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APPENDIX

Teaching Tips to Spark Joy in Your Classroom

Joy arises organically and cannot be guaranteed by a one-size-fits-all course design template. However, the following strategies can help you increase the likelihood of joyful teaching and learning.

Our chapters have shown a connection between joy and both student agency and community. Therefore, our overarching suggestion is for instructors to utilize strategies that balance and enhance agency and community. Additionally, being authentic and transparent with students – such as explaining why emotions matter, how community enriches learning, and the purpose behind reflective activities – can boost joyful engagement. There's a two-fold advantage here: When students understand the value of their tasks, they are more likely to be invested and intrinsically motivated. When you communicate your reasoning behind curricular and pedagogical choices, you flatten hierarchy and foster a more egalitarian learning partnership.

While not an exhaustive list, these are some ideas we've raised in our chapters. You will see chapter notations after each entry to signal where you might go for a fuller discussion.

Feelings Come First: Make Space for Identity and Emotions

- Consider the hidden narratives of shame or inadequacy that students may carry, even those who seem confident (see Chapters 7, 10, 11).
- Acknowledge the impact of stereotype threat, imposter syndrome, trauma, anxiety, and marginalization on students, particularly those from underrepresented groups (see Chapters 3, 4, 7, 8, 11).

- Discuss how cultures use fear to coerce people into conforming and explore ways to develop individual and communal courage as a tool for resistance (see Chapters 2 and 4).
- Educate students on the physiology of emotion (e.g., the fight-or-flight response), helping them recognize their emotional cues (see Chapters 2, 8–10).
- Begin classes with a short breathing exercise to aid in emotional regulation and connection (see Chapter 9).
- Create opportunities for students to exercise their own authentic voices (dialectics, slang, informal speech) in response to open-ended assignments where they have the agency to make choices (see Chapters 3 and 11).
- Ground heavy topics in compassion. Ease into practicing compassion for one another in the class, and model it (see Chapters 4 and 5).
- To optimize psychological safety, start a unit or course with less-threatening topics – e.g., examples from ancient times and hypothetical (maybe even silly) scenarios – that activate students’ emotional responses without being overwhelming because they are distant or removed from their direct lived experiences. From there, start practicing “agreeable disagreement” and celebrating the pleasure of changing one’s mind (see Chapters 3, 5, 6).
- Normalize suffering and the discomfort that results from learning certain indisputable facts (e.g., racism, and sexism); address the impulse to denial head-on (see Chapters 4 and 5).
- Take a chance on students’ emotions (as opposed to feeling threatened by students’ feelings or imagining that there’s no place for feelings in academic spaces). Let them be angry or sad; let them be funny and joyful (see Chapters 3 and 5).
- Help students recognize that emotions may be “real but not true.” Emotions give us information about what we value, but they don’t substitute for reliable information about reality (see Chapter 5).
- Encourage social and emotional learning alongside content learning. Incorporate skills like self-awareness, self-regulation, and social awareness into your lessons/units. For example, engineering design teams might be more effective if they learn non-violent communication (see Chapter 2, 4).
- Recognize that students have finite emotional and cognitive bandwidths. Every student’s bandwidth is different, depending on the day, their past lived experiences, national or world events, and/or employment or family caregiving responsibilities. Check in with your class to see what kind of load they are carrying. A simple prompt asking students to “hold up your hand and show me where your emotional batteries are: 1 finger (totally drained) to 5 fingers (fully charged)” can provide valuable information that can help you be more responsive and plan an effective class session. It also signals that you care about their well-being, an opportunity for joy (see Chapters 9 and 12)!

Engage Cognitive and Imaginative (Re)Framing

- Invite imaginative discussions about what the group would like the classroom to be, from the physical space to its intellectual and liberatory possibilities. What can you dream together (see Chapter 9)?
- Normalize honest ignorance (see Chapter 5).
- Promote a Growth Mindset to remind learners that we all struggle with things before we get good at them (see Chapters 7, 10, 11).
- Talk about resilience: that developing it necessitates an optimal amount of adversity (so don't shy away from a challenge or from discomfort) *and* that there are ways of mitigating the effects of crushing adversity (see Chapters 3, 11, 13).
- Help students set mastery rather than performance goals (see Chapter 10).
- Create celebrations of progress, not perfection (see Chapters 3 and 10).
- Use reflective writing to help students learn from failure and make meaning of their experiences (see Chapters 4, 10, 11).

Communicate Clearly, Creatively, and Often

- Implement frequent opportunities for student feedback to you regarding their learning experiences, not just at the end of the semester (see Chapter 2).
- Represent and present information in multiple ways/modes to optimize learners' active and creative engagement (see Chapter 4).
- Offer students multiple pathways for knowledge expression, such as role-playing, reflective journaling, and artistic projects (see Chapters 3, 4, 11).

Provide Modeling

- Remember that your students will mirror whatever energy you bring to the classroom. Use this power wisely (see Chapter 2).
- Share your vulnerability and recognize it as the source from which meaningful student engagement arises. Encourage them to be vulnerable with each other, but don't force it (see Chapter 5).
- Encourage students to tell their stories and offer your own, modeling authentic vulnerability (see Chapters 3, 5, 13).
- Speak in "your own" voice; discard a formal academic pose in favor of showing you are approachable and human (see Chapter 3).
- Demonstrate compassion for students and speak directly about the value of compassion as an intentional choice (see Chapter 5).
- Share what gives you a sense of awe and wonder in your discipline (see Chapter 11).
- Talk about what you feel curious about and discuss how that guides your research (see Chapter 11).

Make Space for Who Your Students Are

- If you are gregarious, think about making space for quiet (see Chapter 12).
- If you are most comfortable in lecture mode or as discussion leader, think about how you might step back and center student voices (see Chapters 3 and 12).
- If you are introverted and socially anxious, think about the advantages of classroom community and explore ways of leveraging them (see Chapter 6).

Relationships and Community: Foster Joyful Interactions

- Prioritize a classroom environment where students feel safe and/or courageous, so they may become willing to be vulnerable with one another (see Chapters 4–6 and 11).
- Co-define and co-create classroom agreements that include both you and your students as members of the community. Refer back to these regularly (see Chapters 2 and 6).
- Create a culture of accountability by walking students through the consequences of various actions/inactions (e.g., What if no one does the assigned reading? What if everyone turned assignments in late? What if no one comes to class?).
- Get to know your students, by name when possible. Friendly greetings at the door go a long way toward creating a joyful and welcoming climate (see Chapters 6 and 14).
- Encourage student collaboration whenever possible, but with clear guidelines and expectations (the community agreements can be helpful for this) (see Chapters 2 and 6).
- Build authentic trust as the cornerstone of agency and empowerment. If you trust students, they are more likely to trust you. (Note: *Mistrust* can be communicated on day 1 through course policies. Does your academic integrity policy suggest you think all students are likely cheaters? Does your assignment deadline policy signal that lateness is laziness?) (See Chapters 5, 6, 13.)
- Earn students' trust by listening and humbly admitting positionality and fallibility (see Chapters 5, 6, 13).
- Get out of the way; remember the course is for the students, not about you. Look for ways to flatten hierarchy and ranking in your classroom (see Chapter 8).
- Make jokes and encourage play (see Chapters 3, 5, 11).
- Normalize difference and disagreement. Work together to find common ground (see Chapter 5).
- Allow students space and time to craft their own communities organically; however, create conditions where community is desirable (see Chapter 7).

- Remember that virtual environments are not the enemy. When allowed to develop organically, they can be a great way of initiating surface-level forms of joy (see Chapter 7).
- Encourage collaborative problem-solving and “struggling together” to support interpersonal connection as well as continued learning (see Chapters 4, 7, 11).
- Help students build and sustain collective thinking with transparent, structured, and reflective group activities (see Chapter 9).
- Encourage engagement by proactively providing the time and space needed for students to formulate their individual contributions (see Chapter 12).
- Leverage the power of small groups as spaces where many students feel more comfortable interacting – solving problems, discussing case studies, engaging in metacognitive reflection. (This is a great way of making even very large lectures feel intimate.) (See Chapters 3 and 12.)
- Have small groups of students briefly report back on their discussions to the larger class, so that students are able to hear their peers’ perspectives. Celebrate moments of discovery, synergy, and divergence as all contributing to knowledge creation (see Chapters 3 and 12).
- Share and celebrate personal goals and academic aspirations together (see Chapters 4 and 10).

Design with the Body in Mind: Physicality and Physical Spaces

- Arrange learning spaces to facilitate unselfconscious embodied learning and consider having class outdoors when feasible (see Chapters 9 and 11).
- Allow time for students to settle in with brief periods of silence at the start of class (see Chapter 12).

Curricular Concerns, Policies, and Pedagogical Practices

- Make interdisciplinary connections whenever possible. Perhaps even co-teach a course or bring in guest lecturers from other fields of study (see Chapter 2).
- Incorporate culturally relevant materials and diverse perspectives that connect with students’ backgrounds, interests, and experiences. This can increase motivation and support the cultural capital of diverse learners (see Chapters 7, 8, 11).
- Don’t be afraid to slow down curriculum to make space for check-ins and community building. Resist the tyranny of content coverage: do more with less ... and “more” includes meaning-making (see Chapters 6, 12).
- Create regular routines/rituals that students can anticipate. Offer an agenda for each class session (see Chapter 12).
- Develop assignments and a grading system that blunt the negative impact of failure (see Chapters 10 and 15).

- Emphasize assets. Create opportunities for mastery experiences where students experience “getting it right” (as opposed to so much of school culture where they are made over-aware of perceived deficits). Scaffold assignments to build from foundational strengths toward increased challenge and complexity (see Chapters 3, 11, 15).
- Set students up for success: have clear directions posted for students at the start of class and provide a few minutes of quiet preparation time for them to engage the prompt (see Chapter 12).
- Design learning experiences that activate multiple senses and movement, with options to support access needs and variable energy levels (see Chapter 9).
- Develop assignments where students are “having so much fun they don’t realize they’re learning” (e.g., role plays, mock trials, improv games). But then follow-up by asking them to reflect on what they’ve learned (see Chapters 3 and 11)!
- Encourage student agency by making spaces that reduce self-consciousness and are just for them (where there are no right or wrong answers): 10 minutes of silent time at the start of class, journals where they can freewrite and explore ideas, art-making, and/or playful games (see Chapters 4 and 9).

Instructors: Practice Self-Care and Well-Being

- Use “low-effort, high-reward” teaching techniques to protect yourself from burnout (see Chapter 14).
- Find a community that can help you differentiate between those things affecting your well-being that are under your control and those that are artifacts of a toxic institutional culture. (Explore the former and resist the latter.) (See Chapter 14.)
- Find colleagues with whom you can talk, constantly, about what together you value as educators. (Remember, these might be folks outside of your department or discipline.) (See Chapter 15.)
- Use this community of people for reality checks so as not to get lost in your own idealism or cynicism (see Chapters 14 and 15).
- Use this community to help you decathect from harmful beliefs (about students, your work, or the institution) and commit to generative ones (see Chapters 14 and 15).
- Collect your own metrics for success so you can dispute the cynics and nay-sayers (see Chapters 14).
- Practice self-compassion and prioritize self-care (see Chapters 13 and 14).
- Seek out mental health resources for yourself. (It’s okay to ask for help.) (See Chapter 14.)

- Wrestle with your own discomfort regarding ambiguity and fear of failure; remember that the tendency to take failure personally is about ego (see Chapter 15).
- Failure can be generative, but that requires a willingness to take risks and be vulnerable (see Chapter 15).
- Develop objectivity: attend to what is actually happening with your students and avoid doubling-down on making something work/fit just because (in your head) it was “supposed” to go a certain way (see Chapter 15).
- Be open to surprise and let outcomes emerge (see Chapters 3, 4, 7, 11, 15).