Ludic Pedagogy: Taking a serious look at fun in the COVID-19 classroom and beyond

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected deep reflection in higher education classrooms: how do we attract and retain students to (temporary but nevertheless increasing) online learning experiences, how do we keep them at our universities and colleges, and how do we give students a learning experience from which they will remember meaningful information? In this paper, we introduce a new pedagogical framework that we call Ludic Pedagogy. We address the four elements of this model: fun, positivity, play, and playfulness. Each of the elements is described in turn, together with literature outlining how each contributes to a positive classroom environment that helps students engage with and learn course content. Examples of how the authors have used this pedagogical model are included and described. We suggest that instructors consider using the Ludic Pedagogy model so as to improve engagement, learning outcomes, and retention in their classes and broader university/college contexts.

Keywords: pedagogy, student success, student engagement, student retention, fun, play, playfulness, positivity.

Introduction

When Aerosmith frontman Steven Tyler was at a Texas drug rehab centre in 2008, he phoned his managers and asked them to "find me something fun to do when I get out of here." For Tyler, what he did after rehab had to be fun, because he needed something to look forward to (Vedantam, 2020). Shortly after Tyler got clean, he landed a role as a judge on American Idol, in which he was dubbed an "unalloyed genius" (Carramanica, 2011). Tyler's objective of having fun spoke not only to his rock star persona, but more so to his objective of giving his life meaning after drugs and enjoying new contributions to the entertainment industry. Tyler wanted to make sure that his "work" was fun.

A similar sentiment was inherent in our struggles during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although universities continued to operate, we were far from "business as usual." The COVID-19 pandemic emptied classrooms in favour of hybrid or online courses, faculty delivered recorded lessons with web-based assessments, and Thirsty Thursdays turned up dry. Our pandemic-induced isolation is now akin to Tyler's rehab: as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, how can we give renewed energy to making the academic experience fun, and how can we find renewed joy in our work? And there is no time like the present – we don't have to wait to be released from Zoom rooms or for the mask mandates to end. All forecasts point to blended and/or hybrid learning increasing across campus-based institutions worldwide, but this doesn't mean that students simply watch lectures online and complete activities on their own. We can make online, blended, hybrid, and face-to-face learning fun, and we can do it now.

The irony of courses moving online is that while campuses became significantly less populated, the concept of a university campus has become pervasive: classes take place in living rooms or kitchens, and on laptops or mobile phones. Yet this decentralization of the university campus appears to have negatively impacted students' perceptions of post-secondary life. Traditionally, students' positive experiences in university have been largely focused on social activities: parties, events, or residential life. We know that positive experiences are integral to not only attracting students to universities, but also to keeping students enrolled and helping them to thrive (Madgett & Belanger, 2008). To date, the extent of "positive experiences" for undergraduates has been largely limited to social endeavours: parties, events, or entertainment. With these social activities largely curtailed, many students may find little to be positive about in terms of their post-secondary experiences.

We suggest that, especially in context of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, universities ought to consider that a student's academic work can be integral to their positive experiences. How can learning be a salve rather than a chore? How can academic studies be part of a student's positive experiences so that retention is more about an affinity for learning rather than a means to an end or about where the parties are? The notion of enjoyable academic experiences is relevant to a face-to-face, online, or hybrid/blended learning environment.

Much of cultivating and sustaining a positive learning environment is in how one approaches teaching and learning. Here we outline a new model for post-secondary education: Ludic Pedagogy. From "ludere," Latin for "to play" or "to play games," Ludic Pedagogy rests upon the broad heading of fun, which is in turn supported by play, playfulness, and positivity. This pedagogical model is designed to reintroduce and sustain the joy of discovery into learning. Too often, post-secondary education needlessly sacrifices positivity and student engagement in the service of maintaining academic rigour. Ludic Pedagogy illustrates that the two goals are not mutually exclusive. We can have a fun, playful environment in which play and positivity invite a deeper and more meaningful learning experience. This is the goal of the Ludic Pedagogy model. Fisher et al. (2011) argue that "play and learning are not incompatible. It is not play versus learning but rather play via learning for which we must strive" (p. 353). Indeed, research suggests that the elements in this model serve to both better engage students and to enhance learning.

What Ludic Pedagogy Isn't

Ludic Pedagogy does not imply that faculty must play the role of both entertainer and educator; this pedagogical model does not insist that instructors are simultaneously stand-up comics or jesters-in-residence. (However, the option is not denied those who wish to take on a more creative or performative role.) Ludic pedagogy is inclusive of both extroverted and introverted instructors: it includes those who see themselves as educators with a confined role, as well as those who find room for a more nuanced connection with students. The model is inclusive of *everyone* who desires the engagement and success of their students; therefore, Ludic Pedagogy encompasses many other philosophies and practices that share the same conceptual space. Oads et al. (2011), for example, recognize the need for a positive university environment, highlighting the importance of pleasure and positive relationships in the higher education experience.

Ludic pedagogy is decidedly un-boring. It takes its inspiration from learning at its earliest and purest form. As noted by, for example, Almon (2004), fun and play are often the default setting in early education as children learn the basic – and arguably most important – concepts upon which all subsequent learning is built. In fact, the vast majority of research on the educational and developmental value of play focuses on children. Yet throughout a student's formal education, the amount of ludic content and spirit continually diminishes, moving from pedagogies of play for young students to the all-too-common factory (Leather et al., 2020) and banking (Friere, 1970) models of education. By early high school, fun and play have been almost entirely stripped from a student's formal education in favour of standardized tests, exams, and the acquisition of qualifying prerequisites (Olds et al., 2008; Ginsburg, 2007). In post-secondary course settings, fun and play are both even rarer, if not entirely nonexistent. Further, Gray (2011) laments the decreasing amounts of time allotted to children for play today compared to decades past, suggesting this restricted access to play has significant, negative mental health consequences.

A potential objection to employing the Ludic Pedagogy model is that doing so somehow erodes the scholarly impact or rigour of the students' course of study. To that we reply, "Hogwash!" "Balderdash!" "Poppycock!" or "Moonshine!" (our personal favourite). Enjoying the educational experience does not necessarily refer to actions or an environment characterized by frivolity and triviality. Instead, as outlined by Barrett (2005), fun can be entwined with rigor: "learning can be fun because it is hard, challenging, and stretches participants" (p 162).

There is a wealth of research examining the impact of and relationship between formal education and concepts such as creativity (Davies et al, 2013), humour (Bolkan et al., 2018), and engagement (Collaco, 2017). The Ludic Pedagogy model embraces all of these ideas and arranges them so as to allow faculty to better understand and formulate plans to implement such ideas in their teaching practice.

We are not the first pedagogical scholars to observe that academia balks at the notion of having fun in class; hooks (1994) observed:

> Learning should be exciting, sometimes even 'fun,' was the subject of critical discussion by educators writing about pedagogical practices in grade schools, and sometimes even high schools. But there seemed to be no interest among either traditional or radical educators in discussing the role of excitement in higher education. (p. 7)

In response, hooks suggests that, "our bonds are made stronger by shared humor, ruthless wit, and the laughter that gives us a break from the seriousness of it all" (1994, p. 196). Ludic Pedagogy is a response to hooks' call for the role of excitement in higher education. We argue that higher education can (and should!) be fun, contain laughter, and be downright enjoyable – if only we create the space for it to be so.

The Model: Fun, Play, Playfulness, and Positivity

Most students don't go to their university classes with an expectation to have a good time; the primary motivator tends to be extrinsic: grades and the eventual opportunities that those grades and a diploma or degree will afford them. Condry (1977) noted that these extrinsic incentives undermine both the process of learning and students' interests in returning to the topic. In

response, the Ludic Pedagogy model aims to address students' intrinsic motivation, and it is here that the model can have its greatest impact. The goal is to transform the learning experience from one dependent upon external motivators into one that is self-initiated and based on personal rewards inherent in the learning experience itself.

It is this intentional fostering of students' intrinsic motivation for the learning process that gives rise to the four elements of Ludic Pedagogy. Figure 1 illustrates that in the Ludic Pedagogy model, fun acts as the primary motivator, and is supported by play (the activity component of the model), playfulness (attitude), and positivity (affect). In this paper, we address the research on how each of the underlying elements – both individually and collectively – can positively impact both the teaching and learning environment and quality of learning through developing an expectation for and experience of fun. Each of the four components is addressed separately, while acknowledging that none operate in isolation: each element is inextricably connected to each of the other elements.
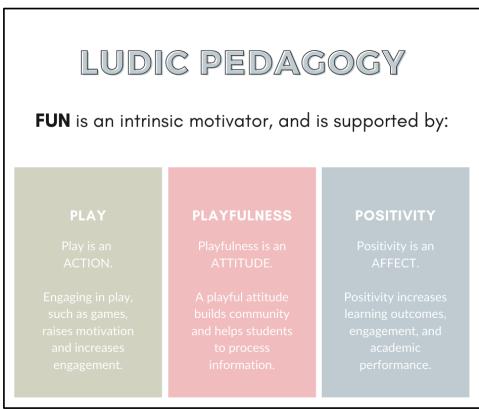

LUDIC PEDAGOGY

FUN is an intrinsic motivator, and is supported by:

PLAY	PLAYFULNESS	POSITIVITY
Play is an ACTION.	Playfulness is an ATTITUDE.	Positivity is an AFFECT.
Engaging in play, such as games, raises motivation and increases engagement.	A playful attitude builds community and helps students to process information.	Positivity increases learning outcomes, engagement, and academic performance.

Figure 1: Ludic Pedagogy Model

Element #1: Fun. Fun, despite its common use and significance in many, if not all, aspects of the human experience, does not have a widely-accepted definition in academic literature. Existing definitions range from generic conceptualizations of fun as an interactive process by which people create social, emotionally-weighted bonds with their peers (Podilchak, 1991), to such broadly-stated terms as to be effectively useless (Fincham, 2016). Ironically, there is very little serious academic writing on the topic of fun, owing largely to numerous ways in which the concept can be interpreted. McManus and Furnham (2010) note that fun is simultaneously used as a motivational concept, a trait concept, a range of behaviours, and a type of social situation.

In the context of Ludic Pedagogy, "fun" is operationalized as the motivational component of the model, encapsulating both intrinsic motivation and positive affect. Expectancy theory of motivation states, broadly, that motivation is a force compelling an individual toward a particular course of action, based on their expectation that one's behaviour will be followed by a particular outcome with a positive valence (Lawler & Suttle, 1973). Therefore, when students are presented with a classroom environment populated with the other elements of the Ludic Pedagogy model – play, playfulness, and positivity – they are likely to engage in those elements if they are seen as being instrumental in creating fun, an outcome with a positive valence. In this way, it is the potential for fun that motivates students to participate, engage with the ludic elements, and thus experience fun. In other words, fun is the result of something that someone does because they want to, and it is something that makes them feel good (or, at the very least, better).

Fun adds excitement to the learning process; hooks (1994) argues that such excitement is fundamental to the learning experience. Although fun can mean the presence of excitement, we suggest that fun extends much further than that. Fun can include, for example, enjoyment, curiosity, experimentation, engagement, and/or laughter.

The experience of fun is by nature inherently subjective (McManus & Furnham, 2010). Instructors attempting to incorporate fun as an intrinsic motivator must remain cognizant that fun is different for many people, and instructors cannot *force* any student or group of students to have fun; they can only create the conditions in which students are likely to experience it. However, we suggest that the practice of inviting and having fun is not as elusive as it may seem. Having fun with learning carries a lightheartedness and happiness that can function as an undercurrent or foundation in education. It may involve surprise, or doing something unconventional, unexpected, or different. Fun may involve connections amongst students. Or it may be the experience of seeing an instructor's unabashed love for the subject matter. Regardless of its form, fun acts as an intrinsic motivator (Whitton & Langan, 2019). Fun is a remedy for "the overwhelming boredom, uninterest, and apathy that so often characterize[s] the way professors and students feel about teaching and learning, about the classroom experience" (hooks, 1994, p. 10). Therefore, creating interactions, activities, exercises, or course materials that are – or at least could be – fun for a variety of students is one of the primary goals of incorporating Ludic Pedagogy.

For example, Sharon begins class with a poll, survey, or word cloud. This is a helpful way of getting students engaged at the start of class, and works particularly well in online delivery. One such example involved asking students (anonymously, of course) to confess if they were wearing pajamas to class at the height of the pandemic (see Figure 2). This poll, results notwithstanding, brought about lively discussion in the chat about giving up on buttons and zippers, and how exciting it had become to get properly dressed just to go to the supermarket. This kind of fun discourse creates prosocial bonds (Podilchak, 1991). The lighthearted disclosure and subsequent discussion make for a fun "icebreaker" that creates friendly dialogue and thus increases student cohesion. This kind of activity helps to create community, understanding, and connections, which pedagogical scholars such as Palmer (1998) and hooks (1994) deem essential to creating the freedom available in education.
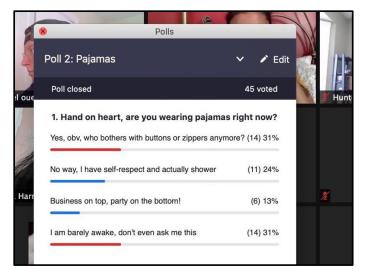
Figure 2: Zoom Poll by Sharon Lauricella, Winter 2021

Fun can also be embedded into course content. For example, Keith uses roleplay activities to facilitate students' understanding of theory and practice: in Business Negotiations, students practice negotiation skills through a simulated purchase and sale of an intergalactic spaceship. This participatory activity allows for deeper learning of the concepts (the difference between positions and interests, for example) and the building of skills (such as dealing with cultural ambiguity) in a context that is just silly enough to make it fun. Certainly, the same concepts could be employed using a less imaginative situation such as purchasing a used car, but the surprising content of the simulation gets students' attention and keeps them involved. It includes more engaging examples, funny explanations, and invites the possibility of thinking differently about negotiation so as to consider unusual arguments or avenues for discussion.

Beyond its role as a motivator and the inherent benefits that it brings to a learning situation, fun has also been shown to make learning easier. The relationship between fun and ease of learning arises from Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) (Sweller, 2010), a theory that formulates how cognitive resources are utilized during problem solving and learning. According to CLT, there are three aspects of cognitive load: (1) germane cognitive load, concerned with the cognitive activities that promote learning; (2) intrinsic cognitive load, which is imposed by the learning task itself, and (3) extraneous cognitive load, or the additional cognitive load resulting from the method by which the new material is presented (Hu et al., 2017). CLT argues that when teaching new material, the information should not be presented in a manner that imposes a high level of unnecessary cognitive load (extraneous cognitive load) (Chandler & Sweller, 1991). When fun is integrated into learning activities through play or humour, for example, overall cognitive load is reduced by moving that which would normally be in the extraneous category into the intrinsic cognitive load. By integrating fun into the intrinsic load, the overall cognitive load is thereby reduced. Reduced cognitive load, in turn, results in greater and more meaningful learning (Van Winkle, 2017). In other words, not only does fun better *motivate* students to learn, it also improves their *ability* to learn. Learning simply becomes easier when it is fun. Hu et al. (2017) provide examples of how fun activities and assignments have positive learning effects in a wide range of STEM programs, including the use of animal (and human) urination to illustrate both biology and engineering.

Element #2: Positivity. While fun functions as a motivator, positivity is an affect: it is the quality or state of being optimistic, in good humor, or experiencing positive emotions (Roffey & Quinlan, 2021). Benjelloun (2009), utilizing the term "humor," suggests that positive affect is "any event that makes the classroom experience pleasant" (p. 313). Taking this concept further, we propose that positivity is the affective state that dictates the potential success of implementing the Ludic Pedagogy model. Connecting back to Expectancy theory, students are unlikely to find positive valence in negative affect. Experiencing positive affect and perceiving that such affect is likely to continue through the classroom activity will encourage participation. Both faculty and students are capable of taking on a positive affect when it comes to teaching and learning. This means embodying positivity in how one chooses to "show up" to class, approach their work, or engage with others in the learning process.

The concept of positivity goes beyond the notion of happiness or joy in the classroom. Studies suggest that positive emotions may be a significant force behind enhancing psychological resilience (Fredrickson, 2001, 2003). Resiliency, in turn, is related to higher rates of retention in universities (Garza et al., 2014), and has a strong association with increased levels of academic performance (Egan et al., 2021). According to King et al. (2015), positive affect is predictive of higher student engagement. Other experimental results suggest that when experiencing positive affect, individuals' thinking becomes "more creative, integrative, flexible, and open to information" (Fredrickson, 2003, p. 333). The application of this finding to the classroom is immediately apparent: students entering the learning context with positive affect, and/or feeling such positive affect from the instructor, are more likely to have greater learning outcomes than those experiencing the same learning context with negative emotions. It is therefore clear that positive affect invites a more robust experience for students in a variety of ways.

This is not to say that students or faculty will never show up to class with a negative affect (e.g., stress, anxiety, grief) due to non-academic factors. In this case, when people are struggling with negative emotions, the classroom (or virtual space) could function as a refuge or "safe space" from otherwise negative factors. We also recognize that one cannot be expected to *continually* maintain a state of positive affect: "Negative affect also has its own purpose and in certain circumstances […] the experience of negative affect is necessary" (King et al., 2015, p 70). For example, when studying topics such as the Holocaust, systemic racism, or violence, positive emotions would be misplaced. However, students can experience adjacent positive emotions such as gratitude for learning, awe, or respect for course concepts. It is the overall sense of getting the most from learning that we encourage in taking on a positive affect in the Ludic Pedagogy model.

Positive affect can be achieved in a variety of ways. The most obvious is when an instructor serves as a model of positive affect. This means that the instructor, as facilitator or leader of a classroom, demonstrates positive emotions. For example, an instructor can be enthusiastic, welcoming, and/or engaging. The precise form that this positive affect takes on will vary from person to person, but modeling a positive outlook toward both learning and the class will go a long way in helping students to feel positive affect as well. For example, course evaluations from Sharon's students reported that, "Sharon's enthusiasm for this class is absolutely contagious," and "Sharon presents course material in ways that you can't help but love it." Even simple

positive gestures such as welcoming late students to class can build positive affect. Rather than admonishing a tardy student, the instructor can say, "Hi, Emma, come on in. We're just talking about…" Students ought to know that they are welcome in class and that their presence is valued. Such positivity sets the tone of the classroom and for the general affect as it pertains to the course.

Element #3: Play. Play is an activity; it is the behavioural component of Ludic Pedagogy. Like most of the core concepts of this model, "play" is not rigidly defined. While Spariosu (1989) has suggested that "play is one of those elusive phenomena that can never be contained within a systematic scholarly treatise" (p. xi), we argue that this view is rather extreme. Spariosu's description captures the problem of the ambiguity of play, and that a conceptual definition of play may be elusive, but we all engage in the activity to some degree, whether in scholarly context or not. With the goal of operationalizing the concept, we adopt a definition of play proposed by Van Vleet and Feeney (2015): "Play is an activity that is carried out for the purpose of amusement and fun, that is approached with an enthusiastic and in-the-moment attitude, and that is highly-interactive" (p. 632). To clarify the interplay between fun, play, and learning: play is the activity inspired by the intrinsic motivation of fun, all in the service of learning. That is, the desire for fun motivates the behaviour of play; engagement in the activity of play results in learning (Starbuck & Webster, 1991).

The suggestion that play has an important role in learning is not revolutionary. It is well-recognized that play is often the first form of learning to which children are exposed (Francis, 2013). Play, for children, aids in emotional development and the growth of social skills (Eberle, 2014). Recognizing the importance of play in education and human development is clearly seen in the earliest years of formal education, where it is unabashedly entwined with established educational programming. However, as children progress through formal education, the activity of play is slowly and systematically stripped out of the classroom. It is removed as a valued pedagogical tool until high school when very little, if any, play remains. This trend continues into higher education, where all too frequently play is considered incompatible with "serious" academic study.

To remedy the dearth of play in higher education, "gamification" of learning is one way to introduce more play into class. Games can raise motivation during learning processes (Iten & Petko, 2016) and can increase learning because games generally require fewer cognitive resources (Robson et al., 2015) than other "less fun" learning contexts. For example, Sharon does not deliver a final exam in any of the courses that she instructs. Rather, she holds an "Epic Finale," in which she leads a game that includes course content from the entire semester. Each year, the game differs – variations have included games based on Jeopardy, Taboo, and Pictionary. Similarly, when the one-year anniversary of COVID-19 isolation rolled around, Sharon noticed that students were physically exhausted and felt emotionally isolated. In response, she created a Kahoot game (https://kahoot.it/) that students played during an online class meeting. The game facilitated laughter, good-natured competition, and in keeping with Vogel's (2006) finding that games increase cognitive gains, students learned new facts, experienced increased understanding, and enjoyed higher engagement with course concepts through this hour-long game.

Element #4: Playfulness. Playfulness is an attitude and thus consists of affective and cognitive elements, as well as behavioural intentions. Therefore, as a concept, playfulness connects positivity (affect) with the behaviour of play (activity). Playfulness is important in the Ludic Pedagogy model because it:

> …is a state of mind, an internal predisposition that is composed of creativity, curiosity, sense of humor, pleasure, and spontaneity. Playfulness allows adults to approach activities with the same openness of mind with which the child approaches play; the beginning is known and a precise end is anticipated, but the unfolding may vary. With playfulness, difficult situations are perceived as challenges to be raised, occasions to learn, and possibilities to increase one's competence and skills. Furthermore, mistakes are no longer considered failure but rather a possibility to learn and grow. In adulthood, playfulness crosses the boundaries of play and extends to all life situations. (Guitard, et al., 2005, p. 19)

This definition demonstrates the value of playfulness to both the professor and the student in the higher education setting. Playfulness on the part of the instructor creates an environment more conducive to both learning and having fun. Students approaching classroom activities with a sense of playfulness are less likely to be discouraged (Guitard et al., 2005) and will enjoy improved learning outcomes (Jarrett & Burnley, 2010). While little can be done to directly adjust students' attitudes, instructors who authentically model such an attitude are likely to encourage a similar frame of mind in their students.

Research on playfulness in education found that a playful attitude can alleviate boredom, release tension, prevent aggression, and signify a sense of group membership (Bowman, 1987). Further, playfulness has also been shown to heighten creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) and aid in community building (Dandridge, 1986). Specifically in terms of post-secondary education, Proyer (2011) found a significant, positive relationship between playfulness and grades. This finding is notable not only for identifying the value of playfulness in a learning setting, but it is also one of the few studies of playfulness among adults in a learning environment (Tanis, 2012).

Engaging with a sense of humour is a key element of playfulness. Much like the concept of fun, no standard or generally accepted definition of "humour" exists (Ruch, 1998). Humour provides a wealth of benefits to pedagogical practice. When utilized by an instructor, it facilitates learning, attracts and retains students' attention, develops and maintains a positive perception of the instructor, and builds and maintains a positive relationship between instructor and students (Aylor & Oppliger, 2003; Gruber et al., 2012). Research has shown that humour creates a pleasant social context (Nesi, 2012) and builds positive attitudes and affect toward learning activities (Garner, 2006). The rationale for including humour in teaching and learning is evident and clear. However, humour integrated into course materials should be relevant in order to not disrupt ongoing learning processes (Bakar, 2019) by adding extraneous cognitive load or otherwise distracting students. To illustrate: one witticism commonly used in biology lectures refers to the "four F's" of mammal behaviour: fight, flight, feeding, and…mating (Veale, 2008). If connected to the lesson, this humorous statement is relevant and will likely result in positive effects on learning. It is important to note, however, that any humour used in the classroom must be appropriate; inappropriate humour (such as personal sexual behaviour, discussion of illegal substances, or in some cases, topics such as religion or spirituality) negates many of the positive

benefits identified (Bakar, 2019). Further, any humour tools used in the classroom by the instructor must be authentic, otherwise the benefits of humour are likely to be negatively impacted (West & Martin, 2019).

The demonstrable benefits of student laughter are not meant to act as a stressor to instructors who feel uncomfortable attempting to channel the cast of Saturday Night Live. There is no requirement to create wholly original material—the stage is in the classroom, not at an open night at the Improv. As such, laughter-evoking jokes can be utilized from any number of sources and integrated directly into course lectures, activities, or icebreakers.

For example, in a recent Zoom session with students, Keith was making conversation in the minutes leading up to the scheduled start time for the class. He asked seriously, "Did I tell you that I was installing a chicken-proof lawn this spring?" Confused-looking students awaited his explanation. "It is going to be im-peck-able." The eyerolling was nearly audible. Embracing his "Dad joke" personality is one of Keith's ways of showing up to class in a humourous way. While some of his quips are requisite Dad-groaners, his sense of humour is consistent and dependable. But humour does not have to be all about jokes; it can include unexpected examples using course content. For example, Sharon illustrates the concept of deontological ethics, in which truth is paramount, by showing a photo of Donald Trump playing tennis and his underwear is visible; the deontological ethicist, in the quest for truth, would not edit out the underwear line. The point of this exercise is not to engage in political polarization, but to illustrate the notion of truth, even as it applies to celebrities or politicians, regardless of one's personal attitudes toward the individual in question. We suspect that few students will forget an academic reference to someone's underwear.

Many students experience post-secondary education as a stressor. Attempting to absorb vast amounts of new material, dealing with high pressure assessments, and working under tight deadlines are common features in a typical university environment. In such situations, humour can provide an important psychological benefit: humour reduces stress (Martin, 2002). While this effect of humor is helpful, the stress is but a consequence of the high-pressure circumstances in which the student often lives. Perhaps of more significance is the finding that humour in educational instruction provides students with a cognitive reprieve which enhances their ability to process material and gain greater understanding (Garner, 2006).

Figure 3: Screenshot of Sharon Lauricella's Syllabus

Sharon demonstrates a playful attitude before her students even show up to an online class, walk in the classroom door, or engage with the course via the university's learning management system (LMS). Her syllabi indicate playfulness in that each syllabus includes a contemporary popular culture theme where she uses memes, quotes, or images to illustrate points in the syllabus (see Figure 3). In the winter of 2021, for example, she used a graphic design program to create syllabi featuring images and quotes from Schitt's Creek (this television show is particularly relevant in that it is Canadian and was filmed just a few miles from campus). In the section about online course delivery, the syllabus features an image of Catherine O'Hara as Moira Rose exclaiming, "I am ready for this!" thus indicating both faculty and student readiness for online learning. This playful addition of images and unconventional quips sets her syllabi apart from others.

Conclusion

The four elements of Ludic Pedagogy – fun (motivation), positivity (affect), play (activity), and playfulness (attitude) – are highly related and cooperative. Together, these elements can create an environment that not only helps students to learn, but also makes learning more enjoyable. Rather than relegating fun exclusively to off-campus or social events, there exist opportunities to employ Ludic Pedagogy in order that students remember their education itself as an enjoyable experience. In this model, students can boast increased retention of course information, a reduced cognitive load, and deeper learning. Both students and faculty can experience prosocial bonds, reduced stress, and alleviation of boredom.

While Ludic Pedagogy may have been born of a pandemic, there is no reason it should remain a tool for such times. As students return to campuses, we can continue to attract and retain students not just for the social opportunities, but also because they will have discovered that learning can be, and is, fun. When students and professors adopt a ludic mindset, the motivation to learn, the freedom felt to play with ideas, a spirit of playfulness, and an attitude of positivity can flourish.

The possibilities for transforming the classroom experience and attitudes toward it are no less than exciting. Future scholarship can address what constitutes fun, humour, play, and playfulness in higher education. For example: What do students find fun in class? Is the idea of fun in education specific to particular disciplines? Does incorporation of online learning activities via educational technology meet the criteria for educational fun? Do apps facilitate prosocial learning activities, thus maximizing fun? The opportunities for the examination of questions relative to Ludic Pedagogy are vast and promising.

Ludic Pedagogy frames the undergraduate experience in a way that promotes enjoyment, experimentation, and vulnerability. We know from published literature that if students have fun in and approach their postsecondary experiences with positive affect, they will experience heightened motivation, well-being, and improved learning. Given that universities and colleges prepare students for life after academia, we suggest that when students experience learning as fun, they may also take this ludic mindset to the workplace and transform our professional culture into a more engaging, collaborative, enjoyable space.

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