

Details

Mistake-Friendly Classroom Strategies You'll Want to Try Tomorrow with Emma Chiappetta - 336

*In this episode, I'm joined by fellow ASCD author and instructional coach Emma Chiappetta for powerful tips from her new book *Learning By Mistake: 12 Strategies to Turn Student Errors Into Opportunities*. You'll hear practical strategies for creating a mistake-friendly classroom culture and using digital tools to help students reflect on their learning process. If you want to shift your students' mindsets around errors and foster a more resilient learning environment, this episode has you covered!*

Link to live show notes:

<https://classtechtips.com/2025/09/09/mistake-friendly-classroom-336/>

*mistake-friendly classroom

Introduction

Hello there, and welcome to today's episode of the Easy EdTech podcast. My name is Monica Burns, and I am so glad you're here to join me today. If you want to make the most of education technology, AKA EdTech, you are in the right place. My goal has always been to help make EdTech easier and give you ideas to try yourself, share with a colleague, or bookmark for later in the school year.

Every Tuesday on the Easy EdTech podcast, you'll hear stories from my time in the classroom, my work with schools and districts, and my travels to different EdTech events. Get ready for solo episodes where I share some quick tips, stories, and interviews full of practical ideas and stories from new guests each month. If we mention something you'd like to check out, make sure to click the link. You'll find it in the episode description or the summary area where you're listening to this podcast, or you can find every episode and all of the resources we mention by going to EasyEdTechPodcast.com or by going to classtechtips.com and just clicking on the Easy EdTech Podcast button at the top of the page.

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Today's Intro

This week's episode is titled: "Mistake-Friendly Classroom Strategies You'll Want to Try Tomorrow with Emma Chiappetta - 336" and it was so much fun chatting with Emma for this episode. She is a fellow ASCD author and has a new book that just came out in July. It's called *Learning By Mistake: 12 Strategies to Turn Student Errors Into Opportunities* and that's just what we talk about together today – strategies and activities you can try out tomorrow with students. I think you'll love everything Emma has to share today, let's dive in!

Episode Transcript

Monica Burns:

Welcome to the podcast, Emma. I'm so excited to chat with you today about creating a safe space to learn for students. But before we get into all of that what is your role in education? Can you share with listeners what does your day to day look like?

Emma Chiappetta:

Yeah. my name's Emma Chiappetta. I've been an educator for about 15 years, but I'm currently taking a step back from teaching because I have a 1-year-old Sila mm-hmm <affirmative>. And I'm enjoying spending tons of time with her. While I do that, I'm still working part-time as an instructional coach, and so my day-to-day includes a lot of chasing my daughter around, but it also includes, you know, co-planning a lesson with a teacher observing a class or brainstorming ideas for an assessment, which is one of my favorite things to do.

Monica Burns:

Amazing. And just that idea of taking that, that pause. Right. And, and having conversations like this one today. Right. To reflect on your experiences, to share what you're doing right. In the present right now, too. You know, I often people ask about inspiration for a book and, and that's kind of tough question that I can't help but ask you, even though I struggle to answer it

<laugh> sometimes. But what kind of gave you that first push or that spark? What inspired you to write a book focused on helping students shift their mindset around mistakes?

Emma Chiappetta:

Yeah. So I have always been kind of afraid of making mistakes myself, you know I think a lot of us educators were those perfectionists in high school, and we were afraid of being wrong in front of our peers. And I think that when I became a teacher, I saw those same anxieties creeping up in my students, and I really wanted to help them get past that because yeah. You know, we all learn from mistakes and I think we all understand the value of them. Probably some of my most meaningful lessons have been mm-hmm <affirmative>. Have come from times that I messed something up. Yeah. And so I really wanted to help shift the culture and bridge that divide between this is something that's really helpful for us, and yet we're afraid to do it. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. And like you said, like taking this pause to be with my daughter, I feel like I'm learning so much more mm-hmm <affirmative>. About learning by watching how a baby learns and they're making mistakes constantly. Mm-Hmm. All they do is mm-hmm <affirmative>. Fall down and they get right back up. And so can we take that, you know, baby mindset mm-hmm <affirmative>. About being resilient in the face of mistakes and grow that into our learners that are in elementary school, middle school, high school.

Monica Burns:

I love that observation because I think it's so easy for us, you know, in education right. As maybe perfectionist. Right. I could, I think I fall into that category of wanting things to be just a certain way <laugh>. Right. you know, we often can say that like a mistake is okay, but we don't always feel that same way Right. In our own practice. And that is a big mindset shift. And so, you know, when you think about classroom culture, you know, what role does classroom culture play in how kids respond to making mistakes?

Emma Chiappetta:

I think that classroom culture is really everything when it comes to how we look at and respond to making mistakes. And unfortunately, our mistake anxieties get embedded when we're really young, you know? Yeah. You might be with your group of friends in first grade and mispronounce a word and your friends laugh at you mm-hmm <affirmative>. And then you get scared, and then you go to class in second grade and you're, you answer a question wrong and your teacher looks disappointed in you. Then you get to middle school and you start getting bad grades for messing up and you become afraid to ask for help and afraid to make mistakes again, because there's this constant reinforcement that mistakes are bad, mistakes

are bad, and mistakes require punishment. But luckily since mistake culture is so tied to classroom cultures, teachers have a lot of power in shifting that.

Emma Chiappetta:

And in my book, I talk about these four different levers that we can kind of turn mm-hmm <affirmative>. In order to change the culture around mistakes, either for the positive or for the negative. The first of those is punishment. So for example, giving bad grades for mistakes and not allowing retakes that reinforces that this is a bad thing, this should not happen. Another thing is, one of the other level levers is teacher strategies. So those are the things that we do in class every day. The lessons, the activities that either normalize mistakes and draw attention to how they can be beneficial, or, you know, we might have classroom activities that do the exact opposite that send the message to students that they should never be making mistakes. The third is the way that teachers react to the mistakes that students make. There's a big difference between saying, no, let's ask someone else for the right answer and saying, huh, that's interesting.

Emma Chiappetta:

How did you come to that conclusion? Like, let's talk about it. And the final lever, and possibly the most powerful one is peer reactions, so mm-hmm <affirmative>. If, I mean, students care so much about how their peers perceive them, and so if their peers don't know how to properly respond to mistakes Yeah. And they're laughing and making fun of somebody for messing up in class, it's just gonna become this traumatic event. And so if we can all create a culture where mistakes are celebrated, they're approached with curiosity, then they'll start to seem valuable and they'll be more commonplace.

Monica Burns:

And just that idea of different angles to address this, I think is important for, for someone to say like, how can we create this full classroom culture? It may be my interactions, it may be the things I say. It may be what we're instilling in a group mentality to have conversations about this. And, you know, we talk so much about modeling when it comes to showing the steps to solve a math problem, or when we're reading aloud a book to students and pointing out a context clues strategy. But we know that kids are, are watching and learning and all different parts of the day. So how can teachers model mistake making in ways that feel authentic and build trust with students?

Emma Chiappetta:

Yeah. I think that's such an important question. And I don't think it's only about modeling mistake making. I also think it's about modeling how to respond to mistakes. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. Because that's gonna, that's how you're gonna turn that peer response lever. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. Is you need to teach the students how to respond when their peers make a mistake as well. But yeah, so modeling, making mistakes as a teacher, I have this activity that I do with my students at the beginning of every class and I do it to sort of normalize mistakes and set the tone at the beginning of each class period that this is a place where we're all gonna make mistakes. Yeah. And that's totally great. And the way that we do that is I have all the students' names on the board and I give a prompt that's really silly and totally unrelated to class content.

Emma Chiappetta:

So nobody's like feeling high stakes like they're supposed to know. So it might be something like, how many eggs does the average American eat in a year? Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. And everybody makes a guess. And I write their responses on the board. And they were hesitant at first every year. And then they slowly start to love the activity. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. So much so that one student decided he wanted to facilitate it. So he came in with his own prompt and he wrote it on the board and I sat with the class and I had to participate on this day. Yeah. And at first I felt that mistake anxiety that all of my students do. I was like, oh my gosh, what if I am way off? And they all think that like their teacher is not as smart as they are. So I got really nervous.

Emma Chiappetta:

But I participated, I was just as wrong as everyone else. I was probably farther away than some of the students. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. And you know, we talked about it and laughed and it was great. And I felt my own mistake, anxiety, ease. Yeah. And so I think for them to like see me play their game and also for me to experience what mm-hmm <affirmative>. It felt like for them was really powerful. So that's just like one way that I think about modeling. But if you're thinking about it more on like a day-to-day and content content related way like you said, math teachers are often presenting a problem at the board. Like, we make mistakes when we present problems at the board, own it. Point out that you made a mistake. Explain to your students what you were thinking that led you to that mistake.

Emma Chiappetta:

Because then they see that like mistakes are logical. They do come from a place of, you know, and they even come from a place of intelligence. They come from your prior thinking. And then show them how you recognize the mistake. Then you're modeling the whole process of how you learn from it. Another thing that I often do is not necessarily making the mistake in front of my students but telling them, you know, when I was learning this, I always messed up blah, blah, blah. So I kind of like call it to their attention that, okay, first red flag, here's something you might mess up. And also, here I am here with you, I also made these same mistakes that you are,

Monica Burns:

I love these examples because they feel so doable in different contexts. Right. and it's so funny you mentioned kind of doing the role reversal with the question because when you said like, how many eggs does someone consume? Like, I don't wanna say I panicked, but I like thought to myself like, I don't even know. Like I don't know what I would say to that. Right. That was my first thought when you said that question. So, and we're not even playing a game in front of other people. Right. Yeah. So I just think that's even something, you know, for families who are listening and are like, how do I, like that's a car ride game, that's a subway game to play. Like, just a quick question and like no wrong answers. We all got there using this different prior knowledge that we have, whether it got us to the right answer or not. So I just love that framing of like, I've made mistakes like this, or this is the kind of thing that caught me the first time I did this. It just feels like a way that we could all do some storytelling and make everyone comfortable with this learning process. 'cause It really is the process right. Of moving through. And, you know, your book doesn't focus specifically on tech or ed tech, but I wanted to ask if there were digital tools or platforms that could bring some of these activities to life.

Emma Chiappetta:

Yeah, so one of the activities I talk about in the book is a multiple choice. You know, like a set of multiple choice questions. And for each question, every single option is wrong. So I call it which wrong is the most right. And the reason that I like this from a mistake culture activity mm-hmm <affirmative>. Or mistake culture perspective, is that it kind of removes the anxiety of I need to pick the correct answer because there is no correct answer. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. And it's all focused on just the logic behind the answer. And I, there's a tech tool that I love to use for this activity, and I've used Poll Everywhere. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. Which is, it's the same idea as clickers, but it embeds into Google Slides. And I'm sure there are other clicker apps that do the same thing, but basically you present the question and the

options on the board, and then the students can click in their answer and it'll show a bar graph with the distribution of all the choices mm-hmm <affirmative>.

Emma Chiappetta:

And so then the students can kind of see like, okay, we all guessed different things. Maybe there's one answer that had the most guesses, but that doesn't mean it's the right answer. Yeah. Because they're all wrong. And then it leads to a pretty good discussion because I can ask the class someone who answered A, could you give your justification, someone who answered B, could you give your justification mm-hmm <affirmative>. And it also has this anonymous feature, which we, when we're building a healthy culture around mistakes, we do want students to be comfortable making them openly Yeah. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. But as they're getting there, the anonymous, the anonymity can be really helpful Totally. For allowing them to be vulnerable. And then if they want to share, then when we have that discussion at the end, they can offer, I chose B and this is why. Yeah.

Monica Burns:

Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. No, and, and that makes a lot of sense too when we think about scaffolding this for kids, building up that comfort level, and you know, that's a great kind of way to get everyone participating. And have you seen teachers using technology, maybe digital journaling, collaborative tools, video reflections to help students process, but then also reflect on a mistake that they've made?

Emma Chiappetta:

Yeah. So there are really simple digital tools that you can use for this. In my book, I have some templates for mistake journals where students can track the mistakes that they made and they'll also kind of classify the mistake as either like an aha mistake or a careless mistake. Well actually we don't like to use the word careless but a mistake that came from just like overlooking something. Right. so they'll, they'll have a column for writing the mistake, a column for classifying it, a column for the correct answer. And all of these can be done either in a table, in Google Docs, or you could have a spreadsheet with some pulldowns. And then teachers can leave comments directly in the document, which, which is really great. Another thing is I've seen teachers use video to facilitate test corrections, and I think that's fantastic.

Emma Chiappetta:

Whether you do a screencast or you Yeah. Kind of mount your phone above your work. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. The student will point exactly to their mistakes. They can explain their logic verbally, which is really helpful for some students who can't, you know, like get it down on paper by hand. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. If they're just talking about it, it's a lot easier for them to explain their line of thinking. And they can point to what they did wrong. They can explain their line of thinking that led to it and then explain the correct answer. And so I think that that's a really great way to do, it's not quite mistake analysis, but you could even do mistake analysis that way too.

Monica Burns:

Yeah. Even if it's like formal or informal. Right. In terms of the structure of it, I think that idea a screencast, I love for so many reasons, and I do think that's a nice way for someone to, right. Just talk through feels more conversational, it can feel a little less formal. And it's giving a teacher a lot of really great information for driving future instruction or in addition to just having kids like the, you know, the powerful pieces we're talking about today. So for anyone who's like looking for kind of their entry point, right. Maybe it's through that kind of lens.

Emma Chiappetta:

Yeah. Yeah. I think that being able to hear what line of thinking led a student to a mistake Yeah. Is such a critical piece of formative assessment for teachers.

Monica Burns:

Yeah. Absolutely. And so, you know, I would imagine you've got some stories and some observations and things you've seen in your own practice and that other people have brought to you, you know, around the impact that these mindset shifts have had. What kind of impact have you seen them have on student motivation or on student engagement in like, you know, a longer term view?

Emma Chiappetta:

Yeah, so maybe the most obvious impact that I've noticed is, so I use one-on-one conferences to assess my students on each learning target. And after I started being really intentional about addressing the mistake culture in my class, I took a, I made a point to ask my students, where might you mess up when you are executing mm-hmm <affirmative>. This learning target when you're doing the skill? Or what did you think when you started this module, this learning target? And what do you think now? And their ability to reflect on those mistakes and

the potential mistakes that they could see other students making just skyrocketed. Yeah. They became so good at anticipating where something might go wrong and where someone might get confused. And that indicates two things to me. One, it indicates that they're not gonna make those mistakes as frequently mm-hmm <affirmative>. Because they know how to look for them and they know to watch out for them.

Emma Chiappetta:

Another thing it indicates is that they're comfortable talking about the mistakes that they've made. So we have kind of started to shift the culture and ease that anxiety because now they're seeing the mistake not as something that is speaking to their character or Yeah. Showing them as a bad student, but they're seeing it as something that they all do. It's expected. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. Like, if my teacher's asking me where I might mess up, then it's kind of expected that I'm gonna mess up sometimes. And so it's a good, it's a good indicator that the culture is shifting to something that's more healthy. Yeah. in terms of motivation, I think that whenever a student is more comfortable making a mistake, they're more willing to take a risk and learning takes risks. Yeah. If you don't try, then you are not gonna make it very far. And there's actually research that says that if you take, let's say you take a pretest before a unit and you answer six out of 10 questions wrong, you're more likely to remember the correct answers to the six that you got wrong than the ones that you had gotten right on the pretest. Yeah. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. So messing up, making a mistake actually primes your brain to learn something better. And so once my students can start recognizing this and start becoming more comfortable making mistakes, they're actually learning more deeply and their learning is lasting longer.

Monica Burns:

And just I love that because I, I do think that resonates so much, right. Of like, I remember the things that got me this grade. Maybe not in the great way <laugh>, even if it wasn't Yeah. Right. An A minus, like you remember that little piece right in between like your aspirational Right. Goal for it. So that's such a good reminder too for why someone might invest some energy Right. In bringing this work into their practice. And, you know, if there is someone who's listening here, whether they're a classroom teacher, working with students day to day, or maybe coaching other educators, you know, if there's someone who wants to start this work but isn't sure where to begin, what advice would you give 'em on, on where to get started?

Emma Chiappetta:

I think the first step is to take the pulse of the mistake culture that is already existent in your classroom. That's where I started. I just started asking my students, how do you feel about making a mistake either in my class or in school in general. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. And their answers were enlightening. I mean, most of them recognized that mistakes were important to their learning, but they were terrified. And they were typically more terrified in classes where their grades mattered more than say their elective classes. Yeah. They told me that they were more willing to make mistakes in elective classes because they were pass fail. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. And, and so grades do play into this quite a bit. Yeah. and then from there, once you understand your student's perspective, you can start really small. So you can do a bell ringer, like the one that I was describing before, where students are guessing at the beginning of class. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>. Just to set the tone. You could change your language around mistakes and the way that you give feedback. And there's actually a whole chapter in my book about how we can make small tweaks to our language that have a big impact. And then you could throw in a mistake analysis lesson every once in a while. You know, you don't have to do anything huge in order to have a big impact on the culture here,

Monica Burns:

But those little shifts, right? They add up, they make movement, and they have, you know, such a, they can have such a great impact. So, you know, Emma, this was such an informative, actionable conversation for listeners. I'm gonna link out to all the things so that people can find your new book and where to follow along. But for anyone who's like on the move and making a mental bookmark of where to go, you know, where can people connect with you? Where can they learn more about your work and new

Emma Chiappetta:

Book? Yeah, so my new book is available through ASCD that's called *Learning By Mistake: 12 Strategies to Turn Student Errors Into Opportunities*. And that's where you can read a ton of detail about my perspective on this. I also have a book called *Creating Curious Classrooms*, and that's available on Amazon. And if you want any like free reading from me, I've got a ton on Edutopia. So you can check out my author page there. And if you'd like to contact me, I am @emmajchiappetta Twitter or what was formerly known as Twitter. Yeah,

Monica Burns:

<Laugh>. Perfect. I know I still call it Twitter. I can't remember that <laugh>, the mental, the mental component there. But Emma, this was fantastic. Thank you so much for your time and your resources and ideas today.

Emma Chiappetta:

Thanks so much for having me.

So let's make this EdTech easy with some key points from the episode...

Mistake culture starts with classroom culture.

Small language shifts can make a big impact on student confidence.

Silly, low-stakes guessing games help normalize risk-taking.

Screencasts help students reflect on their thought process.

Remember, you can find the shownotes and the full list of resources from this episode including all of the ways to connect with Emma Chiappetta on EasyEdTechPodcast.com and finding today's episode #336!

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Outro

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Episode Resources

- Connect with Emma Chiappetta on [X \(Twitter\)](#)
- Check out [Emma Chiappetta's Edutopia profile](#)
- Find Emma Chiappetta's book *Learning By Mistake: 12 Strategies to Turn Student Errors Into Opportunities* on [ASCD](#) & [Amazon](#)
- [Creating Curious Classrooms on Amazon](#)
- [Poll Everywhere](#) (polling digital tool)
- [Power of Pausing Reflection Activities for Your Classroom with Rachelle Dene Poth](#) (Podcast Episode)
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