

Legal Education at the “Speed of Fun”

By Mike Murphy, Penn Law

For the AALS Balance Section Speed-Idea Sharing - Session 3: Well-Being
Teaching Strategies

June 24, 2021

- Think fast!
 - What are you going to have for dinner tonight?
 - Can you commit to an answer in less than 10 seconds?
- I am a clinical faculty member in a transactional law clinic, and as a hobby, I perform improvisational comedy (“improv”), a form of theater created spontaneously and collaboratively by the performers during a performance.
- There are rules in improv! Such as: Always agree with your scene partner and build. Always support your team. Make each other look good. Have fun.
- I have experimented this semester in my clinical teaching with bringing an aspect of improv, called the “Speed of Fun,” into seminar classroom discussion and student supervision sessions.
- In improv, moving at the Speed of Fun means accepting the scene the group is creating, and building on that scene with the first response that comes to mind, without being self-conscious about whether the response is perfect or makes sense.
- It is a requirement of the fast pace of improv. Waiting even a few seconds to form a perfect response throws off comedic timing. Plus, since the audience knows you are making up the scene as you go, coming up with something funny and interesting really fast brings the house down!

- Making clinical legal student work go at the Speed of Fun means encouraging brainstorming and problem solving by asking students “What’s the first solution that comes to mind?” or “What if you had to give an answer right now?” and then accepting that that response – whatever it is – as the logical next step in collaboration.
- The Speed of Fun also requires engagement, which I define as “something in which I can be immersed that gives me energy.” It builds that engagement by making brainstorming an immersive and energetic activity that requires full attention.
- My goal with this technique is for students trust their instincts more and make peace with the fear of “sounding dumb.”
- The Speed of Fun also helps students build a growth mindset, by reinforcing that a first idea does not need to be a best (or even a good) idea.
- It also works in our seminar, which is applicable to non-clinical teaching. But it is tougher for students act at the Speed of Fun in front of a large group, as the “fear of sounding dumb” is even bigger. So, it may work better in office hours.
- I am intentional about this goal and ask students to point out if I request a quick reaction and discount it. (And they have!).

Further Viewing and Reading:

- The Art of Improv - Acting Techniques & Improv Games
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBV8oVxXUM8&t=328s>
- Thinking, Fast and Slow by Daniel Kahneman
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/0385676530?tag=s7621-20>

Michael Murphy is the Clinical Supervisor and Lecturer at the Entrepreneurship Legal Clinic at the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School. He teaches students how to provide transactional legal services to entrepreneurs, and hopefully, how to have fun practicing law. He lives in Philadelphia with his wife, Megan, and his frequent Zoom collaborators, a hound dog named Little Ann and a German Shepherd named Spock. Please feel free to email Michael at mimurphy@law.upenn.edu.