

[00:00:00] Bonni Stachowiak: Today on episode number 276 of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast, Dr. Edward Leach shares about reaching all learners through innovation and teaching excellence.

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[00:00:28] Bonni: Hello, and 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.

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Today's guest was introduced to me through my partnership with the Association of College and University Educators or ACUE. ACUE's courses and community site feature many of teaching and learning's top experts, faculty developers and practitioners to showcase evidence-based teaching practices. Dr. Edward Leach serves as the executive director of the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development, NISOD, a consortium of community and technical colleges that share a philosophical commitment to support excellence in teaching, learning and leadership.

NISOD supports excellence in teaching, learning, and leadership by distributing professional development materials to faculty, staff, and administrators at its

member colleges. Prior to his tenure at NISOD, Dr. Leach served as the vice president of services and programs for the League of Innovation in the Community College where he managed their district sales arm that provided targeted expertise and resources of interest to community colleges. Ed, welcome to Teaching in Higher Ed.

[00:02:09] Edward Leach: Thank you. I'm glad to be with you.

[00:02:11] Bonni: I'm glad to be with you too. I'm excited about our conversation because whenever we've been doing something for a while, we always have these great insights and a lot of people that listen to this show, they're very early in their teaching. I'm just excited about what you have to share with us today. Let's start out with looking at your own early days of teaching. I know you've been a faculty member. What do you recall about one of the challenges that you were experiencing at that time? I'm sure you probably have some advice for those of us who might encounter that same thing.

[00:02:44] Edward: Yes, thank you. It's been a while since I've taught. Just for a little background information. When I was at Central Florida Community College, now what's called the College of Central Florida and before that Genesee Community College at Western New York, I had teaching experiences at both of those locations. I was actually part-time instructor because, at both of those locations, I had full-time administrative roles.

At Genesee Community College, I was the head athletic trainer for the athletic department. At Central Florida Community College, I was a director of human resources, was my full-time position. At that institution, the president had all of the administrators at the college also teach a course so that they would have some sense of what the faculty members at that institution were experiencing. As I said, my instructional role at both of those institutions was on a part-time basis. One of the challenges that was the same at both institutions was not being fully familiar with the community college sector when teaching at those institutions.

When I started, even though I graduated from a community college, as a student at a community college, you are limited in your knowledge about community colleges, your exposure to things at community college because you're not looking at your time there through the lens that you would look through if you were a faculty member. So a lot of the issues around the type of students there attending community colleges and some of the issues around the community colleges, I wasn't fully aware of some of those things, as a faculty member, being asked to teach at those institutions.

I think that's still the issue with a lot of faculty members full and part-time at community colleges today. I think a lot of them, full-time or part-time, coming into community colleges aren't necessarily fully familiar with that sector. Many of them come from business and industry, especially with the part-time folks. They're hired. They might get a little bit of orientation to the community college before they're expected to start teaching. Often times, they're given the syllabus, the keys to the classroom and pointed to where the copier might be and then set off to teach their course.

If they're an individual who has come from business and industry interested in—they're either trying to get their foot in the door of the community college and doing some adjunct teaching as a way to do that or just simply trying to supplement their income and using adjunct instruction at a community college as a way of doing that, they often times aren't familiar with the sector that they're getting ready to teach. That could be very difficult on those individuals even if they've come from a four-year institution where they've gone through a teacher education program.

There oftentimes isn't a whole lot of focus in those programs on what it means to teach at a community college, which is totally different than being at a four-year institution and having that challenge when you just start to teach at one of those institutions can be difficult as I have found.

[00:06:09] Bonni: I appreciate how you spoke about having been a community college student yourself, doesn't necessarily mean that we're going to be able to relate in the same ways that some of our students might. I remember I taught as an adjunct first in my career as well, and I just thought that it was going to be like my college experience. The first night, I asked them all to pull out their textbooks, and they looked at me like I was nuts because it was just not normal in our institution still not today, people don't bring their books to the first class the way that I did when I was in college.

It can be really a wake-up call. One of the other areas I know that you've been looking at for a while now is around teaching innovation. You have been in higher education for decades, how have you seen changes in terms of how institutions approach teaching innovation over those years?

[00:07:01] Edward: Well, fortunately, given some of the initiatives that are and have been present in the community college and maybe in the four-years sector as well but certainly in community college sector, basically forcing institutions to take a look at the most critical aspect of the teaching and learning process, which are the faculty members in the classroom. You can have all these different

initiatives taking place, and there's a number of them out there but without having a qualified, fully professional faculty member in the classroom, the success of those initiatives are going to be polluted.

These community colleges have recognized that and they're taking steps to do a much better job now. Of course, it varies from institution to institution on orienting their faculty members, part-time or otherwise, on what it means to work at a community college and provide ongoing support and professional development for those individuals so that they're the best that they can be at their craft. Including things like sending them to our annual conference and taking advantage of the resources that we have available for faculty members here at NISOD.

I think one of the biggest changes that I've seen is these colleges recognizing that the key component in student success is going to be that faculty member in the classroom and then helping that classroom instructor become a better classroom instructor and maintain that quality of excellence in their teaching.

[00:08:37] Bonni: You mentioned NISOD, and I know that you have many resources available to individuals teaching that can help them be better at teaching. You've also had a number of initiatives over the years. As you think back to the efforts and the kinds of resources that NISOD provides, what is really working to help faculty be more effective in our teaching?

[00:09:00] Edward: Well, I think there's maybe two different questions there. One of them is what's really working with faculty? Talk a little bit about that in a second. Then the other part of that is what are the resources that NISOD has available? A little bit about NISOD real quick is we identify folks out there who think that they're doing something that their colleagues, namely other faculty members, will find interesting and useful. We're not in a position necessarily to evaluate these different strategies that faculty members are using and want to share with their colleagues.

What we do is identify those individuals, provide them with platforms to share that information with their colleagues. I'll talk about a couple of those platforms here in a second. Then is up to the listeners or who's ever been exposed to those strategies and the content and so forth to make a decision whether or not that information is pertinent to their situation because community colleges, they're probably 40 institutions for that matter. They're different sizes, they're urban, they're rural, they're faulty district, a number of different ways that they can be different from one institution to another.

For us to say, this is what you should be doing is probably not the best approach because of that variety and what makes up these various institutions. We do provide the platform for these faculty members and administrators for that matter to share what they consider best practices. One of those platforms is our annual conference. We have a conference that's held in Austin, Texas every year. We just had it over Memorial Day weekend. That was the 41st year of the conference, so 2020 again in Austin, Texas to be the 42nd year of the conference.

It brings together over 1,000 educators from really around the world. A large majority obviously from the United States and Canada, but they come together and talk about [unintelligible 00:11:03] conference, share their best practices and then the individuals at those sessions, they make a decision whether or not that information is something they want to take back to their campus and implement and see how it works for them.

Something else that we have very popular is our webinars series. Our webinar series involves community college educators, again, who have ideas that they want to share with their colleagues and most likely the conference, the participants in those webinars are able to take the information that they've received by sitting in on the webinar and take it back to their institution to decide whether or not that's a good fit for their needs back on their campus. Maybe the last thing I might want to mention real quick, maybe the two things I'll mention really quick that I think about it our innovation abstracts.

Innovation abstracts as a publication, a quick read. It's an opportunity for folks at our member colleges in other institutions for that matter to share with their colleague's strategies that they're doing, initiatives that they may be participating in and share with our audience some basic information about what the strategy consists of. Sometimes, they have data supporting the best practice. Oftentimes, it's just anecdotal, "This is what I'm doing in my classroom. I have found this to be successful in my classroom. You may want to consider trying something like this in your classroom."

Then there 1,200, 5,000 words, Like I said, quick reads, come out each week and they're available to folks that are member colleges. Folks really love them because it does give them a chance to just read something real quick, maybe glean an idea or two out of it that they could take back into their classroom. Then like I said, the last thing I would mention is something we started at about this time last year, our regional workshops. We do a variety of maybe about 20, 25 different topics we have available in our regional workshops, where we do these at community and technical colleges around the country.

As the name implies, folks from within a particular region will come to the workshop and get some professional training, professional learning and are usually done on a Friday. They're 10:00 to 3:00, 10:00 in the morning to three o'clock in the afternoon. There's a one hour lunch. It's a chance for folks to come together, hear about a particular topic. It's a single topic, single workshop facilitator and it's the chance for the folks in the region to come together around that particular topic, do some networking and do some learning around that particular area. We're really proud about those particular convenings and they've been really well received across the country.

[00:13:47] Bonni: The final area for us to explore before we get to the recommendations segment has to do with technology. I know you have seen a lot of change in this area. What have you observed over your years of being in the higher education space?

[00:14:01] Edward: A number of things. I think it would start with faculty members more recognizing or being more aware of how technology can help them in the classroom. Back when I was with the League for Innovation in the Community College, we had some projects that we did in conjunction with Stevens Institute of Technology. It really was around helping faculty members at community colleges use real-time data, for instance. Maybe where ships are located in the ocean or astrological data or other data and basis provided by government entity.

Then be able to use that data in the classroom to make the course more engaging and maybe having more of a real-world aspect to it than it might have if they weren't using those data. Then the other piece of it was the expectation was that those faculty members at those community colleges would work with the teachers, maybe middle school, high school teachers in their area to train them how to use those data to increase student achievement and maybe even get students interested in STEM where they otherwise wouldn't get those students interested in those particular disciplines.

Now, with the internet and how it's increased information that's available out there, some of the companies that are available now that weren't around back when I was at the League for Innovation, which I should probably mention was-- This is certainly back in 1999 so you can imagine how much progress has been made in resources that are available online and the companies that are available out there that faculty members can avail themselves to that didn't exist in back in my early days with the League for Innovation.

I'm seeing more faculty members starting to take advantage of those things and recognizing how those things can help them get their students more engaged, provide them with real-life experiences, get them connected with resources that will help them in their career aspirations and then, of course, more directly with the faculty member themselves, being able to take advantage of trainings that are available to them that were not available previously so that they become better classroom instructors. You've got the OER movement that helped to bring down the cost of books for students.

There's just a number of resources I think that are available now that didn't exist years ago that faculty are recognizing can not only help them be better classroom instructors but also help their students be academically successful.

[00:16:43] Bonni: You were talking about that it's easy for you to recognize the changes. I feel like sometimes I forget. My kids who are five and seven who are in my office at my institution the other day, and they're just enthralled by this telephone that sits on my desk that has a curly Q wire that's attached to it. It's something that I don't really ever think about like, "Oh, you don't see this at home, do you?" It's so easy for us to lose sight of how many things have changed. It has been such a delight to get to reflect and hear your stories about all these changes that you've seen in teaching and innovation and in the ways that technology is used.

This is now the part of the show where each one of us gets to share a couple of recommendations that may or may not be related to what we just spoke about. I have two of them to share today. The first is a blog post that was written by Laura Pasquini and it is called Under Surveillance: Privacy, Rights, and Those Capitalizing On Us. We have talked about previously on the show about some elements of privacy and other ethical considerations when talking about technology.

She is such a lifelong learner and not only is this just good writing and really good information on its own right, but she links over to so many other resources that if this is a topic that's of interest to you, would be really good for you to begin to collect and gather and curate things around privacy and surveillance. That's a really good resource, one that I have definitely bookmarked and then continued to click, click, click because there's so many things that we could go and explore more on the topic.

The second one is an interview that an organization called Project Information Literacy did with a past Teaching in Higher Ed guest named Mike Caulfield. Mike Caulfield is very well known in the area of information literacy and specifically working to equip students to be more effective at their own efforts in addressing

the "fake news crisis." He has, what he calls, the four moves as a much more effective way at helping all of us become more information literate, which is far superior to methods like the CRAAP test. I'm not making that up, C-R-A-A-P.

Some of you may have heard of that in the past, but he says that tools like that can be really flawed. He's got some great recommendations for us. I just thought this was a good interview to get to know more about Mike Caulfield's work and to get to know more about his digital polarization initiative that he directs. It's part of the American Democracy Project, so a good way to get to know his work and how we all can be more equipped in this area. That is the end of my recommendations. Ed, I get to pass it over to you for yours.

[00:19:41] Edward: Well those are quite interesting. I might have to look into those myself. I think the first thing that comes to mind for me, just because it's so fresh in my mind and maybe because I've known this gentleman for, geez, going back to 1999 with my first days with the League for Innovation that you may want to consider as a participant in your podcast is John O'Brian. I don't know if you're familiar with John O'Brian or not. He's the president and CEO of EDUCAUSE. Are you familiar with EDUCAUSE or John O'Brian? You guys know each other?

[00:20:16] Bonni: I am very familiar with EDUCAUSE and not at all familiar with John O'Brian.

[00:20:21] Edward: I won't bore you with information about EDUCAUSE, but John is their president and CEO. He did a presentation at our conference, like I said, over Memorial Day weekend here a few weeks back, which really resonated well with our audience of community college faculty members, educators. It was around taking a look back at what people have said history was going to look like going forward if that makes any sense. Back in the 1800s, back 50 years ago, et cetera, looking at what some of the predictions were around what education was going to look like now and maybe even going into the future and looking at how accurate they were around those things.

Not only for an analysis of how accurate they were but looking at what could be learned from those predictions. It really was really, really fascinating. If you ever get a chance to speak to him about some of his research around that area, I think you'd find it fascinating. The other thing that comes to mind or the person I should say comes to mind is also a keynote speaker that we had at our conference either a year or two ago. I don't know if you're familiar with a gentleman named Alex Sheen. He's the founder of an organization called Because I Said I Would.

[00:21:44] Bonni: I've heard of Because-- In fact, I think I recommended this but didn't remember the person's name. Tell me more.

[00:21:52] Edward: He used to work in the technology sector out in the great Northwest, and he had a father that passed away, if I remember correctly, from cancer. That caused him to think about what he was doing with his life and what kind of contribution he was making to humanity. He quit working in the technology field and created this 501(c)(3) that has a purpose of generally speaking, bettering humanity, but on a more personal level, getting folks to make meaningful promises to other people, other organizations, their community, whatever the case may be, and then keeping those promises.

Of course, the promises are such that they're going to have a significant impact on the individual who they're making a promise to or the organization they're making a promise to. I don't know if you remember, some years ago, I believe it was three or four women in Cleveland escaped from this house where they were held captive for, I don't know, 10 years or something along that lines. He was familiar with somebody from that area and made a promise to-- I believe one of the girl's mother. That when her daughter was found, he was going to try to raise some money by walking across the state of Ohio.

Of course, they found that the girl or they escaped, and he kept his promise. Walked across the state of Ohio and raised some money, but it was really an inspirational moment for him and the community, and really across the country. He's ever since then running this 501(c)(3) where you can write to them, tell them what your promises. They'll send back these cards that you sign and give to the individual or to the organization or whatever the case may be about what your promise is. Once you fulfill that promise, they give that card back to you.

He does a powerful presentation around what his life was prior to starting the 501(c)(3), his father passing, starting the 501(c)(3), and then all the work the organization has done. It's really a fascinating story that he has and a very compelling story that he has.

[00:24:22] Bonni: As you were sharing more of his story, I realized that I heard about him through another speaker. She had us write down something on a slip of paper around our own Because I Said I Would and just thinking through those commitments that we have, and having integrity and following through and the things that really are going to have the most significance in our life. Well, thank you for sharing these two recommendations. I like the theme of additional people we can connect with to learn more and also to be more people of integrity. I just want to thank you also, Ed, just for coming on Teaching in Higher Ed and giving of your time this way and sharing with us today.

[00:24:57] Edward: You're very welcome. I appreciate the opportunity to do so.

[00:25:03] Bonni: Thanks once again to Dr. Edward Leach for joining me on today's episode number 276. If you'd like to visit the show notes for this episode, they'll be at teachinginhighered.com/276. If you want to avoid having to remember to go do that, you could sign-up for the weekly update at teachinginhighered.com/subscribe. That will allow you to receive, on most weeks, the show notes from the most recent episode, as well as an article written about teaching or productivity by me. You also will receive the EdTech Essentials book with 19 tools that helped me use technology in both my teaching and in my personal productivity. Thanks again for listening. I'll see you next time.

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[00:25:58] [END OF AUDIO]

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