

You might not always think it, but mistakes and creativity go hand-in-hand. Listen as Team Grundler discusses this winning combination with Claudio Zavala.

Show Transcript

Jaime: You're listening to The Creatively Connected Classroom Podcast, episode number 38.

Announcer: Welcome to The Creatively Connected Podcast from EducationCloset, connecting teachers and ideas one glue stick at a time. Here's your hosts, and K12ArtChat founders, Matt and Laura Grundler.

Matt: Hey, everybody, this is Matt and Laura Grundler, and welcome to another episode of The Creatively Connected Classroom. And we have with us today ... Not tonight, I'm usually, I don't know. But we have Claudio-

Laura: Zavala

Matt: Zavala-

Laura: From-

Matt: Austin?

Laura: Well, no Houston. Not Austin, he's here in Arlington.

Matt: Oh, that's right. I don't know. I forget.

Laura: So he's close by. Irving. Where are you?

Claudio: I'm in Duncanville, that's where I-

Laura: Duncanville.

Claudio: I'm living in

Laura: Yeah, so people probably ... I mean, anyone that lives in a big city, you kind of just get lost in the DFW area. So even though he's in our area, it feels like a bazillion miles away.

Claudio: Hours in a car, too.

Laura: Yes.

Matt: Oh yeah. I'm sure.

Laura: So, Claudio, we had the immense pleasure of meeting you in person a few weeks back, through a connection through participate.com, and loved every minute of hanging out with you. So we're super excited to have you on the podcast today, and we'd like to start just by having you tell our listeners a little bit about who you are, and what you do in the educational community.

Claudio: Awesome. Well, I am an instructional tech coordinator in Duncanville, which is a district ... We're just bordering Dallas, like you mentioned in the DFW area. I'm a transplant from California, so I taught ... Trying to do the math. 11 years out there, and then when I came here, taught for two years, and then been doing this tech training ... Anything to do with tech, showing teachers how to use technology in the classroom, use it with their lessons, integrate it. So I've been doing that for about ten years, I think, if I'm doing the math right. And everything from how to create lessons to use with an iPad ... A lot of the stuff that I like to share is just creating content, so with applications like Adobe Spark, or any Adobe products, or just pretty much anything just to be creative. It's one of my passions to help teachers integrate tech, but also be creative with it in the classroom.

Laura: Well, and what we love about you too is that you're an artist in your own right. You have some beautiful photography, if people are not following you-

Matt: Instagram-

Laura: Yeah, I was going to say, they got to follow you on Instagram.

Claudio: Oh, thanks.

Laura: Yeah. Some beautiful, beautiful photography. And you share a lot of cool things for education there too. Awesome, awesome stuff.

Laura: So what made me love creativity in the fact that you were a classroom teacher first, right?

Claudio: Yes. Yeah. I think it stems from ... In my childhood, it was ... My father's a musician, and my mother, I guess in her way she was artistic growing up. She really took care of the house, but really let us flourish in the things that we enjoyed doing. Music was a huge part of myself and my siblings' life. But all of us were into art. All of

us loved to draw, and I think my mom just kind of helped flourish that. And my dad was an artist himself, music wise, but also he would paint or draw. So I tried to mimic what my dad did, so he was kind of like, "Oh, my dad's an awesome artist, I want to be like him." And so the drawings he would make, I would be like, "Okay, I'm going to take his art, and I'm going to steal it, and learn from it, and do it."

Claudio: So I've always enjoyed it, so then when I became a teacher, which wasn't really my first career choice. I was going to be a fireman, which is totally funny. A completely different, opposite spectrums there. But when I was teaching the classroom, one of those things that I've always implemented music either in ... I brought some of my percussion instruments in class, so it was either I used them as attention getters, like people will be like, "Hey, if you hear me, clap once, clap with me twice."

Claudio: I kind of used different instruments, I'd either use a triangle, or use a vibraslap. If you're not familiar with what a vibraslap is, it's basically you use the jawbone of a cow, and then you slap it. And it kind of does this kind of sound. If you're familiar with ... What's that song by Black Sabbath? I can't even think of the song, but there's a big vibraslap in the beginning. But kids would also be like, "Can I do it? Can I do it?"

Matt: Crazy Train.

Claudio: Crazy Train, that was it. I was trying to think of it. But in the classroom, I would bring congas in, drums in, just implement all that in the classroom, and then art was a big piece of it too. It was like, "Hey, we're going to do some art." There was a point in my career at one school, I won't say where, but we had administrators, they basically confiscated all the crayons, all the markers, like, "We're not doing any art."

Matt: What?

Claudio: Seriously. It's crazy.

Laura: Oh my gosh!

Claudio: Because there was a big push for, "We got to get test scores up," they brought-

Laura: Holy cow.

Claudio: ... this bigwig in from a different state, like, "We're going to get things done. We're going to make ... There's no time for art." We're like, "What do you mean

there's no time for art?" So needless to say, there was art in my class. It was just contraband. I don't know if you remember

Laura: Underground art. The underground.

Claudio: School of Rock, when they turn all the stuff around.

Matt: Oh yeah.

Laura: Oh yes.

Claudio: Matilda, when they put everything away. That's kind of like ... I had students that were like, "Watch out. Keyword, someone's on the way," whatever. "Let's put everything away." But it was always just a part of me, and I've always been into photography as a kid, either just using those ... I remember those little one ten film cameras. I was using those to take pictures, and as I got older, got more into music, so didn't do as much into photography. But then everything just kind of comes full circle.

Matt: It does.

Claudio: I was still doing music, and then started picking photography back up, and then making videos, movies. Stuff that I enjoy. And so all of that is just a part of me, so whenever I create something, whenever I teach, I try to implement music and just really share with people how you don't have to have an art background, you don't have to be artsy to be creative. I think we're all creative in a way, and fortunately I was able to do that for my students that know art. I was able to, "Okay, we're going to do it here," but at some point I think it's kind of pushed out so people think they can't be creative, but I definitely think we all can be creative.

Laura: Yeah.

Matt: Yeah, no, I think that's something to learn. I always talk about all the time is we hear people say, "Oh, well I'm not creative." So I do that, and we look at it, and we're like, "Well, that takes creativity to do that stuff."

Laura: We always hear it. I actually had someone say to me today, "I don't have a creative bone in my body." And I'm like, "You're one of the best speakers I know, and you're funny, and people laugh," and I'm like, "That takes creativity right there." Absolutely.

Matt: I think also the subject matter that we were talking about in the chat, having creativity in mistakes. You started out with a question of, "Why do we avoid making

mistakes?", and I think part of that conversation we were just saying leads into that. So what do you think of?

Claudio: Well, I think that we're always concerned that they've ... For example, I was conditioned growing up, and just the way school was, that there was one answer. And the answer had to come about this way. And that's not necessarily the case, there's so many different ways to get to an answer. If you think about medicine, and doctors that are trying to cure diseases and whatnot, if you were to tell them, "There's only one way that you can cure it ..." And the guys on Apollo, when they needed to figure out how to fix that problem they were having, if you told them, "You could only use this." No, no. It's like you have to open up the whole thing, we're going to mess up, we're going to make mistakes. There's not just one way to do things. And in our education system, for so many years, we were kind of conditioned to think it has to be done this way.

Claudio: And then years later, you start to learn ... I can do math in my head, myself, and my wife is like, "How do you do that?" I was like, "I don't know, I just can do it." And she has to write it down, and others ... Oh. You did it a different way than I did. So there's so many different ways, and I think we're worried that if we try something, we're going to make a mistake that someone else is going to see and say, "That's not the right way." But there really isn't a right way.

Claudio: So when I say make a mistake, it's really not so much making a mistake, I guess in the sense that it is a mistake, but it really isn't. It's just a messiness way to get to somewhere.

Matt: Absolutely. I love the fact that you reference Beautiful Oops by Barney Salzberg. I know that's a favorite in our house, and I used that in the classroom when I taught elementary. But it's such a great way to get ... And we even talked about the Bob Ross philosophy of, "There's no mistakes, just happy accidents," and I really feel that there's a lot of kids that are coming back to that, so.

Laura: Well, and I've seen Claudio post ... I posted a quote that I said in some chat recently, and then you posted a similar quote, we're all on the same wavelength, about failing for growth. That failure is not ... I never see it as a final, finality thing. It's just an opportunity to move forward, and keep moving forward, and grow. And I think that that's the mindset we really want kids to have, and I liked where you were talking about perseverance during the chat, because really, that's what it's all about. How do you take that moment and persevere to move forward? So how do you do that for students, Claudio?

Claudio: Well, I mean it's been years that I've been in the classroom, so I'll use it with my daughter at home. She's a perfect example of perseverance. I think ... No, I have

two kids. So my oldest is 21, youngest 14. So she's now a 10th grader. Crazy. But in raising them, and it's not so much the difference between boy and a girl, but there was a difference in raising ... It was like I look back, and I say, "I should have let my son ... I should've been more open ... Not so much open, but let him explore more." And it could be first child syndrome, where you're like, "Protect," but he's still very creative in his own way. But I sometimes think back, I probably could've sat back a little bit, and just let him struggle through things, and learn perseverance that way.

Claudio: Whereas my daughter, for her, it's ... I mean really, sitting back on a lot of things when she's working on them. I'm going to say, this past year, I don't think she's ever asked me for help with her homework, and it's crazy. Because eighth grade, it was like, "Dad can you help me with this? Dad, help me with this." And I'm like, "What's going on?" She's a straight A kid. But it was like, "What's going on in school? Everything okay?" "Yeah, I finished everything at school, blah, blah, blah," so it's just ... From a young age, I was just letting her figure things out, letting her make mistakes, and I think that helps build students' perseverance. Because if you interrupt, if you intervene, kid's going to ... Kid has a firecracker in her hand, you may intervene, you know.

Claudio: But in other cases, you're like, "Well, kind of let's sit back and see what happens, sort of figure it out." And I think if we let kids, students, let them roam in the classroom, let them be creative, let them, "Yeah, let's make a mess." And then, "I can't figure this out," ask questions. Not give the answer. Ask questions. Like, "Well, what ... Think about another way of doing it. Think about ...", and so then they go back to the drawing board for the cliché-ish term, but I think about ...

Claudio: You mentioned the chat, that the company that created WD-40. There was 39 tries before they actually came up with the 40 mix that worked. Had they given up, and been WD-2, we wouldn't have what we have today.

Matt: We'd have a lot of machines breaking down. No, I love that. I love the idea, it's very similar to a friend of ours, Cathy Hunt, and she is a big proponent, and she will hand out devices or whatever and just let them explore and experiment on their own. Because they're going to come up with solutions on their own. And there's that play again, too, which is always important, and always-

Laura: Well, I think a way ... It always comes up in our conversations with creatives, this idea of play. And I think that, especially if you've never taught elementary school-

Claudio: Oh gosh.

Laura: ... Which is sort of like the example you just said, Claudio. I'm still stunned. I've heard stories about that, but I've never personally spoken to someone where they actually said, "No crayons and no markers." What in the world? And I think about that, and I think about as a child who grew up in the early '80s, we had a lot of free time. And we had a lot of time to ride our bikes down the street. My parents didn't know where I was half the time, probably. Because I was just out, exploring my community, and playing with my friends, and being in the environment.

Laura: And I think that that is something we really need to be cognizant of for our kids today, because they're so structured. Their school day is so structured, they have very little recess time, that they don't get the time to explore and play that kids in the '70s and '80s had. And I worry about that a lot. I know one of your questions talked about encouraging play. What are your thoughts on that?

Claudio: Oh definitely, I'm totally ... To concur with you as far as growing up, being able to ... I mean, I would go into my dad's garage and I learned how to use tools, a little bit by watching him, and like, "Okay, that thing hits that thing, goes into a piece of wood. Okay. Don't hit my finger? Good." And I think the other thing too that kind of helped me is, there was a Boy's Club when I was growing up, there was a gentleman there who, even to this day, we became friends. He taught us a lot about creating. We worked with wood, we painted, we mixed media. But we weren't able to play in there, really. We were creating.

Claudio: I had wood shop in high school, metal shop in middle school, so those things ... I used my hands to make things. And we're kind of seeing a return to that, with a lot of this theme kind of initiatives in different schools. So I think partly, too, is the need to give room for play. I totally agree. I even think it should be longer recess. This is playtime.

Claudio: But I think it's a whole mindset that playing is not educational, that playing has no value. I think as adults, when we go to training, when we go somewhere, you go to conferences, they have areas now where this is a playground area. We have a maker's space area. So I think part of it is getting the leaders in all of our schools and districts. I mean, sometimes I really think they should have some time to play, because they're just so test scores, test scores, test scores. Like, man, you guys should go take the test to see how it is.

Claudio: But have some time to play, I think, needs to be maybe put into school day. "We're going to take 30 minutes here, this is not recess, we're going to call it play. Creative play." It's a hard thing, because with people who'll say, "Well, all they're doing is just playing. There's nothing, nobody's organized. It's organized chaos." But it just ...

Let the kids, let them have some fun. Let them play, some kid says, "Oh geez, I got paint on my shirt," well-

Laura: He'll live.

Claudio: ... it'll wash off. Gosh, I mean, I would totally ... Being back in the classroom and we could have play like that, man. Go out and create a video with your phone. Come back and, "Go take five pictures. I want you to go find a picture of a pole, go find a picture of a circular object, text your ..." You're learning terms, but you're also going outside. And everyone's will be different.

Susan Riley: Hi there. This is Susan Riley, founder of EducationCloset. If you love these conversations with Team Grundler and friends, please be sure to check out K12ArtChat on Twitter. The chat is held every Thursday at 8:30 PM central, and it's a great way to continue the conversation. Just go to twitter.com, and search #K12ArtChat. We look forward to chatting with you over there soon. Now, let's head back to the show.

Matt: When you were talking about play, I was thinking about kindergarten. They had that, stations, or centers I think is what they call it.

Laura: Centers, yeah.

Matt: Where they had that opportunity to just kind of go around and explore different areas with different types of objects and whatever, and I think we don't see that as having huge benefit, but if you as a teacher actually sit down and maybe even observe ... Not even saying anything, but just observe what they're doing, what they're saying. And as they're pretending, as they're playing, they're working through so many things, and it's so crucial.

Laura: I was actually so on the same wavelength with Matt, because I was just sitting here thinking that, "Gosh, we have it in pre-K, and we have it in K, and then after that it's gone." And the thing about it to me is, it's funny that we have this whole push for creativity, and steam, and social emotional learning. But Matt just said the word. Pretend. Kids learn a lot of that when they pretend, or they make up a game with each other. And then they learn all those social skills and how to interact with each other, and all of that relates to all the 21st century skills that employers are looking for. And it's funny to me that we've taken so many of those opportunities out of the school day for kids.

Laura: And something you said at the beginning, Claudio, is that maybe a little bit, in some ways, we're conditioned to find the right answer. Maybe that is the testing, maybe it's multiple choice, or fill in the blank. I don't know, but really, that's the

opposite of what employers want. They want the creatives, they want the people that can problem solve.

Claudio: Absolutely. So you were saying something about being conditioned ... So I'm going to think about ... Coming back to my son. So my son loved kindergarten. He was just ... School was it for him, he loved it. And kinder up through fourth. And I think we all kind of know what happens in middle school. They go into rows, and there's no more talking, "Be quiet. Don't talk to each other. Listen to me." And it happens in high school as well, so his love of school just ... He was like, "I want to get out of here. I don't care about school no more. I'm just done."

Claudio: And it kind of squashed his passion, I want to say, for learning. Because he still learns on his own, he's such a smart kid. But that's just my son, I can imagine there's millions of other kids like that, that were affected that way.

Laura: Absolutely, well I was just sitting here thinking about ... I had ... In a past life, a female working as an assistant principal at a high school, trying to get kids graduated, I worked with so many kids like that, and I can see his face in my head right now. And he used to come to school, and he couldn't stand the rows, and the not being able to work with his hands, not being able to talk to people. And he would skip school to go work with a plumber, because he wanted to get a certified plumbing license, and he was basically a plumber's apprentice. And it was so hard for me to come down on him, because he was doing something he was passionate about, and that would move his life forward. But the traditional rows, and the way that we teach in a lot of ways just didn't fit for him. And I think about so many kids that I talk to that, then they go on to college, and it was a whole new world, because then they're back in this more Socratic type setting where they're having conversations with people-

Claudio: It's more free flowing.

Laura: ... and it's more free flowing. And then they're happy again. You know?

Claudio: Well, the second thing I was going to say, kind of piggyback on that, I mentioned so I've had an opportunity to visit Adobe headquarters, Google Headquarters. Not headquarters, offices down here in Austin. And all those areas where the employees are working, it is an open space, their places are decorated. They'll put their action figures all over the place. They can stand up or sit down. They can come and wear shorts, or not shorts. They can come in a ball cap. And they're talking to each other, they have rooms where they can go talk if they need to do kind of drown out the noise outside.

Claudio: Those are the places that all of our students, the ways ... The employers are going to have those types of atmospheres, where people have to be able to communicate and work together. But what we've done, is we've basically siloed the kids, and basically ... At kinder, they're like, "Oh, we're cooperative." And they leave. Not anymore. And now we're sending them off to go work in these places, and they can't get these jobs, because they don't have those 21st century skills.

Claudio: One of my driving passions right now, it's like, "Okay, creativity's huge piece. I'm going to as much as I can just evangelize about it, and give students opportunity to create, give teachers opportunity to be creative too, as well. Open up those times. Part of me thinks these tests, they'll fix themselves if you give the kids the opportunity. Because right now, all you're doing is seeing if they can remember something, really. That's basically it. Not if they're learning.

Laura: Yeah.

Matt: I mean, we could probably spend a whole nother hour on that.

Laura: I know, I was just sitting here thinking that. I know our time is getting low, but I just ... There is so much to talk about, but I think at the core, and it's the idea ... I love that you just hit on the idea of giving the teachers time to create, too.

Matt: It helps you to become a better teacher.

Claudio: Oh, yeah.

Matt: You see the possibilities, you see the potential, and it just leads ... Yeah.

Laura: And it's less scary. When you give them the time to practice and create, and feel like ... Then it's easier to give the children that opportunity, and know that it's going to be okay.

Claudio: Yeah. Well, and I think part of it, our leaders have to be open, have to be flexible. I think it's all about taking a risk, too. You know, "Hey, we've done it this way for so long, and test scores are still the same. Maybe let's try something ... Let's give this a try, see what happens." I mean, it can't go any lower.

Laura: Well what would you say to educational leadership to encourage them?

Claudio: Oh man. I think part of it is giving them an opportunity to experience that, the creative open space. That's been one of our drivers here, is trying to get some time with our leaders, and say, "Hey, you know, our models that we're trying to prepare our students, let's experience that ourselves. Let's practice it ourselves. Let's learn some tools here, and what did you make with it? How did you feel when you were

participating this way as opposed to this way?" I see the meetings, the way the tables are, they're in cooperative tables. They're working in teams. But for some reason, it's like ...

Claudio: One of the big things when I taught, I had one principal, she didn't like noise. So basically, I just told these kids, "If you see her coming around the corner, just get quiet, and when she goes by we can get louder again."

Claudio: Just give them leaders. Just ask. Give them time to just experience it, I think that's the first and foremost. And a part of it too, I think, is they also need to get out there and see what's going on in education outside of where we're at. What's happening in the next five years? Where are our kids going to be in five years? What are we doing to prepare our kids for the next five years? We're kind of preparing them for the way it was a couple years back. So are we doing what it takes to help our students? I think that's the first and foremost, it has to be about the students. And if they ... They can't answer and say, "Well, we're not." Okay, well what can we do to ... I'm here to help. I want to help get students ready.

Laura: Well I think you hit something, the fact that you've been to Google, and seen the offices at Adobe, you know, those experiences make it more real. I've had the opportunity to ... Fossil Headquarters, they do accessories, and bags, and watches, and things like that. That's near where we are teaching. And Toyota Headquarters, Matt and I've both been there. And I think for us, especially as educators that've been career educators, lifetime educators, that we get so invested in our little bubble of a world that seeing how other people work and what's expected of the workforce going forward is very eye opening. I would encourage all educators to do, and especially education leaders, to do exactly what you did, Claudio, and go see those spaces, to know what is expected of our students when they go out in the workforce, to be truly career ready.

Claudio: Yeah. Absolutely. And I know there's plenty of opportunities, and I think it's just go experience ... I mean, for me, one of my huge, huge experiences is South by South West education. Because it's just like they're thinking of what's happening in the next five years, then you come back and, "Oh boy. We need to work."

Matt: No, absolutely. Well, I certainly appreciate you coming on and talking with us, and I know that you probably

Laura: Do you want to ask him his last words?

Matt: Oh, I thought the what you could reach out to ...

Laura: No, no.

Matt: Okay. All right. So I guess, before we wrap up, is there any last bit of parting words, or maybe a challenge to someone who might be kind of on the brink of, "Should I? Should I not? Or how do I go about doing that?"

Claudio: I think one of the big things for me was connecting with others that are like minded. And so I think one of the first things that someone out there listening to this, "I feel like I'm by myself. I feel like I'm with my colleagues, and no one's on the same page as I am." Well, you can reach out to others that are on the same page, that are there to support you. For me, getting on Twitter was a huge, huge thing. So if you're listening and you're like, "Where can I find people?" You connect with so many educators that are passionate about the same things you are, just find them on Twitter. Even just post, say, "I'm passionate about this, I want to connect with people who are too." And you will probably find hundreds of people that will be willing to connect with you. So if you're out there and you're like, "I don't know what to do," find someone, connect with someone. The saying goes, "We are stronger together." I totally believe that, and don't be isolated. Connect with others.

Claudio: I think that may be my board ... Is it Wednesday? If not, Thursday. I'll just say Wednesday Wisdom, but it's Thursday.

Matt: Thursday Wisdom.

Claudio: Thoughtful Thursday.

Matt: There you go.

Claudio: Connect with someone, connect with someone that's like-minded, and you will build and get stronger that way.

Matt: Absolutely.

Laura: Awesome.

Matt: Awesome.

Laura: Thank you, Claudio.

Claudio: Oh, thank you guys for having me!

Laura: It's a pleasure to get to know you. I'm really excited that you're close to us, even though it feels far away. And hope to continue to connect with you, and maybe partner in some cool, keep sharing.

Claudio: Yeah, it's definitely, definitely. Still having thoughts about what we talked about that night. Tease the people. Film festival.

Laura: Oh. We have ideas.

Matt: I'm on board with that.

Laura: Yes. The Creatively Connected Film Festival.

Matt: That's right. There you go.

Claudio: Awesome.

Matt: All right, well you have a good rest of your day, and how many more days do you have left?

Claudio: I work all summer.

Matt: Oh, that's right.

Claudio: I'm taking some time off here and there, but can I share my contact information, in case anyone-

Laura: Absolutely.

Claudio: So you can find me on Twitter and Instagram @ClaudioZavalaJr, and you can find my website IAmClaudius.com, and you can find my YouTube channel there as well.

Laura: Awesome. And Claudio shares amazing resources, and some really great stuff. Love what you're doing with Adobe Spark-

Matt: And keynote, didn't you do something with keynote as well?

Claudio: I'm playing with it a little more, yeah.

Matt: You inspired me, because I started kind of dabbling with it as well.

Claudio: Awesome.

Laura: Thanks for all you do, and we appreciate it so much. Thank you, Claudio.

Claudio: Well, thank you for having me, and this is awesome. Enjoy.

Matt: Awesome. Thank you.

Laura: Talk to you later. Bye

Matt: Bye Claudio.

Claudio: Bye.

Jaime: Summer is coming, friends, which means it's time for a break. Team Grundler is taking off for the summer, but stay tuned for what's next this fall.

Susan: Heads up, seven up friends. If you've been enjoying these episodes, be sure to subscribe to The Creatively Connected Classroom podcast. You'll get a notification every time we release a new episode, each and every week. And take a screenshot and put it on your favorite social media, Twitter, Insta, Facebook, you name it. Tag EducationCloset and K12ArtChat so can reach out and say thanks. And if you really love us with all the feels, give us a review and or a rating over on iTunes. It helps others find the show and connect with our incredible community. Thanks for all your support.