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  - • Inviting Students Back to Learning

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# Questions/Observations

Having taught dance in many different environments over a few decades, I've observed something in dance courses that is not present in other courses I've taught or participated in. Students in a dance class are intrinsically motivated to continue learning. They will repeat a skill over and over until they master it.

The students in a dance class are experiencing a learning they can see and feel. What they learn carries through to their daily life. They participate in experiential learning in the purest sense. They are also learning in community, naturally supporting one another in the learning process.



I hear those same students speaking about other courses they are taking. They talk more about the "points" they get or the "grade" they are trying to earn. They also mentioned how many students in class cheat to get a grade or finish an assignment. The prevalence of cheating has only increased since AI usage has become more common. Students taking other courses rarely talk about learning anything, even if it's a subject they are interested in. It led me to think more about what happens in a dance class that doesn't happen in other classes. Can we learn something from dance-based pedagogy and apply it to other courses? Don't we want students to be excited about learning? Feel their progress? Understand how what they learn applies to their life outside university walls?



I experimented with applying techniques in dance courses in a Small Business Entrepreneurship class I taught this semester. Would incorporating pedagogical practices from an experiential-based dance course work in a course not remotely related to dance?

# Why Change How we Teach and Assess Student Work?

Students cheat just to get a grade OR they only do what's necessary to get the grade they want. Rarely does learning happen in either of those processes.

The amount of students using AI to do their work for them is only increasing. Students don't always learn when they rely on AI rather than using AI as a tool.

Students are not motivated to come to class, especially post Covid. We need to make class a time to learn, collaborate, co-create, create community and... shocker... have fun doing so.

Automation is making rote jobs more and more rare. Humans are innately creative, so we must practice that skill to stay relevant.

Not everyone learns the same way, has the same learning goals or learns at the same pace. Changing how we structure classes and content will make classroom more equitable. Students at MSU contend with jobs, families, etc. Their learning schedules may not match pre-planned syllabi.

***Teaching students that are engaged in learning is more rewarding and fun for the professor AND it results in our job having meaning beyond the classroom.***



# Starting with Research: Creative Process, Intrinsic Motivation, “Ungrading”

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## **Centering classroom content on Creative Process, a combination of divergent and analytical/critical thinking**

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In its most current Future of Jobs Report, The World Economic Forum (WEF) found that “analytical thinking is considered a core skill by more companies than any other skill and constitutes...Creative thinking, another cognitive skill, ranks second, ahead of three self-efficacy skills – resilience, flexibility and agility.” If we are preparing students for life outside of school, shouldn’t we be focusing on these desired skills?

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## **Importance of Intrinsic Motivation (*Drive*, Daniel Pink)**

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Autonomy (desire to be self directed), mastery (the urge to get better at something), and purpose (idea that what is being done has meaning). Intrinsic motivation ensures continued learning, a growth mindset, something that encourages success based on how an individual defines it.

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## **Learning (and assessment) that mirrors life outside of school (*Ungrading*, Susan D. Blum)**

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Students need to practice and exercise autonomy in higher education before they enter a world that is less structured. Equity is easier to attain if we honor that each student is a creative individual capable of something entirely unique. It’s our job to help them discover and hone that uniqueness.

# Thoughts/Findings to share

**Creative process** is a process that combines divergent and analytical/critical thinking. These are both essential skills and when they combine, they result in metacognition, creation, and a growth mindset. *Introducing creative practice in any discipline affords more doorways into learning and accommodates different learners.*



**Intrinsic motivation** is key to continued learning and, I would argue, happiness. Daniel Pink, in *Drive*, talks about 3 things necessary for intrinsic motivation: Autonomy, Mastery, and Purpose. *Finding ways to give students opportunities for all 3 of these things sets a foundation for a growth mindset and helps establish equity in a classroom, meeting everyone where they are and helping them grow.*



**Grades are a transaction** that does not show what has been learned. Students learn to follow directions to get a result. In the “real world,” the rules change at an exponential rate. We are in the midst of the 4th industrial revolution. Why are we using an outdated grading system? What if instead we ask students, “What is success in this class for you? How can I help you achieve that? What can you do with the information that is shared with you?”

# How? A Menu of Options

Process over product: Do-Review- Redo- Professor as guide/coach instead of hierarchy.

Feedback instead of points or grades.

Things are not “done” until they meet a standard you and the student set together.

Make sure students know how what you are teaching is relevant. If what you are teaching is not relevant, think of some way to make it relevant for the student.

Give students grades in conversation with them. Have them help you decide their grade.

Have rolling deadline on assignments to allow time for revision.

Do not stand in front of your classroom, sit in a circle to put yourself in line with everyone in the room.

Have peer leaders in the classroom where students sign up to take teach/lead discussion on one of the topic areas.

Introduce “play” into the classroom. Integrate creative practice activities that will help students engage with one another and course material.

# Results from my experiment this semester

I used a creative practice every single class period. Creative practice provided a playful method to experience the topic we were covering in class. Students laughed, worked together, and showed progress with the material we were covering. Students mentioned this was their “fun” class. Many students, when having to miss class due to life circumstances, reached out to find out what we did in class.

I gave a lot of feedback on each and every assignment. In response to feedback, students either chose to redo assignments and/or turned in progressively better work throughout the semester.

We co-created “rubrics” for larger assignments. I shared with students what I hoped learned from an assignment and asked them what they thought should be turned in in order to show what they learned. They thought of things I wouldn’t have and what they ended up turning in was high quality.

Weekly assignments related class material to their own lives, making sure they understood the relevance of what we were doing in class to life beyond the classroom.

Was everything perfect? No. But this was a start at a more democratic and dynamic classroom focused on learning instead of a grade-based transaction. Each student is showing growth. Most importantly, students are having fun learning. This will translate into a growth mindset later in life.

# Great reads with interesting research and anecdotes I used to get started on this journey

01

James Downton, *Playful Mind*. Lots of different creativity exercises that can be adapted to classroom work.

02

Daniel Pink, *Drive*. A thought-provoking book about intrinsic motivation.

03

Susan D Blum. *Ungrading: Why Rating Students Undermines Learning (and what to do instead)*. A collection of writings from 15 different educators around the topic of ungrading. Fantastic collection of further reading and research.