Creative Play as Community Building_default (2)

[00:00:00] **Joan Zaretti:** I'd like to welcome everyone to PodFest 2022 and the topic of discussion in this session will be creative play as community building. And we'd like to just start by introducing those of us who are here in this session, and I can begin. My name is Joan Zaretti, and I am at Bryant University in Smithfield, Rhode Island.

[00:00:24] I teach creativity and the arts and world music. and arts administration. My background is in ethnomusicology and music education.

[00:00:35] **Karen Hopkins:** I'm Karen Hopkins and I'm a lecturer at Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama. I am in the marketing department and I teach the intro course, intro to marketing, and then I also teach personal selling.

[00:00:48] I'm also a faculty fellow in the video center for teaching and learning excellence and let's see, what else? My experience is in industry, in public relations and marketing for non profits, for retail, and and a little bit for consumer packaged goods.

[00:01:06] **Joan Zaretti:** Great.

[00:01:07] **Josh Luckens:** Hi, everyone. I'm Josh Luckins. I work as an instructional designer in the Teaching and Learning Collaborative at the Wentworth Institute of Technology in Boston, Massachusetts, and I have a bunch of different backgrounds, but the one that particularly drew me to this session was I have a background as a theater educator, so I love creativity and play just as a means and just as education itself.

[00:01:34] **Joan Zaretti:** Great. Thank you, everyone. We have a few questions that we're going to start off with, and I may just, I'm going to add on to the fact that part of also my role, my hat at Bryant University is as a faculty fellow in the Center for Teaching Excellence. Along with teaching the undergraduate population here at Bryant I wear that hat as well, so I'll bring in some of those experiences as we talk.

[00:01:59] Through today. So my first question for all of us is what stories or personal experiences have you had? With creative play and community building

in your own professional setting. So maybe Karen or Josh like to start us off there.

[00:02:18] **Karen Hopkins:** Okay, so one of the things that I've done in my class, especially when you're doing internal marketing class, and students are identifying marketing is only being promotion.

[00:02:28] They're only looking at advertising and things like that to help them. Talk about where marketing starts, which is with a customer need and developing offerings to fill those customer needs. I have students get together and the game is to create a product for the students in the class that will fill a need.

[00:02:45] And the students work together to come up with the features of that product, what it does, and then the benefits, what people get out of having that product. And they spend some time creating it can be anything they want after we've gotten to know people in the class, and they match that to want some needs and then they have to do a presentation like a commercial for their particular product that they've developed.

[00:03:10] **Joan Zaretti:** Sounds like a great way to just really stimulate the brain to thinking beyond. Possibilities if you're, you really have an opportunity to go far as opposed to being only having a certain amount that you can speak to. So that's what a great activity. Thank you, Josh. What about you?

[00:03:29] **Josh Luckens:** This is such a good question, and I, I have a lot of different experiences. So I'll just share a few as a theater director and theater educator I, did all sorts of things to build ensemble and to get students feeling free and engaged. Connected into their bodies and to each other, to their voices, the imagination, all of that stuff.

[00:03:48] So that's a very direct application of creative play. And then I also worked in a program that was a model diplomacy program for university students. And it was pretty amazing because it was essentially applied theater because these students were playing the roles, taking on the roles of diplomats and conducting negotiations and making speeches.

[00:04:07] And so they were. trainings prior to the actual simulation exercises, training them in all of these skills, which are essentially performance skills and involve a lot of presence and in order to do that, just the play and getting people into their into that space of presence and engagement is a key way to go, and I

found it to be really effective, and the students were super engaged and got a lot out of it.

[00:04:30] And then it went, we've been doing a lot of work with design thinking, and in some of those design thinking. Classes. There's one around entrepreneurship education, and there's another one that was more around and the engineering design. It was just all about the initial phases of giving them activities that were very playful and very divergent thinking and all these types of things that.

[00:04:52] That, that allows students to get their imaginations flowing and see possibilities where they hadn't seen them before. And then I'll just share one last [00:05:00] example in my role as a faculty developer at Wentworth. We developed a fun program for faculty. It's an hour long program. We did it at a couple of conferences.

[00:05:09] It's called Strike That, Reverse It. And basically we come in and totally theatrically. Make and ask the faculty or the participants to create the worst course ever. And from the kind of worst worst practices, then later on in the workshop, they formulate some best practices.

[00:05:27] And it's just something that gets people thinking in a new way. It's a lot of fun, really silly, a lot of laughter a lot of recognition of things that they've seen go wrong, that experience go wrong. and regret it. So just another fun way to bring in play and playfulness.

[00:05:43] **Karen Hopkins:** I am so stealing that. That is good.

[00:05:45] **Joan Zaretti:** What a great idea. That's wonderful. I'm going to share two of the faculty ones that we've done as well, but I'm going to, I may touch base with you about that as well.

[00:05:53] It's always. Good. It's always nice to find ways that we're working to find ways to creatively engage our faculty. So one of the things that we talked about at the Center for Teaching Excellence at Bryant was sometimes, we have very focused professional development workshops and we wanted to create a workshop that was focused still but allowed faculty to play a little bit, to have fun, to have some joy in, in what they were doing.

[00:06:19] And again, Our other workshops do that as well, but we wanted to really focus on play. And I created a workshop for faculty that was an hour sort of lunch and learn is what we call them. And it was called a creative

collaboration and play. And the actual title of the program was I do not have scary dreams.

[00:06:37] And I, it's an actually a verbal, or it's a written exercise. If you look each Successive line of that statement. I do not have scary dreams has one more letter in the word. It's a type of snowball poem. And so we did a whole bunch of exercises, just to engage faculty and have them play a little bit and the workshop was structured around looking at creative communities that Share things like space ideas, work, etc.

[00:07:07] Looking at creative communities that collaborate on projects, and then looking at creative communities that exchange and by the end of the workshop we were exchanging. Postcards with other people in the university. We had to create the postcards who were not at the workshop. So we were broadening the creative community.

[00:07:26] So we worked on creative exercises, creative games written and visual during the workshop. And then we also brought in how to involve people who might not be there, but engage them creatively as well. So we did that some of these. verbal exercises. We did an old 1940s sort of parlor, parlor game that's visual called the exquisite corpse where you have to draw different sections of a piece and then you trade it and the next person draws something else without seeing what the first one is and just a lot of fun essentially is what we were trying to do in order to community build.

[00:08:05] And then the second one from a few years ago was we had a faculty improvisation group for a year And it was just a lot of fun. We didn't perform out. It wasn't about that. It was about getting together might have been once every week or once every two weeks. And we had a guest improv artist from Providence come in and lead us in, fun, silly exercises where we would be speaking or moving and once again just engaging a little bit in that creative play so I love the fact that we've each.

[00:08:41] Looked at it in very different ways, and yet we can find the similarities in that as well. Thank you everyone for that for the answers there. So maybe this is actually a good transition because it's nice to talk about all of the things that we're doing and the fun stuff with students and faculty but what are some of the challenges.

[00:08:59] That you might face in your center or in your classrooms related to creative play and community building and then after we talk about some of those maybe we can talk to each other if we can think of ways to address some

of those challenges. Do any of them come up for any of you, as we think through that.

[00:09:21] I think one of the biggest challenges from our standpoint is just getting people to come out of their shell a little bit. And because you're both talking from more creative things that are inherently creative topics and students who are in business, or they're taking a business class, they are not expecting and I'm talking about undergraduates.

[00:09:42] So if I had a graduate class that might. I don't know what it would be like, but I know for undergrads, it's more a lot of times they're checking a box or they're thinking that they have to be more serious because it's business and maybe letting them loosen up a little bit and use those creative energies [00:10:00] that they think that in a lot of ways.

[00:10:02] Maybe they have to put away because of the context they're in. How interesting. Yeah, very interesting, right? That idea of what's your preconception coming into the class or coming into whatever, what you are allowed to do and what you're not allowed to do and how that plays into how you react to it.

[00:10:17] That's. Really important. I think absolutely challenge for sure. Josh, what about you? Yeah, I've experienced a similar challenge but this time with faculty. We have obviously a lot of STEM faculty and they, I think they have limiting beliefs about What they could do in a classroom or what course in engineering or whatever it might be, could look like particularly around, being taught the way they were taught or, the students aren't going to like it.

[00:10:45] They're going to, they just want to sit there and be passive or, so I encountered this even resistance, even when talking about more active learning strategies, let alone active learning. And in that kind of creative way but I think that. There are faculty members who have gone on board some of whom kind of burst through technologies being like, oh, yeah, virtual reality.

[00:11:06] That sounds like a lot of fun. And then it turns out it's very playful and gets the imagination going in other ways. And some of them just, because they maybe have a different background. They also, in addition to being a scientist, they also do improv or whatever it might be. So they might, see that the value of that, particularly around the, just Building community and sense of belonging in the beginning of the semester.

[00:11:28] So I think that there's, it is a question of just getting faculty to see that this is possible. It's something that they can facilitate and it's something that

students will go for and get a lot out of. Great. Thank you. I it's interesting. Mine is. Slightly different, but I think we can address two things.

[00:11:46] And at the same time for me with faculty, I would say time, right? Where do we find the time to have people come to a workshop or come to or, just invest that time in community building, but I think that you both of what you both said. Also is a real challenge how to get not the same 10 15 people who like to do create.

[00:12:10] I think they like to do creative team building, that kind of thing to come out. How do we really engage the fuller spectrum of our faculty within, all departments. I think that was a great point that you mentioned, Karen how to cut through the expectations. And how to get people to come out of our shell, what do we think what strategies have you used to help that process.

[00:12:39] One of them is just to remind them that there's no, there are no mistakes when you're playing. Give them very clear but simple parameters. They, and this is something that we experienced, we did a, I attended a workshop on gamification. Back in the spring at our original conference and one thing that we noted was that when the instructions were complex.

[00:13:06] There were, so we broke up into teams and we were playing this game, and when they, when the instructions were complex, it delayed the So the instructions need to really be developed very simply and very clearly ahead of time to try to anticipate any confusion or questions. And just keeping those directions really simple because what we found were there were some groups who thought they were doing it right, and they weren't.

[00:13:36] And there were some who had all kinds of questions and it turned out it was okay, but they just hadn't felt like they knew exactly how to proceed. That's great. Really important and good point, right? If someone's nervous to begin with what instructions and what the complexity of a particular issue is, that can be a very big barrier to break to even get to the point where they're going to be able to loosen up.

[00:14:01] Great. Thank you. Excellent. Josh, do you have any maybe suggestions or ways to address some of the challenges? Yeah, sure. So yeah, Karen mentioned this notion of, if a playful space is set up really well, then people don't feel like they can be wrong. They feel like that's just part of the exploration.

[00:14:23] And so I think it's just figuring out how to intentionally make a container within that workshop or whatever the space is where people really feel safe to let loose and explore and have, have ideas they haven't had before and share freely and be authentic. And I think. That has to happen little by little.

[00:14:42] Just little warm ups little ways to get people feeling comfortable in them with them themselves with each other, engaging and also with the facilitator and the facilitator really holding that space in a way that feels very. Accepting and warm and open and, like that improv [00:15:00] principle of yes.

[00:15:00] And, not never saying no to people's ideas, but instead building on them and making making connections between whatever people bring in the room and the ultimate learning goals. Yeah. I think that's probably a bit of the challenge with faculty in this regard, right? So in a classroom, we see them repeatedly.

[00:15:22] Together and over time, in my creativity class, I think we do improv a little bit after the first half of the semester where we were comfortable with each other. We, we know each other, etc. It's a little bit more difficult in a space where I'm not seeing the same faculty members or we have different, paths that we cross.

[00:15:44] So I think it's a really important point that you mentioned the challenge of Working to build that in some way to make a successful workshop of play, et cetera. It's this, it's the chicken and the egg conundrum, right? With community building and creative play a little bit in order to feel comfortable with creative play.

[00:16:04] There's some sense of community maybe has to be there, you work towards both of them simultaneously. It's a very interesting point to think through. I think something else that is interesting. This made me think of How might we address these challenges? I think they're Sometimes is a misinterpretation.

[00:16:20] Let's just think of something like improv. There's a misinterpretation with what that actually is, right? Students will think in particular, but if we're even talking about a faculty workshop, may think it means, oh, we're doing improv this week. She's going to explain. And this is going to happen. And this is what it means when in a lot of these ideas of creative play.

[00:16:41] It's so process oriented and not product oriented. And a lot of people are used to saying, Oh, I'm going to be expected to do this, when in reality

creative play. To me is more about not expectations to do something, but to be part of the process to be part of something. And I think managing those understandings is helpful and getting more people involved is and I'm not expecting you to be able to do X, Y and Z.

[00:17:11] I'm hoping that this process in and of itself will be one that brings something to our community. So I would advocate for that as well as one way to address. Some of the challenges of people coming out of their shell, maybe help them understand. Definitely. I would say that, the expectation around improv and play is really more about presence than about, anything else because that, and it's about discovery because the whole joy of anything that we do or we don't, it's not all scripted in advance as we're discovering ourselves and alongside the people we're playing with or engaging with or creating with.

[00:17:52] You know what? What this thing is that we're gonna be making or doing or bringing into the light of the world. And so that is the challenge. I think so many people want to feel the safety of the known and the kind of what they can expect and feel held in that. And I think part of the need for safety is that with creative play, it's all about stepping into the unknown and doing this collective discovery and doing this.

[00:18:17] discovery within oneself and being able to, see that I can do something that I never would have thought possible or hadn't even thought of before. That's the magic. And so getting students in that and faculty in that mind frame is the challenge. But I think once people are a little bit in that, it's really joyful and it's really ecstatic and can be so You know, almost addicted that rush of yeah we just, an hour ago, I, I did, you could never imagine this.

[00:18:43] And we just did this amazing thing together. Let's do it again. So I think that once you get people on board, it snowballs because it's just so magical and it's so human. Play and it's just so essential. I think to teaching and learning. Absolutely. Absolutely. That's terrific.

[00:18:59] That's good. Hopefully that is some helpful advice that all of us can take in right as we listen to each other. Go through some of the challenges, some of the joys, a little bit of that together. I would like to move on and ask, now that we've thought of some of the things we've done, what would you love to see happen?

[00:19:16] Thank you. Maybe where you are in creative play or in community building, let's say in a three to five year age, but doesn't have to think about years even just what will be something that you could dream up that might be

fun to think through in your own in your own world of creative playing community building.

[00:19:37] I think as tools for my class, I just keep trying to build my toolbox or my playground or whatever it is. And I being in marketing, especially having some experience in consumer packaged goods. I'm always collecting toys for those kinds of things. So I guess in three to five years whether it's a lab space.

[00:19:57] And in my case, it's not a lab space. [00:20:00] It's a mobile thing that I can take into my classroom with me. That might be something that we might want to consider for our teaching and learning centers as a library. We have, I know lots of classes have used things like Mr.

[00:20:14] Potato Head. There's another toy that I love called Tubers and Zots. And it's like Lego, but they're flexible and they're they're just all these shapes that can be stuck together and create things. And I use that to make, for them to make imaginary products sometimes. So maybe to have a lab or a place where you can check out props that could be used for for these kinds of exercises.

[00:20:37] What a great idea, right? And that's also a great way to address some of those challenges, right? Normalizing the space. where you have this creative lab space normalizing the idea that you can come in and try these different things. Fantastic. Thank you. Josh, what about you? I would like to see these kinds of more playful pedagogical techniques and activities just be really more integrated into and normalized in the way that we train future engineers and architects and designers, et cetera.

[00:21:08] And I see that happening a little bit on campus in Kind of non academic space. It's a really cool maker space. We have where they do an entrepreneurship education and they have these competitions, make a pitch and you can get funded and all this stuff. So I really see that starting to happen there, but it's not quite crossing over into the classroom into the official curriculum.

[00:21:28] So I'd love to see that happen. And another thing I'd love to see is more multidisciplinary play. Collaboration. We have students studying product design and engineering and architecture and all these different things. Like, why don't we make multidisciplinary teams of these people who are training in these different fields, just like they might be together in industry to, create and marketing.

[00:21:49] For instance, we have that too, to create some sort of product and actually Go take it forward a little bit and have some sort of competitive

element to it. Have it be fun and just have it be type of thing that they can, really take forward as an experience as something they can even talk about job interviews, etc.

[00:22:05] Or maybe even it's a real idea that we have a startup coming out of our senior year, with. Interdisciplinary program or whatever that might be optional. It's not required, but it's just I think there's a lot more ways to get people engaging in these types of these types of creative activities that aren't necessarily like for grade, but they're really exciting and dynamic and just like ways to bring the material to life on campus.

[00:22:33] Terrific. Yes, I, I think we all would champion more interdisciplinary multidisciplinary ideas that Generate creativity and like you said a multiple tons of different ways, whether it's with across colleges, whether it's cross departments, whether it's cross classes, and I love the that you mentioned the maker space and I just reminds me of.

[00:22:58] I Love the idea of a maker space because we have some of those ideas to within a Bryant, but I love the, you have multiple places that you can be to be creative. So that just makes me think of Karen's lab space versus maker space right lab space being slightly different that you can find different spaces.

[00:23:16] They're not one space on campus that you can be creative that you can really find it in various colleges, various buildings, various departments that it becomes it normalizes it. a little bit, which I think is a really great point. I would love to see some involvement, even Beyond specific workshops, for example I was in a walking as creative practice class which really blew my mind.

[00:23:45] And I think this was something that a little bit like Josh was saying that there's an interdisciplinary way that when you get, I've been teaching creativity for a while. It really brought a new perspective into it and looking at it through your senses and looking at in all kinds of different ways.

[00:24:00] And I love the fact of, getting faculty even outside of our building outside of our walls and thinking creatively physically thinking creatively in many ways that are that is part of our daily life, not only as teaching because I think sometimes if something becomes part of you. What you do outside your professional walls, which most of us do you, you integrate it in more seamlessly within your professional walls.

[00:24:29] I would love to try some new things like that work on maybe. seeing if we can get people to come out of their shell in a lot of different ways. Just like even someone who taught creativity, learning new ways and new methods and how to be creative. So I would love to push that boundary a little bit.

[00:24:48] Thank you, everyone. And I think what we can do feel like I've got a lot to about my notes here and all the things I can think about. I think what we could do maybe to close it out today is [00:25:00] very personal level. What's the last event you attended that really inspired you creatively? And why do you think that was?

[00:25:08] What was it about this event and event? I'm using very openly. So however you want to think about event. What was something that you attended or you are part of? Thank you. Really inspired you and tell us a little bit about it. Sure.

[00:25:25] sO I am in a writing group that started over over the pandemic. So it meets over zoom and people are literally zooming in from all over the place. It's pretty small. So we get to know the people and the way it works is somebody volunteers to lead and leads like some writing prompts, people have some time to go write, and then basically can share whatever they want at the end of the evening and get.

[00:25:51] Exclusively positive feedback, just things people resonated with and things they loved and I found that to be just this incredibly creative, deep space to connect with others and connect with myself and see some of the things that I've been doing in my life, like in a new way, because there's space to write about it, and space to make it fiction, and space to make it poetry, and space to make it story, and magic realism, and go wherever you want with it, inspired by the prompt that you wouldn't have thought of yourself or maybe I'll get inspired to with a prompt, and then be able to offer that.

[00:26:22] So it's just this really nice little community and it doesn't, it's not a huge lift on anyone, but it's just this magical little community we have, where we get to be creative, expressive, reflective, and just make meaning and connect and feel safe and seen and heard on zoom every week or 2.

[00:26:38] so that's just been a beautiful kind of gift from the pandemic time that continues today. That sounds fantastic. I can't think of a specific event, but 1 thing that I really love to do is when I'm traveling it, it can be just about anywhere. I just really. Getting down to my roots in research are in qualitative.

[00:27:03] So observation, and it really lends itself to marketing because everybody, consumers are everywhere. And so you can sit and just watch people and watch what they do at a shopping mall or in a museum or an airport, or just watching. So I get inspired by things like that and say, how can we Simulate that in my classroom.

[00:27:24] How can we get students to because I think that what happens a lot of times is because mine are usually aimed at consumers, the things that are at the students as consumers, because I want them to be not just good marketers, but I also want them to be better and more informed consumers, but I don't think to think about get bringing some experiences that I see other places because I feel like when we're on the university campus.

[00:27:49] That's not really the real world. There are so many things that are just that kind of in a little silo while we're on campus, and especially for us because we're, even though we have a lot of students enrolled our town is relatively small. So I just like to try to observe new things and see how can we Simulate that experience in my classroom and things like getting students to interact with one another.

[00:28:11] And so it's just when I travel mostly and going to places that I haven't been before and maybe a lot of my students haven't been. Great. I think that observation, the anthropologist in me, loves when I hear that. It's just, it's great to think through. Now you're right, it brings up and it really does engage your mind in so many different ways and makes you re frame.

[00:28:32] What you might see every day in a totally different manner. So thank you for that. I think for me one thing we have a annual day of understanding at Bryant University and one of the panels that we had this year that I was able to facilitate was four guest artists from around New England So we had a visual artist and a muralist from Providence a performance artist and a choreographer from Providence, a hip hop artist from Connecticut, and the board member of a spoken word organization that does after or school programs.

[00:29:05] So they were all part of a panel talking to students about their experiences, and what was, first of all four of them were just incredibly inspiring to listen to, but what was very exciting about that was watching how The four of them who did not know each other and who had just met that day created their own bond during the panel.

[00:29:27] So while they were inspiring us and while students were getting ready to ask questions about their artistic practice, etc. You could see them

inspiring and supporting each other in this really beautiful way. And it was, it reminded me a lot about. That idea of community building with faculty.

[00:29:49] The fact that getting people together in that same space to talk and to share it was an unintended consequence of the panel, which was that, it was really a panel to get the [00:30:00] university community to hear from different voices, etc. But I, as you watch in real time, as people build community, it can be very inspiring.

[00:30:09] And so for me, Thank you so much. It just made me think about bringing people who may not always be together, people who may not know each other, and building places and spaces for that interaction to happen. And happen can be a very powerful way to build community no matter, who the people are.

[00:30:28] So that was very inspiring to me. Personally but I believe we are just about out of time, so I want to thank my fellow guests today Josh and Karen. Thank you so much for being here. We really appreciate your participation in PodFest 2022, and thanks for facilitating. This has been a really good conversation, and we've had more ideas coming out of this.

[00:30:55] Yes, it's been a real pleasure to talk with you all and feel very inspired by our conversation. Thank you. Likewise. Thank you all. And until the next time, take care.