



Let's Discuss: Radical Empathy, Empathy Without Burnout, and a Recipe for Engagement

SPEAKERS

Tierney King, Mary Norman, Lisa Low, Julia Osteen

Tierney King 00:01

This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast. 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. This week's episode is sponsored by the Teacher Professor Conference. This year, join us in person in Atlanta to pursue your passion. All right, today, we have Mary Norman and Lisa Low with us from Texas Tech University, who will also be presenting at our Teaching Professor Conference in June. But before we dive into what you guys will be talking about at the conference, start us off with a little icebreaker. And we're going to start with, what does your morning routine look like, and how does it motivate you for the day?

Mary Norman 00:42

So my morning routine is always you know, best-laid plans, right? But the days that I feel the best, and I feel the most present and engaged and feel like I'm bringing my best to my students and my colleagues are when I get up and get outside and get exercising and moving. I feel that when I move my body physically, I'm able to kind of transport my mind someplace else, make a list of priorities, think of what it is that I need to accomplish for the day. So I really like to get up and get out the door. I do have three children, so full disclosure, that doesn't always happen. Like it happened yesterday, and it was a great day. Today that didn't happen.

Lisa Low 01:22

Well, unlike Mary, I do not have three children. I do have a dog and she thinks she's a child. But you know, it's a little bit fascinating. We haven't really discussed it, but the fact that we are morning routine people may in fact, you know, be an indication of why, you know, empathy, and our research is important to us. I am a firm believer in exercise in the morning. If I don't get out and get active and do something, my mental state is just not the same. My body isn't ready for the day. And I'm always, you know, I follow up that activity with some quiet time, you know, maybe meditation and maybe a devotion or reading of something inspirational. And then, you know, I'm big on to-do lists as well. What's the day look like? What do I need to be prepared for so that I can be flexible? So yeah, we both both kind of approach the day that same way.

Mary Norman 02:22

I'm also smiling and smirking over here because Lisa has this incredible physical planner. And she has this really teeny, tiny handwriting where she writes out everything she needs to accomplish for the day.

And she updates it on the daily and she crosses things off. She's fantastic at it, and I have a lot to learn from her in that regard.

Tierney King 02:41

That's so great. I think it's, I mean, whether you have kids or animals, they definitely keep us on our toes and make sure that we stick to a routine. And when we don't, it's not only ourselves that notice those differences, but our our dogs and kids as well. So your session at the Teaching Professor Conference is called, Empathy Without Burnout, How to Empower Students for Success. So can you tell me about the catalyst for this session? Why do you believe this topic of radical empathy and burnout is so important at this time?

Mary Norman 03:13

I'm going to jump in there and start off why I think it's important at this time. And then I think maybe it'd be great if Lisa would fill in kind of the start of this because she was really the start of this. But I think that radical empathy is something that's very important to talk about, because it's so needed right now. Our students are really being inundated with stressors that we've never before seen. And so I think it's something that we need to be aware of and practice. And the other thing about burnout, the reason that we need to talk about it is it's also all around us. And I know that I have some faculty members who really fight it, they fight burnout, they want to be here for the students. But as we get towards the end of the semester, I think it's always inevitable. And then you put the pandemic kind of teaching burnout on top of it. And I feel really fortunate that I found a group of instructors and teachers who are really diligent about fighting it and pulling each other out of it. And I've seen some faculty members that have made the choice to step away from teaching. That they really can't get beyond it and push past it, and it's sad and unfortunate, but I also have to choose to surround myself with people that are uplifting to me, and helped me remember why it is that I'm here and why I chose this profession.

Lisa Low 04:32

Yeah, and I'll just jump in there. I think, you know, the catalyst was definitely the pandemic. I mean, that's the elephant in the room, right? But the most surprising thing for both of us are the responses that are the typical college student issues, work life balance, mental health, time management, those kinds of things, just like us. And let me pause and say that again...just like us. I think I'm not the only person in the world that responds to, "Hey, I couldn't make it to class yesterday. Did I miss anything important?" And I have a physical reaction. I don't know about everybody else, but I feel a lot of emotions in my body. I have a physical stress response to that message, no matter who it's from, first before I even engage my brain. So I think what I really want to show is that if you just flip that switch just a little, and begin with an empathetic response, "Hey, I'm sorry you're having that issue," or "We missed you in class yesterday," and keep the snark out of it. That physically alleviates that stress response for me. Now, it may not work for everybody, but we've got lots and lots of tips like that. And, you know, that's just one way that we're managing that burnout.

Tierney King 05:54

Yeah. And you know, that's so, so important. Just these these little integrations of empathy that you that you can include in your classroom, it not only helps yourself, but you know, your students as well. It's just an overarching theme that helps everything. And so at the conference, you're going to provide

specific empathy tactics and resources that instructors can implement into their own courses. What empathy tactic do you use most in your course? And then what empathy tactic are you most excited to share at the conference?

Mary Norman 06:28

So I actually had an empathy tactic yesterday in my class. I was teaching PR campaign, and they had just turned in a pretty big assignment last week, and really waiting for feedback for me. And I just chose to have a moment to check in with them. And I read the room, essentially, and so I asked them two questions: How are you feeling about this class today? And so a lot of them just gave me some sort of a gesture back - a thumbs up or thumbs down or an in the middle? And then that led into a conversation of okay, but how are you feeling right now? They're all in their final semester of seniors about to graduate. And so I got drastically different answers in the class. They're feeling sometimes motivated, a little bit scared or nervous. But the bigger pressure of being about to graduate, they're also feeling excitement, unease about what's next? Are they going to move, get a new career, all those things? And I think helping them parse those things apart, and let them know that it's a safe place to talk about it is really helpful. And it sets a good tone for the day in my class.

Lisa Low 07:37

Well, I already mentioned one is that empathy messaging that's so easy. It takes a little practice, but to me, that's a really important tool in my toolbox. The other thing is, I tend to teach younger students, and using messages that let them know that they belong here, that they belong in the classroom, encouraging their self-efficacy, and that they can do this. Perhaps they didn't do as well as they wanted to on the test or on an assignment, but working with them, and always reminding them that, "Hey, I am here for you," you know, that is part of my job. And just those those subtle reminders, I think, are really important.

Tierney King 08:23

Can you guys, you know, you both said that you teach seniors and you teach younger students, and the fun thing is that you guys can both use those tactics in either or of those classes. And it doesn't matter, you know, what age group that is it's still beneficial no matter what. And then I guess lastly, at the conference, what do you hope attendees will walk away with after seeing and viewing your presentation? And what do you hope they'll gain by attending this session?

Mary Norman 08:50

I think that we hope our attendees walk away with some new tools in their toolbox, of course, and they're gonna get that from a lot of different sessions. It's a great conference. I always feel inspired when I watch, listen in or attend. And so I think I hope that specifically from ours, that they're not afraid to ask their students how they're doing, what it is that they're wanting to get out of the class or the semester, and then pushing that a little further to say, "How can I help as your instructor? What can I do to help?" And I think that one thing that Lisa and I have found is sometimes they need some really pretty simple things like a reminder to get an actual calendar or how to set up their Outlook calendar. And I know that Lisa has even taken her calendar in the class and shown them how she schedules out her day. So sometimes it's really simple things like that. And sometimes they're a little bit bigger and heavier and things that you take home at the end of the day, but I feel like no matter what a student's

going to tell me in those moments that I know how to respond. So that would be my hope that there's a sense of empowerment with all of it.

Lisa Low 10:01

Yeah, empowerment and peace, you know, more peace in their interactions with the students. I certainly am a work in progress. Definitely, in my teaching approach, even you know, at eight years of full-time teaching, but I can tell you that we've got such a variety of tools that if they just try one, just try one thing, and see how it feels, see how if it works, if it doesn't, there's no, you know, they'll come away with a lot of tools. But I would like to challenge listeners to try and experiment before you come to the conference. Open up your email in the morning, where you are very zen, you've started your day with a workout and you're feeling really good. And then you've got five messages from students that just suck the wind out of your wings, right? Try to use those empathetic messages, see how you feel. And really selfishly, of course, it's about the students, but it's more about me and how I feel, bringing the joy back to teaching and not feeling like oh, my gosh, I just can't take one more thing today, and not having to go in Mary's office and say, you know, I just I don't know if I can do this anymore, you know, and we've all been there. So these little incremental things, I think, will add value. And I think I would just like to hear from folks who have tried this little experiment, when they come to our session, how they felt about it, did it work for them.

Tierney King 11:35

So next up, we're going to chat with Julia Osteen, who is the assistant director for the Center for Teaching and Learning at Lipscomb University, and who will also be presenting at our Teaching Professor Conference in June. But before we dive into what you'll be talking about at the conference, start us off with one piece of advice you would give to someone starting their teaching career.

Julia Osteen 11:56

Thank you, I'm really excited to be here to share it today. You know, just to give you a little background on me, I made the transition to higher education almost nine years ago, and as a faculty member in the College of Education. But prior to that I worked in K-12 education for 27 years. So if I had one piece of advice to give someone starting out teaching, it would be to develop meaningful relationships with your students. I find that when students know you're in their corner, they're more willing to take risks and become vulnerable for true learning and engagement to occur. And my role in the Center for Teaching and Learning at Lipscomb University, I often coach professors toward their goals for teaching and learning. And inevitably, student engagement comes up in those conversations.

Tierney King 12:44

That's awesome. That's great advice. And then your session that you'll be presenting at the conference is called Recipe for Engagement: Strategies That Work. So tell me a little about this session, because you know, I was reading through it, and you include recipes and desserts and master chef and, you know, ingredients and kind of how does this all fit into your session?

Julia Osteen 13:05

So just like great chefs create menus with a variety of ingredients, teachers need to put together a variety of strategies and techniques to reach today's learner. If we break down the anatomy of a class

lesson, we can see an opening to the lesson, which I would call the appetizer. And that serves to pique the students interests, there's the heart of the lesson, which I would call the main dish. And it provides foundational knowledge. And the opportunity for applying the content would be the dessert, which promotes the skills needed. What's oftentimes overlooked is an end reflection. And this would be complimenting the chef. It's much like when you're in a restaurant and a server comes to your table, and they say, "How was it?" and you say, "Oh, it was delicious," right? But this encourages in our students the development of metacognition. So the learning experiences in our classrooms feed our students' knowledge, and skill, so they can become the professionals in their chosen field they wish to become.

Tierney King 14:09

And then we don't want to give too much away, but in your session, you call it a student engagement buffet, where you offer specific strategies and best practices. So, you know, take me through just a few of those ideas that you're excited to share at the conference.

Julia Osteen 14:23

So I've already mentioned relationships as important. And they are very important to really to reach our learners today. So the opening activity really sets the tone for the entire class session that you have. And I feel like this is an opportunity to build relatedness and to create a climate that's conducive to learning. So the check-in activities that we'll be sharing really are key to a productive class session. I'm excited to share a number of those during the conference session. Also, we've all experienced classrooms that encourage student discussion of topics. Frankly, some people do this better. More than others, I was really curious as to what the professor's did who were the most successful getting students to open up and discuss. One strategy I came across is using discussion protocols. The protocols actually provide structure to scaffold the discussion without over directing the students. So students are still free to share their own ideas in regards to the content. But they do that within a framework. I'm also excited to share some of the protocols I've found most useful. I find when I share like this, that people in the session, also share some of the activities that they've tried this type of give and take is what I think makes the conference so valuable.

Tierney King 15:41

And then, you know, lastly, what do you hope people gain by attending your session? Specifically, what do you what do you hope they'll take away after this presentation?

Julia Osteen 15:51

I think that people attending the session will come away with first of all rationale. I think it's important for us to know why we do things. So that rationale for including engagement-type activities in their classes, but also some very practical ideas that simply they could take and just use the next day that they have class.

Tierney King 16:11

Whether you're driving to work, or you just need a 15-minute think session, we hope the Faculty Focus Live podcast will inspire your teaching, and offer ideas that you can integrate into your own course. For

more information on the resources included in this episode, please check out the links provided in the episode description.