

Bonni Stachowiak [00:00:00]:

Today on episode number 570 of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast, how to get started with interactive storytelling in any discipline with Laura Gibbs. Produced by Innovate Learning, maximizing human potential. Welcome to this episode of Teaching in Higher Ed. I'm Bonni Stachowiak, and this is the space where we explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning. We also share ways to improve our productivity approaches so we can have more peace in our lives and be even more present for our students. It is with joy that I welcome back to the show Laura Gibbs. She completed both her bachelor's and PhD at UC Berkeley and then joined the University of Oklahoma faculty in 1999, where she went on to teach fully online courses in world mythology and folklore from 02/2002 until she retired in 2021. She's now teaching Latin and Greek online, as well as working on folk tales, proverbs, and riddles.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:01:24]:

In today's conversation, we'll be exploring how to get started with interactive storytelling, otherwise known as choose your own adventure, which I used to love reading as a kid. Laura Gibbs, welcome back to Teaching in Higher Ed.

Laura Gibbs [00:01:40]:

Hi, Bonni. I'm glad to be here.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:01:42]:

I'm so grateful that we get to have this conversation. I was thinking back about I had created this card game, and it was a funny situation because I had to get the cards printed because of their deadlines before it was even a game. It was just it was a concept of a game. And so I I remember I went on LinkedIn, and I said, hi. I could use some help here. I'm realizing I want to create a game, but I don't even know what a game is. So I feel similar to that convert this conversation for you. I'm nervous about it not because of you, but just because of the topic where I think, gosh, do I even really know what a story is? And I thought maybe we could experience a story together.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:02:34]:

And so since this is a predominantly audio podcast, I'm letting listeners know that I'm now sharing a website that Laura is now going to describe to us. What is what is this website that I'm looking at, and why might we come here if we're asking the question, what is a story?

Laura Gibbs [00:02:56]:

Well, this is interesting because this is both a story and a game, this website. This is a collection of what some people call Twine games or some people call Twine stories. And so this is actually a project I did side by side with my students in our classes because students would make what were called storybooks and most of them contained just what you might call traditional stories, stories that are just written out. But Twine is a way where you can create branching stories, that sort of choose your own adventure type of story. And what I did with some of these was actually to put strings of stories together. And so, like, I I think you may have clicked on the Aesop one.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:03:40]:

Okay. Yeah.

Laura Gibbs [00:03:40]:

And so this is, can you survive the world of Aesop's fables? And so the way this game is set up is that it has a series of these little hundred word stories, and I'll say more about hundred word stories later because I'm a believer in hundred word stories. And so as it says here, the way the game works is you will make a choice each time about which animal you will be. And you know it's hard in the world of Aesop's fables, one animal is gonna go down in the confrontation, you know? So you have to choose carefully if you want to survive. And then here's a word of warning: not all strong animals live. Not all weak animals die. Who will be the survivor? There are many ways to win, but there is only one animal who is the ultimate survivor. So, that's how the game is set up and it actually contains lots of stories. So, if you just wanna start the game, that means we'll read a story together.

Laura Gibbs [00:04:39]:

And hundred word stories take a little under a minute to read. They don't take too long. So here's the question for you, Bonni. Do you wanna be the lion or the rabbit, or do you maybe wanna be a cat?

Bonni Stachowiak [00:04:49]:

I haven't decided yet because I first wanna ask you, is it important for us to know the difference between a story and a game, or am I getting caught up on semantics too soon?

Laura Gibbs [00:05:01]:

You know, that's interesting. I would say that all games are story full in some way and in various kinds of ways, but I'm not prepared to say that all stories are games. Will that do for now?

Bonni Stachowiak [00:05:17]:

Yes. I think it will. And now I'm thinking about, do I wanna be a lion? So where I work, the mascot is a lion and a rabbit. I like rabbits because I like rabbit holes. I think we need to reclaim rabbit holes at from being a bad thing to being a good thing. And then our daughter loves cats, so this is a very hard decision. But I think I think because I'm intrigued by rabbit holes and and all that, I think I'll start with a rabbit. And, of course, I'm also laughing at myself because I'm thinking there's something in my inner being that says there's only one animal who's the ultimate survivor.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:05:56]:

So I feel there's some okay. When I used to read choose your own adventure books, I loved reading them when I was young. And I but I my fingers would get tangled up in all of the pages because I wanted to know all of the different ways that it could possibly go, and I wanted to understand the implications. But, anyway, so I chose I chose rabbit. Okay. I'm in it. I'm in it to win it, as they say. Okay.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:06:20]:

Now do

Laura Gibbs [00:06:20]:

do you wanna read the story to our audience?

Bonni Stachowiak [00:06:23]:

Sure. A lion found a sleeping rabbit and was about to gobble him up. But all of the sudden, the lion then saw a deer passing by. The lion abandoned the rabbit, and he started to chase the deer. Awakened by the ruckus, the rabbit ran off. The lion, meanwhile, chased the deer a long time, but didn't catch her, so he returned to the rabbit. When he discovered the rabbit had also escaped, the lion said, bye, Hercules. I got what I deserved.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:06:58]:

I cast aside food I already had in my paws, preferring to chase an uncertain hope instead. Lucky rabbit, you survived. Do you want to be the deer or maybe you want to be the rabbit again or perhaps a goat? Right.

Laura Gibbs [00:07:17]:

So you can see how they're all connected here. So that deer ran off. We don't know what's going on with the deer. Right? You could still be the rabbit again. The rabbit might be the ultimate survivor or you could be goat. That little hundred word story gives you a sense of how you really can tell the whole story in a hundred words.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:07:35]:

So I just read a hundred words. That was that was the part that I read. Okay.

Laura Gibbs [00:07:40]:

That was the story. Exactly. And as you can see on the screen, it's presented here as a paragraph. Normally, when I publish these hundred word stories, I put in line breaks to create lots of, you know, short little paragraphs just to help with the pacing of the story, but that is a hundred words right there. And by Hercules is your clue that this is a classical fable. It's been around for two thousand years or so. So

Bonni Stachowiak [00:08:03]:

Oh, that's fascinating. In your whole world, I get so intrigued anytime we get a chance to connect. And both a lot of times, you and I connect these days in community through what's called my fest, which we've talked about before on the podcast. But I feel it's I remember reading fables growing up, and my favorite, by the way, my favorite fable related expression has to do with the scorpion. And, of course, the scorpion bites the turtle as the turtle is taking it across the the the river. And why did you do that? Because we're both going to die, and it's in my nature. That that's the only fable I really know, and I'm sure I don't even quite understand that fable. But I so because, what I was gonna say is I recently watched the season finale of a number of different very suspenseful television shows, and I love it when I can figure out these stories that are told over time. Generally speaking, I can do that better with Shakespeare than I can with fables because I know I learned a little bit more about Shakespeare than I ever did, but there's so many of these are Shakespeare.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:09:15]:

I need to go, oh, yes. That's you know, even if I knew even more about Shakespeare, I'd probably understand the stories behind these things. So talk to us a bit then just about storytelling as a pedagogical tool.

Laura Gibbs [00:09:29]:

Well and I have lots to say about that. But first, since you mentioned Shakespeare, I'm not a big Shakespeare person, but the most amazing live performance I think I've ever seen in my life was just this year here in Austin. And I have to tell you about it because it might be coming to your community. It's a traveling group called Improv Shakespeare. Oh. These five amazing performers get up on the stage. The audience yells a title to them, and they create a Shakespearean drama for you in pentameter verse right there on the stage. And so it's supposed to go for around ninety minutes.

Laura Gibbs [00:10:09]:

The play that they created for us was so amazing. It went for two hours, and it was a legit Shakespearean comedy with all these plots and subplots and a play within a play, all in pentameter verse, a lot of it rhyming, and the characters played multiple parts. So by the final scene, there was this one character, this one actor who was playing three or four different parts and he had to keep running around on the stage because all the subplots had converged in the final scene. If you ever get a chance to see this improv Shakespeare experience, you should go. I've never seen anything so brilliant in my life. I've seen a lot of improv. This was beyond any kind of improv I've ever seen.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:10:58]:

This sounds incredible. And

Laura Gibbs [00:10:58]:

the reason it works is because of that pentameter verse. It gives them a kind of formal constraint that is actually really productive. Right? Because it allows them to to pace what they're saying. You've got the lines. They build it line by line. And because it has a formal structure, it's possible to do that kind of creating on the spot because you're like pouring your creativity and everybody's creative, but you're pouring it into a receptacle, into a shape, a thing, a line that's waiting for you to fill up the line. So that's actually a segue into what I wanted to say about, hundred word stories and just storytelling in general is that you need some idea of a form. You need something that you're filling up with your creativity.

Laura Gibbs [00:11:47]:

And I think what happens with a lot of people's efforts to tell stories is that they're staring at a blank page, say, or a blank screen, and and they just feel lost in it because they don't have a form that they're filling up. Now that form can consist just of a simple length constraint. If you have a 50 word story or a hundred word story, or there's a poem that you're gonna write that's got three lines or five lines or so many beats in a line, it can be that kind of formula. It can be a plot

formula. You know, there are only so many plots to go around. Like, I love all these TV shows. Right? And I love their beautiful multi episode season long arcs of plot, but they're recycling all kinds of plot motifs before. If people have never been to the TV Tropes website, that is a place where you can go to find sort of all the formulaic material that's being brilliantly recycled in TV shows today.

Laura Gibbs [00:12:45]:

It's called tvtropes.com. So so that's the main thing that I wanna emphasize about storytelling is that it's it's it's wild. It's creative. It's it's it's original. You're making things that have never existed before, but you're not doing it without help, without the guidance, without the formal elements, the formal elements of style that help you to do that. And so the main thing that I did as a teacher, because most of my students didn't see themselves as storytellers and were terrified of this idea. I mean, they hadn't told stories sometimes since kindergarten. Mhmm.

Laura Gibbs [00:13:21]:

It's that they needed to learn about these formal structures and possibilities, not as constraints in a negative way, but as the kind of support that that you need for storytelling. It's not rocket science, but it it is important. It's something I think that storytellers need to learn about if they haven't learned it before, and a lot of students have not.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:13:42]:

You're reminding me so much. I I didn't anticipate this in our conversation, but so much of that's that LinkedIn thread, and I will, by the way, dig through my LinkedIn to find it because it was a treasure trove for me. But someone was so helpful in there, he said because I I really was struggling, but it was the best kind of productive struggle. Mhmm. But he had said, just go think of a bunch of games you've already played before. You've probably played Uno. You've probably played Go. Any any list of some of them I didn't even realize were already in card deck form.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:14:16]:

I thought I mean, that's I for example, I remember the book, The Game of Life, I think, or one of the oh, no. It's Monopoly. Monopoly, yes, of course, exists like I played it growing up, but it also exists as a card game. So he was suggesting where I might draw inspiration, and I'm realizing that's similar to what you're saying here too. That's the constraint, or that's the way of shaping it so that it doesn't feel so overwhelming to invent something. By the way, I'm gonna I'm so excited about today's conversation because not only do we get to talk now, but we're gonna do for the first time, in the history of teaching in higher ed.

We're gonna do an after party type of a thing that will be a video based thing where we're actually gonna look at some things from Laura. She's gonna talk to us about actually using Twine, and we'll get to see it and and all that.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:15:09]:

But, anyway, I just keep thinking back to that LinkedIn thread and what a gift it was to me. Just a treasure trove to keep going back and looking at and and all of the elements of games. I'm now realizing how much is in common with stories too.

Laura Gibbs [00:15:26]:

Right. And and game creation and story creation have so much in common as well because for thousands upon thousands of years, the way people made stories was by taking existing stories and just tweaking them. Right? And eventually, after you've tweaked the story enough and enough and enough, it's like telephone game. You might not even recognize that that was a story about a cannibal, you know, three or four or five generations ago, and now it's a story about a bear or something. I don't know. Game design works the same way. I recently had a great time that I spent with a former student who's a board game designer now, where he gave me a kind of crash course in board game design because it's not something that I do, but I did play a lot of board games when I was little. I haven't so much as an adult.

Laura Gibbs [00:16:13]:

And he introduced me to this term reskinning. So one of his favorite games, and it came out right before COVID, but became very popular during COVID, is called pandemic. And so this is a game where you're trying to defeat the virus. Very popular game, popular all over the world, and the makers of that game have reskinned it in various ways using the same game dynamics. And one of them is about the Roman empire. And instead of the virus, it's barbarian invasion, but it's the exact same game design just filled up with different content. So for me, as someone who studied story design, I guess you could call it, it was so cool to see that the exact same thing is happening there in the world of game design. That when you have a dynamic that's really great, well, you can fill that up with different content and people get the pleasure of the new content, but but the enjoyment of the the, at this point, to them, familiar dynamic of of of knowing how the game works and what to expect.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:17:21]:

Tell us a bit more. You mentioned hundred word stories, and I think I didn't take you quite as literally as I'm now realizing I should have. You literally mean exactly 100 words?

Laura Gibbs [00:17:33]:

Right. When I discovered this kind of writing and it's a kinda sweet story, so I'll go ahead and tell it because it involves a mutual friend. Has George Station been on your podcast?

Bonni Stachowiak [00:17:43]:

No. But I know who he is. Yeah.

Laura Gibbs [00:17:46]:

Well, so my dad was quite ill, and he was having some medical treatment that meant he had gotten sort of confused. He didn't really have dementia, but he was finding it really hard to read. And my dad was such a reader, but he realized that, like, when he turned the page, he just couldn't follow what had gone on before. So his ability to focus had really shrunk. And I forget the exact sequence of events, but I was trying to figure out I wanted to write a book for my dad for Christmas that year, and I was wondering how I would do it. And George Station, who lives in Monterey, California, let me know that they were having a, I think it was a 99 word story competition in their newspaper. And I was just fascinated by it, and that turned me on to the whole world of hundred word stories. And so I started writing these stories and making books for my dad, but I realized that my students were gonna love these too because they fit right there on your phone screen.

Laura Gibbs [00:18:47]:

There's no waste. You get the story and you get it fast, and it and it and it's very punchy just by definition because it's a hundred words. It's kinda like a joke or something. And so I was writing all these hundred word stories to share with them, and then they started writing hundred word stories. And that was the real game changer. Because for me, writing hundred word stories was fun, but I feel confident writing in lots of different genres and formats. But for my students who weren't confident writers, hundred word stories were great for them because they could sustain their own focus and attention for the hundred words. When they got feedback from other students, the feedback was really good because the students had maintained their focus and attention while reading it.

Laura Gibbs [00:19:30]:

So since they read every word, they gave good feedback as opposed to when students were writing stories that were five, six, seven hundred words long, which might not sound like a lot. That's a lot. Right? Reading every word of something that's five, six, seven hundred words long and giving good feedback about all of it is difficult, but a hundred words, not hard to write, not hard to give feedback

on. And then thanks to the good writing and the good feedback, the polishing was excellent so that by the time students finish their process of writing and revising and maybe revising again their hundred word stories, they were so good and they were so proud of them. All of them were proud of their stories, the unconfident writers, students who struggle for whatever reason with their writing, students for whom English is not their first language. Everybody was thriving with these hundred word stories. So one of the links we can share maybe afterwards is this all happened my last two years of teaching. We published a book each semester, so that was fall of twenty twenty and spring of twenty twenty one before I retired, with my hundred word stories, the students' hundred word stories all mixed together in books.

Laura Gibbs [00:20:38]:

I'd never thought I could publish a book of my students' writing before. It just didn't seem feasible, But these hundred word stories made it feasible, and this was all a long way of saying, I do exactly a hundred words because I want every word. I always have to shorten mine. Other students just treated that hundred words as a maximum, and that was a just a sort of difference in personality. The people who were gonna write more and trim it down and the people who were just gonna know I'm not gonna cross that hundred words, that's when I'm done. They also experimented with other limits, like six word story is a fascinating phenomenon. And six word story has a lot of currency in elementary school education. I've seen lots of teachers who do six word stories with their students, librarians who do six word story workshops in their libraries, and I have a a lot of materials on six word stories I can share too.

Laura Gibbs [00:21:24]:

So I would say from six words to 100, that was that was our range.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:21:28]:

Well, since you've started down this path of kind of talking about different contexts in which we might see this kind of storytelling, And I I'm gonna broaden it, of course, beyond a hundred word stories to to whatever you'd like to, but tell us about some practical applications across disciplines, especially if they're maybe unexpected to some of us.

Laura Gibbs [00:21:48]:

Well and and that was something that I came to realize working on this kind of writing with my students is they were really not into expository writing. So over time, I shed all the expository writing elements almost entirely for my classes to focus on creative writing. But most of my students were not creative writing majors. So very rarely did I get a creative writing major. They were mostly either

engineers or health science majors of some kind. And so I started to see all these fascinating crossovers between the creative writing they would do and the things they were learning about in their courses. And it made me realize that there's all kinds of narrative material out there, and a lot of narrative material depends on research. You know, I read a lot of science fiction.

Laura Gibbs [00:22:39]:

You need to know some science to do science fiction. I read all kinds of historical fiction. You need to know some history to do historical fiction. And as I just for myself as a writer, as I started to appreciate more the role of research in writing, I began to realize that that's something that my students could do in their fields. You know? And now they're so aware of this from TV too because you have all these police procedurals. You have all kinds of medical procedurals. You have all kinds of shows that's about storytelling, but it's also about knowledge about the stuff of the world. So I really think this this would be my contention is that you could use story writing in any discipline for students to share their knowledge with an audience in a way that's engaging, far more engaging, I'll say, than than most kinds of traditional academic writing.

Laura Gibbs [00:23:30]:

And if we're talking about undergraduate classes with students who aren't necessarily going to go on to academic careers, I really have to question our emphasis on academic writing in the traditional form. And this is even before the advent of AI. Right? This was already a conclusion I had reached long ago. And it's not that AI can't write creative stuff. It can too. But the difference is students are motivated when they write stories. Right? They feel like it's their own in a way that they never felt that sense of creative connection with traditional academic writing, at least in my experience. So you get this great sense of involvement by the student in the act of creation itself because it's their story, a story they're telling.

Laura Gibbs [00:24:17]:

And then they also get better engagement from their readers, which every writer likes to have. You wanna have good feedback that's not perfunctory. And stories invite all kinds of feedback because a story can go so many ways. Right? So if you're gonna just write me a kind of flat description of, say, some, I don't know, some economic formula or some biological event, pretty much everybody's gonna write it the same way. It's gonna sound more or less like a Wikipedia article because that's the goal of that kind of writing. But with a story, you make choices. Is this sort of gonna have a happy ending, a sad ending, a violent ending, no ending at all? How are you gonna start the story? You make

all kinds of choices telling a story that are different from the choices you make in other kinds of writing, and it's just fun. That's what makes it like a game.

Laura Gibbs [00:25:03]:
Lots of choices.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:25:06]:
Well, I wanna I wanna share with listeners the behind the scenes of how today's particular episode came to to into being. I was attempting to address the fact that a source I have relied on quite heavily, Mike Caulfield's three hour course on his SIFT framework. And for those not familiar, that's a fact checking framework he developed that's used around the world. And he had his has a game in the beginning of it that no longer exists. And so I was attempting to go try to find alternatives. I couldn't quite find what I needed. And because I I I think I really particularly like just his approach. I've talked to him a number of times.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:25:51]:
I use Sift on practically a daily basis. And so I I thought, well, I remembered about Twine. I first heard about it from you, Laura, and I thought, well, I wonder if ChatGPT could help me because I had tried to go in Twine before. I couldn't get it quite I can't even I don't even remember what my challenge was with it, but I thought, well, maybe it can help me with it. The answer was through a lot of back and forth, and I mean a lot of back and forth with me trying and failing and trying and failing and trying and failing. I eventually did get to the point where I could have a single story, like the example that Laura and I read together from earlier, just one thread, not with any even any different options. And so I'm gonna I'm gonna just start this last part of our of our conversation by saying, don't do what I did. Don't try to use Twine for the first time and to have ChatGPT come up with three different scenarios for three different things on a very complicated story that doesn't doesn't already exist.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:26:58]:
And, I mean, I just I tried to do way, way, way, way, way too much, but I'm really intrigued by the idea of introducing choose your own adventure type stories into my unique context. So first off, tell us what would be some first steps for beginners, and then those people who want to learn a little bit more, we'll invite you to come watch us on on, the video after party to learn a little bit more about Twine specifically and some of the more intermediate and advanced. So what are some good first steps for us that might wanna be getting started here? And we wanna start small for sure.

Laura Gibbs [00:27:39]:

Right. Well, the the first thing you need to do, this is very old school, is go get a pack of three by five index cards. Right? Because the way you need to start designing it is with paper things that you can move around because the the the the branching, although it will seem simple when someone plays it, is actually really complicated when you see it laid out. And I think it gives gives people a chance to appreciate why computer programming is complicated, you know, because we do all kinds of things in our lives, all kinds of if then loops and all kinds of arrays that we evaluate. We do these things in our head without realizing formally what we're doing. And so this gets back to what I was talking about earlier too, that that that that forms and formulas are are are how we navigate through stuff, how we process stuff, how we create things, how we interpret them. And so with Twine, the key is to have your index cards where you have both the content on cards, and so each card is a piece of content. And and that's a good way to keep your text from being too much on the screen too, is if you start with you could do four by six cards, I guess, if you want, but three by five is better.

Laura Gibbs [00:28:58]:

And then on the backside of the card, you can also keep track of any variables you want to use, and that's what makes Twine really into a game. You can do branching games, and and the the basic games that I created were just branching games. People make choices and so you go in different directions and maybe there's a goal. Like in the Aesop game, you wanna survive. I did a nursery rhyme maze where you wanna get out of the maze, but that's just reskinning. It's the same idea. You survived, you get out of the maze. This is the basic kind of branching.

Laura Gibbs [00:29:31]:

Can you well, it's like that playing a maze game. Literally, can you get to the end of something by the path you take? But Twine also lets you create variables so you can keep score of things. You can let your characters have objects or powers, and that's where it gets into more of role playing kind of game. And so you can use the cards to keep track of, you know, this is where someone wins a magic potion. You know, this is where someone dies if they don't have the magic potion to revive themselves. And so you can have the text. And then on the back of the card, the the variable behind the scenes. And that can even be just as simple as as keeping track of of what people have read or not.

Laura Gibbs [00:30:14]:

Like, I did a really fun project for my fest last year or the year before where the Twine was just being used to help people work through a reading assignment, but getting to choose what order they wanted to do it in so that it would

remember, oh, you know, you've already read about that dimension of the model. So so where do you wanna go next? And then it would ratchet on down until there was only one thing left. The mathematics of that, the number of paths that people can follow Oh, I'm not good at doing the math on my fingers, but whatever. There was probably, like, a hundred thousand possibilities, literally. But if you keep track of the variables, you don't have to have a hundred thousand things that you've anticipated. You just have to let the variables keep track of things and and remember what they've done and what they haven't done. So index cards, that's the key. That's the key to Twine.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:31:05]:

Wow. And then I'm imagining for a beginner, don't do what I did is the is the big lesson here. But, also, go read someone else's. Go, you know, go start experiencing it as a receiver of this kind of storytelling.

Laura Gibbs [00:31:21]:

And and and people who do Twine usually put them up in public places, and it's just great. I remember a couple of the best Twines I ever saw that really inspired me were during the pandemic, and they were role playing things about during the pandemic. Because during the pandemic, we were making all kinds of really hard, even scary choices. And Twine was a great vehicle for just walking through those choices. For me, Twine is something where I've done it with stories. And so my students were making Twine stories. I was doing stories. So we had a nice, like, group of Twine things.

Laura Gibbs [00:31:55]:

So any student coming into my class could look at our Twines and say, I wanna do something like what she did or what he did. But the best way to learn about storytelling is from reading lots of stories. And the best way to learn about Twine is from doing lots of Twines. Yeah. Even though playing them.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:32:12]:

One other thing I want to just mention, because people may not be as familiar with your all the people that you've inspired on across so many different areas. But one one thing that I imagine really has to be in place to make something like this work is some kind of alternative grading form. If if you were, for example, thinking, oh, wow. She just said I can keep track of who's read what parts of a reading assignment so that I can, you know, punitively punish people for not finishing. That's not the spirit with which Laura has taught over all of these years. So the idea talk a little bit maybe why people might want to learn a little bit more about alternative grading approaches such that this could really, really do something transformative in their teaching.

Laura Gibbs [00:33:02]:

Well, the re I've I've been mentioning feedback all along here because feedback and revision are how writing happens. Right? And feedback and test play are how games happen. And so my approach to grading, which was to not grade, was all feedback, no grades. And I've I've written a lot about this. And I was trying to remember, Bonni, the last time I was on your podcast. I couldn't remember if it was that we were supposed to talk about not grading, and we ended up talking about storytelling. Or if we were talking about storytelling, we ended up talking about ungrading, non grading. I can't remember which way it went.

Laura Gibbs [00:33:41]:

I'm retired now, and I have to tell you all the teaching I'm doing now outside of school structures where we just make up our courses as we go along and there are no grades and everything, it's it's just great and so liberating. And to me, that's what teachers and students need. Within the constraints of school, it can be hard to come up with ways to get out of the trap of grading and focus on feedback, but I certainly have all kinds of techniques that work for me, and I'm still very glad to brainstorm with people. So if anyone wants to just shoot me an email or something, tell me about your situation. I can share my materials and and truly, I think this is probably one of the most important issues in education. I'm so glad to brainstorm with anybody about how to minimize or get rid of of traditional grading in your classes.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:34:27]:

Now this this is a question which with just a couple minutes left before we get to the recommendations is totally unfair, so brace yourself, Laura. Since we have last spoke, the absolute emergence is not even strong enough of a word of chat based large language models and existence. And since we were talking about stories that are exactly a hundred words, Say I'm taking a class from you, and you've assigned me to have a hundred word story. And I take what I've written, and I've written maybe, I'm guessing, you know, 80 words or something, and I put it in to get those last 20. And I want it to be exactly right, so I offload that part of my writing to chat GPT. I just put it in there, and I say I'm writing a story about a rabbit, rabbit trails, and rabbits, and, help me get here to the finish line. I first would like to know how you feel about that, Laura. Like, what is that when I say that a human being took 80 words and told this large language model to make it exactly a hundred for me? How does that sit with you? And then how you feel about it in context as one who teaches.

Laura Gibbs [00:35:42]:

I'll try not to use four letter words here. I'll tell you the scenario you spun out there is that you've got 80 and you can't get to a hundred. That doesn't happen. The challenge really is usually getting it under a hundred. And I can tell you that the the writing tools out there, the AI generative writing tools, do a terrible job with making those kinds of choices. And so it's really not gonna help you. But the great thing is in my classes, students would not feel the need for that kind of help. And I think students rush to AI tools, to me, is a call for us to really change completely how we teach writing and what we're doing with the writing.

Laura Gibbs [00:36:23]:

Writing is an expression of of yourself that you're sharing with another human being. So automated writing, automated feedback, I don't know what it's good for in education. Maybe it serves a purpose out there in the corporate world that I don't have experience with and I don't understand where meaninglessness maybe is an acceptable situation in which you find yourself. But meaninglessness in education won't work. Right? Education has to be meaningful, personally meaningful. If people aren't following Audrey Waters again on all of this, I'm not gonna really even try to answer that question in detail, but I will just say that Audrey Waters is writing about education technology again, and I'll say thank goodness. I mean, there was there is no one whose voice we need more now than Audrey's, and she just had a brilliant piece in her substack this week and following a series of other brilliant pieces. But the main upshot of this one that that really got me thinking hard is that she she looked back at primitive kinds of AI, not this large language model stuff, but still AI esque events.

Laura Gibbs [00:37:29]:

And she went back to Clippy, Microsoft Clippy, and and people's reactions to Clippy. And, of course, no one ever really liked Clippy very much, and she has all kinds of guesses as to why that would be because Clippy was kind of surveillance. Clippy intervene when you didn't want it, on and on. But she found a a master's thesis, I think it was, where someone had looked at people's reactions to Clippy. And and back in the day and and I guess we're talking now this might have been, like, 02/2002, something like that. It was sort of, like, just before Office XP maybe. The reason people didn't like Clippy is that they would prefer to ask another person for help. And so this idea of people helping other people, asking help from other people, and forging connections through getting and giving help was why Clippy was not working for them.

Laura Gibbs [00:38:21]:

Well, flash forward like ten years later, where our lives are more online and more screen based than they were because 02/2002, that's before all this platforming happened in social networking online, that people are now less trusting in other people and more trusting in the technology and wanting the technology to help them. And for all kinds of reasons, not wanting or being able or feeling confident to ask other people for help. I think this erosion of trust is a huge problem, not just in education, but I mean, in our society as a whole. So there are just so many issues going on here, and I think that's why I really like what Audrey does. It's not just this kind of knee jerk, and there are all kinds of reasons to have a knee jerk. This is bad. This is dangerous reaction to AI based on previous technology problems, I'll call them, in education. But she just has so much insight into broadening these questions into really big important questions that we need to be asking and and thinking about.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:39:26]:

Thank you so much. I will certainly be adding that to the show notes for today's episode. And this is the time in the show where we each get to share our recommendations. I have been so excited to have a conversation with you about storytelling, and one of my favorite all time audio storytellers is John Biewen. And he is the creator and host of a podcast called Seen on Radio. I've recommended it before on the podcast, so I'm not recommending it this time because I try not to recommend the same thing twice, although I have failed at least once that I'm aware of in in in more than a decade of doing this. But instead of recommending seen on radio, I'm recommending he started a new newsletter, and it is s c o r keeping score. There's no e on the end of that, keeping score from John Biewen.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:40:20]:

And he writes of himself about this newsletter. I've long been reluctant to create a newsletter, wary of giving myself another hungry content mouth to feed, not to mention contributing to the newsletter glut. At the same time, I've felt the love and energy from our listeners and wished for more engagement with you all, so here we are. This is a journal for the community of seen on radio listeners and anyone else, of course, written usually by me. My intention is to write once a month, and he says he'll be sharing notes and reflections on democracy, capitalism, climate change, race, gender, and social justice. So I would highly suggest this newsletter. And since Laura brought it up too, also, while you're up there on the show notes, you also gotta subscribe to Audrey Waters newsletter as well. So I hope I didn't just steal one of yours from you, Laura.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:41:18]:

I'm gonna pass it over to you for whatever you'd like to recommend.

Laura Gibbs [00:41:22]:

Well, I did something kind of different, and I'm really grateful that this show prompted me to do this instead of a recommendation. How could I choose? Right? People, you can see my background on the Zoom. If you're looking at the Zoom, I'm surrounded by hundreds of books, and I read a children's book every day. But I did a bibliography of write your own books. Write your own story, write your own fable, write your own myth, write your own legend, write your own fairy tale, write your own nursery rhymes, write your own haiku, all the write your own books that I know of in series. And I link to the ones that are at Internet Archive for people who wanna check them out and use the amazing library at Internet Archive that's available for borrowing so you can see if that's the book for you. These are good books. They are for little kids, which is great.

Laura Gibbs [00:42:07]:

Right? I cannot say enough things, good things about reading children's books, especially when it comes to creativity. And one of the things Bonni had asked me in terms of suggestions for getting started, I would urge everybody just to try to do one little creative thing a day. Like, even if you just write a haiku in response to the day's news. You know? It'll just take you a few minutes, but but you will feel so much better. You really will. And the news is bad. Right? So we need to feel better, and just writing a little haiku about that will make you feel better. And you probably haven't written haiku since, like, third grade or something, but haiku is one of the great poetic traditions of the world.

Laura Gibbs [00:42:48]:

It can change your life. And so one of the books on that list is, write your own haiku book. It is available at the Internet Archive for borrowing, so anybody can just check it out, but I think once you see how wonderful and cute the book is, you'll be inspired to get a used copy of it. Children's books, thank goodness, are available cheap, used at bookfinder.com, where you can find the cheapest version of any used book. And children's books by nature end up in the used book market because people take their kids' books and tow them down to the Goodwill, and then Goodwill sells them to you cheap. So, anyway, in the show notes, I guess we'll have this we go write your own bibliography, and I hope it will inspire people. And if you have other write your own books maybe that you've used with your own kids or with your students, let me know so I can add it to the list.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:43:34]:

And if you try writing the haiku in response to the day's news, definitely, we would love to hear from you on that too. We'd love to hear that from you. Yeah.

Laura, it's been so good getting to reconnect with you today. As I mentioned at the start of this episode, we will include a video option for our discussions that take place in a more visual format as we go and have a look at Twine and a little bit more after this recording ends. Thank you so much for being here on Teaching in Higher Ed, Laura.

Laura Gibbs [00:44:06]:

Oh, thank you so much. It was really fun.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:44:10]:

Thank you once again to Laura Gibbs for joining me for today's episode. I hope you'll consider watching the bonus content from today's episode. The link will be in the show notes. Thanks to Andrew Kroeger for your wonderful editing of today's episode and for Sierra Priest for the always reliable and wonderful podcast production support. Today's episode was produced by me, Bonni Stachowiak. If you've yet to sign up for the weekly updates from Teaching in Higher Ed, I encourage you to head over to teachinginhighered.com/subscribe. Thanks for listening, and I'll see you next time on Teaching in Higher Ed.

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