

# Teaching with the Learning Glass Interview with Dr. Noel Marie Spina



## *Verbatim Transcript*

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*CAPTION: This interview is brought to you by Academic Technology Services.*

**INTERVIEWER:** Dr. NOEL MARIE SPINA is a board-certified Clinical Specialist, in Pediatric Physical Therapy. She's a Senior Clinician at Children's Hospital of Orange County, caring for pre-term and term infants with medical complexities, in their young lives as well as young children diagnosed with cancer. She finds time somehow to also work at California State University Long Beach. Thank you very much for being here.

**DR. NOEL MARIE SPINA:** Thank you, guys, so much for having me.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, at Cal State Long Beach, doctor- should I call you DR. Marie Spina or DR. Spina?

**DR. NOEL MARIE SPINA:** I'll tell you what, why we don't go with Noel -thank you so much for asking though.

**INTERVIEWER:** Absolutely. So, Noel teaches the Pediatric Curriculum, and she also organizes and facilitates integrated clinical experiences and service-learning projects. And she also supports clinical midterm site visits.

**DR. NOEL MARIE SPINA:** That is correct. Makes me sound very busy.

*(Sound of Laughter)*

**INTERVIEWER:** Right, how do you find time for everything?

**DR. NOEL MARIE SPINA:** Well, you know, it's always a choice, and when you get the privilege of doing what you love being fully ingrained into it seems less like work; each day that goes by it definitely keeps you busy though.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yes. So, thank you very much for speaking with us today. We're going to talk about your experiences with the mobile learning glass.

**DR. NOEL MARIE SPINA:** Okay.

**INTERVIEWER:** First, I think it's a good idea for our listeners to get to know you a little bit.

**DR. NOEL MARIE SPINA:** Okay.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, what led you into teaching and was teaching the first thing you did in your long career?

**DR. NOEL MARIE SPINA:** Well, actually, no. I went to school with the intent and focus of becoming a physical therapist and within the profession of physical, we are constant teachers whether we're instructing our families in ways that they can care for their infants, whether we're instructing our clients and things that they can do to care for themselves, whether we're instructing physicians and the medical team on who we are and what we do. So, education and client instruction is a key component of what we do as a profession.

So, I think I started my teaching on a slippery slope by just being a clinician. And from there as a clinician, teaching younger clinicians or acting as a clinical instructor and then from there stepping into continuing education courses where I was taking some of my clinical expertise and being able to teach to other clinicians. I'm an alum of Cal State Long Beach. So, when the opportunity came about to return back to where I graduated from and give back to the program from where I graduated, I very cautiously and hesitantly jumped in, and it's been a slippery slope ever since. So, I've been now teaching in the department for a number of years, focusing on the pediatric curriculum because that's where my specialty lies.

**INTERVIEWER:** What leads you to teach how you teach and why you teach?

**DR. NOEL MARIE SPINA:** Well, I'll tell you Roger, I'm a big believer in building community. I was born and raised in Long Beach. I went to school in Long Beach. I treat children and young families who live in the greater Long Beach area. So, I am firm believer in building community. Not only within where I live, but between all the members where I'm gracious and lucky enough to have different lives intersect at different times. So, when you say, "How did you wind up teaching or what's your driving force behind teaching?" I would say it's probably the same driving force that I use clinically and that I use in my personal life. And that is to continue to build the resources around me - to make where we live, a rich environment for everyone that I'm able to interface with. The way that I teach really has an awful lot to do with the way that I treat, and it starts from a place of

validation and respect. And I think being a clinician and being able to see your clients and interface and have their gift of trust, makes me a better teacher. Because I'm able to bring that into the classroom - and being in the classroom and having to redefine what I do clinically in a step-by-step methodical process, being an instructor makes me a better clinician. So, my worlds intersect quite a bit both in passion, intensity, and in style.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, touching on something you just mentioned. Being able to connect with people who you're treating or their families and your students, it must be it must be different doing that virtually? And so, I'm wondering if you could talk to us about what you have found challenging and how you've dealt with that, in this new environment?

**DR. NOEL MARIE SPINA:** I wish I could say I embraced it.

*(Sound of laughter)*

**DR. NOEL MARIE SPINA:** I think I was like everybody else and I was incredibly frustrated by it and potentially raged against it because so much of what we do both in the clinic and in the classroom has a personable approach. There is a piece of humanity that's missing. And that ability to connect and relate to whether it's your client or your student on an individualized basis is missing. So, in both of my worlds when this happened, we had to find a way to continue, for lack of a better word, to play the game, right? Continue to get the job done and somehow reinvent how it's done, so that we don't miss out on or lose the personal connection that that drives us all together. So, to say that it was an easy transition would be just nothing short of a blatant lie. To say it was unbelievably, positive and jumped in - the whole-time full force, I wish I was that gracious. But I struggled with it and I think I still struggle with it. But you have a choice, don't you? You know you have a choice and even when you're in the doghouse, you have the choice which way to face- and I choose to always face out the door and reinvent how we do things and why we do things. And if at its core you stick to this concept of building community with those around you, for those around you, not only for the present but in the future, then it's easier to find and navigate your way through the mayhem and madness out to just a moment of sunshine. Yeah?

**INTERVIEWER:** That's very clear. So, let's get into the mobile Learning Glass.

**DR. NOEL MARIE SPINA:** Okay.

**INTERVIEWER:** When did you decided to try this out?

**DR. NOEL MARIE SPINA:** Well, it certainly didn't start waking up thinking, let's try a mobile Learning Glass. This whole transition to an online platform was, "forced discovery" I would call it, and when this semester came about, I knew what I had done in the past needed to be elevated. It's one of my favorites- it's one of my favorite words. Like the community around you, learn from them and elevate your game. So, when Covid first hit and we had to do an online transition, you know, learning how to do a Camtasia voiceover entertaining video was cutting edge technology for me. The next semester rolled around and that just wasn't quite enough. We had to drive that ability to interact and ability to connect. When I'm teaching graduate students, that is foundational and housed in personable connections, I have to find a way to bring that to the classroom. So the next semester rolled around, and we built more technology in with live Google docs in breakout rooms and me reaching out to fellow clinicians in the community to share some of their insight via videos, to try and push the engagement and levels of participation. And then when they announce, "Guess what, we're still not done; this next semester we're going online as well." After I picked myself up off the floor, which was a few days of exhaustion, thinking there's just no way I can do this again- this just might be the final straw. My husband sent me an email link for whatever reason I opened- usually, I don't. Which, now I am on tape admitting publicly- but he sent me an email link about innovative teaching techniques. For whatever reason, I open that link and one of the first pictures was somebody behind a mobile learning glass or a learning glass. And I saw it and I thought, *I guess that's my one up*. Because what I saw was the ability to engage. And what I saw was the ability to interact, live, in person in real time with students, that were then able to share their thoughts and share their ideas in real time and get the immediacy of feedback through discussion. But I had no freaking idea how to do it, how to go about it, where to begin, and I was exhausted. And I knew I couldn't withstand another semester. I figured if I couldn't withstand it, probably my students couldn't either. So I jumped onto YouTube and I found a very clear, do-it-yourself link on how to build a mobile learning glass and showed it to my husband. I said, "This is what I wanna do, this is what we're gonna do." And I'm going to nickel and dime and cheesy my way through this and we did it really quick. And he looked at it and said, "I know you. You are going to break that in an instant." Concurrently I found out that Cal State Long Beach had a mobile learning glass that I could actually borrow. So, I reached out to that phenomenal team, Lane and company, who were gracious enough to let me borrow it and I looked at what they had. I compared it to this ridiculous do-it-yourself nickel and dime thing that I had built. And as a family, we collectively decided that we could move forward if we could figure out how to build it, gain some of the resources for it and try it out. But I knew that this was going to be my way this semester- to save my own soul and sanity but also one up my game. Teaching in an online platform to really bring the classroom discussions to life.

**INTERVIEWER:** It sounds, and correct me if I'm wrong, this is what I gathered from what you just said: You used the learning glass to teach with during synchronous sessions with your students and they can actually respond to you in real time, and you can use the roughly is a whiteboard that people can see to help illustrate what you are trying to convey?

**DR. NOEL MARIE SPINA:** That is that is more right than wrong and there's just a couple pieces that I would just kind of shift for you a little bit. The mobile learning glass that I borrowed, that I was so fortunate enough to borrow from the University, that glass was smaller because people have traditionally been using it to record asynchronous content. What I was after was a bigger piece of glass with technology that would let me go synchronously with my students and large enough that I could, like you said, accurately kind of diagram clinical reasoning processes and flows that we were able to construct with live discussions. So, it's not necessarily a whiteboard. It's something that I can stand behind, so they can still see me just like you can see me on Zoom. When I write on the board the technology will invert the image so they can see in real time what I'm writing, and what I'm writing is feedback that I'm getting from them based on live discussions. So, my preference, and the reason I shifted from shared Google Docs in a shared whiteboard via Zoom is I wanted to bring a more direct interactive experience that also had a different visual feel and a different audio feel. So that you don't have to shrink me down to see the light board. You can actually see me through it, in real time, and I don't become a giant head on the side, with a big screen, on the other side of your computer.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, that's fascinating that you were able to see how useful it would be for your students and you to be able to use learning lesson this way. Going back to your experience with the mobile learning glass what would you say are the pros and cons?

**DR. NOEL MARIE SPINA:** Here's my thought on the mobile Learning Glass: it is probably the most phenomenal piece of equipment that I've ever been able to borrow. That from start to finish is so cherry, everything works, there are step-by-step instructions on how to use it, the technology behind it, the build behind it-- I could not have touched on my own. I needed something that I could keep - therefore I had to build my own. And number two, when I shifted from asynchronous to synchronous content, I needed a bigger platform. If I didn't want to go synchronous there's no reason for me to have built one. I would have used this phenomenal piece of equipment that those guys built. And it is packaged perfectly for transport. The check-in and checkout process is easy. These guys are intelligent, they know everything about it. And it was the platform that let me build what I built. Had I not seen it and used it, I would not have been able to build what I built to work so well. It is hands-down, for anyone of any level of tech to be able to access it and use it successfully.

**INTERVIEWER:** What would you say to a faculty member who has just decided that they're going to try out the mobile Learning Glass?

*(Sounds of laughter)*

**DR. NOEL MARIE SPINA:** I would say, know it's going to be worth every headache that you put in, and so I would say definitely jump in with both feet. But I would temper it with a toast of reality. Was it easy? Not by any means. You know I had to scratch and claw and figure it out myself. So, if they want to try it, I would say, boy, ask somebody smarter than me on how to go about doing it and use the resources, whatever resources you have to help you get there. But whatever form of technology you're willing to take a look at in on board. Right, number one it's a choice. Number two it's a change, which means it's gonna be tricky and difficult. So, manage that within it and know there's going to be glitches. Know you're going to mess it up. Right? Know you're going to get slayed a little bit with it but, if at the endpoint it helps you enter the classroom in a positive head space, then that's going to help all of your students answer the classroom in a positive head space. So, if you say, "What is your advice?" Regardless of what piece of technology you want to explore, that resonates with you as an instructor, that resonates with your students, whatever that piece of tech is --become proficient at it and make sure that managing that tech through the course of your class doesn't interfere with your teaching. Because really that's what you're trying to get done. It's just another tool. The learning glass was a tool I chose based on my personal needs, my commitment to active engagement. My drive for participation, connection, and community and this is what resonated with me. My students are so intelligent, and so passionate, and so dedicated, that at a minimum I have to bring that back to them.

They work so hard to get into the program, the program is a graduate level demanding program with the foundation and the interpersonal communication and professionalism, we have a course set of values that we as a profession have to abide by. It starts with accountability, runs through excellence, and ends in professional duty.

**INTERVIEWER:** What would be your advice for the mobile learning glass that somebody could check out from ATS?

**DR. NOEL MARIE SPINA:** Okay I will say this about ATS: "Rockstars." Lane and Lane's team were fantastic. And so, if your first step into trying use of a Learning Glass, the first thing I would do is email Lane and those guys and say, "Hey, can I just borrow it? Can you walk me through it? Can you show it to me?" I have no clue what this crazy woman's talking about. So, if you want to try it out email Lane, borrow the Learning Glass, you can try it out in an asynchronous recording format, and they just have it dialed in fantastic.

**INTERVIEWER:** It's been wonderful to hear your teaching philosophy and how important both sides of your career are to you and your students and how you feed off each other's energy. But I just also want to personally thank you for spending the time with us.

**DR. NOEL MARIE SPINA:** Well, I want to say thank you as well to you guys for taking the time to put something like this out there. Because as a part-time faculty member, as a full-time faculty member, as any faculty, as any person on planet earth, right, we're all struggling with different components of how our

current situation has impacted us. There's no way that I could have pulled this off without the support of my family, friends, my department the tech team at Cal State Long Beach and it and my students and their consistent input. So, I think it kind of brings us back to where I started and that's the importance of building community. Knowing that when you're down on the ground and you need help to ask for it, because it's hard you know. It's hard but all it is a massive inconvenience. It's not really a problem and I was fortunate enough to have support of people I love, people I work with, people I don't know and people that I teach with and for, say all right I'll buy what you're selling. Let's see where it takes us. So, thank you to you guys as well absolutely for putting this out there.

*(Sound of music playing)*

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