

Ep. 037: The Last LinC

Claire has wrapped up teaching her eight week Learning in Communities course. We reflect on what she learned teaching freshmen for the first time in a decade, what worked, and what she'd change. We also explore her one bad day teaching the class, when a conversation went "off the rails."

Podcast: <https://prodev.illinoisstate.edu/podcast/2017/ep037.shtml>

Transcript

JIM: Hi there. I'm Jim.

CLAIRE: And I'm Claire.

JIM: Let's Talk Teaching.

JIM: Welcome to Let's Talk Teaching, a podcast from the Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology here at Illinois State University. I'm Jim Gee. Joining me again today, Dr. Claire Lamonica, our director Hey, Claire.

CLAIRE: Hi.

JIM: We took a trip this week-

CLAIRE: We did! We had a road trip; we took, we took our podcast on the road.

JIM: Yes, although we didn't actually record anything, which was a plan.

CLAIRE: But we played but well, we didn't record anything. But so, we went to a conference in Montreal, Canada, is the professional organizational Developers Conference. And educational developers are the bulk of that conference, people who do what we do. And we did a session on how to create a podcast for your teaching center. And it was well attended. And people really got into it. We had about 10 or 11 groups pairs and triads, recording little demo demo podcasts. They had a great time and a really good time.

JIM: Really good questions too. And, and, you know, as with any teaching, or professional development, I'll seriously Yeah, you you learn things by by the act of facilitating something by the act of leading a class. And so, on the flight back, I was thinking I got work to do. When we go there-

CLAIRE: We got job security.

JIM: Yeah, that's exactly right. So, but thank you to everyone who participated in that. And maybe we had got a few new subscribers.

CLAIRE: Some of you if you're listening to this, because you were at our session. Thanks for coming.

JIM: Yes, exactly. Exactly. So, but that's not the gist of our, or the the the central thesis of today's episode, we wanted to kind of put a period on this semester's teaching experience for you, because you went back into the classroom and taught link, which is learning in community and communities. And it was an eight-week course. So, it's been a few weeks since it's ramped up, then over for a while. But you still had some you had some because of the nature of the course, I think, because you only had half a semester to deliver it. And you had a project-oriented course at the towards the end, you were still living clean up a little bit.

CLAIRE: I had only half a semester to do all the things that you do in a semester. Right. So we had a final project, you know, we had Yeah, it was, it was intense. Yeah. For, for me and for them. But I'm almost finished with my grading. Yeah, yeah, I didn't actually get the first student email, wondering about course grades until the beginning of this week. Well, that's good. And I and I wrote back and said, bye. And I've been, you know, I finished teaching the course. And I went to the West Coast. And then I came back, and I went to a conference here. And then I came back. And then I went to Montreal, which is east, and I came back. And so, it's been a little hairy. But I am almost finished with the grading. And they'll all be glad, I think.

JIM: Oh, I'm sure. I'm sure they will. So that leads to what we wanted to talk about today was, like I said, kind of kind of put the final punctuation on it for this semester. But let me start by looking ahead. Do you want to teach it again? Absolutely. And you think you'll get the chance to?

CLAIRE: Oh, well, you know, that's not my decision. But I did have lunch with Pam Ambrose. And she and I shared with each other that we always end the semester wishing that we could start the semester over. And that teaching the course again is a great chance to do that. I said that I thought I would be able to do it better next time. I learned some important lessons about the course this time. So I sort of made my case, and they're hoping she's gonna take me up on it and bite me back.

JIM: And it runs only in the fall only in the fall. Yeah, that's right. Yeah. Well, stay tuned. Yeah, find out to stay tuned. So now you're teaching. So, you got back into the classroom. And we talked a little bit we did an episode recently about around midterm for you, which was about quarter term for the rest of us who were teaching a 16-week course. And you talked a little bit about what what you had expected going into the course and what you actually encountered when you got in front of those students and started working with them. And you had some good days, but we were also talking before we started that you had you had a bad day.

CLAIRE: I had a bad day, and you know, it's it's only an eight-week course. So, I'm sure I could have had more bad days if it had been a little longer course. But I did have a I had a bad day. I came back truly distressed because I had initiated a student conversation, a discussion, a class discussion that really went off into the weeds and took off at the

very end of class, right? You know, when it was too late for me to pull everybody back into the corral or anything like that, you know, where where we sort of were getting But I considered dangerously close to blaming the victim. Right, things like that.

JIM: So, so, tell us what happened, because I think it's important. And, you know, one of the things that when we when we consult with faculty members about having difficult conversations, and we've done a couple episodes of this podcast about that, too.

CLAIRE: I just listened to them.

JIM: But it's so important...

CLAIRE: I should of listen to them before.

JIM: Well, I think I think what you just said was one of the things that that we often say is that we have to regain control of those situations. And unfortunately, you were also playing Beat the Clock. Yeah, and you weren't able to do that. So, if you can give us some specifics, and then tell us how you ended up resolving it?

CLAIRE: Well, so one of the things that the students in link do is participate in a activity called the Human Library, which is this great activity where students get a chance to meet with people who have overcome some difficult circumstances in their life or gained some important lessons somehow, and they, and they give the and these are, these are books, these are people who are books, and the students get to choose which books they're going to engage with. And they go and they listen to the book tells its story. And then the students can ask questions and have a little conversation. Well, in preparation for that, I had the students listen to a short podcast by a gentleman who is now a teacher and an author, but who was at one point in his life in his early 20s, homeless, and I had them right before they listened, I had them write a little bit about, you know, what do you think of when you think of homelessness? You know, I told them, they didn't have to share it was just for their own purposes. What do you think of when you think of homeless people, you know, so on and so forth. And then they listened to the podcast, and then I asked them to write again, about, you know, whether their perceptions had been altered or challenged, or confirmed by the podcast. And then we had a class discussion, sort of reflecting on their reflections. And the discussion was going, I thought pretty well, actually, until very, like, two minutes before the class was gonna be over. And then all of a sudden, it was like, well, you know, sometimes those people are just scamming you. And they, you know, they, they have a Lincoln Park down the street, you know, with a coach handbag inside and, and I was like, Oh, wow, wow. And literally, I mean, before I could hardly open my mouth. Everybody is packing up their bags and leaving. And I was like, whoa, whoa, yeah. Right. Wait, come back. We need to talk. So, I got back here, I was pretty uhm, I was bothered. Yes. And Welter.

JIM: -And I, and I was up as I sometimes I'm working in the lobby up front. I think I was here when you came back. And just like I said, after your first day of teaching you floated in. Yeah, you weren't, you weren't-

CLAIRE: So, I kind of crawled Yeah, it was kind of time. That was, that was a bad day. And I. So, I think the importance of telling that story is not to say, hey, anybody can have a bad day. But to say that I had to do what we all have to do when we have a bad day. And that is I had to figure out what I was going to do the next day. Right. And I think the process that I used for figuring that out, which involved some reflection on my own, but also involved consulting colleagues. So I went, I had a great conversation with Dana Karraker, who's a coordinator here, who I think did the podcast on having difficult conversations. Yeah. And so, I went and talked to her about what might be appropriate. And you know, we came up with some ideas for activities, or some anyway, we came up with some with several ideas. And then when I went back to the class, actually, it was it was very interesting. When I went back to the class. It was almost as if some of them had been bothered as well, because as soon as I sort of broached the topic, they started jumping in and saying, well, you know, we kind of ended up you know, oh, yeah, they I think they felt it too. Oh, that's great. Yeah. Yeah. So, it was great. That was like, that was like a gift from heaven. You know, but we Yeah, it was good.

JIM: And I think the lesson there is that it is very easy for us as teachers to tell ourselves when it does happen, and a conversation goes off track and you're not able to bring it back that you know the old cliché, time heals all wounds. Now, we'll just let's just not deal with it. But let's just let it lie and move on. Students are affected by these things, even if you don't pick up it in the pick it up in the moment. Yeah. And even if it is not, you know, this particular example you hit is something that is socially uncomfortable, borderline, possibly socially offensive. It may not cut as deep as a racial slur or or some or some sort of some sort of uncivil speech in a class where as a teacher, you have to write you have to address—

CLAIRE: —Where you have to draw the line, that kind of that kind of talk is just unacceptable.

JIM: We can't do that. Yeah, yeah. So, it kind of skirted the edge of that, but it was still enough. So, I think it's great that you were able to pick up on that, and we were able to have them help you. With that follow up.

CLAIRE: And I think it was great that they had picked up on it. I don't think I was the only person that went home and reflected on that conversation afterwards. And that really, you know, that's sort of reaffirmed my faith in the class. Sure. So that was right.

JIM: So, what was the kind of the final resolution of that conversation? What what did you What was the consensus? Or was there none? Or...?

CLAIRE: Well, we, so we, we actually ended up working, I had them work in small groups to talk about perspectives on issues, and where different perspectives come from and how there's not, you know, issues aren't generally black or white, there's not usually just two perspectives on any issue. So I actually had them identifying a variety of perspectives on a variety of issues and, and where those perspectives might come from. And so, they sort of came around to why you know, a person, a given person can develop a perspective based on a single incident, or, you know, experience. And that that's not the whole perspective. And it may not even be the most informed

perspective, because the experience may not have given them the whole picture, or they might have even understood the misunderstood the experience. So anyway, they came up, they, they were great. And and they went into the Human Library, had great reflections on the books that they had, you know, that they had heard. So, it was. So, in the end, it all worked out.

JIM: Well, so much of teaching is. So, a couple of final questions to wrap up here. What would you if you do get the chance to teach this again? Mm hmm. What would you change? Either or? I mean, I'm sure there, I'm sure you have a list, we always have less, but what would you change from a, from a, from a you standpoint, from a procedural standpoint, or from a content standpoint? Anything like that?

CLAIRE: Yeah. Well, so it seems to me that when we first talked about the fact that I was going back into the classroom, I said, that I was running into the problem that I think a lot of us run into, which was I had too much content and too little time. And so I was, at that point in the semester, I was tossed madly tossing things, you know, scrapping things, okay, I'm not gonna be able to do this, I'm not gonna be I didn't do enough of that. So, I still left, I left too much stuff in. Okay, so I and I, I fell into the trap of trying to do more things, I'm sort of an inch deep, instead of a few things, you know, a yard deep ran. I think this is a class that might benefit from a few things a yard deep. And so that's one thing that I'll I'll do next time is I'll I'll focus a little more on spend more time on some of the major components of the class and sort of toss some things that I was bringing to the class that I thought might be helpful, right, but we're probably just distractions. So, So that's, that's probably the thing I did differently for that plus next time, I'll know Reggie net better, so.

JIM: Well, that's true, too. I mean, it there is the the practical learning curve that you have to go through whenever you're doing a new course for it because you're doing something differently. So, what was your favorite moment of your of your short of your truncated semester?

CLAIRE: Oh, wow. Um, I think I think well, this Okay, so this is just, um, this is just pure hubris or something. But my favorite moment was the last day of class when one of my students asked me what other classes I thought, oh, yeah, sign up for something else I was teaching and that was really, you know, that was just sweet. And I mean, it wasn't, you know, there was there was no point in just, you know, he wasn't trying to suck up or anything, right, because, you know, the work was done. They had spent the class period sort of sharing their final projects with each other, and we'd had, oh, and the other thing was so the final class, they all brought drafts of their final projects to share with each other. They had a few more days to work on him, but they, they had him bring them so they could give each other ideas and then And I thought, well, it's time to take the whole class. I wonder what we should do. And so, oh, well, I'll bring treats. I took muffins because it was like an 11 o'clock class. And we'll play a game. And so, I, I made this bingo game, you know, I went online and found a bingo card generator. And we made this bingo game with terms from the class. And I thought, oh, I don't know how they're gonna respond to this. And they were so excited. Like, I was like, Whoa, score. That just really surprised me. But it was kind of it was a delightful last class. And

it would not just because the semester was over for us, right, right. So that was a favorite.

JIM: Great. Well, Claire, thank you so much.

CLAIRE: Thank you, Jim.

JIM: And that's all the time we have for this week's episode of Let's Talk Teaching. To find out more about our podcast, go to CTLT.IllinoisState.edu. Click on the podcast link in the upper right of the page. You can find more information about this episode and the LinC program through University College here at Illinois State, and you can also find some past episodes. For Dr. Claire Lamonica, and all my colleagues here at the Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology, until we talk again, Happy Teaching!