intrigued by the idea of whole-course play but had a difficult time envisioning how to create an environment that would be appropriate for the course topic and the students in the course. After learning about University of Denver law professor Roberto Corrada's use of *Jurassic Park* in his administrative law course, I had an epiphany about how to make the move into whole-course play.

#### **The Starting Point**

I teach in a fully online master's program in Higher Education Administration, delivered through Blackboard. The course, which I have taught for more than a decade, addresses higher education resource management and introduces students to college finance, budget processes, personnel management, facility challenges, and so on. Most of the students in the master's program work full-time on college campuses in the southern United States, and the course usually has an enrollment of 15 to 20 students. The primary course assignment is a team project, occurring in steps throughout the term. As a team, students create a new college office including developing a mission statement, outcomes, activities, staff descriptions, etc. Once their office description is finished, the team develops a detailed budget to align with everything they described for the office. Feedback is provided on each step before the final team product is submitted about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way through the course. As a last step, each student adjusts their team's final budget based on two different scenarios to demonstrate individual mastery of skills and knowledge. Along the way, there are class discussions and an interview-a-budget-manager assignment.

Students enjoyed the main project and accompanying assignments, which had been perfected over time, so I did not want to make significant changes. What I needed was a story shell to wrap around my existing course with enough flexibility to introduce playful touches.

#### **Identifying the Story Shell**

Popular culture offers a variety of invented worlds to consider, but only a few focused on educational settings. The wizarding world seemed like the best option with its emphasis on a school environment and well-developed universe. However, the wizard schools depicted in the books and movies focus on students who are ages 12 to 18 while my students are college employees working with students over the

age of 18. Inviting them to attend a fantasy high school as a student did not match who they are in real life. Since no wizard colleges exist in popular culture, I decided to create my own. This approach allowed me to build on familiar wizarding world elements while also introducing a blank slate for whatever I could create.

With a wizard college as the goal, I moved on to a plausible story. As an educator, I have long noticed how *Harry Potter's* Hogwarts school never provided formal activities with students outside of class except for Quidditch. Students need engagement options outside of the classroom for both academic and social development. I decided to correct that problem by making it part of the story. I also took some of the current financial challenges U.S. colleges are experiencing and incorporated them into the story.

### The Story Shell

The story shell premise focused on challenges with enrollment and persistence in wizard colleges because of the lack of engagement outside of class. Prospective students were no longer interested in attending college and the ones who did attend were not connected with the campus or building a social community so many stopped taking courses. I, as headmaster of the wizard college, needed to hire staff who could create new offices designed to increase student engagement both academically and socially. Because non-magical colleges already had these offices, the new staff would study how non-magical colleges manage and financially support engagement so we could model our new offices after theirs.

To fill in the story, I focused on the first *Fantastic Beasts* movie which offered a New York City setting as well as a North American approach to magic. I named the wizard college after one of the minor characters in the movie and adopted the movie's wizard vocabulary (e.g., "Muggles" became "No-Maj"). Since the setting of the movie occurs away from wizard schools, not much is known about wizard education in North America. This allowed me to borrow familiar wizarding world elements while still inventing the learning environment I needed.

### The Playful Flip

Next, I needed activities that would support the story and increase the playful environment. As an introduction to the course, I mirrored the first Harry Potter story. Students received an email ("Owl Post") from me (the Headmaster) on the first day of class welcoming them as new staff of the wizard college and providing basic information about why they were hired. At the end of the letter, the students were directed to "Staff Orientation" where they learned the full college backstory and received a "magical" version of the syllabus that reflected the project purpose. [A "non-magical" version was also provided for students who were confused, unfamiliar with the wizarding world, or unhappy about the approach.]

During orientation, students were sorted into six houses (e.g., project teams of 2 to 3 students). Each House had a mythical or magical beast mascot and a house crest depicting its beast. The sorting ceremony relied on a free online spinning wheel from Flippity that allowed personalized entries. I added the names of all students, then created a screencast of me spinning the wheel and calling out the members of each house.

After the sorting ceremony videos, I introduced a House Cup competition (more details are included later) and then I sent students to a virtual escape room with six hidden items. The items contained more details about the course as well as clues leading to a numerical code. Because the escape room occurred via Google® Slides, the numerical code allowed for students to come back to Blackboard®, enter the code as a quiz question, and receive credit for completing orientation. Through the Blackboard® Adaptive Release feature, I locked down all materials in the first course module until students entered the correct code. This helped me direct all students to the orientation activities before they could move forward with the course.

One special item introduced during orientation was a “magical coin code” modeled after discount codes for online shopping sites. Students could redeem their code at any point during the course to receive a one-day extension or 10 points back on an individual assignment. Or, if all House team members put their codes together, students could redeem the codes for any group project step but they would forfeit the individual application.

I designed a weekly report template to complement the story. The weekly report, named after the college, reminded students of class readings, assignments, and House Cup opportunities; offered an inspirational quote addressing something about magic; and shared a cartoon about magic, wizards, or witches.

The primary gaming element in the course was the House Cup competition. This voluntary, extra credit activity spanned most of the course and a leaderboard tracked weekly point progress. The top three teams at the end of the competition could earn different amounts of extra credit for the course. To encourage reluctant students to participate in some engagement activities, any team reaching a minimum number of House Cup points would also receive a small amount of extra credit for their efforts.

The competition contained a mixture of individual and team activities, and most activities were easy to perform and required very little time. For instance, two reoccurring activities focused on (1) answering a weekly higher education trivia question (with a bonus wizarding world question), and (2) finding a *Fantastic Beasts* character image hidden somewhere in each week’s course materials. In addition, three to five new activities were offered each week such as brainstorming ideas, working a special word into class discussions, posting something about the course on social media with a special hashtag, or offering feedback about the course. One significant House Cup activity focused on creative projects that teams could work on throughout the course. All options related directly to the team project and required an investment of time, but also awarded a significant amount of House points. While not initially planned, I also began awarding discretionary House points so I could recognize students’ random demonstration of play.

Several other changes transformed the course into a wizard college including:

- Renaming all assignments so they included magical terminology.
- Having each student create an introductory Google Slide; putting all individual slides together in Google Draw to create a virtual “community quilt”; then posting the quilt for all to view.
- Adjusting small words to create an overall effect (e.g., “pens and paper” in the supply budget

became “quills and parchment”).

- Creating a college “Common Room” on Padlet where students could go to perform many of the House Cup activities.
- Describing a new wizard shopping area near the campus (e.g., “Technic Alley”) that had branches of Harry Potter stores such as Gringotts New York and Weasley’s World Wizard Wheezes.
- Designing magical college grant programs with connections to Harry Potter and Fantastic Beasts for their budget step.
- Offering Harry Potter themed crafts for house points such as creating a virtual chocolate frog card or cutting out a paper snowflake from an online template.

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

Although I was concerned that my older adult students would not be enthusiastic about the wizard college, they surprised me by jumping right into the action. Within two hours of sending the welcome email, a few students had already completed the orientation, found the first location in the hidden character game, and posted their newly created magical pseudonyms in the common room.

Students demonstrated more engagement each week beyond what was anticipated. For instance, the first week of the team project, the assignment was a team contract, for which I provided a simple, plain-text template to guide their discussions about communication, deadlines, and expectations. One team put their resulting contract on a parchment paper background with a special font, while another team turned in their plain-text document alongside a link to their new interactive team contract webpage. In another example, a student emailed me privately with a request to use his magical coin code for a one-day assignment extension. His email stayed in character from start to finish, even calling me the “headmaster” and signing with his magical pseudonym. Each time students exhibited extra efforts to playfully engage with the wizard story, I rewarded them with House points. All house teams reached the minimum threshold for extra credit points by week four of the 15-week course.

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

Popular culture is a good place to find ideas for a story shell to place around an existing course. Look for unique environments that either do not have well developed features or have aspects that are not well developed. For instance, superhero movies or those occurring in space provide opportunities for creativity and flexibility. Think about how your course topic could fit into these worlds, then develop a story that explains the gap your course will fill.

When you are designing the playful elements for the course, make sure you are not burdening students with time commitments. If it takes too long to play, they may opt out of participating. Start by reviewing the existing course requirements to see what can be eliminated to make space for new activities. As you think through possible new activities, keep the engagement time to 10 minutes or less so it is reasonable for students to add in alongside formal course activities. If story activities require more time to perform, provide several weeks for students to complete them. And, if you provide a way to earn extra credit, track those points separately to reduce confusion about what counts towards the course grade and what is optional.

Finally, create playful elements for each gaming personality. According to Bartle (1996), there are four types of gamers – (1) achievers, who like to earn points and rewards; (2) explorers, who prefer discovery and appreciate the details; (3) socializers, who want to interact with others and share the experience, and (4) killers, who want to win. Killers and achievers may be the students earning competition points while explorers focus on creative ideas and socializers emphasize community. Tap into each of the types by having individual and group elements, offering creativity options, and setting up team activities for interaction. When each student has opportunities to play to their strengths and interests, they may choose to engage in the new world.

### **“Can You Tell Me How To Get” Started: Using Sesame Street as an Example for Developing a Themed Course**

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#### **Technique Summary Description**

Connecting course content to the media and real world allows students to develop a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the material (Tessier & Tessier, 2015). One way to do this is through themed courses, or courses that cover a topic (e.g., human development) through the lens of a specific theme (e.g., Harry Potter). In addition to helping students connect to course content, the focus on creativity, peer engagement, and exploration makes themed classes a fun way to foster improved and lasting student learning. Thus, the goal of the present project is to provide techniques, tips, and strategies for the development of themed courses. Using the theme of Sesame Street as an example,

this proposal will outline steps for the development of a specific curriculum composed of individual modules, each of which covers a different topic and contains resources for educators to supplement their teaching. Overall, the goal is to provide instructors with a broad roadmap for the development of their own themed courses that can be employed for a wide variety of courses and disciplines.

### Technique Detailed Instructions

1. Choose a theme: The first step is for instructors to choose a theme, preferably one they are knowledgeable and passionate about. Some themes lend themselves better to a themed course than others. A show like Game of Thrones, while full of great content, has eight seasons and hour-long episodes that must be watched sequentially (skipping around would be confusing). Conversely, a single movie or mini-series might not contain enough content for an entire semester. We recommend choosing a theme with either short episodes that do not require sequential or complete viewing (e.g., Sesame Street) or several stand-alone movies (e.g., musical theater). It is also important to consider the course goals. For example, a psychopathology course necessitates a theme that displays many and varied examples of disorders (see Step 4).
2. Identify collaborators (optional): While optional, this step can be helpful by reducing the workload for any one individual. Additionally, selecting collaborators with a variety of expertise allows space for each person's individual mastery, rather than relying on one person to be a master of all topics. It also provides multiple perspectives on the material. For example, the project team has members representing various specialties (e.g., gender, language development, academic readiness) and disciplines (psychology, education), adding to the diversity of our collaboration.
3. Consider course logistics and materials: Course logistics such as the type (e.g., core course, elective), structure (e.g., seminar, lecture), modality (e.g., online, hybrid, in-person) and size of the class will impact the decision-making process. It's also helpful to consider the needs and structure of the student body. For example, an advanced psychology seminar may not work as well at a university with a small psychology program. Instead, perhaps consider a broader approach that would be applicable to students from a wider variety of majors and experience levels (e.g., through the core/general education program). Student access to materials is an especially important consideration in themed classes. Be mindful of copyright rules, availability of the themed media, and student costs. If applicable, consider including a subscription to the streaming service with the media for the duration of the course in the list of required materials so students can plan ahead. When possible, place themed material on reserve in the library, show the material in class, or hold optional viewing sessions. This may depend on the type of course (e.g., hybrid, in-person) and media. For example, Sesame Street has shorter episodes (which are each broken down into short segments) that could be viewed together within a class period, and many clips are freely available on YouTube. Conversely a Psychology of Musical Theater course that asks students to view a musical theater piece each week would not be able to fit an entire show within a standard class period, so outside viewing would be more appropriate.
4. Identify course objectives and assignments: Assignments should always be driven by course objectives. Golinkoff and Hirsh-Pasek's (2016) 6Cs model provides a useful framework to that end, asking instructors to develop assignments that build students' skills in six key areas: 1)

collaboration, 2) communication, 3) content, 4) critical thinking, 5) creative innovation, and 6) confidence. We encourage incorporating the 6Cs framework into themed courses by designing assignments that capitalize on multiple Cs. For example, having students work in groups to design their own Sesame Street segment or episode provides the opportunity for collaboration (e.g., working together), communication (e.g., conveying education material “to the public”), critical thinking (e.g., deciding what material to include), creativity (e.g., there are many different directions students could go in episode design), and confidence (e.g., sharing the final projects with peers for feedback and support). Additionally, we suggest focusing on achieving course outcomes rather than covering specific topics. Tempting as it may be to start with the thematic material and build the course from there, resist the urge and choose the theme material to fit the objectives rather than the other way around.

5. Identify the number of lectures and topics/sub-themes: First, decide on the number of topics and themes to include. From there, lay out a semester-long roadmap of topics and related themed content. Below are examples of some broad topics and specific sub-themes for a Sesame Street themed class (including sample episodes or segments).

- **Families and peers:** Peers, parenting and families, foster families, divorce (Little Children — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXjqfgoIw8>), BIG Challenges – Divorce — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXjqfgoIw8>).
- **Cognition:** Executive functioning (Furry Potter and the Goblet of Cookies — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6ju2-IjWhs>), theory of mind.
- **General Development:** Language, fine/gross motor skills, play, health, death and dying (Farewell Mr. Hooper — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxlj4Tk83xQ>).
- **Emotions:** Emotion regulation/development (A Song About Emotions — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y28GH2GoIyc>), social-emotional.
- **Identity:** Identity development, gender (Dress Me Up Club — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sgs4bcRWamc>), race (ABCs of Racial Literacy — <https://www.facebook.com/SesameStreetInCommunities/videos/3520725778026983/>), culture (A Very Sesame Street Thanksgiving — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1sGu5WQibEE>), LGBTQIA+ (Family Day — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iph6Sj44Zpo>).
- **Academics/Education:** ABCs (Letter of the day — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iph6Sj44Zpo>), 123s (Number of the day — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZi8KbgVhFc>), school behaviors (School for Chickens — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDCDjxSqsFI>), STEM (Ramp Racers — [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_S4PPEoaCEE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_S4PPEoaCEE)).
- **Exceptional Children/Special Education:** Physical/intellectual disabilities, Autism (inclusion of the muppet Julia — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dKCdV2ozLMs>).
- **Adaptive Domain:** Self-regulation, attendance to task, impulse control, regulation of sensory responses, activities of daily living (e.g., feeding, dressing, personal hygiene) (teeth brushing with Elmo — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFCzMowXTp8>)
- **Societal issues:** homelessness (inclusion of the muppet Lily — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQKxTDfGH-o>), incarceration, international conflict.

6. Create detailed lesson plans – After developing the class structure, the next step is to build out each lesson. Below are two sample approaches to teaching language development in a Sesame Street themed class.
  - Assign articles on language development (e.g., Larson & Rahn, 2015; Rice et al., 1990) for students to read before class. During class, show What's the Word on the Street? (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F29JlzanDd4&list=PL-aqpA5GLbKljxU1rjKEe6onKSxXIwV2->). Have students discuss different elements of word learning techniques (education classes can consider interventions), how they were used in the clip (e.g., presenting words in multiple contexts), how the segment aligns with research on word learning, and ways to improve the segment to better align with research. Students can also work in pairs or small groups to develop their own “Word on the Street” segment.
  - Assign articles on the 30-million-word gap (e.g., Hart & Risley, 1995; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015) for students to read before class. During class, students could write an argument paper or lead a discussion about how Sesame Street has addressed this phenomenon over the last 50 years.

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

The core instructors for this project piloted some of the initial modules developed by the project team and completed a survey assessing their perceptions regarding the use of these materials. This survey was also completed by eight additional instructors who use themed materials in higher-education courses. Preliminary data indicated that teaching themed courses increased confidence, awareness, and thoughtfulness about their teaching, and they reported that it has encouraged them to take more risks in their teaching. They also reported increased satisfaction and the use of new teaching strategies or techniques as well as increased student engagement and learning in the course(s) in which themed materials are used. Qualitative data indicated that instructors found the use of these materials to be fun and engaging for both the instructors and students. Challenges included difficulties in identifying appropriate material and aligning it to course content and in helping students to make the connections between the themed material and academic content. We plan to continue assessing faculty perceptions as more faculty transition to using themed materials in their courses. Student assessment is also a future goal and will be ongoing as we pilot our themed courses at multiple institutions.

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

The project team consists of a cohort of researchers from multiple institutions and disciplines who created a set of modules on a range of topics, each with topical readings, video clips, and student activities. The modular structure is intended to provide flexibility, and easily translates to the development of themed courses across the social sciences and related disciplines (e.g., Psychology, Education). Core instructors plan to incorporate *Sesame Street* into a range of classes this semester including Early Social and Emotional Development, Developmental Research Methods, Psychology of Gender, Cognition and Emergent Literacy in Young Children with Disabilities (graduate course), and a *Sesame Street* themed Senior Seminar course. These materials could also be adapted to graduate study or K-12 classes.

## **Paralegal Capstone Using Dr. Seuss' *Horton Hatches the Egg***

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### **Technique Summary Description**

This course was taught at the culmination of the paralegal associate's degree program. Students in all legal programs learn statutes, cases, how to draft documents, and how to use specific legal software. Sounds pretty dry, right? This technique uses a popular children's book as a more novel way to apply law into action.

### **Technique Detailed Instructions**

Since this was a course where students use all skills that they learned from other courses, we used Dr. Seuss' *Horton Hatches the Egg* as the only textbook. I chose this book because students were familiar with it (or with other books by Dr. Seuss). I didn't want them to need to keep up with fictitious party names. My goal was for them to learn how to apply the law. This was a full-course build, so up-front work was necessary. I created a fictional law firm employee manual explaining the class and its structure. Students need practice summarizing depositions, so I created a deposition for Mayzie Daisy-Head (I made up the last name for the legal action). All of the assignments that needed pre-work were completed before class started.

During the first class, we reviewed the employee manual and read *Horton Hatches the Egg*. Then students brainstormed all the legal issues in the book. You wouldn't believe how many there are! Then we divided those into areas of law and students chose or were assigned to different areas. For example, there was a Civil division, a Family Law division, and so on. Students were to be in the paralegal pool of our fictional law firm.

Once a week we had firm meetings. Students shared their research and the documents they'd drafted during the week. Students had the benefit of seeing how others in a different division handled assignments. At the end of class, students gave closing arguments that they drafted and "recommended" to their "supervising attorney."

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

Any time this course was in the rotation, there was a buzz. Students couldn't wait to take the Capstone even though they'd heard there was a lot of work. There was. Each week, they researched, drafted, presented, and collaborated with the other students in their legal area. They created portfolios using my notations on their work to guide corrections, and I liked using the portfolio for assessment for three reasons. First, the students were applying all of their skills to create a finished product they could take to an interview. Second, it gave students something they enjoyed discussing with the interviewer.

Invariably, the lawyer would see Horton Elephant v. Mayzie Daisy-Head as the case name and ask questions. Third, the whole thing was just plain fun.

### Reflections on Wider Use

Paralegal programs are notorious for using fairy tales, movies, and children's books for hypotheticals. These resources can be used in other disciplines, as well. For example:

English Composition: Use a fairy tale as the basis for essays. Have students write a narrative essay from the point of view of a character other than the main character, or an expository essay from yet another point of view. You will never run out of essay topics using this method, nor will students run out of creativity.

Mathematics: Use the Three Little Pigs as a starting point. Begin every new section with students working together to solve problems related to the story. For example, how much wind would the wolf have to blow to knock down each type of house? Or, given the dimensions of each house, what would be the square footage?

I once taught Criminal Law using movies as the basis of the class. I taught Civil Law in the same way. Creating a course using a single playful premise takes more work on the front end, but you'll see the payoff in more engaged students. And their survey results will bear out their antidotal accolades.

### Zombifying a Complete Course

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### Technique Summary Description

The course Leadership for Technology Innovation was presented in a Zombie Apocalypse wrap-around theme. Much more than a theme, it's also a strong and consistent metaphor for using leadership skills to defeat "zombies" or recurring problems that are avoidable but persistent. Every concept or learning essential course can utilize this metaphor building students' skillsets to lead in the arena of technology implementation and training.

### Technique detailed instructions

To create this fun, intentional, and richly metaphorical atmosphere, every aspect, every unit, and every concept of the course is hung on this delightful narrative. And by every aspect, I mean graphics, sound effects, document titles, home pages, course conclusions, discussions, assignments, and more. To accomplish this every genome of learning within the course is edited with the Crispr of FUN. For example, see this course introduction: "The day it started":

[https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1p9OPt6impmlolofoxr888DoYuNz5-DyeblFxod\\_PBKc/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1p9OPt6impmlolofoxr888DoYuNz5-DyeblFxod_PBKc/edit?usp=sharing)

*"I hate fighting zombies. They always seem to sneak up on you. And as soon as you dispatch one, another grotesque figure chins up, and here we go again. Another funny thing about zombies is their ability to reanimate after you thought they were dead. In his book, "What Not to Do in Business," Thomas Berarducci, describes this phenomenon as the "zombie problem." He explains it this way: a problem appears, we deal with it. Everyone relaxes, because the problem is gone. But suddenly, perhaps months later, the problem reappears! "The zombie problem," he warns, "plods back into our lives the, again sucking life force out of the team or company [or school]." In this course, we will be following Berarducci's advice that, when you see a zombie problem coming, we must "run, not walk, toward the problem, lest we spawn more and more zombies, until [we] are mired in a land of death and depression."*

Also, each content page in the course ends with advice from Dr. Henry Blake, the lead narrator of the course, who is half-zombie, but assists the learners:

#### Critical Zombie Preparedness Lesson



Creative Tension will keep you at your peak. Ready to act. Imbue you with a bias for action. You see, we cannot afford any doldrums when fighting ed-tech zombies. The stakes (life and death of your technology initiatives) are too high!

My techniques are quite specific:

- Slightly gamifying learning.
- Theme-ifyng learning.
- Weaving creative storylines and narratives into learning; online learning as a *story*.
- Interlacing rich visuals and metaphors throughout the learning experience.
- Interweaving relevant music, sound effects, dramatizations, and ambient atmospheres into learning experiences.
- Sprinkling our learning with the seedlings of surprise, mystery, and curiosity (lots of that in the narratives).

#### Results, Impact, and Outcomes

This technique raises student interest and commitment to learning, as evidenced by both phone interviews I conduct and numerous testimonials I have gathered. Students LOVE it. They have never seen anything like it. They try to replicate it on a lesson or course level. They remember this course for years.

Select feedback includes:

- "...The most wonderful class ever."
- "Professor Scrogan's class was an excellent introduction to educational technology. He created a fun learning environment, which elicited energetic and thoughtful responses from participants. His use of the "zombie apocalypse" meme helped to tie together the various

topics covered and brought an amusing twist to serious issues. Overall, Professor Scrogan is a highly effective instructor teaching important material in an effective way.”

- “Len’s Zombie theme for Tech Innovation was delightfully unexpected. The class structure created a higher level of engagement by adding a layered metaphor that drove the narrative and clarified the concepts .... all while making it fun!”
- “Memification was one of the best parts of Len’s graduate class. Not only did it make it more interesting and fun, but the theme of zombies really made the concept of leadership in technology easier to understand. The memification served as one giant analogy which helped me wrap my brain around more complex topics. Understanding how to lead a professional change initiative more effectively was easily grasped when the learning was framed as “ways to ward off the zombies,” and in this case, zombies represented problems or threats that could lead to the failure of a change initiative. I also really appreciated the storytelling aspects that the zombie theme added. Each week a new part of the zombie story appeared alongside the academic work, and this made me actively look forward to the new video lectures, readings, and discussion boards. The story elements also made it feel like I was engaging in a game. Completing an assignment felt like defeating the zombie horde or an epic boss battle. I think zombifying the course also helped Len in chunking the course into manageable bite-sized (pun intended) portions. The story of our apocalypse felt like chapters that had just enough information to sate my thirst and at the same time keep me curious enough to want to explore more about the topics beyond the walls of the course shell. I wish more professors would try what Len did in memifying this course. He captured my attention and imagination in ways that traditional instruction does not which contributed to my willingness to want to go above and beyond in all of my projects and coursework. It also allowed me to get to know my professor’s sense of humor and allowed me to connect with the online course on a more human level.”
- “The zombie theme in Len’s *Leadership for Technology Innovation* course caught my interest right away and sustained my attention as the theme was integrated throughout the content of the course. The zombie metaphor is a clever way to teach about the recurring problems that can arise in any technology implementation. Although zombies are not a real fear of mine, the potential for technology innovations to fail is a huge concern in my role as a teacher librarian and technology leader. This course helped me consider the technology zombies that will come my way and how to prepare an attack to defeat them head on. Thanks to Len’s course, I now understand the essential building blocks and potential obstacles for effective technology use in a school setting. I’m prepared with the necessary tools to plan ahead for these obstacles and I won’t ever let my guard down as unplanned technology zombies pop up and threaten successful implementation. I will continue to fight back!”

### Reflection on Wider Use

I do similar things with other courses, wrapping courses around other themes: superheroes, pirates, secret agent organizations, jungles, and the like. But what makes this particular course so effective is the power, forcefulness, and tensile strength of the metaphor in application to common leadership problems. All the graphics and sounds I use I have rights to use.

## Who's Got Spirit?

### **Techniques for Engaging Students in a Sport Psychology Class**

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#### **Technique Summary Description**

To encourage engagement, incorporate play, and increase student accountability, I re-designed my undergraduate sport psychology class. The semester-long course is now structured around a class-wide team spirit competition. Students can earn points by engaging with their classmates in various activities focused on different aspects of course content throughout the semester. Below is a description of the class design and some aspects of delivery.

#### **Examples:**

##### **1. The First Day of Class:**

Establishing a learning environment centered around play starts with me. The first day of class I dress up in my commencement robe with a hoodie on so I can cover my head like a boxer. With boxing gloves on my hands, I punch and dance my way down the center of the classroom with the “Eye of the Tiger” playing and a colleague announcing my entrance: “*And now...from the great state of Washington, entering the classroom, standing at 5'6" tall, with a PhD in Sport Studies, dancing and loving sports...your professor...Dr...Heather...Van Mullem!!!!*” I choose to do this to get students engaged from the moment we meet. They don’t see my face until I get to the front of the classroom. I greet them with a big smile and usually laughter. In addition to talking about the design and delivery of the class, we spend a considerable amount of time talking about sport itself, why we love it, and why they are taking the course. Additionally, we do some class reflection on my entrance. It is during this part of the conversation that I focus on the importance of play, its role in this class, and how it can enhance our learning.

##### **2. The Second Day of Class:**

On day two, we immediately begin to engage in the Team Spirit Competition, which serves as the structure for the course. During the second day of class, students choose their teams for the spirit competition. This activity is tied directly to a course chapter on team building. We discuss effective team building strategies and team cohesion. In addition to covering information from their assigned readings, the class activity simulates some best practices. Teams are asked to decide a name, their team colors, a mascot, a team cheer/chant, and identify their team goals (i.e., arrive to class on time, attend and engage in class sessions, be prepared to win team spirit points, create study groups prior to exams, etc.). In addition, teams are provided with paper and markers and asked to incorporate their team’s name, colors, and mascot into a team poster that is expected to be brought to class each day and hung in the classroom. Before students leave, team photos are taken and the rules for the competition are shared.

**Rules:**

Points can be earned in the following ways:

1. All members of a team are present in class.
2. Team members sit together in class.
3. Team members come dressed in their team colors.
4. The team poster is hung in the classroom during class.
5. The team provides evidence of active assessment of team goals.
6. The team provides evidence of identification and implementation of strategies to help teammates achieve success on class assignments and exams (i.e., study groups, group notes, etc.).
7. If a class cheer-off occurs, teams are prepared to give their team chant/cheer in unison.
  1. I reserve class cheer-offs for days when engagement is lagging. If I yell “cheer off”, to earn points, teams must stand and give their chant/cheer in unison with their teammates. Getting students up and moving helps to bring back focus and engagement.

Throughout the semester, I incorporate play and games into many of the topics we cover. Course topics where I embed play and games include:

1. Motor skill learning
2. Building confidence
3. Motivation
4. Energy arousal
5. Regulating arousal
6. Concentration
7. Imagery

As an example, on the day we discuss motor skill learning, the class is focused around a lesson on using chopsticks. I bring chopsticks to class and each student is given a set. I show them a very short video of how to use chopsticks correctly and then they are asked to use them to pick up their writing utensil. As you can imagine, students are all over the place in ability. After each person has attempted to use them, within their teams, they work together to identify the phases of motor skill learning and brainstorm how a coach can design and deliver effective learning opportunities using the different types of practice to improve skills. Teams then provide one example of a skill building strategy for the rest of the class. Each team can earn a point if they are able to share a strategy with the class.

In the LMS in the class shell, I keep track of team spirit points throughout the length of the semester. On the last day of class, we crown the Team Spirit Award winning team. I purchase Silly String and ask the students who didn't win to form a tunnel down the middle of the classroom. The winning team members walk through the tunnel to the front of the classroom to the song “One Shining Moment” from the NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament and are sprayed with silly string along the way. The winning students are given a plastic medal and pose for a final team photo with their hard-earned hardware. From the first day until the last, the class is designed and delivered through incorporation of play.

## Results, Impact, and Outcomes

Students have responded positively to this course redesign. Student course evaluation comments indicate they enjoy the opportunity to engage in activities which illustrate the topics we discuss. They also seem to enjoy the competition. Engaging in the spirit competition does not directly impact their course grade. However, they can earn points by engaging in behaviors which strengthen their engagement in the course material and with their classmates.

Anecdotally, since I re-designed the class, regular attendance and test scores have improved. Perhaps what's been the most fun for me is the effort some teams go to when they try to upstage the others. One semester, the teams got into a decorating battle over my office door. They took turns decorating my door with balloons and streamers in their team colors. If they were together studying, some took team selfies. On other occasions, teams have asked a librarian to email me to vouch for their study group's engagement in the library. It was fun for me to see them having fun with this learning approach.

### Reflection on Wider Use

Class redesign is possible for all classes. Choosing a theme that makes sense for the content and then restructuring learning activities to fit that theme, but still meet the course learning objectives, can be accomplished with creativity and, if needed, additional classroom resources. If you like to incorporate play into your teaching, I encourage you to consider how you might redesign parts of your class (or the class in its entirety).

## Eidolon Station

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### Technique Summary Description

I designed this course for the Engineering Student Services Learning Community at Iowa State University. This LC was created for students who were undecided in their engineering interests. The goal was to create a multimodal composition course that allowed them to see the connections between STEM writing and rhetoric.

### Technique Detailed Instructions

#### Game Elements Used:

1. Game Narrative – the whole course was turned into a science fiction story. See welcome letter below.
2. Team Missions (in-class activities) – these were collaborative in-class activities, such as building manuals, mini research presentations, and team resource-building.

3. Solo Quests (the assignments) – these assignments corresponded with the standardized curriculum. However, they were modified for the course narrative. For example, instead of a literacy narrative, the students wrote out a researcher profile that described themselves and their experience with research and writing. Instead of a visual rhetorical analysis, they completed a multimodal rhetoric project, which allowed them to use a variety of tools to construct an argument about and using technology.
4. Roles – these were related to both the student's research interests and their role on the team for activities and peer feedback. These included: Strategist, Medic, Gladiator, Bard, and Scribe.
5. XP – extra credit tied to course concepts. These were mini-assignments for extra practice. An example of one was the students could design a poster for Eidolon Station's newest restaurant, practicing visual and electronic communication.
6. Badges – earned through quests and XP. Examples included Station Explorer (for finding easter eggs on the course site), Officer Check In (for attending student hours), Quest Designer (for those who co-designed/modified one of their solo quests with me), and Level Scribe (for my consistent note-takers).

**Game Narrative (this is the welcome letter at the start of the term):**

*"As your senior officer and instructor for this term, I'd like to welcome you to Eidolon Station. As you may know, we are one of ten space stations in the training catalog. We are also the last station you will pass through as a Junior Researcher before you are given your official station assignment, and before you are allowed to start your research missions down on Earth. This course's aim is to practice your general critical thinking and research skills and advance your skills in multiple modes of communication. You will compose various forms of communication, including giving oral presentations. I am here to help, so please come to me with any questions, concerns, ideas, or roadblocks."*

*This course will take place over sixteen weeks. Your work is divided into team missions and solo quests. Please make sure your attendance is consistent, as your team will need your input. For all of the team missions, there will be a chance to earn points, and we will keep track of team progress with a class leaderboard – updated each Friday.*

*Please make sure you have the necessary equipment for our course – Praxis, A Brief Rhetoric, access to a computer, and a subscription to GoReact for our presentations.*

*Your promotion to Eidolon Station means that you are part of the most elite research group of the cosmos. As such, you will be held to a high standard in terms of both your conduct and research. We will learn about ethical research practices, and your solo missions will be evaluated for these. We assume goodwill on the part of our classmates, and ourselves, and we are all here to learn. We all have room to grow and create deeper understandings. As your instructor, I will use inclusive language and ask you to do so as well. You will be challenged to think beyond your own perspective and consider various points of view. This may make us confused, scared, defensive, etc. Those feelings are valid, but they do not excuse creating a hostile environment for those in our classroom community. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards will be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, culture, religion, creed, politics, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression, age, ability, and nationality. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly*

*honor your request to address you by an alternate name and/or pronoun. Please advise me of this early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.*

*For more detailed information, please see the Policies Handbook on our website. Again, I look forward to working with you all this term.”*

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

The students took varying amounts of time to “buy into” the course as a game. Generally speaking, most of them had jumped into the narrative by the end of the first solo quest (week 2). The team missions helped in this respect, because there were multiple people to help brainstorm the concept of the assignment within the sci-fi context of the class. The narrative also had a surprising result in that it helped with reflections! The narrative gave students a way in, in terms of thinking about how their work fit into the broader scope of their research portfolio, and how their interests further aligned with engineering. Students requested more “in character” acting from me, and a few were calling me Commander Malone by the end of the term.

Another outcome was that this helped students to think about their role in the class more deeply, as they played the role they chose within the game. For example, the Strategist in each group did research in games and interactive technology, but they also filled the role of audience analysis expert for their group. This gave them something specific to look for and provide to the group during peer review and team missions.

### **Reflection on Wider Use**

While Eidolon Station itself was built for STEM students – specifically engineering students – I think it could work for the social sciences and could be tweaked into a fantasy game (guilds instead of stations) to work just as well in the humanities and arts.

## **An Escape Room Project in Three Parts**

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## Technique Summary Description

A series of Escape Room activities scaffolded across the semester provides a fun and approachable way for students to see the textbook material “come to life” in real time, and better understand the practical application of theoretical concepts. Students have an opportunity to apply the course concepts in action, understand how various aspects of a project utilize different skills, and reflect on their own progress in different areas. We have run this activity in an undergraduate, junior-level sociology Small Groups course, adapted in both face-to-face and remote classes, ranging in size from 14-19 students. The overall course format is an experiential approach to small group dynamics and includes games and activities throughout the semester designed to help students understand and practice transferable skills applicable across venues. This includes teamwork, communication and listening, creativity, problem-solving, conflict management, and leadership. Although most students are sociology majors, this class draws from across disciplines and usually includes several students who have not taken any previous sociology courses.

## Technique Detailed Instructions

This activity has three parts:

### Part I: Initial Escape Room Participation

Early in the semester, students participate as players in an Escape Room challenge. They learn how an escape room operates, reflect on group dynamics and skills used in problem-solving via the challenge, and have the team building experience afforded by the game.

Escape rooms are theme-based team games, growing in popularity among educators. The games present fictional scenarios — haunted houses, sinking ships, etc. — from which a small team of players work together solving various logic puzzles, clues, and riddles to “escape” within a prescribed time-period (typically 2-8 people with an hour time limit). Off campus commercial escape rooms can be utilized or enterprising faculty can assemble their own on-campus escape room at minimal cost. After planning and organizing this activity for one semester, students will have built an escape room that could potentially be used as the initial escape room in subsequent semesters.

### Part II: Designing an Escape Room

Students form teams and build their own escape room over the course of the semester.

As a class, they decide on the game theme. Then the class is broken up into smaller teams, with each team assigned a certain number of clues they must contribute to the game. Group size and number of clues required per team/game depends on class size and any possible time-constraints. For example, a class of 20 students can be divided into five teams consisting of four students per team, with each team required to develop two or three clues. This process requires attention to both intra-group and inter-group dynamics as each small team works together to design their own clues as well as coordinating their clues and sequencing with other teams to ensure the game “works.”

### Part III: Hosting and Observing an Escape Room

The class hosts their escape room. This affords them the opportunity to see the fruition of their work, and to observe the participant's interactions and implementation of course concepts. This is the culmination of the activity and happens at the end of the semester. It provides the students another angle from which to interrogate the course concepts they have been learning throughout the semester. Students are prompted in advance to watch for examples of various concepts and skills "in action" (e.g., good or poor communication strategies, creativity, the value of diversity and inclusion, etc.). The entire next class period is devoted for groups to debrief after hosting their escape room challenge.

Our escape room participants have been other college students recruited to play as well as a group of middle-schoolers. (Plan in advance for who the players will be so the clues will be at the appropriate level of difficulty!). At the end of the activity, arranging time for the escape room creators and their guests to socialize over light refreshments like cookies and lemonade provides an inexpensive and celebratory conclusion to the project and semester.

### **Results, Impact, and Outcomes**

Students evaluate the activity and reflect on the "concepts in action" three times across the course of the semester: first, after their initial participation in an escape room challenge; a second time after creating their own escape room challenge; and a third time after they have hosted and observed their own escape room challenge. The same basic evaluation is used for each part of the project (See Tables 1, 2, and 3 below.) We have discovered over the course of the semester that the students improve their conceptual knowledge and individual skill application, in addition to developing a better understanding of how these skills are utilized in "real-world" group settings. It is one thing for students to use skills when they are engrossed in the moment and doing the escape room puzzles; however, when constructing an escape room, they start to learn an array of skills and apply them in dynamic ways. Then when purposefully observing people participating in the escape room challenge that they constructed, students are learning and engaging skills at a more holistic level.

We have used this activity in a class that is scheduled as twice weekly 75 or 100-minute sessions. To minimize potential scheduling conflicts, we do the initial escape room challenge (Part I) and host the escape room (Part III) during class time. We also use at least a portion of the following class session to debrief. Three full class periods throughout the semester are designated for designing the escape room (Part II) – one for organizing the initial project, one mid-to-late semester to "touch base" on progress and give groups time to work together in a shared space, and one just before hosting the escape room to do a practice run-through and make sure the clues and any sequencing work correctly. Other group work on designing the clues is done by individual teams outside of scheduled class time. Intermittent, quick check-ins at the beginning of class throughout the semester are useful and sufficient to gauge progress and handle questions as they arise.

The semester-long activity becomes an interesting way for students to connect concepts and theories that otherwise risk being simply textbook content. They get to see concepts and theories applied and practice them first-hand. Basic follow-up reflection papers ask students to apply how they might use these concepts in the workplace, community engagement, or their personal lives outside of the classroom.

Most students are eager to play and experience escape rooms. They provide a fun challenge that overcomes general student resistance to group work. Students learn about themselves and develop bonds with classmates. Escape rooms provide good team building opportunities; they allow students to get to know each other in non-threatening ways and see strengths in their classmates that may be otherwise unacknowledged in standard lecture classroom interactions (e.g., the quiet student who is a creative problem-solver becomes an emergent leader, etc.).

### Reflection on Wider Use

Initially, based on an enthusiastic student suggestion, we implemented one trip to play an escape room challenge as a team-building activity for the course. That turned out to be a well-received activity with observable immediate value for us and the students. This semester-long sequence grew out of student feedback. They enjoyed the game and could see the potential value-added for a deep-dive approach. However, if building an entire semester project around the escape room project is more than course scheduling allows, strategically incorporating one escape room challenge during the semester can still be a valuable learning experience that is well-worth the time.

This escape room semester project would be applicable to any course in any discipline that covers one or more of the transferable skills that are utilized in problem-solving escape room approaches. The team dynamics and transferable skills emphasized in escape rooms are applicable to any group work situation. The project provides an innovative way to bring technology, collaboration, and critical thinking into the classroom. Other disciplines might adapt the general idea to emphasizing other course concepts as well.

We have run this project in both face-to-face format and remote formats, and found it worked successfully in both mediums. During the pandemic, numerous types of virtual escape room challenges were developed by educators, museums, libraries, and other entities. These online experiences range from “virtual” games in which a live person uses real-time video feed to guide a remote group through a physical escape room challenge to a plethora of “self-guided” games played via Google Forms, Google Slides, or similar technology. Following this three-part approach, our students have created and hosted both in-person and “self-guided” form-based Escape Room challenges.

In addition to in-class debriefings and a written reflection at the end of the semester, students complete an evaluation on each part of this project.

#### Part I: Initial Escape Room Participation: Table 1

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements; 4=strongly agree, 3= agree, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree:

The class participation in the off-campus Escape Room experience helped me to better understand the concept of ...

concept	4	3	2	1
Team-formation model (forming, storming, norming, performing)				
Norms				
Roles				
Groupthink				
Social loafing				
Communication (verbal)				
Communication (non-verbal)				
Listening				
Creativity				
Leadership				
Decision-making				
Problem-solving				
Conflict resolution				
Diversity & Inclusion				
Power Dynamics				

What was the most valuable aspect of this escape room experience?

In what way could the escape room experience be improved?

#### Part II: Designing an Escape Room: Table 2

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements; 4=strongly agree, 3= agree, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree:

Working with my team to design the escape room activity helped me to practice the concept of...

concept	4	3	2	1
Team-formation model (forming, storming, norming, performing)				
Norms				
Roles				
Groupthink				
Social loafing				
Communication (verbal)				
Communication (non-verbal)				
Listening				
Creativity				
Leadership				
Decision-making				
Problem-solving				
Conflict resolution				
Diversity & Inclusion				
Power Dynamics				

What was the most valuable aspect of this group project activity?

In what way could the group project activity be improved?

### Part III: Hosting and Observing an Escape Room; Table 3

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements; 4=strongly agree, 3= agree, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree:

Hosting and observing teams participating in our class-designed escape room experience helped me to see this concept in action ...

concept	4	3	2	1
Team-formation model (forming, storming, norming, performing)				
Norms				
Roles				
Groupthink				
Social loafing				
Communication (verbal)				
Communication (non-verbal)				
Listening				
Creativity				
Leadership				
Decision-making				
Problem-solving				
Conflict resolution				
Diversity & Inclusion				
Power Dynamics				

What was the most valuable aspect of hosting the escape room activity?

In what way could hosting the escape room activity be improved?

### Our Brains at Play

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#### Technique Summary Description

*Our Brains at Play* was originally designed as a freshman orientation course by Dr. Mary Anne Peabody at the University of Southern Maine, to offer high impact experiential teaching while building student engagement and community. This course combines two areas of scholarly interests: play studies and interpersonal neurobiology. Experientially-based andragogy runs throughout the entire course with intentionally sequenced assignments emphasizing writing, interpersonal skills, and identity development as a collegiate student. Recently, as the University made curricular changes with its freshman orientation courses, the course is now offered at the Social and Behavioral Sciences undergraduate departmental level. The course description is as follows:

*This course will explore how play and interpersonal experiences forge key connections in the brain. By examining “our brains at play,” students devote equal time to the fields of interpersonal neurobiology and play studies. The course will build communicative competence through experiential and cooperative learning, community engagement opportunities, class discussions on topics of ethical and social importance, oral and written*

assignments. Several times throughout the course, students will utilize a modification of the LEGO® Serious Play® method, a kinesthetic and storytelling methodology, for understanding how and why the interpersonal neurobiology of play contributes to the well-being of individuals, relationships, and society.

### Technique Detailed Instructions

As a play scholar and mental health play therapy-supervisor whose primary teaching responsibilities are in an interdisciplinary undergraduate major, this class was designed to share my belief in the power of play to teach, learn, and connect with others. To that end, the course content explores play and interpersonal neurobiology through an interdisciplinary approach with a primary focus on the fields of psychology, sociology, and anthropology. As a certified facilitator of the LEGO® Serious Play® methodology, I embed and adapt this methodology throughout the entire course to introduce or review course concepts, to engage students in reflection experiences, and as a tool for community building utilizing the interpersonal neurobiology of storytelling play.

The blending or integration of interpersonal neurobiology and play studies requires students to learn, discuss, and wrestle with multifaceted issues from both fields. Course content includes examination of play theorists and definitions of play, interpersonal neurobiology of play, exploring play across the life span, play in education, team sports and therapeutic recreation, play therapy, improvisational play in medical settings, video gaming, the use of digital technology in physical and mental health arenas, challenges to play in the 21st century, and finally the dark side of play. Examples of past assignments have included: interviewing advisors and faculty for “play histories” and simultaneously allowing the student to experience a different type of relational connection with these key individuals and a series of guest speakers that use play in their careers. For example: a kindergarten teacher who set up play centers for the University students to engage in play. A recreational therapist who models a range of adaptive sports, and a business consultant who discussed how creativity and innovation includes having a playful mindset. We visited the University virtual reality lab where gaming is used for creativity and undergraduate research. The course also included a special visit from the University President to share his memories and current views on “play” while modeling for the students the importance of interpersonal connections with staff, faculty, and administrators.

### Textbooks

The supporting textbooks and articles have been rotated through different semesters. I require the first two texts and then have introduced an optional text across different semesters.

The first two texts are:

- L'Abate, L. (2009). *The Prager handbook of play across the life cycle: Fun from infancy to old age*
- Siegal, D. J. (2012). *Pocket guide to interpersonal neurobiology*.

Supplemental texts have been:

- Brown, S. (2009). *Play: How it shapes the brain, opens the imagination, and invigorates the soul*
- Kestly, T. A. (2014). *The interpersonal neurobiology of play*.

Additionally, I rely heavily on the *American Journal of Play*, a multidisciplinary scholarly journal that includes a wide multidisciplinary approach to play studies and the *Journal for Interpersonal Neurobiology Studies: Theory, Research, and Practice*.

## Assignments

Course objectives were met through a variety of play-based content and assignments. Students explored significant questions about the interrelationship between human culture and the natural world. Questions could be posed through journals, discussion boards, or in-class discussions depending on course delivery modality that semester. Examples of questions have included:

- How does the interpersonal neurobiology of play shape who we are?
- How does play shape relationships?
- What neurological processes are impacted when play or recess is reduced or eliminated from the school day? Should recess be the first class of the day?
- Is there a connection between the decline of play and the increase of anxiety, depression, and attentional issues?
- What benefits exist in the growing culture of gaming?
- What is the discourse surrounding the culture of dark play?
- How does play build innovation and creativity?
- Is innovation, creativity, and imaginative problem-solving in today's workplace considered a form of play?
- How does play therapy intersect with interpersonal neurobiology?
- How do we claim or reclaim an ethos of play in our lives?

Throughout the course, students describe, explain, and analyze concepts both orally, playfully, and in formal and informal writing contexts. For example, students select one scholarly journal article to read either in the field of play studies or in interpersonal neurobiology. Then they present the key highlights of the article to a small group of classmates in a playful way (create a board game, interactive role play, or by building a model using LEGO® bricks). This familiarizes the student with the research being conducted in the field and taps into their collective creativity.

Another assignment uses the ‘play community as the classroom’ to show how community-based play shapes and informs human relationships across the life span. Students are required to participate in or observe two social community “play” events across different developmental age spans and to assess the interpersonal neurobiological issues present in the experience. The students may focus their observations on the relational aspects present in either the players or spectators or both. Class discussion about these experiences intersects play observations with interpersonal neurobiology including the importance of attention, relational connections, and self-care into human experiences along the life continuum.

Students have written reflective papers on their observations at the local children’s museum, adult team sports for players over 50 years of age, a competitive high school soccer game vs. a recreational soccer game for six-year-olds; an after-school play program for youth with autism, a video gaming club of all ages, a town community ice skating rink, a therapeutic adaptive skiing lesson, a senior citizen knitting

group, a senior weight strengths-building class, and an intergenerational community theatre practice-to-production process.

Additionally, students are required to interview two University community members (preferably their advisor, a faculty member, or someone in a leadership position) regarding their play history as a child and how those diversions may have shaped them. This intentional assignment also makes a connection to individuals within the University community. This assignment supports a learning objective that is woven throughout the course of the recognition that individual viewpoints are shaped by experience, historical, and cultural contexts. The interviews and guest speakers all share with the students how their own history, upbringing, and cultural contexts around the role of play in their lives and relationships had impact on their current beliefs and values around play and playfulness. At the end of the course, a formal final paper is assigned whereby the student chooses a “hot topic” issue related to play to delve deeper into the play studies or interpersonal neurobiology literature.

Films and video clips regarding play in different cultures are utilized to compare various cultural or diversity perspectives. While film choice has varied over different semester, the options have included:

- *Where do the Children play?*
- *Life Animated*
- *Power of Play*
- *Now Playing trailer*
- *NPR Ed clip on Brains at Play*
- *The Intelligence of Play by Stuart Brown*
- *A Childs right to play*
- *Go outside and play by Richard Louv*

And several YouTube clips of different professionals engaged in play such as:

- Playworks
- The nonprofit organization that offers recess and play support to schools
- Mental health professionals using play therapy with both adults and children/youth
- Preschool through collegiate educators and coaches
- Occupational therapists.

Finally, both quantitative and qualitative student ratings have been rated highly. I've included a few qualitative student comments below:

- “Finally starting to get the hang of classes and making more and more connections every day. I feel even more connected to the community and secure being away from home and in a different country. Coming to class just puts a smile on my face, hence why I am always in class which I think is a good thing.”
- “This has been an interesting class to say the least. It has definitely been one of the more engaging classes I've taken. It has given me a new perspective on play. I've enjoyed the multidisciplinary aspects of the course and their relationship to play. This class has also shown that there are still parts of the university that I am unaware of. The lab on the top floor of the science building is a virtual reality lab that offers a place for creative expression of ideas for all students.”

- “It is unusual for a President of a University to come into a classroom and talk to students about his childhood play and his current play. When the President came to class and shared his personal experiences with us, it is something that I don’t think any of us will forget and it was very kind of him.”
- “I like the fact that this class incorporates many different fields of study. The class entails elements from neurobiology, genetics, anthropology and psychology and ties them together to explain the relationship between neurobiology and the effect of play and interpersonal relationships on the brain.”
- “I also enjoy the fact that the class involves a variety of learning styles. By alternating between learning styles, the class becomes more engaging as well as builds stronger neural pathways responsible for recalling the information.”

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# Chapter Six: Getting Past the Wall & A Creativity Exercise!

So, are you all in?! Maybe now you're sold about this playful pedagogy stuff. Maybe you've been sold before even reading this book. But the buy-in is the first step! The second step is the *how* – how do I bring play into my teaching? What does that even look like? Well, hopefully this book provided you a starting place for ideas and ignited your inner creativity and innovation to keep designing playful learning activities. But, even with the buy-in and an understanding of the *how* of playful pedagogy, sometimes there are still barriers that prevent us from actually doing these things in our classrooms. We've been there and, in many ways, still struggle with some of these barriers. To explore these barriers further, the following is one of Lisa's Professors at Play website blog posts from May of 2021. It seemed important to share here.

## The Wall

(not related to the Pink Floyd song, but you were hoping)

Let's be honest, there are a lot of personal and systemic reasons why bringing play into our classrooms is hard. But, in order to do something new and break out of the status quo we have to figure out what stands in our way. That pesky wall of anti-change factors is to blame. Without identifying what makes up our "walls" and then working to overcome those factors, we likely won't change. For example, you could really want to be a better friend but until you can figure out what gets in your way of *being* better, it will only be a half-assed aspiration and flimsy promises made to another person. Finding the barriers to the change is where the magic is...that's just good ol' advice for anything in life.

Lecture-based teaching seems to be this bad habit that's been passed down from generation to generation of academics and we just keep doing it despite how boring and largely ineffective it is. I'm skeptical of any "tradition" or norm that's been in existence for centuries and keeps being just "the way we've always done it." Don't get me started on my disdain for traditions.

Despite lecture-based teaching being the primary mode of education for so long, and even more recent literature indicating that lecture actually isn't the most effective mode of teaching, many faculty are still slow to adopt a more active, engaged, or playful approach. It seems simple to me but I realize there are barriers that influence our way of existing in academia. I think there are some structural reasons for why it is the way it is in academia. It's this way because it works for certain groups of people. In my heart I don't think the traditional mode of teaching works for students but I think in a way it works for faculty. And maybe students *think* it works for them but that's simply because their neuropathways are

carved out to passively learn. I don't want to lump all faculty into one category or characteristic but I am talking broadly about academia being largely similar across institutions.

So, let's look at some of the bricks in the wall...

### Safety and Comfort

It really is easier to continue to do what you know than to try new things and to potentially take a risk by doing something that you are not certain about or that may require you to give up some control. It may feel safer to continue to teach the way we do when students' feedback on our teaching is considered in our promotion or merit review. Change is scary, especially when it's trying something potentially out of your comfort zone. Not to mention, faculty work very hard on their lectures and lesson plans so who is happy about re-doing everything that you've worked so hard to construct. But we never learn or grow very well in our comfort zones so...

### There's No Time, There's Never Any Time! (Jessie Spano meltdown, anyone?)

Many faculty already feel limited in their time and resources so the thought of spending time doing something they don't necessarily *have* to do for their job is off-putting to some. When I was a new faculty, I certainly felt the time crunch and felt as though I was just trying to stay afloat so there wasn't much space for creative thinking at that time. The number of roles, activities, committees, etc. that faculty are required to pour time into is a barrier for anything extra. But I'd rather spend extra time (or protect my time to make the time) to work on creative, fun, and playful endeavors so to me, it's a choice...You make time for what matters to you. Learn to say "no." It feels so good. AND, when we are playful people in life and work, it's amazing how you are more productive and all of a sudden feel as though you *have* more time. Play is magic, people.

### Habit and Modeling

I think we can become creatures of habit in a sense where rigid lecture has been modeled to us so it's what we know and so when we are finally a professor ourselves, we end up doing it that way too. Then our students see us teach in that way and then if they enter a teaching position, it gets mindlessly passed down from generation to generation of academics. But if we recall boring lectures from our training days, we can admit we never learned very well that way so we need to be mindful about our approach to try something new. Our brains disengage when bored. Spice it up, y'all!

### Systems of Academia

As faculty, we are told to be innovative and creative and yet we are not rewarded for those things. Promotion and merit reviews tend to value quantity over quality. *How many committees are you on? How many publications did you get? How many classes did you teach? How many students did you advise?* These evaluation measures do not reward or support innovation, change, or reflective practice. How can we value a more playful, flexible, innovative approach if our universities and colleges don't allow space for tinkering or risking failure? Sometimes the structure of higher ed and the policies we must navigate around limit our ability to demonstrate excellence in teaching. Sure, this suggests a deeper effort to enact policy change—that's a part of the Playvolution. But, until then, I ask myself: *How can I bend the*

*rules without breaking the game?* Don't even get me started on teaching being viewed as a second-class citizen to research efforts. That's a related but entirely different book.

### Social Scripts of Play in Adulthood

There is a bias in adulthood and in academia that says seriousness equates to rigor and so anything that's playful is often considered trivial or "soft" thus not holding students to high standards. This issue deserves much more space than I have given it here but the bottom line is, we have been socialized to believe that play is for kids and not serious adults – and that is a problem. It's problematic for our health and well-being and it's problematic for providing adequate space and legitimacy for faculty to break out of the "serious mold." We must resist societal messages that mandate people to one way of thinking and behaving. It's a trap. It's mind control. "...We don't need no education, we don't need no thought control." Okay, sorry, I just can't stop thinking about Pink Floyd's *The Wall*...just so good.

### Deadpan Perception

The systems of academia as well as the social scripts of play in adulthood make it that a playful approach isn't always taken seriously. This can lead to faculty feeling as though they need to fit the mold of seriousness. So, in the quest to be taken seriously, respected, and seen as a rigorous academic, we avoid playfulness like the plague. It's fear-based mostly. But, like Will Smith says in After Earth: "Danger is very real, but fear is a choice." (*I wrote this before the 2022 Grammys but I'll just leave this Will Smith quote anyway 'cuz I like it ☺*). I truly don't believe being playful is something that will get us fired. It might make some "deadpans" (as Alison James & Chrissi Nerantzi, 2019 say) view you differently but in the end, whose approval do you really need? If you didn't get your parent's approval when you were little, you will be more likely to need the approval of other people as an adult. Okay, I shouldn't have gone all counselor on you but I just couldn't help myself there. But there comes a point where you have to stop worrying about external perception and just follow your instinct and passions. If you limit your playfulness because you fear how you will be perceived, I dare you to try out counseling to work through that unmet need.

So, step three in becoming a more playful instructor: Figure out what holds you back. Find a way to address that barrier and remove it or blow right past it!

### The Worst Idea Ever

Okay, okay, we know what you are going to say next: *I'm just not a very creative person so thinking of playful ideas is too hard for me.* Yeah, you and every other academic. Obviously, this is a grand overgeneralization on our part but it's a dramatic way to communicate our belief that academia kills creativity. Semi-side note: do you know that if you put a frog in a pot of boiling water, it will immediately jump out to safety but if you put that frog in a cool pot of water and gradually heat the water to a boil, the frog won't notice the subtle yet dangerous increase in heat and it will die. Graphic, we know, but that's what we believe happens in academia – but instead of a frog dying, it's our creativity and playfulness.

Over years of being in academia, I (Lisa) began noticing that I wasn't thinking outside of the box much anymore. I noticed that I had stopped creating – both personally and professionally. The day I realized this was a sad day for me because I was always a little "out there" and loved to create new things that

never existed before. A little while after realizing academia had killed my creativity, I came across the idea of fun in teaching and I felt like I had gone back to my creative roots except as I tried to think up fun and playful pedagogical ideas, I was having a hard time thinking beyond what had been taught and modeled to me. It was as if my creative neural pathways had shriveled from under-usage.

So, David and I came up with an idea that we use to exercise our creative brain. We call it the *Worst Idea Ever*. It's pretty easy in principle and quite powerful in practice. When facing some problem in your teaching or to simply generate new and creative ideas, follow this simple recipe:

1. Think of a solution to the problem that is, quite literally, the worst idea ever – that *will* likely get you fired, or at least in a lot of trouble if it was actually executed. The more outlandish the solution, the better. Make it wild, wacky, inappropriate, and impossible in practice.
2. Once you are done transgressing all manner of policy, decency, and common sense, take a look at the really bad ideas that you generated and see if any of them might be salvageable into something useful and playful. Think about how you can pare down your idea into something still “out there,” but not illegal, dangerous, or mean. In other words, figure out how to execute your idea, in a slightly adapted way, without getting fired! (\**We are not responsible for anyone getting fired if you don't pare back your worst ideas before implementation!*!).
3. Repeat over and over again for the rest of your life for fun, to exercise your creative neural pathways, and to come up with playful and creative activities for your classes.

See? Easy peasy.

An example might be something like this:

If you recall my (Lisa’s) Gerald the Giraffe children’s book case study example in chapter three—that was generated from a *Worst Idea Ever* brainstorm session. I was thinking of really bad ideas for teaching and one of them was: *sit my master’s students down on the carpet in front of me sitting crisscross apple sauce and treat them like Kindergarteners and read them children’s books for the entire class period*. Not only would that be a highly unproductive class, I am sure my students would maybe enjoy the stories but would not enjoy being treated like 5-year-olds and I’d definitely get some bad end-of-semester reviews. I thought, *that is a terrible idea but I might be able to use children’s books in my classes!* Then one night I was reading *Giraffes Can’t Dance* to my kids before bedtime and it hit me: use this book as a case study! Poor Gerald could use some counseling.

And, here’s a look into David’s brain and his Worst Idea:

I am wondering how to get my class more engaged in class discussions. Students seem to largely be shy, bored, and disinterested. How can I get them more excited to engage in discussions? So, my worst idea ever is.....(bwahahaha!) I am going to bring a Super Soaker to class. When I ask a question, I am going to look around the room and when I call on a student, if they don’t answer immediately, I’m gonna blast ‘em with water! That will get them talking. And, get me, um, fired.

You can see probably a handful of ways that this idea is a VERY bad idea from guns in schools, to soaking people who don’t want to be soaked, to forcing engagement, and more! So, how can I pare this really bad idea back? Well, what about a nice soft Nerf ball. And I toss it to a student as an invitation to answer. Once they are done, they can toss it to another student, who will answer. That sounds fun and

engaging. And hmm, maybe I can add hoops around the room. If the student wants to try and make a basket, they can go for a shot. If they make the shot, they get a prize. Or maybe extra credit. But if they miss, they answer another question. That will be fun and keep everyone on their toes.

See, from a terrible idea to something useful. That's how the *Worst Idea Ever* works. It allows you to think so far outside of the box that you are no longer confined by it. It loosens you up by accepting all the possible consequences as a part of the initial brainstorm—not limiting our imagination because we need it to be “reasonable.” It’s only when we think wildly that we have a large, colorful canvas full of possibilities. Once you have your creativity in gear, it’s pretty easy to modify an idea into something that is both reasonable and playful.

So, go on, give it a try. You might find that hiding behind your worst ideas are your best ideas.



# Focus On: A Metaphor for Play's Place in Learning in Higher Education

## White Water Rafting and...Play

A re-print from one of Lisa's P@P blogs

My (Lisa's) step uncle was an avid white-water rafter who unfortunately died from cancer. At his funeral, his nephew described the life lessons he had learned from his uncle about navigating rivers. Quoting his uncle, he said:

*"The water is always stronger than you are, organize your tools and effort, and work with the current. Your goal isn't to steer the boat so much as putting it in a beneficial position for the currents of the river to steer it."*

The impact of play in learning is a lot like this white-water lesson. Imagine that the water is the student's stress and barriers to learning and traditional education (strict, hierarchical lecture-based teaching) is like fighting the currents to try to "steer" students' learning. However, using play is like organizing your tools and effort to work *with* the current. Play reduces stress and anxiety, increases a sense of safety, and allows students to better concentrate in order to access the course content in a way that is like simply "putting the boat in a beneficial position for the currents of the river" to steer it toward success.

We believe that instead of expecting students to enter learning free of challenging currents which you must fight against, play enables us to work *with* students to provide a more humanistic form of education that opens students up to learning. We can't expect that our students are always centered, focused, and ready to learn. Realistically, we must cultivate that *with* them. Play does that – it cultivates a warm classroom environment with trust and safety. Play's presence reduces stress, fear, anxiety, and balances out the seriousness of learning so students can approach it from a centered place. Play awakens students' motivation and excitement to learn so the material becomes more intriguing. Students who are motivated and feel safe, become vulnerably engaged, and are more willing to take risks, make mistakes, and receive feedback. When students are allowed this type of learning environment, their learning becomes self-directed, personal, and meaningful.

It might be too dramatic to suggest that play is often an undervalued and hidden superhero in education...but we will let you decide that for yourself.



# **Chapter Seven: What Now? Where To? Who's Out There? By Play Researcher Alison James**

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These pages have provided a plentiful, varied, and passionate evidence base for the importance of play in higher education. The examples from multiple authors offer inspiration and instruction for educators who are new to or not confident with playful learning and for those who now think they might have a go themselves. They also constitute a body of collected work which adds to the increasing visibility of play in higher education. This does not mean it is uncontroversial, but it does mean that educators are going public with their use of play. Not everyone has felt able to do this for reasons already given earlier in this book.

Usefully, the collection body swerves around debates as to the nature, importance, and meaning of play. These are important issues but if we want to, as I assume we do, fully achieve the Playvolution in HE we need to focus on other questions. These are: Is the use of play pedagogically sound, humanly enriching, and does it inspire learning and connection? That is, connection to the subject, the educational context, to peers, to tutors, and to the wider world. I see authors in this book answering emphatically yes to all parts of these questions.

The good news, as underscored here, is that the last five years have seen signs of change. There has been a rise in playful learning conferences and events, networks, clubs, and writings about practices which suggest a shift in the zeitgeist. Three great publications about playful learning (in addition to this one, of course) are the *Journal of Play in Adulthood*, *Playful Higher Education* (Toft-Norgard et al, 2022) and *The Power of Play: Counterplay* (Poulsen et al, 2017) Newer initiatives, along with Professors at Play, include the Playful University Platform, led by Rikke Toft-Norgard and the Playful University Club at Exeter University in the UK, founded by Maarten Koeners.

There are many others, including long established bodies, such as the Playful Learning Association in the UK which has existed for over a decade. Educators are finding and/or creating, their tribes and taking steps towards critical mass. Research is being undertaken to increase theoretical understanding of playful learning at university. Publishers who hitherto have been nervous to take on texts for adult

learning that have “play” in the title, are becoming braver. Just like ferns in woodland, playful learning is unfurling the first fresh fronds of credibility and, as it establishes, is releasing its spores into the air and seeding them widely.

My own academic life has been spent experimenting with, and exploring, playful, creative and imaginative forms of teaching and learning (James & Brookfield, 2014, James & Nerantzi, 2019, James, 2022). I have been in good company of many other playful educators in examining the pros and cons of play in HE. My latest study builds on all these experiences. I’ll focus on it here, as I feel it complements the industry and inventiveness displayed in this Playbook. In introducing it I want to return to the editors’ words early on which spoke to me:

What if we changed our perspective from “you can’t make a horse drink” to “how can we inspire the horse to be thirsty?” (Jansen & McConchie, 2020)

My study looked at why the horse came to drink in the first place, what it was drinking, how much it was drinking, and how it caused other horses of all kinds to drink too. Like writers in this Playbook, my study also found out why some horses refuse to drink from the play trough, even if other troughs are dry as a bone.

Let’s turn back the clock three years (if we can remember that far back. Sometimes it feels like two of those years are missing in action). In 2019 I received funding from the Imagination Lab Foundation to carry out a study of the use and value of play in higher education. Its aim was to explore the use and value of playful higher education internationally. In line with the interests of the Foundation, it also had a special focus on play in the context of management education, although it gathered examples and input from across the disciplines.

Thanks to COVID-19 it changed from being an interactive and face-to-face enquiry to an online one. Through it, I gleaned primary data from 120 survey responses and 65 semi-structured interviews and involved participants in over 20 countries. It was underpinned by a range of academic encounters and extensive literature, as well as my own experiences of playful teaching and academic development.

My findings resonate with many of the points made implicitly and explicitly in this Playbook. Six of these are that:

1. All disciplines can play.
2. While historically some disciplines may be associated with particular kinds of play (e.g., performative play in dance, drama and theatre; medicine – surgical ‘enactments;’ physical play in sports; role play and simulations in management and business), in fact, play-forms across all disciplines are infinitely varied and the disciplinary boundaries are loose and permeable.
3. There is significant inventiveness going on in higher education, even if we cannot locate it or it is deliberately under the radar.
4. Educators are both passionate and nervous about playful learning – the latter because of the negative perceptions they think it might garner.
5. These negative perceptions stem from misunderstanding, fear, and narrowly held beliefs in the wider educational community about what constitutes ‘proper’ teaching at an advanced level.

6. There are huge divergences in how people understand play and how they feel about their most favoured play practices and the value of these. What participants and secondary data reveal is the extent to which play can add almost limitless value to and within a learning experience; just as contributors in this volume have made apparent.

The third and fourth points above have strong echoes in this Playbook too.

From a theoretical perspective, I also explored the seven rhetorics of play, created by the eminent play theorist and psychologist Brian Sutton-Smith (1997). He described these as value systems and ‘persuasive discourses’ which reveal the use and significance of play in different contexts. In so doing, I considered what they could tell us about the value of play in higher education. Participants’ accounts of what they do, and why, made clear the kinds of play and rhetoric that are accepted in higher education and those which are less popular.

I write about these in my full account of the study (see references) and I won’t go into them here. What they do show, however, is that arguments for the value of play in human life have been made for several centuries. What each of these focuses on will be determined by its context or discipline. An animal behaviorist might focus on the physical responses or evolutionary uses of play, while a sociologist may look at how play affects social interactions and developmental behaviors.

In the context of higher education – which, in this study, largely meant at university – educators valued play for many reasons, among them because it is a means of:

- Being authentic to the self and to one’s professional and life values.
- Connecting to self, peers, teachers, subject and wider community.
- Engaging with complex materials, mental issues, and techniques.
- Exploring scenarios and making decisions, often with gaps, constraints and challenges in situations, information and resources.
- Making learning memorable.
- Bringing learning alive – one participant memorably referred to bringing in play when they had evaluated ‘how much dead was in the room’ (i.e., when momentum, interest, and energy had waned).
- Catering for multi-sensory and multimodal learning preferences.

These also find strong echoes in the Playbook and there were many others. The third of these chimes nicely, but sadly, with Lisa’s story of her white-water-rafting step uncle, and of how students have to learn to navigate their own kinds of currents while they study.

Contributors to the Playbook are well aware that some of the objections to play are not always directed at other pedagogic approaches, such as experiential/active/problem-based learning. And yet, all of these may have a play-based or playful element. The old adage ‘a rose would smell as sweet by any other name’ is definitely not borne out in the case of play; where sometimes it is masked by terms like exercise – what a participant termed “weasel words” – to avoid any resistance.

Resistance comes from many factors but in the study, as the editors do here, I conclude that the two biggest ones are fear and misperception. Fear of being criticized, seen as dumbing down the academy, being irresponsible with a fee-paying student’s time, looking like an in-credible academic – one whose

reputation and capability is undercut by the use of childish activities. Misperceptions arise from too narrow of an understanding of what play is, and the inability to point to reassuring markers of ‘okayness’ — mainstream use and a significant literature/research based on the subject to lend playful HE weight.

Fear and misperception are worsened by unfounded assumptions about what is being proposed – that playful learning can only mean time out from the subject, kicking over the traces of anything that has gone before, and insisting on certain kinds of play over others. The first two of these are nonsense and the third one will depend on context. However, this book and my own investigation shows all kinds of play can have their day. Sometimes those who are nervous about playful learning do not understand that good educators who play do so from an informed base, judiciously, with all the kinds of framings and reflections that go into the planning of any important (and *serious* – though it pains me to use the word) educational endeavor.

As I did my own framing and reflecting on findings from my study, I identified a number of actions that could answer these misgivings and enable play to cohabit with other effective pedagogic approaches. In order to create a culture in which playful learning can thrive I suggest the following six aspirations (James, 2022):

1. **Create, explore, and support play culture** – Creating, exploring, and supporting a play culture that is open, tolerant and respectful of difference. To do this I suggest starting small, trying some practical magic (this Playbook is a great help for that), and fostering a live and let live attitude. For this last I suggest we make a space for the open and honest airing of assumptions. Not – I hasten to add – the recital of entrenched prejudices, but conversations which explore genuine concerns, thoughts, beliefs about play. I outline a small activity which, after creating it, feels like I was inspired by the work of Nancy Kline and her outlines for how we reframe our bedrock assumptions about things that may neither be true nor constructive.
2. **Rebuff negativity and myth-making** – As already suggested, playful educators often hear fictions about play – that it dilutes or replaces high quality learning. Airing assumptions will be a good way to address this, and also the identification and discussion of certain false dichotomies – the play vs. work one is an obvious example, education vs. entertainment is another. In each of these cases the two can join together; they are not separate. Another way to rebuff any negativity is, of course, by
3. **Research play** – Researching play in university learning/subject areas to deepen understanding and reflect critically on its complexities. There are already many examples of research undertaken to create a theoretical basis on different aspects of adult playful learning (e.g., play moods (Skovbjerg, 2017); signature pedagogy (Toft-Norgard et al, 2017); play for educational development (Nerantzi, 2015); the meaning and definition of play (Forbes, in progress), evaluation of play (King, 2018)). The potential field is vast and the range/size of questions and subjects that could be considered are limitless. Some of these questions are also about whether or not the field needs some universal theorizing, or whether, in fact, it is more realistic to have a broad and mixed economy. The only way to know is to do the work (come on y'all!).
4. **Allow for a wide spectrum of play** – Allowing for a wide spectrum of play, including free play, without imposition or exclusion. One of the findings that struck me most about my study was the extent to which playful educators could hold diametrically opposed opinions on the same

thing. I dedicated a section of my study to this; calling them polarities of play. These opposites included views around the extent to which play could be all embracing or selective, inclusive, or exclusive, predicated on certain forms of cultural capital and prior experiences and knowledge, or open to all, irrespective of background. Primarily play with a purpose was welcomed by playful educators, whereas truly free play was less frequently engaged in; no doubt because of fears over time wasting or value for money. This did depend a little on disciplinary context, however, as well as how you define free play. The difficulties of obligatory play are ones to consider also, with coaxing, not coercing, preferable to ‘enforcing fun.’ This point goes hand in glove with 1 and 3, as creating playful experiences in which everyone can participate and enjoy in some way is not always easy.

5. **Create or join local or global networks of play people** – we can expand by creating or joining local/global networks of play practitioners, educators, researchers. Professors at Play is an obvious and successful example of one of these and I have cited others earlier. Just as universities and research groups have long had special interest groups (SIGs) for all kinds of activity, so playful learning can benefit from its own home – however small and informal – within an institution. From little acorns do mighty oak trees grow. I have found too that the pandemic has forced/enabled us to participate in global networks even more vigorously than before, via Zoom. This in turn helps us find out who is doing what where, and who is not doing what and why. A section of my study also touches on educational cultures which may or may not influence this. By joining these networks practices are learned, reviewed, expanded on, shared and many playful educators have found they are not alone, or mad.
6. **Evaluate appropriately and judiciously** – especially if existing metrics and measures do not allow for a true consideration of playful learning. In considering the relationship between play and research, several participants argued that if we only investigate new things through old ways we will miss real opportunities for growth and change. The need for review applies just as much to what we call ‘proper’ research as it does to ‘proper’ teaching and learning. This kind of enquiry has invaluable potential. Many educators feel that the kinds of evaluative measures that are currently favoured, particularly in Westernised universities, are not always fit for purpose. They do not allow for intangible or indirect benefits of learning in certain ways, or prize certain outcomes over others.

What we also need, in tandem with these six suggestions, is that those of us who are passionate advocates of playful learning are also positively critical. Being at the front to spot when play is not beneficial, enjoyable, appropriate or well-managed is as important as being there to tear down the walls of tired teaching practices and outdated beliefs. Even the most staunch of playful educators and researchers expressed to me their concerns that some approaches to playful learning are ill thought through, uncritically accepting of anything anywhere and that some playful research has weak foundations in terms of its scope and design. Other playful educators are also strong defenders of the academy and of the rigors of traditional education, when it is well designed and delivered. It is essential that playful educators who want to extend the power of play more widely are part of the critical conversations, rather than leave them to external observers. We need to be honest and balanced in our scrutinies of playful learning, not just its defenders.

From all the data, as well as extrapolating headline messages and recommending ways to foster an accepting culture, I offered two further distillations. One was a mini-portrait of play in HE (in place of a definition) and the other was my offering of eight principles for creating a framework for play in HE. I omit the former but, should anyone have the energy to formulate a framework, here are the latter to help inform its design:

1. *A loose but tight fit* – Broad enough to welcome all disciplines, while equally allowing for specificity to suit the subject and its players.
2. *Reflective and insightful engagement* – These are mutually supportive. Thinking about what our play experiences have meant and revealed to us.
3. *Inclusive and respectful behaviours* – Being aware of the times when play might exclude possible players and how to avoid this; being respectful in how we voice our play preferences and concerns and in how we respond to the equally respectfully expressed views of others.
4. *A scale of orchestrated freedom* – If participants cannot play freely, that they have some element of freedom in their play. This also allows for a way in which they can cease to play, if desirable.
5. *Open and receptive mindsets* – These in terms of environment, culture and behaviour at all levels
6. *A sense of origin and direction* – Thought has been given as to why play is being introduced and how it might unfold. There is a reason for the play, even if there is not predetermined outcome.
7. *An informed basis* – This may be empirically founded and evaluated or theoretical and scholarly or both.
8. *Multiform, multi-vocal, and multi-sensory aspects* – Almost anything can become play if we so make it. Allowing for all variations of play that are ethical and non-harmful (James, 2022).

The Professors at Play Playbook gives us rich and extensive material from which we can take all of these principles forward, as well as many more that I have not thought of. What would you add?

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# A Bit About the Authors/Editors

## Lisa K. Forbes, PhD, LPC, RPT™



Hello, I am Lisa. I am a Pieces. I love graphic T's and I wear too many rings and braided bracelets. Sorry, not sorry "professionalism." I love plants, cats, kombucha, my kids/family, and the beach. I play on four adult soccer teams; indoor, outdoor, women's and co-ed. Some people think it's weird how intense I am about soccer. It's probably just that I am trying to re-live my college soccer days. Or, that soccer is a form of play that completely satisfies my soul at the deepest level. Let's go with that.

I earned my master's in clinical counseling and my PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision because I am obsessed with counseling—so much so that I have to do counseling and teach about counseling—basically, I scream about counseling from the rooftops. And, yes, some of my graphic T's are about mental health. ☺

I am Assistant Clinical Professor at the University of Colorado Denver and I teach

people to become licensed professional counselors. I am also a play therapist (mental health counseling for children) and I maintain a small side clinical practice working with clients from 3 to 12 years old. Obviously, I am obsessed with play. I find play to be a powerful force not only in our personal lives but also as a therapeutic medium for healing and to create a powerful learning process. I'd love for my life's work to be about advocating for play in adulthood and higher education and fighting back against all the rigid, harmful status quo's that restrict people's well-being and human freedom. I am completely passionate about playful pedagogy and proud to be a Professor at Play.

David Thomas, PhD



David Thomas is the executive director for online programs at the University of Denver and an assistant professor, attendant, in the department of ...oh wait. There's Lisa being goofy and reminding me to play. Seriously. As someone whose academic area of study is fun, sometimes I forget to stop thinking about fun and have a little fun. When I am not researching fun architecture, teaching about playful places and pontificating about fun in the workplace, I love to hang out with my dogs and my family (oh wait, my dogs are a part of the family), read about magic and run Immersive Denver, an organization all about playful forms of art and entertainment. I am an unrepentant Disneyland fan and will go out of my way to explore fun place.

And yes, I do run the Online Program Services unit at the DU and I am professor in the department of Architecture at the University of Colorado Denver where I teach and research about fun. As a result, I have no choice but to be a Professor at Play. Oh, and if you are interested. I am a Leo. The best and most fun of all signs, don't ya think?

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