Magic Mountie Episode 3

Speaker 1: 00:05 Welcome to the Magic Mounty Podcast. This is a podcast that's dedicated to helping faculty and other college employees as they try and navigate the challenging fabric of serving students, especially at Mount San Antonio College, but everyone's welcome.

Christina Barsi: 00:25 Hey there. I am Christina Barsi, a former student of Mount SAC from many moons ago, as well as the co-producer for this podcast, and I am your host for this episode. Today, we're featuring one of the faculty courses that was offered on Flex Day called Jazz Up Your Lectures With Six Learning Principles Based on Brain Science led by a Mount SAC counselor, Emily Versace, who is certified in teaching these principles that were created by Sharon Bowman. Not only was this lecture really fun and interactive, and of course educational, but Emily herself is the perfect guide for these methods. She embraces these principles so fully, making it a really easy learning experience for anyone sitting in her classroom. Because there are so many activities happening during this lecture, you will occasionally hear my voice pop in, just to give you a little more grasp as to what's going on.

Christina Barsi: 01:21 If you love the sound of all of this, Emily is offering a two-day workshop May 11th and 18th from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM as part of the spring 2018 professional growth opportunities for faculty. You can sign up for Emily's course and any other course that peaks your interest, including my podcasting for faculty workshop on March 27th, wink, wink, at the website, which is mountsac.edu.com/pod. That's P-O-D, and click on the calendar. All right, let's drop in on Emily. Right now, I'm here with a presenter named Emily Versace. Her lecture is called Jazz Up Your Lectures With Six Learning Principles Based on Brain Science. Her session is full, which means she's sold out, so excited to hear what she has to say and what we can learn from her.

Emily Versace: 02:23 I love how connected you guys already are. I see learning communities forming before I even introduce myself, and I love that. So, I hope that this question kind of helped you start thinking about the mind of a student. What do they experience when they come in the classroom? What really helps them? What did you like back in the day, when you were a student, or today right now, when you're hopefully going to learn some things, as well? This workshop, Jazz Up Your Lectures With Six Learning Principles Based on Brain Science, comes from this book, Brain Science: Using Brain Science to Make Training Stick. I wanted to tell you about how I found this book. A few years ago, I went to a conference. It was a multi-day conference. I signed up for a training or a workshop. It was like a long workshop. It was four hours long on a subject.

Emily Versace: 03:16 Now, when you think of going to a conference and there being a long session, we all have different experiences, so I want you to give me a thumbs up if your experience was that it was super interactive, you felt like you were learning the whole time, you never wanted to look at your phone because you were so engaged. You were so excited about the content. You were getting to know people. Or thumbs down if when you go to a conference, you usually experience it's kind of boring. It's kind of long. The person at the front is talking the whole time. They have a PowerPoint, but there's not a lot of discussion. Go ahead and show me, what's your typical experience? Thumbs up or thumbs down. I know it's hard. There's a lot of them. Well, mine was a thumbs up experience. I went to this workshop and my mind was blown. I thought, oh my gosh, I was completely 100% engaged every second. Not only was this presenter's content amazing, but the way she presented it, I feel like I remember every single thing I was taught. Over the course of the four days, people kept asking me, "What was your favorite workshop?" I would start to tell them, and they would get really interested, and I would pull everything out and I would do a mini version of what she taught. That's how much it impacted me.

Emily Versace: 04:32 So I found her at the conference, and I said, "You are the best presenter in the entire world, and I just think you should know that." She said, "Everything I know, I learned from Sharon Bowman." She said, "Go buy her book." I bought her book, and I went on her website, and I found out she offers a two-day training called Training From the Back of the Room that is all about how to teach any subject using the principles of brain science to engage your learners. So I had to go. I signed up, and I went to this two-day training. I loved it. I came back and I talked to Lisa Rodriguez. Lisa, you want to wave? She's the Title Five counselor. I mean, I'm the Title Five counselor. She's the Title Five director. I should know who I am, know who she is. I went to her and I said, "I love this. Can I bring it to Mount SAC?" She said, "Yes." So Title Five is going to fund us to have this two-day training in May, May 11th and May 18th. I thought, why wait until May? I'm going to take just a little snippet of information from that training, kind of work it my own way a little bit, and offer it at flex. You guys can kind of see a preview, and then if you're interested, sign up for Training From the Back of the Room.

Emily Versace: 05:48 If you come to Training From the Back of the Room, you get, first of all, it's two consecutive Fridays, and we're submitting it for 16 hours of PGI, so that's pretty good in two days, right? You get these three free books. One, two, three. Thank you Title Five, right? Thank you. Look how kind of ratty these are. That's because I've been using them since I went to that training. This one is because I forgot my book at home, so Lisa gave me one of the nice new Title Five ones. These are your books. I really hope you like what you see today and you consider coming to this two-day training.

Emily Versace: 06:22 So, what are we going to learn today, though? We are going to focus on identifying and applying six learning principles based on brain science that will significantly enhance learning and retention regardless of content being taught. You're going to recognize these in action. As I teach you these six principles, I'm also attempting to use the six principles, okay? So pay attention to everything I'm doing. It likely has a reason that I incorporated it.

Christina Barsi: 06:50 So here, Emily basically goes over some ground rules that only pertain to the classroom, but I do want to mention that each room she creates offers tons of permission, like not doing an exercise if you want and opting out, to getting up when you need to. Her method of quieting the classroom after an exercise is also interactive and engaging. By raising her own arm and exhibiting an overemphasized closed mouth, she asks that whoever notices will copy and so on and so forth until everyone is participating in copying her movement and being quiet. All of these rules, I suspect, come from the brain science toolkit and definitely are worth mentioning.

Emily Versace: 07:32 I need you to know, this will not be a perfect presentation. Perfect does not exist. I promise to give it my 100% attention and effort, and I hope you all will give it your 100% attention and effort, as well. So, we're going to learn about six learning principles today. Sharon Bowman came up with the term the six trumps. Trumps, in a game of cards, is the winning card, right? These are winning learning principles. Is this a workshop on politics? No. Is this a workshop on brain science? Yes. So think card game, not politics when I use the word trump. We're using her materials. That's her word. So grab your handout and get ready. I hope everyone has a pen. If you don't, Lisa has pens in the back, because we think of everything for you when Title Five is involved.

Emily Versace: 08:33 You're going to go ahead and in your first box on your handout, draw a mouth where it says draw it. All right, a mouth represents our first learning principle: talking trumps listening. Now, usually, we're told you have two ears, one mouth, get it together. Listen more than you talk, which is true in relationships and conversations, but when we're thinking about learning, the person who talks the most is going to get the most out of it. So we want our students to have as many opportunities to talk as possible, not just listen. Learning is social, and we learn from, by, and with other people. That's Jay Cross, the author of Informal Leaning. Many, many learning experts and brain experts went into the creating of this book.

Emily Versace: 09:18 So, talking increases retention. When you speak, you're processing the information twice when you think about it and then also when you say the words. It builds relationships. How much of the equity information have we gotten, that learning, a lot of it comes from feeling like you belong, having a sense of community, connecting with other students. Talking is a way to help that.

Christina Barsi: 09:42 Emily goes on to explain all the benefits talking has on one's ability to learn better, like it causes you to make more connections. It enhances self-worth and confidence. It elicits feedback in a group setting for both students and instructor. It basically comes down to the person who's doing the most talking is doing the most learning. There are many ways to incorporate this in your teaching. Emily then demonstrates with the class how one of these methods can work.

Emily Versace: 10:10 We're going to try one right now. Turn and talk. That's the Sharon Bowman version of pair share. Turn to the person next to you, or two people if you're in a group of three, and share why you think talking is better than listening or trumps listening when it comes to learning. Great job. So, let's look at the second learning principle. Go ahead and draw on your paper some shoes. All right, what do these shoes represent? Learning principle two, movement trumps sitting. John Medina wrote a book called Brain Rules. It's one of the best brain science books that has come out in the last 40-so years. He talks a lot about movement. You see the quote from him, "Exercise boosts brain power." He talks about in our country, we are sitting ourselves to death. We sit at home. We sit in the car. We sit at work. That's not good for our brains. Our brains need oxygen, and movement gives us oxygen, right?

Emily Versace: 11:15 We think better when we insert movement throughout the day. I think they even did a study recently where they found throughout the day is much better than even doing all your exercising at one part in the day. The longer your learners are sitting, the less they learn. We have to think, how do we get them out of their chairs? What are the benefits of movement? It enhances cognition, it boosts their memory, it helps them stay awake, and it increases energy. The point of this is we want to get oxygen to their brain, and to do so, we need to help them move.

Christina Barsi: 11:50 Okay, so everyone listening to this podcast, get up and do five jumping jacks. Okay, just kidding. Just to summarize a bit, Emily does go on to explain that you don't always have to do full-body movements, that the hand movement from writing can actually be enough. Turning and talking to someone can be an exercise. Standing and stretching. Having them get up to grab handouts from the front of the room can also be an idea to try. Of course, Emily has her group get up and find a partner across the room to share with and to demonstrate, and that's the next exercise that she does for the class.

Emily Versace: 12:26 All right, get out your trusty handout and draw a camera. Yes, learning principle three. All right, so what does this one represent? Images trump words. We don't see with our eyes, we see with our brains. Our brains love images. The more visual it is, the easier it is for our brain to remember it. That is also from John Medina of Brain Rules. Images evoke emotions. When you study brain science, which I bet many of you in the room have, emotion comes up again and again and again. Our emotions are so connected to our learning. Images bring those up and help us remember. It can trigger long-term memory, and it can create shortcuts. Whenever you have been building something, what helps you more, written instructions or some pictures? For our students, too, including images in our presentations can really help them.

Christina Barsi: 13:22 All right, so you guys may have noticed that Emily has handed out a packet of some sort to the people of this class, and she also has a PowerPoint being projected that she's referring to from time to time. She goes on to talk about a Picasso painting she has displayed in the PowerPoint to describe the first time that she ever saw this painting in elementary school and how easy it was for her to remember it because of the emotions the painting evoked. From there, she has the class engage in what's called a quick draw, where they draw freely in their packet. After that, she introduces the fourth principle by having them draw a pencil in their packet. If you haven't picked up on it yet, she's been using a few of these techniques each time by having them draw something as she moves into the next principle. Very clever.

Emily Versace: 14:09 All right, so what does this pencil represent? Writing trumps reading. So go ahead and write that. Writing and thinking are strongly linked. "Writing serves as a tool for refining thinking," Patricia Wolfe from Brain Matters. When you look at research, again and again it says note-taking is very important for students. Taking notes really helps them remember and have a tool that they can revisit later to review for tests and quizzes. Writing stimulates memory. It's kinesthetic. So you're moving. You're moving your hand. Movement is good for the brain, right? It's visual-spatial. I don't know if you've had this experience, but sometimes I'm picturing what I wrote in my mind, and I can even visualize where on the page it was, and that helps me bring it back. When you write, it's visual-spatial, and writing grabs your attention. Writing is a whole-brain process. You cannot think about one thing while you're writing about something else. When you're writing, it's engaging your mind.

Emily Versace: 15:10 We talked about talking, how you think about it and you say it, so it's like you're processing it twice. When you're writing notes, you're listening to the information, you're thinking about the information, and then you're writing the information, so it's like three times. We tell students all the time, "Write, write, write. Write notes," but they don't always do it, right? How many of you, because I gave you a graphic organizer, are taking more notes than you would have if I didn't give you one?

Christina Barsi: 15:35 In case you're wondering, everybody does raise their hand. Emily then goes on to talk about how to modify your typical PowerPoint to be more interactive by creating two versions, one version being the student version, which will have missing information for the students to fill out. Or you can just make a companion packet, which she calls a graphic organizer, which she's done for this class. Of course, she has the class then write a bit in their packet about what they're learning to emphasize this part of the technique.

Emily Versace: 16:05 All right. So, let's look at our next learning principle. Draw a crazy design. If you have colored pens or markers in your bag, feel free to bust them out. In your first box, just draw something wild. What does this crazy design represent? Learning principle five, different trumps same. "To the brain, contrast and emotion wins hands down," Eric Jensen of Brain-Based Learning. I thought, what can I do different for different trump same? I don't want to just stand here and do a lecture again. You guys are used to that now. I want you guys to wake up and see something new with contrast. So I made you guys a video.

Christina Barsi: 16:51 Emily's video was pretty cool. She had it narrated by her husband so that even the voice was in contrast to her own, which makes it a different learning experience. The video explains that to make the brain pay attention, you must introduce the ideas of novelty, contrast, meaning, and emotion. It talks about why our brains are wired this way, starting with the prehistoric brain, which was trained to be alerted when there was a change in the environment, which is a signal of danger. That activity in the brain is called RAS, or the Reticular Activating System, named the "Pinky Brain" because of its size. The Pinky Brain basically decides what info gets in and what doesn't. Like if you zone out during your usual drive home, that's your Pinky Brain letting you think about other things while you drive because there's nothing new happening. What it also does is alert you if there's a major change by being tuned into contrast, differing expectations, or if something is meaningful or personal.

Christina Barsi: 17:56 Emotions make the brain pay attention, also. Basically, how can we make learning more personal and different? How can we introduce contrast and novelty and create an emotional experience and connection to what the students are learning? After the video, she has another activity that included a culmination of all these things. She has everyone get up, walk across the room to find a partner. The person talking about what they learned stretches and moves around while the listener mirrors the talker, and then they switch halfway through. Back to Emily.

Emily Versace: 18:29 Our last learning principle, draw a clock. Our last learning principle you can write down is shorter trumps longer. When you keep things short and sweet, when you break up your lecture into chunks, the learners are going to remain alert because they're not having to wait so long. They become more engaged. The learning becomes more collaborative, because if you're stopping and doing things like we've been doing today, you're not just learning from the presenter. You're learning from each other. The last one is it helps you polish your content. Sometimes what I think of when I hear about a really great activity or a really great way to do things, I think, but do I have enough time for that? I have to cover so much content. How will I cover it and do all these other things? Sometimes you have to think about what do the students need to know, and what would it be nice for them to know? Might as well focus on the things they could actually learn and teach it very, very well.

Emily Versace: 19:24 I encourage you to think about this and think, how can I really polish my content? How can I chunk up my lectures so they are engaged and they are using all these principles? The point is the longer you talk, the less they learn, because at some point, they're going to zone out. We have the 10-minute rule. If you remember, Captain Jack Sparrow, he said, the pirate's code, it's not really a rule. It's more of a guideline. Well, our 10-minute rule is also a guideline. Maybe sometimes it's every 15 minutes. Sometimes it's every 20 minutes. The idea is how can I break it up, even with a pair share, even with a little activity, even with a quick write? How can I break it up so that their mind stays engaged?

Emily Versace: 20:06 So, for our quick activity, turn to your last page again, and you are going to do a beat the clock. You get one minute, and you're going to try to write down four facts you have learned about this writing principle. Go. Now, I've done a lot of talking. I want you to get a chance to process this information and to show me what your ideas are. If you look around on the whiteboards, you might have noticed our learning principles. What we're going to do is Lisa has a beautiful bag full of the most gorgeous Expo markers you've ever seen. Or maybe they look like the same ones you all have seen. Either way, she's going to have them, and you all can have an Expo marker. What you're going to do is you're going to walk around, and you're going to think about applications.

Emily Versace: 20:55 So for talking is better than listening, you could do pair share or turn and talk. Now, I don't want you all to write the same thing, so I want you to read the board before you write and add something new. You can write things that we did today, or you can write things that you've done in your classes before, or you can write brand-new ideas that just occurred to you during this past hour. You want to think, how can I apply this principle in my class? Go ahead and take a seat. All right, so sharing is caring. I would love to get six volunteers to kind of paraphrase this and share out. Can I get six volunteers? People willing to read a whiteboard. One per whiteboard.

Christina Barsi: 21:43 She did find six volunteers, in case you were wondering, and they all read the fun ideas they brainstormed on the whiteboards. The interaction of the class was really neat to see. It really creates an environment that feels more like a workshop than a lecture. Here are Emily's last thoughts.

Emily Versace: 22:00 So, I really loved getting to hear all of your ideas and to see what you've contributed to our learning community. I see some really great stuff there. I hope this has been an engaging, interesting learning experience for you. I hope it stimulated your own creativity and what you can do with students. Just make one change at a time, one step at a time, and build on it. I hope you have a great day, and I hope you're first in line at lunch.

Speaker 4: 22:26 Yes!

Speaker 5: 22:26 Awesome!

Speaker 1: 22:32 Hey, thanks so much for joining us for the Magic Mounty Podcast. We love your likes, we love your shares, and we love your comments, so please engage with our community. Download from wherever you love to get your podcasts—iTunes, Google, Rate My Professor. We're there, and we want you to be back with us next week. Remember, any opinions that are expressed in this podcast do not necessarily represent Mount San Antonio College or any of its agents. We'll see you next time.