



## Episode 23: What Fun! How to Implement Gamification Strategies and Play-based Activities Into Your Course

### SPEAKERS

Tierney King, Kristin Ziska, Susan Wehling

#### **Tierney King 00:01**

This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast sponsored by the Teaching Professor. I'm your host, Tierney King, and I'm here to bring you inspiration, energy, and creative strategies that you can utilize in your everyday teaching. Most everyone loves a good game. So today we're going to be going through some gamification strategies and play-based activities that you can implement into your own class. So with gamification, there's competition, feedback, rewards, sometimes there's points or levels, and there's a lot of failure, which this failure can often foster a lot of good learning. And this isn't to say that everything should include some form of gamification, but when integrated correctly, gamification can increase student persistence and student engagement. To start us off, Susan Wehling offers a few activities she uses in her class, and explains how play-based activities can get students to study more and engage more in her class activities in this 20-Minute Mentor, What Five Play-based Activities Can I Use to Create an Active, Learning-Centered Class?

#### **Susan Wehling 01:11**

So my experience has been that if you are going to lecture, 20 minutes is fine, and then after that, you need to start incorporating some activities so that students will become more interested and more passionate about what you're teaching. Why do I play? I've incorporated play into the classroom because I get better buy-in from students and better attendance rates. Students also tend to do more homework, they're coming to class more regularly, and they want to do well when they compete in games. So I get more homework production, and also more studying - they don't like being caught without knowledge about what we're doing. So they really tend to study more, because they know they're gonna have to recall vocabulary and ideas in the class on the first day, sometimes, or the first week. And then usually once every week or every other week, I play associations. It's a very simple game. I'm sure you've all played it before. But I have students get in groups of, I don't know, four to seven, depending on your class size. And they don't need to have anything on the table except a piece of paper and a pen. And we just play associations. So I tell them, "Okay, I'm going to go ahead and give you the category. You have one minute and you list out every vocabulary word or idea, or concept we've learned in class so far related to the topic that I'm going to tell you." And I'll give them the association. For example, on the screen here, you can see religion and I'll say, "Okay, you have one minute, write down everything you can relate to religion, go ahead and go." So they're busy writing for a

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

**Tierney King 06:03**

It's easy to say, "Yes. I want to integrate this really fun game, my students are going to learn more, engage more with the content, and it's going to be great." But sometimes it can be a total flop. No one wants to play, maybe the directions are too complex, and it can just fall short. So how do you know when to use gamified elements so that it's effective, and so that it doesn't fall short? In Kristin Ziska's 20-Minute Mentor, How Do I Design Effective Combinations of Gamified Elements to Encourage Deeper Learning, she explains how you know when you should gamify elements of your course, and specific elements you can use to help you on your gaming journey.

**Kristin Ziska 06:41**

Students experience this honeymoon phase, much like a lot of us do with new ideas and new skills that we gain, and gamification is much the same. So by gamifying every single part of your class, students

might not respond to it as well. So how do you know when to gamify? Gamify when things get a little bit creative for students, when they have a really strong base to what you're teaching them, and they're able to think creatively about the content. That's when you know students are primed for gamification. Another time that you can gamify is when you are struggling with how to get students engaged with something. So maybe the students don't necessarily find an innate interest in learning how to do financial accounting. By gamifying that part of it, you're encouraging students to think a little bit more critically about the content that you're giving them. Your Learning Management System, more than likely, has a quiz feature. You can gamify your course by using that quiz feature with the feedback turned on. Have students take a quiz that they can repeat several times and learn from it. There's also apps out there to help you out. There's one that I absolutely love to use, and it's called Classroom Teammates. I can create teams based on this app, and I can give teams points. This is a great way to keep track of team points and to update a leaderboard. You can also use apps such as Kahoot. Kahoot is free for educators and you can create quizzes and create competition within your course by using them. So you can have a student competition at the beginning of every one of your classes where students get quizzed on the reading. Number one year encouraging them to do the reading. You've got a little bit of competition in there, and they get to see leaderboards and earn points. Find ways to give students easy feedback. So if you tell them that you're concentrating on one thing as you're grading, that's a great way that you can create a sustainable gamification area. So you go through your papers and you analyze them based on that one thing and students get to retry to perfect that skill. Then maybe eventually, you badge that skill and you create leaderboards based on it. Begin to think unconventionally about the technology that you use. So if you are a Pinterest user, because we all are, how can you use Pinterest to create a gamified area of your course. So maybe Pinterest is what you use to give students the resources that they're supposed to use to complete the game. Or if your students are really into using Twitter, how can you gamify your students discussing things on Twitter, so maybe students compete to see who can come up with the answer the fastest using a Twitter-based platform. More than anything else, use the tools that you use in your daily life. If you're not a Twitter user, don't try to use Twitter. If your students aren't super into competing individually, then don't make them so use something other than Kahoot. The most important thing is that you're using technology that you're comfortable with because in the end you become the technology person in the room when things go wrong. So let's say you implement one or two games, or a play-based activity into class. How do you move from one or two games to consistently using gamification or play-based activities in your courses? In Kristin Ziska's 20-Minute Mentor, How Can I Use Simple Gamification Strategies to Engage My Students? She explains how badges are a great element to add to any game by activity. So what do you need to do to prepare to gamify more of your course? The most important thing is to keep playing games. Yes, I am telling you to keep playing games. You have to look at these games and analyze what are the game goals. So as you play more games, you notice that some games have the same goal. In Candy Crush you need to match three. In Dark Souls you need to survive and kill skeletons. They all have a certain game goal. So by playing more games, you get more ideas for game goals within your own class. And how do these games get you to concentrate on the objectives? So the game goal wants you to survive, but the objective is telling you that you need to survive and collect coins or survive and grow taller. How are they constructing their objectives? And how is the game goal related to that? Finally, how are they getting you to come back? What is the most fun for you? What did you notice? And what did you think about long after you turn that game off? Your students will be doing the same thing with your class. Another thing that you need to do is to explore your content. What areas of

your content scream for gamification for gamified learning? You need to begin thinking like a designer. So understand the importance of clear objectives. Are your objectives clear enough? Do your students know what is expected of them? As far as the overall game goal goes, you also need to understand that there needs to be clear assignments and clear pathways for students to follow. So have you provided all of the information that students need in order to complete your game appropriately? And finally, you have to understand the importance of feedback. Students can't improve if you haven't given them clear feedback, and failure just becomes failure if there isn't feedback associated. So how can you clarify your feedback and close your feedback loop for your students? One of the main ways that people gamify their class and find a lot of success is through the art of badging. So we all have earned badges for one thing or another. I am an ultimate shopper for Target. Granted Target is the only really good place that you can shop by my house, but I have earned all of the badges. So what does this mean? Well, number one, it means I shop at Target way too much. But it also means that I've paid attention. So instead of just going through Target and buying the milk and the chips that I love, I am paying attention to how I'm spending my money and how I'm navigating the store, and I didn't even realize it. So for badging to be done correctly, it really has to be meaningful to the student. And meaningful means that it's applicable either outside of your classroom into other classes, or it's applicable outside of the university into the real world. So by badging these meaningful skills, have a student get badged in effective writing, have a student get badged in something that they can actually take outside of your class and say, "Look, this is what I've accomplished," and create badging tracks for people. This aligns completely with the opt in aspect of gamification. So as the student progresses further and deeper into a certain area of content, they want something to show for it. By giving them a badge and showing that they've done these things, really encourages the students to dive as deeply as they can. And it also can go outside of my class, outside of the university into the larger world. So if they decide that they're going to apply for a magazine position with PC Gamer, they can show that they've done something, and they have an artifact attached. Oh, yeah, that's the last part, include an artifact. Something that students can leave, that they can show that they've actually earned this badge. So I can say that I've badged you guys for gamification, but what do you have to show for it? Well, right now, nothing. But if I told you to create an artifact that shows that you've earned that badge, so bring in student reflections that talk about the game, then you can show that you've gamified something and then you can show that you've earned that badge. Leaderboards are great. My students come into class and they start talking about the rank and why they are the rank they are in my class and what they're doing to improve. It's a great motivator for your competitive students. Unfortunately, for your non-competitive students, it's just another thing to look at. So how do you make a meaningful? Well, competitive students, you don't need to add any more meaning into it. But the non-competitive students, usually what I do is pair them up with a competitive ones. I create teams so that way no student is singled out. And there's a lot of ways that they can work together to improve their scores. It also functions as a de-motivator. So a student who's consistently, or a team that is consistently, in last place isn't going to find that leaderboard very motivating. They tend to give up. So usually what I do is either at the end of the unit or at midterm or final I reset so that way everybody starts back at level one. And you have to work your way back up again. It creates this world where number one doesn't always stay number one.

**Tierney King** 15:02

We said at the beginning that failing is part of the game. When we fail, we can keep trying, we can keep learning. And this goes for whether it's from a student perspective or an instructor perspective. So it's important as an instructor that you have fun with this, and you encourage the power of failure in a way that makes your students want to get back at it and try again,

**Kristin Ziska** 15:24

A lot of times we look at things from the instructor standpoint, and we don't always consider the students' standpoint. Finally, try and try again. If things failed, change them up a little bit, and then try again, see what happens. Your students aren't the only ones that need to embrace the power of failure. So keep getting out there and keep trying.

**Tierney King** 15:44

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