

# Introducing play to higher education reduces stress and forms deeper connection material

June 14 2021, by Meghan Azralon

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A new study found higher education students are more engaged and motivated when they are taught using playful pedagogy rather than the traditional lecture-based method. The study was conducted by University of Colorado Denver counseling researcher Lisa Forbes and was published in the *Journal of Teaching and Learning*.

While many educators in [higher education](#) believe play is a method that is solely used for [elementary education](#), Forbes argues that play is important in post-[secondary education](#) to enhance [student](#) learning outcomes.

Throughout the spring 2020 semester, Forbes observed students who were enrolled in three of her courses between the ages of 23-43. To introduce playful pedagogy, Forbes included games and play, not always tied to the content of that day's lesson, at the start of each class. She then provided many opportunities for role-play to practice counseling skills, and designed competitions within class activities.

During the study, students mentioned they saw more opportunities for growth while learning in a highly interactive environment. Students also described that the hands-on nature of learning through play established a means for skill acquisition, and they were able to retain the content more effectively.

"As we grow older, we're conditioned to believe that play is trivial, childish, and a waste of time," said Forbes. "This social script about play

leads to it being excluded from higher education. A more interactive learning approach leads to a deeper and more rigorous connection to the material."

To maintain what Forbes described as "rigor" within higher education, the most common approach tends to be lecture-based learning. However, according to Forbes, this mode of education is counter to the very outcomes educators set out to achieve.

The results of the study suggest there is a unique and powerful classroom experience when play is valued and used in the learning process. According to Forbes, students who participated in this study also indicated that play increased [positive emotions](#) and connections with other students and the professor in the course.

"I also saw that when I introduced play, it helped students let their guard down and allowed them to reduce their stress, fear, or anxiety," said Forbes. "Play even motivated students to be vulnerably engaged, take risks, and feel more connected to the content."

Play is underutilized and devalued in higher [education](#), according to Forbes. She suggests educators reevaluate their understanding of using play in graduate courses. Playful pedagogy creates an interactive and warm learning environment, resulting in greater understanding of the material. This method is also more aligned with the humanistic missions and values of universities and programs.

**More information:** Lisa Forbes, The Process of Playful Learning in Higher Education: A Phenomenological Study, *Journal of Teaching and Learning* (2021). [DOI: 10.22329/jtl.v15i1.6515](https://doi.org/10.22329/jtl.v15i1.6515)

Provided by University of Colorado Denver

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