

Learning Ludic: A Seriously Fun Classroom

Shaun G. Cameron

Adult Education and Teaching Excellence Department, Red River College Polytechnic

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Ludic Pedagogy explores the topics of fun, play, playfulness, and positivity in the modern post-secondary learning environment. Established within the last decade as a form of pedagogy, the idea of play in the classroom is not unique to early years education, but is somewhat unique in its implementation in the post-secondary education setting. Not devoid of rigor, but serious on fun, ludic pedagogy is finding its way more and more into both traditional and contemporary post-secondary settings. Through an broadcast style interview with the co-author of *Ludic Pedagogy: A Seriously Fun Way to Teach and Learn*, as well as the host of *The Ludicast*, along with empirical evidence in published journals and media, I intend to explore this topic in detail and provide a case for introducing fun in the modern post-secondary classroom. Three resources were used in researching this topic– Ludic Pedagogy: A Seriously Fun Way to Teach and Learn (Edmunds, Lauricella, 2023), The Ludicast: Audio Podcast (Little, 2022), and a peer-reviewed article on ludic pedagogy (Edmunds, Lauricella, 2022).

Findings From Resources: the “What”

Resource #1: Personal interview with ludic practitioners: T. Keith Edmunds, Richard Little

Ludic Pedagogy is a model of pedagogy that was established in the last couple years during and since COVID. It's really based on four pillars: fun, play, playfulness, and positivity (Edmunds, 2024). Both subjects identified strategies to implement ludic pedagogy in the classroom, as well as methods that have a wide body of practice to determine their effectiveness. My findings concluded that there are benefits to including more play, and playfulness in the classroom without having to sacrifice academic rigor or rubric scoring. The ludic model provides a unique opportunity as well to allow educators to engage students, especially during the activation phase of learning. If considered as part of the overall toolkit available to learners, the ludic model provides opportunities for students to highlight new skills, engage with their peers, and create memorable classroom experiences. For Rich Little, he models a simple activator at the start of each class that uses ludic modeling in its delivery, “The one of the things

that's been a real hit for my students is that at the start of every class I will play a music video that connects to the topic," (Little, 2024).

Resource #2: The Ludicast (podcast): Unlocking Fun: Host Rich Little with Dr. Trent Tucker (Thompson Rivers)

In a graduate level class at Laurier University, Dr. Trent Tucker (2024) introduced the concept of play through the use of lego blocks to deliver teachables on advanced level mathematics. By providing opportunities to connect with their playful nature, and in many cases their childhood, the instructor very adeptly introduced concepts and teachables in a venue some might consider sacrosanct. By examining the classes he enjoyed as an undergrad though and using those memories, Dr. Tucker (2024) was able to unlock the fun in learning for his own students. "My very first teaching experience was at Laurier, teaching a Linear Programming class which is extremely mathematical and extremely dry" (Tucker, 2024). By incorporating lego, he was able to teach complex algorithms and syntax to higher education programming students. The ludic concepts of play and playfulness were readily practiced, and results were more engaged learners, while not abandoning the rigor of post-secondary learning. Tucker has since become a leader of learning with lego, and routinely educates educators about the opportunities of incorporating play and playfulness in the classroom setting. Another concept that is introduced by incorporating play into high learning is the idea that abstract thinking and the use of the lego blocks can represent tools and variables in solving more complex problems around mathematics and economics, with both of the interview subjects in agreement that educators can design or craft memorable experiences in the classroom using ludic pedagogy principles (Little, 2024). Educators must be deliberate and calculated in advance to achieve the maximum impact of the active ludic classroom.

Resource #3: Ludic Pedagogy: Taking a Serious Look at Fun in the COVID-19 Classroom and Beyond:**Sharon Lauricella and T. Keith Edmunds**

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? (Edmunds, Lauricella, 2022). The challenge posed by the educators and authors came on the heels of a moment that fundamentally changed the structure of the modern classroom. The COVID-19 pandemic took learning to new frontiers, and challenged educators worldwide to engage learners of all ages in a virtual and oftentimes uninspiring environment. Those who often struggled the most were instructors who were defined by their hierarchical, “sage on the stage” style of instruction, while their peers who sought to actively engage learners in reverse classroom models and lessons with play and playfulness, found the engagement and involvement of their students grew in their online environment. A word of caution though, the authors observe though that ludic pedagogy does not take on the role of instructors being both “educator and entertainer” (Edmunds, Lauricella, 2022). This is a keen observation as much of the play and playfulness displayed in ludic pedagogy should put the instructor into the role of a jester, or stand up comedian. It should however recognize the need for a positive environment, highlighting the importance of “pleasure and positive relationships in the higher education experience” (Edmunds, Lauricella, 2022).

Resource #4: Ludic Pedagogy - A Seriously Fun Way to Teach and Learn: Sharon Lauricella and T. Keith**Edmunds**

Both Edmunds and Lauricella are practitioners of ludic pedagogy, which provides a level of authenticity to their book. The idea of educators being playful, and engaging in playfulness in the classroom is the fundamental aspect of their work and methods. Allowing students (and faculty, for that matter) to step outside the day-to-day reality of their lives and look beyond what is normally perceived

as their limitations (Edmunds, Lauricella, 2023). Further, giving educators the freedom to approach learning in this way can be rewarding and in many ways liberating, while maintaining the structured model of the four main pillars of ludic pedagogy focus on fun, play, playfulness, and positivity. The text also highlights many ways for students and instructors to engage in activities.

During my discussions with my subject matter experts, they continually referenced the idea of the planning involved not being more onerous than traditional instruction, more so just a different style of educator prep, which again stands as a further benefit of the practice.

Analysis of Resources

Evaluation of Resources

In looking at my own experience gathering knowledge on ludic pedagogy, I found the interview and experiential questioning the most helpful. This is also reflective of my learning style, so being able to engage in a discussion with subject matter experts resonated more than the text based resources. One of the challenges I found was due to the nature of the pedagogy being relatively new, the gathered body of work on its impacts and effectiveness were limited to many of the already established authorities on it. The podcast examples were an opportunity to hear from different voices on the subject, and glean perspective on their practice of the pedagogical methods.

Edmunds, Little (2024) were engaging and shared many realistic examples and bodies of practice regarding ludic methods in their own classrooms, and their engaging nature makes it quite evident why their students value the time spent in their respective classrooms.

Little (2024) the host of The Ludicast provides a different medium for discussion, and broadens his approach by including other guests who although not in name practice ludic pedagogy, do practice a form of play and playfulness in their classrooms.

I could see implementing these resources in a learning environment, and using the tools gleaned from research to activate and engage learners while as an educator I create situations and environments

that promote higher level learning outcomes that allow students to evaluate and analyze problems in a fun learning environment.

Similarities and Inconsistencies

The resources are consistent with my findings, albeit that a couple of the resources are from the same authors, so differences are harder to derive from that content. As a result of this, I utilized content from The Ludicast for many considerations and comparisons, as the subject matter experts vary week to week as guests on the show. Their approach to play and playfulness in the classroom was relatively consistent though, which shows that the modeling that is ludic pedagogy is useful.

One of the more holistic opportunities that came about from the practice of ludic pedagogy though was the opportunity to improve student mental health in post-secondary institutions. This theme resonated throughout the guests on The Ludicast, as well as the written and interview works of T. Keith Edmunds and S. Lauricella. The landscape of mental health on college and university campuses is not a pretty one. Instructors can not only alleviate some degree of stress and anxiety by implementing components of ludic pedagogy, but we can also work to show students that learning can be enjoyable (Edmunds, Lauricella, 2023). By introducing a degree of play and playfulness into the classroom, the inherent positivity that students feel is more achievable and could be considered representative of legitimate mental health gains.

Reflection on Learning: “The How”

Evolution of Topic

Having the opportunity to meet in person with practitioners of ludic pedagogy was helpful in my growth, and I found it was very important to deepen my knowledge on the subject. Given more time and a classroom of practice, I think one of the items I would like to learn more about is the practice of incorporating ludic pedagogy in the classroom. Through my interview and readings on the subject, I found that there were numerous examples of best practices, but would still like to grow more in how the

practice performs in a real life scenario. As I'm not currently in an instructor role, it is harder to plan for the practical scenarios, but I feel should I have the opportunity to again work in the classroom, I would have a wider basis of knowledge to plan ludic exercises that will help engage and activate learners.

Because I had the opportunity prior to taking Teaching for Learning, I did have a basis of knowledge on the subject, and had been an avid listener of The Ludicast, due to my connection with the host. It was helpful in coming up with a list of questions, and the body of the interview premise. I feel the interview itself was highly successful, relaxed, and had both subjects at ease sharing their thoughts on ludic pedagogy. I take great pride in that fact.

Moving forward, I feel that to become more immersed in the subject, I would continue to source out contrasting or complimentary viewpoints on ludic pedagogy from other practitioners, and use their bodies of work in shaping a more thorough perspective of where I would like to be as an instructor.

Reflection on Inquiry Process

I've enjoyed this project, and the growth that has come as a result of it.

In learning more about ludic pedagogy, I went in with two goals in mind. I wanted to deepen my understanding and approach to making learning fun, and at the same time further my own knowledge of methods to engage learners. The open-ended nature of the inquiry approach, and the ability to use my skill set in media production to conduct the interviews put me at a sense of ease. Inquiry based learning speaks to my natural want to ask questions and I think it helped to be in a medium that is designed to inquire and discuss.

In consideration of whether my teaching has evolved, I think my approach to a classroom and how to engage learners has. I still feel a great deal of work should be spent on achieving higher level learning outcomes as presented in Bloom's Taxonomy, and much like so many other learning strategies, ludic pedagogy becomes one of many tools used in a modern classroom environment. Given that alone the evolution of my teaching strategies was a success. As a lifelong learner though, I don't feel as an

educator I should rest on my laurels, or feel I have all the necessary tools to create successful classrooms. Trying to provide a recipe that will work for every course in every faculty in every institution is a non-starter. There is no way to do it. Ludic Pedagogy is not meant to be a recipe - it is simply the ingredients (Edmunds, Lauricella, 2023).

As an educator, I feel a greater level of self-awareness and more motivation in taking control of my learning. Inquiry Based Learning has allowed me the opportunity to create the learning how I would like to see it, so as a student I can see some of the practices we share in class coming to life. I've always been someone who wants to foster curiosity and critical thinking in the students, and encourage them to take an active role as I have in the learning journey.

References

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