

In the Classroom 137
**Take Your Discussions to the Next Level
with Digital Powerups**

SEE THE SHOW NOTES AT: <http://tubarksblog.com/itc137>

Stan Skrabut: Thanks ever so much for taking time to listen to this podcast. I know you could be doing other things, perhaps you are on this beautiful day, but you're hanging out with me anyways. I really do appreciate it.

As I'm looking at what's going on, a couple of things are happening. One, my class has started and it's going just marvy. I've introduced a lot of new strategies into my class to just tighten it up, make it more engaging. I think I'm seeing some good stuff, and football season's already started. It's nice to be able to do work and, out of the corner of your eye, watch football, so able to crush a lot of work. I'm grateful that we have fall and the temperatures are getting more reasonable. I'm really excited about that.

This week, we are going to, once again, dive back into discussions. I talked about discussions in previous episodes, and I will certainly put them into the show notes, but this time we are going to look at it from a different perspective. Do you want your students to think critically during online discussions? With a small tweak to your discussions, you can move students up to higher-order discovery.

This week, we're going to take a look at a technique called digital powerups, and how you can use them for your discussions. The first time I had heard about digital powerups was while listening to episode 295 of the *Teaching in Higher Ed Podcast*. Bonni Stachowiak was interviewing Travis Thurston, who is the Assistant Director of Empowering Teaching Excellence.

After listening to that episode I knew immediately I needed to share this with you. What are digital powerups? Basically, every insight of a discussion post is tagged or coded with a hashtag that corresponds to one of the levels of Bloom's taxonomy. That's it, but tremendously powerful in what it is able to do.

If you look at your discussion post, a typical discussion post response may have one or two key points. What the responder does or what the post writer does is preface the sentence with an appropriate hashtag. I'll explain in a few seconds.

Thurston defines digital powerups as keywords displayed as hashtags that are associated with corresponding prompts in online discussion forums. What do they look like? If you think about discussions, there is an opening question, or opening instructions or prompt that gets the discussion going. Typically, students have to respond within original post, responding to that question or that prompt, and then

there are subsequent responses that normally in a discussion you respond to somebody else. That's what makes them discussions.

What happens is as the student is writing these discussion posts they start the discussion post with a hashtag. These hashtags, as I had noted, are associated with the six levels of Bloom's taxonomy. If you want to know a little bit more about Bloom's taxonomy, go check out episode ITC82, which I will put in the show notes, and that will give you more information.

Bloom's taxonomy originally has six different levels, and what Thurston is sharing-- he's actually added a seventh level, makes sense. I've included it as part of these instructions. A student, as they're writing, needs to look at that particular sentence or a couple sentences that they're writing, and identify where it sits in Bloom's taxonomy. Then at the beginning of that particular set of sentences, sentence or sentences, they will add a hashtag.

One of the hashtags they can add is remember, so it is a number sign followed by the word remember. Hashtag remember. It is used when referring to facts and basic concepts. They're reading something, they're putting out factual information so they would preface that particular post with the word remember.

The next one is understand. You would use understand when explaining ideas or concepts, or you can use the hashtag understand to pose questions to other students as a way to further your understanding. That you're looking for input from fellow students that could increase your level of knowledge of a particular topic.

The third one is hashtag apply. Hashtag apply is a useful tag to highlight new creations based on what you've learned. This new creation could be simply a reorganization of the content, or the creation of presentations, or charts, or diagrams, or images, or what have you. They are taking that information they have and applying it to create some type of meaning.

The fourth one is analyze, hashtag analyze, and you would use this to connect ideas as well as do comparison and contrasting of ideas. That is that when you're writing that particular post and you're pulling different ideas together and showing how their relationship is, then you would use analyze.

The fifth one is hashtag evaluate. This hashtag is used to judge or critique an artifact. Normally you would want to support your critique with appropriate citations. As I stress to my students always want to hear their opinion, but their opinion is stronger when supported by others, and so getting those appropriate citations.

Number six is to create and create is where you're highlighting your new and original work. These works they can span across multiple formats. You can have texts, you can have audio, video, imagery, simulations, whatever that you are creating something new and making that available.

In one article that I'm sharing in the show notes, Thurston also includes the seventh tag called hashtag connect. This is used to highlight issues that are outside your

course or outside of your school. You're drawing that in and making that connection to something that is happening at a bigger level.

Those are the seven different hashtags that you could use. Once again, hashtag remember, hashtag understand, hashtag apply, hashtag analyze, hashtag evaluate, hashtag create, and finally, hashtag connect. How do you use them, or how could you implement this into your class? Typical discussion instructions require an original post and, very often, responses to other participants.

In my case, I use a format called IRA, which requires an original post consisting of three insights, a resource, and an application. Students then need to provide responses to fellow students until they earn 15 points for the week.

What I could do is I could have students enhance these posts with digital powerups. For example, I could require four to five power up for the IRA post. When they're providing insights, at what level are they? Is it just simply something to remember, or are they analyzing something, and identify those particular insights with those hashtags?

The challenge here, at least for me, because I have not yet implemented this, it is very much an intriguing idea and maybe something that I'm going to incorporate in future courses, but I haven't done it yet, is how does that then affect my weekly calculations?

Part of my rubric is I will have to evaluate how the powerups were being used. I'll have to make an adjustment to my rubric. They could garner these points based on that, or I could leave the points the same and they would just get fewer points if they did not incorporate these powerups appropriately, so is something that I still need to work out.

One thing, when you are creating these new instructions, you want to list the different digital powerups and when they are to be used. One of the benefits of this is the fact that quite often students are not even aware of Bloom's taxonomy and the impact on their learning.

These digital powerups can then cause the students to think about the level they are engaging with the conversation. What level are they engaging it at? These digital powerups can actually cork students into performing at a higher level because they are aware that different levels exist. That's one of the huge benefits is they recognize at what level they're providing information and can make adjustments to make it more scholarly.

Having good instructions, including those powerups, how you want those to be applied in the discussion, that will make it successful. Here are some tips that will help you get more out of the digital powerups. The first is voting. If your LMS allows it, turn voting on so students can upvote responses they feel add to their learning. With Canvas, you can allow students to do voting and you can also sort the posts based on the votes.

In one article, Dominic Slauson offered an additional suggestion of limiting the number of likes a student could award, and provide extra credit for the author that gets the most likes so you can see which particular post resonates the most with your student.

Another tip for getting more out of digital powerups is to actually model the behavior in your own posts. When you respond to students also use these different powerups, and put them appropriately in your posts.

Another idea that you could use, and the last one that I'm going to add, is that you could actually turn this into a badging opportunity. If you want students to start working towards those higher-order thinking skills, you could modify the digital powerups into badging opportunities. If students successfully demonstrate the use of powerups across their term, you can award an appropriate badge. Naturally, it would be up to you to determine the number of examples of performance that need to be provided for each particular hashtag or each badge that you're trying to award.

I think this idea of digital powerups is pretty exciting when it comes to online discussions. I'm confident that there's other ways that you could use it in your classroom. As you're presenting information, you could markup content to indicate what level it is in Bloom's Taxonomy. I think there's a lot of wonderful possibilities.

When I first heard this discussion, I knew immediately that I needed to share it with you. I encourage you to just go out and check it out. Go back to the show notes that I'm providing for this episode, and you will see different ways that it is being used. With that, here's a quick plug for my book.