

[00:00:01] Bonni Stachowiak: Today on episode number 444 of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast, growing a Positive Learning Community with Dr. Todd Zakrajsek.

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Welcome to this episode of Teaching in Higher Ed. I'm Bonnie 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's an absolute pleasure to be welcoming back to the show, Dr. Todd Zakrajsek.

He's an associate professor in the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Chapel Hill. He's also the president of the International Teaching Learning Cooperative. Todd was a tenured associate professor of psychology and built faculty development efforts at three universities before joining UNC. At UNC, Todd provides resources for faculty on various topics related to teaching, learning, leadership, and scholarly activity.

Todd has served on many educational-related boards and work groups, including the Journal of Excellence in College Teaching, International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, College Teaching and Education in the Health Professions. Todd has consulted with organizations such as the American Council on Education, Lenovo Computer, Microsoft, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. He's delivered keynote addresses and campus workshops at over 300 conferences and university campuses in 48 states and two countries. By the way, I recently talked to him and I'm really rooting for him to get all the way to 50. Todd publishes widely on the topic of student learning, effective teaching, leadership, scholarly activity, and assessment. Todd Zakrajsek, welcome back to Teaching in Higher Ed.

[00:02:17] Dr. Todd Zakrajsek: Oh, Bonni, so great to be back. I'm just, oh, so looking forward to this conversation.

[00:02:22] Bonni: I am not only looking forward to this conversation, but we're already-- when we get together, we start thinking about then the next time and then the next time you have some good stuff coming up. I am thrilled to have you on today and look forward to those future conversations as well. Today we get to have a conversation about establishing and maintaining a positive learning community. Before we start to share some ideas around that, why would you say it's so essential that we do just that?

[00:02:49] Todd: It's funny because so many people get focused on the content and that's what it used to be. There's a long time ago when I started teaching content, was it. My job was to instill the content into my students and now with the internet and everything that's readily available to the students, they can get the content. My job has shifted along with everybody else's, I believe, into helping the students to be the best possible learners they can be.

That requires us establishing a community because we now know from the science that's going out there, they're not going to learn if they're in a situation where they don't believe they can learn. If I'm not helping them to learn, if they don't believe in me, there's a lot of things going on. Community to me is what drives learning and the content will come along.

[00:03:38] Bonni: I taught for over 10 years in a doctoral program and I used to teach people the importance of, and then how to use a references manager. It used to be really frustrating for me because people would give up not realizing that they were this close. For those of you listening, which is to say all of you, my fingers are very close together, they were this close to getting it to work, but they just had the one more step. In Zotero, you actually have to sign in to the software to your online account to get these two things, to be able to talk to each other.

That's what allows you to be on a website, click the little thing, and then it gets added to your references manager. What you're wondering, why is she talking about Zotero when we're talking about a learning community, I noticed that a lot of times when I'm working with faculty and probably looking back on myself too, you're trying things and it seems like they're not working and, in fact, sometimes they're not because you're not there yet. It takes a little while and there's some resistance that's very natural that comes in and you can't tell how close you are to getting there.

I don't know, before we even really start talking about the techniques, any advice for just-- It's going to be messy, it's going to be tough. This is not like step one, do this, step two do this, and all of a sudden you've established and maintained a positive learning community. It's a struggle. It's a difficult thing to do and hard because we don't know how we are doing always.

[00:05:02] Todd: Anything that's worth learning is going to have a rough time at the beginning. That's the way our brains are wired. Brains are set up so that if we are going to do something only once, there's no real reason to devote any real energy to it. If we're going to do it multiple times, then it gets to the point. Long-term potentiation the official term for this, then it becomes easier and easier.

I think it's a helpful thing for students to understand and all of us to understand is it's going to be hard at the beginning. That's not just students, that's us as well. As we establish community, it's not going to be easy at first, but once you work at it for a while, it gets easier and easier. Then you become the one that can see your students because it's a community and you get to know them when they're one step away. If they're trying to do that program you're talking about there is that we can help them get through that last step because we know better than they know what they're capable of doing.

[00:05:53] Bonni: It starts from before the first day of class even. What are the things that we can do prior to the first day of class that can help to begin to plant some seeds?

[00:06:02] Todd: I think this is fascinating too because again, I only mentioned a couple of times I've been doing this, I've been teaching since before the internet was around. It used to be when we first saw our students on that first day of class was our first opportunity to see the students. It is a hideous waste of just possibilities to not make a connection before the first day of class. It's so easy to send a note to the students to say, "I'm really looking forward to you coming into the class and I'm really excited about this." To post a short video.

I can post a two or three-minute video of me talking about what I love about this course and why I'm excited for them to come and to even get to know a little bit about them. They can post a video, they can use Flip or some of the other programs and they can post something. When we walk into class that very first day, we can already know each other and have the community started. Again, if we're not doing that before that first day, we're wasting some opportunities. Once you get good at it, doesn't take much time to do that.

[00:07:00] Bonni: I had some failed efforts across a number of years where I would send out an email, I'd introduce myself and then I'd say, why are you taking this class? Would you reply and let me know why you're taking this class? Mostly what I heard, you have to listen very hard on this one, were crickets. Just absolute crickets. I changed a single thing. I introduced myself. Same thing I always did.

I said, why are you taking a class about, and then I put the name of the class. I changed a single thing, like how can that make that much of a difference to be

more inviting? I mean something about being a little bit more precise. I could get closer to what I was looking for and some students are taking it. I've been doing this for a while too, taking it because of you, because I had you last semester and I really wanted to take another class with you before I graduate.

Some of them are taking it because they're really interested in the topic or the set of skills. Maybe it was recommended by their chair or one of their professor mentors. Lots of reasons, but I got a lot more specificity and I think perhaps my hypothesis would be, it seemed more like I wanted an answer by being that specific about why you're taking this class instead of why are you taking a class about this topic?

I got closer to what I looked for. It's just funny how little tweaks would work. I would also say just because you think you have it figured out, then I'll probably do it next semester and then I'll get crickets again. Context matters and every group of students we have the privilege of working for is working with is always, always different.

[00:08:30] Todd: It doesn't. Before we move on too, is, what you just said and we should always be experimenting. Try different verbiages, try different ways of stating things. If it doesn't work, try something else. Those subtle differences are the same as when you're talking to colleagues. If I just say, "How's it going?" You're going to say, "Fine," conversation's over, that's just me. "How's it going?" You say, "It's fine," we're done. Because that's an assumption of what you're after. If I say, "Hey Bonnie, I haven't seen you for about six weeks, how's it been going? What's you up to?" Just that little tiny difference. Now that leads into what is the expectation of a conversation. We have these little subtleties all over there. I love the fact that you could make a tiny twist in there and all of a sudden the students realize they're supposed to respond instead of just typing something that says, because it's required because I want to ever. Oh, that's great.

[00:09:18] Bonni: It's the first day of class. What are the things we can do to make that more planting seeds and maybe even fertilizing that community we so hope to build.

[00:09:28] Todd: I really do think there's so many things we can do on the first day of class. One thing I would say is a mindset to get in your head and think about, one of the things I've been thinking about recently is higher education's really built for fast-talking risk-taking extroverts. That's just when we ask questions and say, "Who thinks this? What do you think of this?" It's that person who's willing to take a risk, who's okay being wrong is what that means. They're extroverted. Extroverts are individuals who will begin sentences, curious how they might end. That's just how they operate, and that concept of they're really fast thinkers.

When you put those together, that's a certain group of people who have always been able to play in higher education. One of the things I like to do is to say, "How can I get other people to participate?" That's number one. Just keeping that as an overall mindset. A couple of quick things. I think greeting students as they come into class is always good. It's a great opportunity to start learning names.

If you're teaching a class of 25, 30 students, you should learn their names pretty quickly. I've had a lot of faculty say, "Well, I teach 200. I can't learn all their names." Nope. You could learn 30. By the way, quick insider tip for the newer faculty here, if you go to class early, students will tend to sit in the same place. Go down to the front of the room, learn a few names, and chat with people.

The next class period, go to the back of the room. Third class period, go to the right. Fourth class period, go to the left. In those four class periods, if you learn four or five names each, you're now going to have some people that you know from the front, the back, the left, and the right. Now when you ask people to respond, you could say, "So I'm thinking about this concept here. Judy, what do you think?" Judy looks up and says, "Wow." Everyone in the class is, "He knows our names." That starts to build that community. I think that's one of the things you can do. Showing up early, learning some names. I think just greeting people, being friendly about that, letting them know on that first day of why you're excited to be there.

There's an old adage that used to be said was, "You never smile before Thanksgiving." The idea is you come in and you're tough so that the students don't take advantage of you. That's ridiculous. It is possible to have a warm classroom where you are very supportive of students and have high expectations. Kindness doesn't go with easy. If you can establish kindness, showing the students that you're there for them, learn some names, show them that you care, maybe post a slide up on the screen. I love this one. I learned this from a friend of mine. Put a PowerPoint slide up of the name of the course and your name so that when a student walks through and glances up, they know they're in the right place.

There's a lot of anxiety on the first day. Anything you can do to reduce it. I answered your question with a whole bunch of things. I'll take a breath here and see what you think.

[00:12:15] Bonni: I really appreciated what you said about learning names, but also how you said it. You mentioned the importance of mindset, and I would apply that to learning names too. I know for myself when I start to feel insecure. About a couple of months ago, I was part of a group. I presented a mock class to 60 prospective students and it was in person. I hadn't done that in a very long

time. I started to notice some stinking thinking going on. Then I thought, "Hold on a second. That's not going to be helpful to put stress on yourself as in, this is really important to me, but not the stress that takes me so far to perfectionism." No, I wasn't likely going to learn 60 of their names in this, I think it was a 20-minute or 25-minute mock class, but I actually learned about-- I spoke to 20 of them out of the 60.

Sometimes it was a quick interaction. There were lots of different quick things, but I saw one of them later on, I remembered his name. I think not just allowing ourselves to say, "Oh, that feels too big, so therefore I give up." It's so much of life. No, this is really important. I would like to do well at this. I'm going to work hard to improve my likelihood of having success at it. That's just to me a much better mindset.

I'll put a link in the show notes too, a very back catalog episode of Dave Stahoviak and I talk about how to learn names and he's exceptionally good at it. He sometimes doesn't like when I say that because he also has to work at it. We all have to work at it. Rather than thinking of it as in a fixed mindset, we either are or are not, we can instead be using that growth mindset and then using approaches to get better at it. I really appreciate how you phrased that.

[00:13:55] Todd: That's great. Then I would also point out too is get to know a little bit more about your students. I think it's really, really important to know who's in your class. What proportion of first-generation college students do you have? What proportion from different underrepresented groups? The types of things that you can do to build a classroom where people feel welcomed means you need to know who's in the classroom. Keeping in mind that individuals-- As a first-generation college student, I was scared to death on the first day of class, that first fall semester. That concept of helping someone to feel that they're welcomed there and you can't just assume that they know these things. I think anything you can do to know who they are and help them feel welcome.

[00:14:37] Bonni: I really appreciate the instrument that Tracy Addie and her colleagues developed called the Who's in Class Survey. She talks about that in her book, *What Inclusive Teachers Do*. I've used it now for three semesters. I would have told you before that I was really good at getting to know my students, that I would still argue that I was, but this survey provides a little bit of nuance. I used to treat some things that I would know about students in pretty binary ways. Are you a commuter or are you not a commuter?

[laughs]

Now through the survey, it's like, "Well, let's define a little bit about what a commuter means. Are you 15 minutes down the road or do you drive two hours



each way to get to your classes?" That's provided me with some nuance that is really rich and I appreciate it. It's really well designed and designed in collaboration with students, faculty, and staff members. It's just a really nice tool. Not hard to use. It's already designed and then you could tweak it if there's something that will work a little bit better in your context.

[00:15:34] Todd: That's such a good book and Tracy's such a fabulous person, so thanks. It's a great resource.

[00:15:40] Bonni: As far as we've had those first few classes, in fact, maybe even first few weeks of classes, and there are, what I like the technical term is really getting through those humps in a semester. You can just feel it. I one time wrote a blog post, this is probably 10 years ago or something where I talked about the stages of team formation. Trying to remember the authors, I shouldn't do this off the cuff. Tucker, maybe Tucker. I'm going to look it up and see if I'm right. Someone will email me. [laughs] I think Tucker is the stages of team formation.

[00:16:11] Todd: Tuckman is very close to that.

[00:16:14] Bonni: The internet is right at our fingertips. For those listening, I've hurt my shoulder and I'm trying to type as little as possible. We'll look it up after the episode. I'll put it in the show notes. Anyway, I had blogged about how the stages of team formation, which if you're not familiar forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning, that there's that. That storming, there's a predictable pattern that will sometimes come out when you're trying to build community. Not everyone's going to be super excited about doing that right off the bat. There may be some apprehension. Remember that people coming into our learning spaces and places are bringing with them the good things that they've experienced in prior educational experiences as well as the bad things. So there may be reluctance.

It can be hard to figure out how do I work well with people who are different than me. Many people can be experiencing stresses that we are not aware of and may not be able to understand. Just recognizing that those humps are going to come. Sometimes I find, Todd, in very predictable times, they're the individuals that go through their own humps, but then collectively you can see it. It's different in the fall than it is in the spring. Some of you teach in terms ,trimesters, what have you. There is some predictability. I know, Todd, you have some advice for us. How do we get through the humps that will inevitably come in our terms or semesters?

[00:17:38] Todd: In addition to Bruce Tuckman's stages that you just referred to--

[00:17:42] Bonni: Did I actually remember it right? Did I remember it right? Or did I say it right? [laughs]

[00:17:46] Todd: You did. I'm pretty impressed with that. I think that's fabulous too. I think that's should be well done. The other one is, I believe it was Donna Duffy. See now I'm doing it without having the actual citation at hand. She wrote a book a long time ago called *The Rhythms of the Semester*.

[00:18:00] Bonni: Oh, okay. I didn't know that.

[00:18:01] Todd: The things that happened and how you can like be ready at different times. One of the most sure things that you can count on with any part of life is that something's not going to go well. That humps that you have, or just the days that don't go well-- Quite frankly, over the last three years, we have experienced more things going wrong than we could have ever imagined a few years ago. Those things will happen. The one thing I really like it's that concept of margin and having capacity. I think it's really important. We try to schedule every moment because every moment is so important, but we really do need to schedule things so that there's always time for a class to take on its own organic life.

Part of what that does is if you are having a day where students are just really into it and asking a lot of questions, you have some space that you can then do other things. If students aren't getting it or if they're really not paying attention, you might want to throw in some metacognitive strategies or throw in an activity because you need to live in the class. These humps that happen in the semester or times when things aren't either not going great or you need to make an adjustment, big thing is just leave some capacity in there. You can always fill it. It's just so easy to always fill it if you have the time. I think that's a really important thing to do. I try to always fill those in because, and here's a rookie error that I made early in my career and I will just advise everybody out there, do not change your schedule on your calendar for what you're doing in your class unless you absolutely have to.

If you say on a Tuesday, I know we're supposed to have an exam Thursday, but it's going to be hard to do. Why don't we move that to Tuesday? You're definitely going to get some cheering because some students are going to be excited. They don't have to take the test until next week. You're also going to have students who have scheduled babysitters because they have to work in the evenings and they need to be able to study. Now they've scheduled babysitters so they could schedule so they could study. Some students have scheduled work off on certain days and they have to make up on other days. Students build their lives around your schedule and then that quick, "Hey, let's just do that Tuesday instead. Please don't do that." That means is having that



capacity so you can make adjustments but leave the schedule alone. I think that's really important.

[00:20:21] Bonni: We were meeting with our student government representatives during the peak of COVID in 2021 and I mean there's been so many peaks. I have to be more precise than that, don't I? One of the things that they shared with us among others is getting notifications on their phones from the learning management system that their professor was changing. I like to, in those cases, I teach at a fairly small school rather than let's name who that professor was out there in front of everyone, that wasn't the appropriate time. I did follow up with the student who mentioned it, said, "Would you mind sharing?" It turned out that that professor's from the same department that I teach in the same discipline and he had no idea this professor that when he would push dates around, it seemed to him like it's just for him, it's his calendar. He's just moving things around and he'd get behind.

Well, what that translated to was literally sometimes in a single day, 51 notifications that you just scroll and scroll and scroll on the phone. He had no idea. A lot of times if we're not good about looking at the student view or talking to our students and saying, how is the structure of my class working for you? The structure by the way includes our learning management system. You're not going to get that feedback then you really recognize what you said Todd is so true for me that there might be some students who are happy about that delay.

There are just as many, if not more, who just prefer to write it down on paper. I find sometimes students with ADHD or even if they're just really, really hyper-organized, love to have the calendar that's visual on the wall, on their dorms or they just love having it on paper. Something tangible like that. They're copying down all of their assignments and all of their exams. For you, what's just a little thing can really translate.

If you do it once, illness happens. If it's a really big deal, I think students will understand, but I would really protect against it and how do we protect against it? We leave margin. The other thing I was going to mention is I love using flashcard tools in general, but the one that I use a lot, it's called Quizlet. If you've got a deck of Quizlet flashcards, that's a ready-made activity that you can do either individually. There's a match game that just puts terms out there and definitions and they just click and drag.

That's something super quick and easy. Sometimes students prefer to test themselves and they like that individual work. Some students really, really like the more communal work. There's a great game that you can play called Quizlet Live. This can work on a Zoom session. It can also work in an in-person class and they actually get to work collaboratively because only one person who's playing

the game has the correct answer. You'll find them talking to each other and laughing because as your scoring points, your little animal figure is moving ahead.

If you get a single one wrong, you go all the way back to the beginning again and you'll hear the team will just go, "Ah." It's just absolute torture for them to have to return. It's really fun. People are laughing. It's intense in some really fun ways. That's a great way to build some community. I just have it any time. Do we have time to do it today? Perfect. Opportunity for retrieval practice. Do we run out of time? Well, I'm going to make sure and plan some more margin in that next class session because it's so important that they're building those neural networks.

[00:23:56] Todd: The other thing we can do is build a little time in, but if you actually have a little bit of spare time, and I have had great success with this one too, just take a little bit of time to relax. We now know that the incidence of depression, anxiety. Data from 2021 it was up 25%. Since that time of course it's been going up even higher. Everybody's struggling. It brings in Ian McClellan, a long McLaren Ian McLaren a long time ago. He was one attributed to that quote of be kind for everyone that you meet as fighting a hard battle or another way I've heard this is everyone's fighting a battle you know nothing about because that's all out there.

If you can just take a few minutes of class and just say, "Hey everybody." If we just take three minutes and just breathe, and I have had great success with that and it's okay to just be quiet for a little bit. It helps students quite a bit. By the way, I will say just because I had brought this up, I hadn't meant to talk about it, but that concept of everyone's fighting a battle, you know nothing about, I have found that to be the most freeing thing in my life is to really understand and truly appreciate that everyone you meet is fighting something at any given moment.

If you know that, and the way I like to think of this in my own head right now is because I know that, I don't need to know what it is anymore. I just know that it's there. If somebody says, "Hey, Dr. Z, I really could use some extra time," or if a faculty member says, "I'm sorry I can't make it today, can I do it next week?" I know that they're struggling with something and because of that, I can give a little bit of grace or a little bit of just freedom there to say, "You know what? That's okay." Yes, you're going to be taking advantage of time, sure, that's going to happen, but 99% of the time it's just somebody who needs the extra time. I think that it'll work out fine. It'll be okay to have just a little bit of time to just do something at the last minute or just breathe and do nothing for a minute.

[00:25:52] Bonni: I don't think any idea has changed my teaching more and my feelings about teaching more than just that idea of how poor our brains can be determining what are in other people's minds. If we assume the best that there is something challenging that they're experiencing and we look at situations in that way, what a better time it is for them, how much kinder we can be and more supportive of people who likely are experiencing something pretty awful if not then, the next week or the week after that.

Also, it just feels better. Like you said, it's very freeing. It's very relaxing to just go in with that assumption. I'll never forget when I went to take the standardized test for my master's degree, I don't even remember what it was called, but let's just say it was not my favorite day, wasn't my favorite test. When I got the results back, I curled up in the fetal position and balled under my desk. I don't have fond memories, but I remember just being so incredibly stressed and showed up that morning without a pencil.

I mean, if you've taken a test like this, at least back then, you got to bring a pencil. I don't know if they still bring pencils to this. Do they still do a test like that? Anyway, and the woman who was there, so shaming the facilitator of the test, so shaming like, "No, I don't have a pencil. You clearly got the information." I should remember came at me like nobody's business and I'm normally a pretty responsible person who remembers her pencils. Then I felt so I was going to cry and I'm walking around just looking at strangers.

Would anybody give me a pencil? Sure enough, I think the first person I asked said, "Oh, absolutely, here you go," was very nice. What would it have cost that woman? By the way, she doesn't work where I work anymore. Many years have passed by. I wish her the best. I'm sure she was experiencing challenges of her own. I do think about her often because I think, how much trouble is it to carry around a few extra pens and a few extra pencils?

Yes, there may be, as you said, someone, taken the pencil thief, taken full advantage of your generosity for pencil. For every person who is somehow trying to take advantage of free pencils and pens, there are people who really are struggling and who just need a little generosity and kindness. That literally and figuratively doesn't cost you that much.

[00:28:15] Todd: No. Technically, it's egocentric bias. We know most about ourselves. That's what we know. It's what you're saying, which I think is fascinating. I can be having a really rough day, which might make me even less patient with you because I'm having a rough day. I could even say, "Well, Bonni, you don't understand how hard my day has been."

Making that statement without understanding that you're also having a battle is really an egocentric bias. Once you do that, and I will say, just as a quick example, somebody that I know very well mentioned a while back. She said she was apologizing because she made a little mistake on some little things. She's, "Well, I didn't get to bed until midnight." When she said that, my response was, "Look, I know you normally go to bed at nine o'clock and get up very early because you've talked about that in the past.

If you were up until midnight, it means you specifically were fighting some battle that I do not need to know anything about. I will let you know if you need any help, you let me know. In the meantime, take another swipe at it, it's going to be fine." That changed things so quickly and it could have just as easily been, "Oh, you made another mistake or you made this mistake. Well, that's inexcusable, you need to fix it." The outcome would've been the same, but the process would've been so different that that day the outcome may have been the same, but the outcome tomorrow will be very different if you're a little more patient and a little more kind.

By the way, that ties right back into the classroom. I think if we treat our students like that in class, again, I really believe that the outcome that day, like you with your pencil, the test, you got your pencil, that outcome was the same, but the outcome tomorrow is the one that changes. I think during the class, that's what we got to do with our students and creating this community.

[00:30:00] Bonni: The goal is to create a learning community, and the best is when it doesn't end when the class ends. Would you talk about ways we can end well to sustain those relationships?

[00:30:12] Todd: If things go well in class, and I don't know, I guess this is a tricky one too. I probably get too attached at times and maybe some people have told me through my career it's professionalism. The class comes, you teach your students and they go away. I just feel that's awful. If you spend three months with a group of individuals, they're family by the end of it. Especially if you build a good community, so I never want that to end.

The last day of class is always hard for me because it's the three months of getting to know somebody and now they're friends and they're going to go away. There's lots of options that we can do. I think keeping in touch-- I just wrote a book, *The New Science of Learning*. The last thing I put in the whole book was, "If you've enjoyed this book or learned anything from it, send me an email." I used to tell my students, "Send me an email if you have any questions."

Before it was popular, I used to tell my students, "My home phone number is--" and I would tell them what my home phone number was, and I would say,

"Here's the deal. Three things you have to think about. Number one, look at a clock before you call me, and if it's between 10:00 PM and 6:00 AM, do not call me. Call me at a different time, but look at the clock. Number two, you have to have tried at least for 15 minutes to solve whatever it is you're going to call me about because you need to try first. Number three, you have to ask somebody who has a legit shot at answering your question. If you've done those three things, just call me."

I had colleagues who would say, "I can't believe you do that. You're going to get inundated with calls." Putting my email in a book and saying, "Write me," everyone thinks you're going to get inundated. Number one, you don't. I think I had 600 students when I gave away my phone number, and I got 10 phone calls that semester, and so it doesn't happen. I tell people, "Email me, let me know what's happening down the road. I want to hear from you."

I don't get many, but I will tell you every time I get one, I'm overjoyed. It just makes me reconnect and think about that person. I always send them an email back that says, "I am so proud of what you're doing. I'm so happy for you, and let me know again in a couple of months how you're doing even then." I think the other thing you can do is have the students even write quick notes at the end of the class.

Aside from evaluations, is there anything you'd like me to know as you're leaving the class and something I can think about, if you want me to contact you down the road, jot down your email address, maybe I'll drop you a line, but this concept of if you're going to build a community, we shouldn't feel like, "It's the last day, goodbye. I'm not going to see you again." Which I would never want.

[00:32:44] Bonni: I asked a couple girls to stay after a Zoom session that we had because I wanted to extend that opportunity to stay in touch. It's complicated, but our endings aren't all ending on exactly the same week. Some people are deciding to go asynchronous and others are staying synchronous. Anyway, I didn't want to miss the opportunity. I asked them to send me their personal contact information, and so we were exchanging those things.

Then they didn't even know each other too terribly well, but they were in similar businesses and it turned out that one of them had just gotten engaged and that was when she chose to tell me, and also ... I would not have had this opportunity to get that major life update had it not been for just wanting to extend those relationships and exchange. That was just funny that it provided that opportunity.

I like to connect on LinkedIn. Actually, I should say I like to invite students should they wish to, to connect with me on LinkedIn. It's fun. You get little updates when

they change jobs. You can send a little note pretty quickly and be able to encourage them along the way. Then of course some students it's fine if they want to connect on Instagram, they go on someday, maybe they have babies or something like that. It's really fun to see cute baby pictures from former students [chuckles] and get to watch them at seasons of their life well beyond when they were in a class. It's really, really fun.

[00:34:04] Todd: Oh, I just think it's the most wonderful thing in terms of you're making connections with humans, you're helping change their lives. When I do workshops with faculty, I love to ask a question as, "Has somebody ever said something to you and they probably have no recollection of ever saying it, but it changed your life, it changed your path?" And everybody I have talked to has had at least one of those. They keep thinking about, "If I've changed somebody's life by saying something, maybe you don't remember what I've said, but I've done this, I want to hear down the road when they're just doing well." What a wonderful thing.

Probably the longest this has ever gone on, so somebody I now connect with or chat with periodically on LinkedIn, actually, was a student that I had in class in 1987. I mean, these can be lifelong just friendships that can come out of this. I guess we should say too, Bonni, because we're building the community and doing this. I love the fact that you said you invite them to connect with you. As my daughter would say, you don't want to be a creeper.

[00:35:12] Bonni: No. [laughs]

[00:35:12] Todd: We want to be careful with that. Number one, if a student doesn't want to connect, let it go, but give them the opportunity, and then I always let them lead. If somebody says, "Hey Dr. Zak, just want to let you know this happened." I'll say, "So great to hear from you." Very short message. Then I'll say, "If you have more time and you want to fill me in on more, I'd appreciate hearing that." If they don't ask me about my life, I don't tell them my life. I give them the opportunity to open up for their life and then I reciprocate, so reciprocal disclosure, I only reciprocate with my disclosure that matches whatever they have disclosed first. We do walk that fine line, but we are humans and if we built community, we're part of the same community.

[00:35:53] Bonni: So true. This is the time in the show where we each get to share our recommendations. I'm going to share a few, and I know you have a couple to share as well, Todd. I mentioned Tracy Addy earlier in the podcast. I also made a random mention of Zotero. Well, prior to our conversation today, Todd, I was going and looking up to make sure I had my links for the show notes and everything, and I wound up finding Tracy Addy's Zotero profile. I didn't even



really ever think about that that is one place if you maintain a Zotero account, that's how you manage your references.

She has on there all of her scholarly works. It's blog posts that she's written, it's academic journal articles that she's written, and it was pretty extensive from memory of something like 20 or 25 different publications or citations. I didn't even notice it until I went back, but literally, if you're logged in, you can just click "add to my library", "add to my library", "add to my library". I thought, "Well, what a wonderful place for her to keep that." Because she linked to it from her website, which, again, is in the show notes. She just has to maintain it in one place, but how nice to maintain it in a place that is both a list, but also a list that it's that easy then to add to somebody's collection of references.

I really liked that. I would suggest that you go explore Tracy Addy's Zotero profile just to get a sense of what's possible, and then add a profile of your own. If you already are using Zotero, why not add a profile, and then you can start to add your own things that you might like to share. Things that you've written and created out with the general public in academia. Then lastly, I don't even remember how recently. Time has lost all meaning. At some point, I retook my professional headshot photos, and I have started to make a list of all of the places that I need to update whenever I decide to change my profile picture. The list is very long.

My suggestion to you is if you do wind up changing, maybe you change a job title or you got a better photo that's more representative of you and how you look today, create a checklist for the places to change your profile picture or your profile information because it will not be the last time that you do that, but the next time could be so much faster and with so much less friction if you got that checklist going where you can go back and be, "Oh, I got to change Twitter, I got to change Instagram, I got to change one of the places. I've got mine going.

By the way, Zotero just got added to my checklist because I had forgotten. [laughs] There's a photo up on Zotero too. Anyway, Todd, I know both of us want to recommend this first item and that is the Lilly Conference. What can you tell us about Lilly Conferences in general, and the one that is coming up most soonest coming out into the world this episode?

[00:38:50] Todd: Oh, that's great. Well, first of all, I loved your recommendations, and I'm going to go do both of those, which right after this show. This will be great. The Lilly Conferences, Lilly Conferences were first done by Milt Cox a little over 40 years ago. They were done as a part of a Lilly Foundation's grant. The grant only ran three years, but nobody back then was having conversations

about teaching and learning, and Milt needed some place for his faculty learning communities to share their work so he started those Lilly Conferences.

About 20 years ago, I ran my first Lilly Conference, and since that time, I've gotten to the point where I now run five Lilly Conferences a year. They're interdisciplinary conferences on evidence-based teaching and learning. It's a chance for people to really, really believe in helping students to do the best they can in the classrooms to come together. When you come to this group, it's funny we talk about community today, I strive to build a real community Lilly Conferences. I hope you'll consider coming to one. It's L-I-L-L-Y, so it's Lilly Conferences. There'll be a link in there.

Next one coming up, depending on when this show is produced here, but we've got one coming up in San Diego in January, every year in January in San Diego. Then we have one in Austin in May, late May, early June. We have Asheville, North Carolina in August, with Traverse City, Michigan in the fall and then we have an online conference. The Lilly Conferences, I hope you'll consider coming to one. Bonni Stachowiak is going to be one of the plenaries at the San Diego one. There's a treat for you. She is amazing. That's the one recommendation I would make. Then the other one is the scholarly teacher blog. Scholarly teacher, I started in 2014.

The idea was-- and it's weird, I call it a blog, but it's not really a blog. We never know what to call this thing because I want three to five references. I want it to be evidence-based. That's a big thing for my life. I think everything should be, we build on the work that's been done by others and there's discussion questions at the end. If you do use this with a group or something, you have questions built in, but there's post done by faculty, there's also post done by students and we have infographics.

The latest series of infographics I'm really excited about is one series called What's the Buzz and Their Buzzwords and Higher Education. Now what we do is define in an infographic what do we really mean by scaffolding. What's meant by metacognition, what's meant by ZPD and APK, and those types of things. Then the other one was Level-Up series, and this is off the gaming thing. It occurred to me a while ago, we've been doing active learning for a little over 20 years now, is when we really started to push it.

20 years later, we shouldn't be talking about active learning as if it's all the same thing. My pitch with this one is, if you've been doing something like think, pair, share for a while, it's time to level up. It's time to do a different level, a higher level of all of these engaged learning strategies. There's a whole series on leveling up your active learning strategies. All can be found on the Scholarly Teacher site.

[00:41:49] Bonni: I wanted to mention about the Lilly Conferences that I love how you show up with such intention, but you take it beyond just intention. That's how you design it and I can remember-- I do need to go back and look at exactly what year it was. That was the first year I ever went. It does feel very humbling and honoring that I would be speaking at this [chuckles] year's because I still remember the first one and it was both exhilarating and a little intimidating but in a good way.

Taking something as seriously as what we do in our teaching, there's a seriousness to it, but there's also a playfulness to it, but there's that intentionality where you really do build community. I was just speaking with someone a couple of weeks ago who I met for the first time a number of years ago at a Lilly Conference and he remembered it exactly. Maybe I shouldn't tell you this, but we actually missed two sessions because we were getting so much out of that conversation.

But the Lynch conversations are always so rich and I've really been able to build a number of relationships. My colleague lives down in San Diego, so he's already looking forward to coming this year. Really look forward to those every year. I also happen to like the location, but it sounds like they're all in lovely locations. You don't pick bad locations, it sounds like is what you intentionally--

[00:43:03] Todd: No, I try to find good locations, but I'm going to help you out, Bonnie. I can tell you when you were there the first because now I'm going to give you a retrieval cue. You caught me after your session and said, "Hey, Todd, I just started doing this blog or this podcast and I'd love to have you as a guest on it." You had been doing it, I think you probably had about seven or eight episodes at the point you asked me. It was then.

[00:43:24] Bonni: I think you changed when the conference was. It wasn't always in January. Maybe the first time was in 2014?

[00:43:32] Todd: It probably was right about 2014. It was in February. I don't know, that was probably a couple of million downloads ago for you.

[00:43:40] Bonni: Wow. Absolutely amazing. It's been such a pleasure not just having today's conversation, but our ongoing conversation. I love the ones that we get to have in private where-- [chuckles] but also these also feel private in the sense of you're so vulnerable and willing to talk about things that you've been challenged with. It's just such a comfortable feel that we're all in this together in solidarity. Just thank you so much for your work and for the continued dialogue.

[00:44:05] Todd: Appreciate the work you're doing and anytime I can be involved, I just love talking to you. I always learn something. Thank you.

[00:44:10] Bonni: Yes, same back to you as well. We already know you're coming back, so look forward to that everybody.

[music]

Thanks once again to Todd Zakrajsek for joining me on today's episode. My gratitude goes out to the ever-talented Andrew Kroeger and the amazing Sierra Smith for in Andrew's case, editing, and in Sierra's case, for the podcast production support. Today's episode was produced by me, Bonni Stachowiak. Thanks to each of you who engaged in the community by listening or sharing episodes or other resources with people.

Thanks for listening today, and if you have yet to sign up for the email list, head on over to [teachinginhighered.com/subscribe](https://teachinginhighered.com/subscribe) and you'll get even more resources than you hear on the episodes and see in the show notes. Thanks so much for listening, and I'll see you next time.

[music]

[00:45:17] [END OF AUDIO]

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