Bonni Stachowiak [00:00:00]:
Today on episode number 585 of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast, Toward Socially Just Teaching Across Disciplines with Bryan Dewsbury. Production Credit: Produced by Innovate Learning, Maximizing Human Potential.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:00:22]:
Welcome to this episode of Teaching in Higher Ed. I'm Bonni Stachowiak, and this is the space where we explore the art of 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. What does it take to build trust in the classroom? And why does it matter for equity? Bryan Dewsbury, associate professor of biology at Florida International University, joins me today to explore how inclusive teaching is rooted in human dignity, deep mentorship, and the cultivation of agency. As you'll hear, he draws from his own experiences, his research, and classroom practices. He helps us challenge traditional assessment models and invites us to reimagine rigor as a form of respect. You'll hear him talk about big, beautiful questions and where he draws inspiration from that practice to the classroom, feedback models he uses, and ultimately his aim in teaching. Bryan Dewsbury, welcome back to Teaching in Higher Ed.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:01:46]:
How long has it been?

Bonni Stachowiak [00:01:47]:
Oh, my gosh. Real time.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:01:51]:
Should we do that math or no.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:01:52]:
I'm going to look it up real quick because this is the beauty of audio editing. You know, people won't even have to listen and wait for me to look it up. But I am very curious, actually. Let's see how long it has been. July 26, 2018.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:02:05]:
Yeah. Yeah. So that was my second year as a faculty member.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:02:09]:
Wow.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:02:10]:
Which is. Which is just now. 10 years. Bonni, I don't know how I feel about this anymore.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:02:16]:
Well, one thing I right away, since I did pull it up, one thing I just want to revisit because it has been so many years. You shared with me for the first time. I had never heard about it before from npr. The this I Believe essays.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:02:31]:
Yep. Yeah.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:02:32]:
And is that something? Well, first of all, tell the listeners what that is and then are you still using it in your teaching?

Bryan Dewsbury [00:02:38]:
Well, for those who. Who are listeners of the now unfortunately defunded npr, there was a weekly program called I Believe or this I Believe. And then the Essay was an oral essay program where the guests wrote or read aloud an essay that was about three minutes long, which is about 500 words starting with the words I believe. And the prompt for that essay, which you can find at the website. This I believe.org guidelines is roughly describe the values that shape your deepest passions. When Bonni and I talked A decade ago I had shared with you about using that when I was a grad student ta. Right. Because back then I was kind of, kind of very much an NPR junkie and loved so many programs that what that one in particular.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:03:28]:
Right. This is. And the thing what I like about it is this was before all the publications and affirmation theory and values Affirmation and all of that stuff came out in the 2016, 2017 period. So I just did it because I was man, this is a really good idea. Right. So I did it. I continue to do it. I do it every time I teach intro bio in particular.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:03:50]:
In fact, I have some IRBs associated with it. So I have a paper we're working on looking at some of the themes coming out of 10 years of this, I believe, reflection. So I'm pretty excited about when that.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:04:04]:
Comes out and how has that shifted in terms of today? We recognize that any of us could take a prompt like that and place it in a chat based large language model and have it produce that. What kinds of things are you seeing pop up in your own work for wrestling with how do we convey, not even solely focused towards students, how do we convey to the world that that sort of wrestling, reflection, iterative approach to our writing and our thinking actually matters? And specifically in STEM fields?

Bryan Dewsbury [00:04:42]:
Well, I think the beginning where you convey that is to actually see that out loud. And that for me is one challenge. I think STEM fields in particular, this is just speaking from my experience being a faculty developer and a teacher and consulting for over 200 institutions, is there are a lot of behaviors or a lot of things we expect to happen in a science classroom that we just sort of expected to happen, either because we think it's sort of a collateral generative thing that comes from another activity, or they just maybe expect students to understand that this is a classroom and therefore there are certain things that are expecting. And my response to you on this particular question, and I think in general, is to say that, right. And this really gets to this bigger AI conversation, Right. I am not and you know, fair warning this is going to tie to my recommendations later on. But I am not interested in being in a war with AI. I'm not trying to be a faculty detective to see who's using ChatGPT or not, that I didn't sign up for that work.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:05:50]:
Right. I understand that this is the world that I live in and the world that they live in and the world that they will continue to live in. And when they become a doctor and a researcher and A federal employee, whatever they plan to be when they grow up, they will get into a workforce where the generative models are much more sophisticated than they are now. So the conversations that we have on the first day of class in Intro Bio is who Here has used ChatGPT? Who here has put a prompt in and for what reason? Not to judge you, just, I just want to know. Let's talk about how you use it. What do you know about what these tools can do, not just for you turning in an essay in the 11th grade, but also for doctors in hospitals, for lawyers, scanning briefs, things like that. Okay, so let's imagine what this might look like in 2035 and 2045, right? I mean, you don't have to get super dark. You can if you want, but you don't have to.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:06:47]:
But just think of how it progressed in the last three years and what might happen in the next 10 years, and what might you envision your role as a medical professional be at that point. And if you can come up with some articulation of that, then now let's talk about what kind of things we need to do in class today to prepare you for that world. And me giving you random home assignments that you can plug into LLM probably is not one of those things. But me investing in saying, hey, I want you to retain your creativity, your uniqueness, your experiences in the world and using that to bringing that to bear, and how you solve problems and how you connect with your peers and how you understand people from different experiences and how you collectively do those things to come up with new interesting ideas, that is something we can still do, that is useful in my view. And so that is what we're going to spend our class time doing. So it certainly has shifted in a fair way what my class looks like. But I will say that not necessarily in a major way, because that sort of listening and keeping a pulse on what's going on outside and what, you know, what students experiences are, that has always been my approach. Right.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:08:03]:
That's why you have essays like this, I believe, because those are the kinds of things that give you that pulse that tells you how are they navigating the living world outside of your class and how they are bringing that to bear on their value system. So I think still, I mean, to be fair, I'm very moved by all the professors around the country who have been doing assignments like this or doing other kinds of reflections. So we're not at point zero here. But I do see when I do professional learning, I do see Sometimes it's a struggle for people to really fully see the value of that kind of exercise and teaching an intro chem class, for example, or intro bio. But I certainly think we've come a long, long way.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:08:47]:
You mentioned saying something out loud, which of course reminds me so much of the literature around transparency. And that's really been important to me. I don't think I always knew that. I don't think I always realized that. It's something I come back to a lot of just how important that is. Another aspect that I come back to a lot is so much of it is around trust. We're really asking people to trust that whatever work they may put in, whatever friction they may experience, the grappling with things, that it'll be worth it in the end. I think it's pretty arrogant of me when I start to think in really binary ways about that, though, because my class is just one class.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:09:27]:

I don't know. I mean, are they taking six classes? Seven? I don't know how many hours they're working. So I really try to treat that with the tenderness and nuance that is appropriate because otherwise it becomes like some sort of a competition for how much attention gets. And I just. That's an impossible mental calculation.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:09:46]:
Competition between who?

Bonni Stachowiak [00:09:48]:
Competition between the classes and, like, whose is worth it the most, you know, that I don't think I want to enter that competition or I don't think I want to do well at that competition because doing well in it could quickly turn into coercion or being the most hardest at whatever, you know, the most grueling, that sort of thing, or the most charismatic. That's not my best side either. But. But one thing that comes out a lot for me is to try to build that trust by showing them. I'm not asking you to do anything I don't do myself. So I predominantly. I feel quite fortunate in the academic leadership role that I have. I teach a lot of the same class.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:10:28]:
So I teach a business. Business ethics class most often in the spring and most often.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:10:33]:
Why would they need that?

Bonni Stachowiak [00:10:34]:
Oh, I don't know. Most often in the fall, I teach a personal leadership and productivity class. So when I'm teaching them. How do you use digital tools for productivity? A project manager, task management, you know, setting goals. I will show them. These are my goals. This is my task manager. This is my calendar.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:10:53]:
Which scares them, by the way, because that really scares them when I do that. What do you do as far as trying to build the trust through?

Bryan Dewsbury [00:11:01]:
I'm not.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:11:02]:

We're not playing games here. I'm not just having you do this assignment because it doesn't matter to make you juggle or do something. What are the ways in which you try to think about building that trust? Through modeling, I guess, or having. Having them realize that the stuff you're doing, you've taken a lot of time to think about why it matters.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:11:21]:
Yeah. Yeah. So when you want to. Let's talk about trust for a second because. Because I think it'll be helpful to not start this conversation in the classroom. Because a lot of times when we do that, you know, the thing somebody, a listener may want to hear is, well, what are the three things you do to build trust? What are the three things to do to model your, you know, to be transparent. And I think to get a better, deeper understanding of what we really mean when we say this is just think about trust in general, right? Think about people in your life that you do trust. Think about when you didn't know them, right.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:11:56]:
Or when they were just maybe a casual acquaintance and the trust was at a certain level, but then over time the trust built, right? Think about the relationships. Perhaps a married partner, a girlfriend or a child, offspring, whatever. Think about the trust that you've had with them over a long period of time. And so you ask yourself, well, what are the things you did and they did in the beginning that built the trust that you were able to do? Things like, I don't know, be married to them or give them money or anything that made that okay and a comfortable experience for you. And then over the ensuing time period, what are the things that both people did to make sure that the trust remained? And this is all we're saying, right? So I can give. I gave vows on my wedding day. I did all the old dog and pony show, like, you know, we had the whole shebang. And.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:12:51]:
But there certainly was a lead up to that day, right? But once the relationship began as a marriage, then there are things I had to do as I grew and evolved into, you know, 45 year old, right. That, that show that model, right. That I'm still committed to this partnership working. So in the context of the classroom, that first day matters. Because part of that first day is I understand many of them come in with an assumption of no trust. Many of them come in with an assumption that I'm a problem to be solved. And I'm, you know, if you can figure out how Bryan examined, writes his exam, if you can figure out Bryan's style to figure out the things that make me Happy when you answer a question. If they could, you know, if you could solve the intro bio riddle, right? That's the key to getting a jump start in the college career.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:13:45]:
So I spent a lot of time like completely disabusing them of what, what is going to happen over these next 15 weeks, right? I'm not your enemy. I'm not against you. I'm rooting for you every single day. I mean, I really mean that, right? When I talk about even things like tutoring, I don't even call it tutoring. I say, look, man, in any technical discipline, you have to spend a lot of time. The only way to get good at it is you have to spend a lot of time. That's how, that's how it works. Like, if you didn't know Spanish, you didn't know French.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:14:17]:
You started off learning verbs and nouns, right? But at some point you'll go to Paris and be, do an immersion, right? That's, that's how you get good. You immerse yourself in the environment and you commit to it, right? And so all tutoring is, is an extra opportunity for you to do that, right? It's not for the weak and the disenfranchised and the unprepared, is for everybody. It's. It's an additional service that is given as part of your tuition dollars for you to do that immersion, right? So, so there's language like that, like I really invest in to just, just set the tone, man. Hey, we, we are family here. I love each and every one of you. I, I have skills in differential instruction. I could figure out the thing that can get you motivated, the thing that can get you going, the thing that gets you to do metacognitive approaches, you know, or learning how to learn.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:15:05]:
Like, I know that stuff, right? So I would bring that experience to be in this relationship. Now, over the course of the semester, the things I say on day one is not going to mean anything if I don't give them feedback in a reasonable time or if I'm rude when they answer a question wrong in class. So if I, you know, I'm dismissive when they raise their hand. Like if, if I act in ways that are counter to that whole inspirational speech I give on day one, then I might as well not have said anything on day one. So it's a combination of both things, right? And, oh yes, part of it is I tell them, look, I was a 3.25 bio major when I graduated, right? I did just fine. I didn't blow it out the water. I took biochem three times. Like, I did just fine.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:15:56]:
And honestly, I feel like, my kind of, like, passion to learn how to learn all of that stuff that kicked in, honestly, really, at the doctoral level, like, when I decided to do pe, that was when sort of there was a switch that, like, yeah, I mean, I really kind of enjoy this getting to the bottom of everything kind of thing. So it took me two plus degrees to get to the level of passion I'm trying to get you to right now. So, yes, we have those conversations openly, but I think I know, apparently, love

languages is not a thing anymore. And it was proven. Whatever. But to the extent, acts of service is mine. Right. I do think the acts of service that demonstrate.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:16:40]:
Hey, I didn't just say I believe in you. I'm going to show I believe in you by the way, in which I give you feedback with the respect in which I speak to you and the ways in which I make sure I pronounce your name correctly. They make sure that I give equal space to voices when hands are raised, and not just the ones who want to raise their hands all the time. To show you what David Yeager calls wise feedback, where I make it clear to you that I believe you can hit these standards, but I'm going to give you a pathway on how to get to it. That's how the trust is maintained.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:17:13]:
I'm intrigued by wise feedback, and I'm not familiar with David Diego. Can you tell us a little bit more about what wise feedback looks like?

Bryan Dewsbury [00:17:21]:
Well, David Yeager. So there's a book that just came out I strongly Recommend. It's called 10 to 25. He's a professor at UT Austin, but he came out of that Stanford group who are doing a lot of identity contingencies research, wise interventions. So Jeffrey Cohen, Greg Walton, I believe, Claude Steele, Carol Dweck. So, you know, there's a whole bunch of literature around that. So 10 to 25 summarizes a lot of that work. And he ties it to in the book.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:17:54]:
He talks a lot about mentoring. But what I like about the book is he makes a point I've made perhaps in a less articulate way, in that there are a lot of similarities between good mentoring, good parenting, good teaching, good supervisors. Right. There's a lot of similarities in that when there is that hierarchy, when there's that power differential and there's somebody who is tasked with giving feedback and giving direction, and there's somebody moving from novice to mastery for some reason. Right. The way in which that is Provided can have different outcomes. And so you can have the like, I'm the big bad wolf is stick and tell, you do as I say, and if not, you're a terrible failure. Right.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:18:35]:
That has proven to not work. And then, then there's the other end of the spectrum where it's like, I just want to be your friend. That also is not good. Right? But so, but there is a place to be firm and clear. And by the way, Paulo Freire talks about this as well. Right. Way back in the pedagogy of Hope, right. People

were asking him about, well, does critical consciousness mean that the whole class is egalitarian? He's like, no, no, no.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:18:58]:
I'm still a professor. I still have 20 years of bio. These processes come to me a lot more easily. Right. But the way in which we can interact around this material doesn't have to be one that's dictatorial. Right. At I can say, hey, this is what it takes to be really good and to be an expert in understanding this particular thing. And here's the path to that.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:19:23]:
What I'm seeing in your responses right now is we're not there yet. And I know you can get there. And here are the things you need to do to do that. So let me give you a specific example of hopefully what I mean and what David Yeager means on my exams, my big exams. The last question I ask them is to predict their score of 50. And as you can imagine, the predicted score versus the actual score, at least in the first set of exams, are usually quite different. But one of the reasons why I do that is. Well, a couple reasons.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:19:56]:
One is I asked a question at the end of the exam. So you took the whole exam. So you legit thought that this is what you may have gotten. Right. So if you predicted a 48 out of 15, I graded you at a 36. So now we can have a discussion. Okay, well, that difference of 12 points, like I my view of these answers and your views view of these answers have a 12 point difference. So now we have something specific to talk about.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:20:21]:
Right? Right. Because how do you know that you knew this? Like, when you wrote this, you felt it's a five out of five answer. I say, okay, two out of five. So that's a different conversation. And say, hey, Bonni, you really need to study harder. You really need to apply yourself. You know, biology is a very difficult subject. And you know, not everyone's, you know, that's a different conversation.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:20:39]:
Because now I can talk about, well, tell me how you study Or I see in this answer, you put the terms there, but this is not a coherent sentence, Right? If somebody who wasn't in this class saw this, they wouldn't really know what it's saying, right? And so let's. How can we take this answer and turn it into something that's actually giving information, right? So that's the wise feedback, where I'm very clear on what the expectation is, Right? But I spend most of my time giving them

the tools to meet that. Right? And at no point, the feedback is vague and uninterpretable, Right? Like, it's like I'm giving you clear things to work on. That's an example of the wise feedback. 10 to 25 is the book, and that's not going to be my recommendation, by the way. So.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:21:26]:
Okay, I can't.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:21:26]:
We got. I'm not cheating. I'm not cheating.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:21:30]:
So I'm very intrigued by this, too. If I'm taking your class, I'm sort of bringing some assumptions from having known you and kept in touch with your work for all these years. I'm guessing you don't give a midterm and a final. So I'm guessing there are many opportunities throughout your intro to bio for me to be engaging with the material and to be assessed. How does that take place from a practical thing? How am I hearing from you as.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:21:54]:
Your student in intro bio? Well, in all my classes, you hear from me all the time. But in intro bio, I'll just be specific, first of all. And I actually. Let me take a step back here, Bonni. Higher ed makes me laugh sometimes. And I'm sure it does. I'm sure it does to you as well.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:22:12]:
And cry and rage. Yes. All the advice.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:22:15]:
I'm gonna go with laugh for now. I'm gonna go with laugh for now. Because what makes me laugh is how we hold on to terms and things even when they're past their prime. So, I mean, why midterm? And fine, right? Like. But that. That whole dynamic made sense when the only times you were assessed were three or four times. And so you had this very clear midpoint, and you had a very clear endpoint. In fact, my previous institution, they actually had a rule where you had to call your last exam a file.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:22:48]:
And I tell my students that. So just to be specific, I have four, what I guess we'd call summative exams, the quote, unquote, bigger exams. They are, out of 15% of their final graders, four of those. Right. So all four of them collectively are 66.0%. 60% of their final grade. The other 40% is a mishmash of quizzes, case

studies, peer evaluations in class where a whole bunch of stuff. So to answer your question directly, they're hearing from me through all of those very diverse assignments that's happening every week, all the time.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:23:25]:
It's a constant feedback model. But the four, I guess what people might think of as traditional exams, right, that's it happens four times and it happens after every unit. And the students always ask me, like, is there final? Is there a midterm? I said, well, there's a second exam. I don't know what to tell you. The final is the fourth exam. It's the same structure as all the others. Others. We finish a unit, we do an assessment.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:23:49]:
So I'm not making it weighted anymore. I'm not adding more stuff. I'm not bringing back stuff from September. It's, you know, it's cumulative in the sense that, you know, we talk about like thermodynamics in September and then OSMO regulation in November and the principles build on each other. So it's cumulative in that way. Right. But I'm not going to grab a question from September 15th and pluck it in the December exam. Just.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:24:17]:
No, no, it's just the fourth time you're doing this, right? Just could we calm down on that? So that, that stuff makes me laugh because some people just want to hold on, like, must have a final that's nine hours long and oh my God. But the point is, other than that, we are always in a back and forth, right? So even aside from those things that have points that go towards the final grade, the class, the nature of the classes are back and forth. Like I, I might be quote unquote, lecturing for maybe 10, 15 minutes, depending on what they say on the discussion board. But the rest of it is we are trying to answer questions, we're trying to pick at some tricky things and they're hearing from their peers, they're hearing from me. So the feedback is constant.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:25:00]:
And from what you just. The example you just gave, I'm presuming a lot of feedback's happening during a class when you're all together, which as opposed to one on one in a more formal mechanism with you in the learning management system, trying to navigate that many one to ones throughout those formative assessments.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:25:21]:
Yeah, I would say, you know, in terms of feedback itself, maybe a good 80% of it is happening in that in person experience. So a couple of things, a couple of

pieces of context, I think would Help here. One is the way the class is designed. Every week we start off with what we like to call big, beautiful questions, right? Michael Palmer talks about this a lot. And to me it makes all the sense in terms of teaching a science class because that is literally what we do. That is the exact definition of what we do as professional scientists. So why we aren't doing that in our classroom is beyond me, right? So even if I sort of, kind of have the answers to the questions, in the process of answering the question, we are getting through topics, right? So you know, why does the flounder not freeze in the winter in New England, right? And that gets us to water tension and protein folding and all of that really cool stuff. So because of that design, there is, there is always just a built in kind of Q and A culture to it class, because everything is in service to that question.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:26:29]:
The second piece of context is we have a class slogan that goes, you do not understand something until you can explain it to your roommate. And we say that aloud, aloud together, every Monday, because that is the bar that we are holding for what knowledge is, right? And there's a whole lot that could probably be its own podcast, right? Like, there's a whole lot of reasons why that approach is taken, right? It's agency. It's like, what does it mean to know something is self regulated? Learning is metacognition. Like, it's a whole lot of. I'm not trying. You just absorb what you hear in 15 weeks and hope it sticks. Like to know something is to be able to talk about it and articulate it and defend it, right?

Bonni Stachowiak [00:27:14]:
Something so intriguing by what you just said, the example that you gave of the flounder and why it doesn't freeze. Hearing from people like you can, can be so uplifting and so inspiring. It also can feel unattainable when. When we only hear you in a context of a very controlled dynamic. You know, I don't get to see you failing at this, that kind of a thing. And I can't get into your mind enough to always think through all the examples. I want to just point something out and try this out with you. You said differentiated instruction earlier.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:27:55]:
And that to me is very inspiring that I could be attempting to get each student curious and to get each student thinking about how this relates to their lives. And that is that. Isn't that the dream, Bryan? I mean, isn't that the dream? And we can do that, and we should do that. But I think what gets missed, at least in my mind, is it isn't possible for me to do that all of the time. So in a class that I designed, I could have a thread of that. Where will be the thrill threads that will allow students then to explore their unique context, their unique strengths and

cultures, et cetera. But at the same time, you gave the example of the flounder and you're not thinking of, well, this person's interested in fish and this person over here likes dogs or whatever. And so I think that's a really.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:28:51]:
Because. Because I. I guess we'll circle for this final part of this part of the episode all the way back to A.I. i mean, I keep hearing. I mean, isn't that the promise? I mean, they can get down and know everything and they can come in and give me the example that's perfect. And it can even use the names of my children and my husband. I mean, like. But that's not what you mean.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:29:11]:
I know that's not what you mean, but I just wonder if we might close this part of the conversation with you reflecting a bit on what do you do that's more to the whole class. Because it's just human nature to be curious about why fish don't freeze. And that's far more interesting to me. I'm curious, by the way, I'm totally curious to know the answer to that question. And as someone who has some memories of my Intro to Bio class in my undergrad experience, and they're not good. And I said cyonara to science. And that was it until having children who are very curious about science all these years later. But anyway, do you know what I'm saying? Am I making any sense?

Bryan Dewsbury [00:29:51]:
I think so. And let me know if my answer is in the book. First I will say, is that the flounder, in the flounder's blood, there's a special protein whose name I'm blanking on that lowers the freezing point of the blood so that it doesn't freeze. So that allows us to talk a lot about proteins, protein folding, water, high freezing point, things like that. So a lot of kind of physical properties. Here's my best take on that. With differentiated instruction, or quite frankly, any sort of like socially just instruction, where the just part of that tomb is your attempt to do right by everyone, right? To know that for some people you might need to do some other things to get them to that place where they see the beauty of their potential, right? And in doing those things for those people, in no way negatively impacted people, for which you may not have to do as much for which is a common misconception of socially just. Right.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:30:50]:
In any sort of approach like that, by definition you're not going to bat a hundred, right? Like I've taught a range of class sizes, right? From 21 to 287, right? When the class, when I was at University of Rhode island, the class sizes never dipped below 150, right? So, you know, but I'm a big names person. I want to call you by your name. So I would read every name, every name, I read

every name aloud in my room before the semester starts. Would I remember every name for all 15 weeks? Absolutely not. But I definitely remembered more names than if I went into that semester, assuming that, well, I'm not going to learn everybody's name anyway. So whatever I remember, I remember. But because there was a rabbi who said, you don't have to be able to save the world, but you're obligated to try, right? And so the whole key behind that is like in trying, you almost by definition achieve more. Then if you just assume, you just get dwarfed by the enormity of the task, that you can't, you can't, you won't even like lead the starting blocks.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:31:55]:
So I think if we accept that, then, then you give yourself a little bit of grace to say like, look, man, if I, if I couldn't save everybody or be the best Jesus for every single student, it doesn't mean I had a bad semester, right? The other piece to this, and this is important, is that one of the, and I'm not suggesting this is what you meant, but one of the misconceptions, I believe, of cultural relevant pedagogy that I've seen is that some people felt like, well, I have to find an example that connects the life of every Student from all 95 cultures I have in front of me. And I'm like, first of all, good luck finding the time for that. But number two, I don't think that's the point. Don't get me wrong, there's the other piece to this where certainly highlight the contributions of people in science in particular who historically haven't been as highlighted as they should. I am 100% on board for that. But let us not forget that one of the most beautiful things about education is the opportunities it affords us to open students to new experiences. So I want that student from west Nebraska to learn about New England flounder. I want that student from northern Maine to learn about spiny urchins in the Caribbean.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:33:14]:
Right? I want this to be a place where you get your eyes open to different ways in which living things process and navigate the world that you may not have encountered otherwise. And so I do want to retain that piece of it. So that's less about differentiated instruction and more about the beauty of how education allows us to be global citizens. And I say it's important because I do honestly, I do honestly think that it's a narrative. I don't hear enough from progressive instructors. It's not a narrative. I hear enough from people who talk about equity and inclusion. Right.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:33:55]:
There's good people, whatever. This is not anything personal, but. But I do think we have to center that that is something we value in why we teach. Right. So one of the things I've been doing in the 10 years we haven't spoke, the Northern

Guide to Equity Minded Teaching that I was honored to co author with E.C. sansevaker and Flora Darby. Maisie Madd. The first section is on rigor, right? Like, this stuff is not about making classes easy and finding ways to just get them through.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:34:27]:
No, no, no. Because we respect you, because I want you to trust me, we will maintain those standards. But where the equity and where the social justice comes in is the work we do is to make sure that you can see how you can attain those standards. And so I think this is along those same lines.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:34:46]:
This is the time in the show where we each get to share our recommendations. I have two of them. They are both good television. I mentioned being on vacation, so I did spend some of that time watching. This recommendation actually came from Jessamyn Newhouse. She recommended on episode 577, the TV show We Are Lady Parts. And when she described it as Muslim women getting together and starting a punk rock band, I thought, wow. I used to listen to punk, maybe a little bit like in high school, but like, this is not a music genre I spend a lot of time today listening to.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:35:23]:
So I wasn't really sure it was for me, but I trust Jessamine. So I was kind of like, well, let's. Let's just see what this is all about. Oh my gosh. I just want to echo Jessamyn's recommendation. We Are Lady Parts is so funny, so moving. It does explore cultural questions, it explores friendship. It explores how our faith traditions get wrestled with across different contexts and identities.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:35:52]:
It's. I think I already mentioned it's funny. It's so moving. I mean, it's incredible. And let me say, the soundtrack really, really is phenomenal. I mean, they did such a great job. Some of the songs that they perform. You can get them on your Spotify or your Apple Music or whatever.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:36:08]:
Some of them are this band of musicians that do original music and that's really fun. But some of them are covers of songs that many of us know from way back when. So it was a really fun watch. I want to echo that one and then one that I've heard recommended a number of times but I hadn't explored yet is Abbott Elementary. And Abbott elementary is a sitcom. It. It takes place in a K through 12 context.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:36:31]:
K5.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:36:32]:
Okay. 5.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:36:34]:
Yeah. Yeah. It doesn't go past.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:36:36]:
Okay. I think there's a side guy that maybe does middle school, but. But anyway. Yeah. Mostly focuses on the little ones. So funny. Wonderful acting.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:36:44]:
It's great. It's great.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:36:45]:
Oh, my gosh. Wonderful.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:36:47]:
It's not car favorite. Yeah.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:36:48]:
Oh, I'm so glad to hear. Wonderful. Ethical questions about teaching. I haven't. Who teaches in that context that. My friends that teach there. Because just like any show, I imagine it's not entirely realistic. So you would have to suspend your disbelief a little bit.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:37:05]:
But it certainly struggles with real world problems in teaching, for sure. Challenges and hopes and aspirations.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:37:11]:
Yeah, a little bit. I mean, my wife taught elementary school for 20 years, so if anybody can tell you about, you know, where there's embellishment, she could, you know. Yeah, there's some. Right. You're not gonna, you're not gonna be perfect. But I would say having as a couple seen a lot of shows about school, they come a lot closer to the reality than most, especially given the community that they, they, they worked in.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:37:37]:

Here's the biggest thing that I think is not realistic. So maybe you could ask your wife about this. I don't think you're. I don't think you can leave a classroom like that of Littles.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:37:44]:
No.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:37:45]:
Like, they're. They're constantly.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:37:47]:
They're a little too well behaved.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:37:48]:
They're constantly leaving their classroom to have conversations with colleagues in the hallway.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:37:53]:
And I'm like, you know, I don't.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:37:55]:
Think you can leave Littles alone that long and not. I don't think you'd be allowed to at a job like that. I don't imagine. And I don't think that would go well if you were allowed to do that.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:38:05]:
But it allows, certainly a very well behaved school. But I'll give them that.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:38:12]:
Yes. All right. What do you have to recommend today, Bryan?

Bryan Dewsbury [00:38:16]:
I just have one book, if that's okay. It's Nexus by Yuval Harari. And being in education, I'm confronted with Questions about AI constantly. And I'll say for the record, I'm not a Luddite, you know, very much. I get what technology can do, but I'm a late adopter, right? My first iPhone was the iPhone 8 or whatever like that. That's kind of figure out the kinks and then I'll decide what I want to do. I'm part of that is maybe I'm just a little bit sensitive about maintaining my agency in my decision making and how I want to live my life and who's trying to influence my behavior, et cetera, et cetera. And what I saw a lot of maybe in the first couple years of this AI boom in education was either AI optimists, right? This is great, use it.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:39:03]:
Here's how to do it in your teaching. Do this, do that, which I thought was curious for a variety of reasons. And then all the AI complete pessimists that the Terminators are going to come and take us over and we'll end up in the Matrix, right? But what Harari does in this book is he actually he's the first person, at least from what I've read, who's not really fully having an AI discussion. He's having a discussion about a relationship of the human race with information. And to do that he goes all the way back to stone tablet. I mean it's the well laid out argument, right? He goes through over time and he shows you as the media changed, how it changed the relationship with the society and the power structures like governments and stuff and how some structures enable fascism and things like that. So he definitely is a little bit more on the pessimist side. So just prepare yourself for that.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:39:58]:
But it's still in my view the most thought out argument on how to think through this because I think in my view, I think people are getting a little bit distracted with just the tool itself and here's what they could do and who can cheat and all of that stuff. Unless with like this is actually rearranging our entire relationship with the information landscape. And that's a different question to answer. And that's one he answers in that book. Not a long read, but it's fascinating.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:40:26]:
Bryan, I so appreciate you coming back to teaching in higher ed after all these years. We need to not have it go this long. Till next time.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:40:34]:
2035 is when I could expect another invite.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:40:38]:
I'm so glad for today's conversation and just your ongoing work that you continue to give so generously to this community. As we wrestle through our hopes, our aspirations, our challenges, and everything of wanting to do just and socially just work.

Bryan Dewsbury [00:40:53]:
Thank you so much.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:40:56]:
Thanks once again to Bryan Dewsbury for today's wonderful conversation. And and thanks to each of you for listening. Today's episode was produced by me,

Bonni Stachowiak. It was edited by the ever talented Andrew Kroeger. Podcast production support was provided by the amazing Sierra Priest. Thanks for listening. And if you've yet to sign up for the weekly emails, this one's going to be just like all of them, chock full of great links. And you don't have to remember to go get the show notes on your own.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:41:29]:
And you get some other goodies that don't show up on the regular show notes. So head over to teachinginhighered.com/subscribe. You'll receive the weekly email, and thanks so much for listening. I'll see you next time on Teaching in Higher Ed.