

Bonni [00:00:00] It's early in the semester for some of us on today's episode Episode 31 I talk about all that we cannot see.

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Bonni [00:00:19] Welcome to this episode of Teaching in Higher Ed. This is the space where we explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning. We also share ways to increase our personal productivity approaches so we can have more peace in our lives and be even more present for our students.

Bonni [00:00:45] As I mentioned at the start of the show it is the first week of classes for a lot of us I know some of us starting next week some of us are on a quarter system I realize it's not across the board but it is a time where many of us are thinking about a lot of things. We've got some new faces some new names.

Bonni [00:01:02] And I don't know about you it can be a little overly overstimulating. I've got a couple of young children at home as I know many of you who listen no. And boy you see what a toddler looks like when they're overstimulated well me in my 40s or overstimulated get a little bit scatterbrain.

Bonni [00:01:20] But I also do a lot of deep thinking and I've been thinking about the things that we cannot see and it's kind of funny how sometimes when we start to think about things they show up in all sorts of ways in our life.

Bonni [00:01:33] I tried really hard to find the commercial that I'm talking about so that I could link to it in the show notes which by the way will be a teachinginhighered.com/31 as this is the thirty first episode but I was unable to find it so if anyone listening knows the commercial I'm about to describe I would love it if you would send it to me.

Bonni [00:01:53] Essentially it would go through a whole montage of people in a busy area maybe a train station if I recall correctly and it would have first does the picture or the video of the person and then it would go to a still frame and it would have something that expressed words would show up on the screen of what's really going on in their lives such as I'm in the middle of a divorce.

Bonni [00:02:20] I just lost my child. I'm grieving the loss of a friend. What whatever the case may be it started to have us as viewers feel a little bit more empathy toward the people who we saw and also just to recognize gosh we never know what goes on when we're seeing other people. I did the best I could with the google but I was unable to locate it. Everything else that I mentioned in this show by the way will be at teachinginhighered.com/31 except for that one.

Bonni [00:02:53] But if someone sends it to me I will edit the notes and add it back in. So those of us that are in the field of technology know that when we go around in our lives and we see things. There's also a lot there that we can't see that involves digital data. This is often referred to as augmented reality.

Bonni [00:03:13] One of the most often used examples of augmented reality is Google Glass and if we were to wear Google Glass we can see reality. But we also habit augmented in some way by the technology but we don't have to have Google Glass in order to have technology augmenting things for us. It shows up on our phone.

Bonni [00:03:33] We could have a location based service a lot of universities might have a tour of their university where you're carrying around your phone and you point it at a building on the campus and up comes up on your phone.

Bonni [00:03:46] Information about the history of the building or some of the projects and innovations that go on in that particular space. And so it's I see in front of me a building but my technology device allows me to see more that's there.

Bonni [00:04:01] There are tours like this in museums there are tours like this on college campuses and unfortunately a lot of advertising goes along with this to where I can go into a store and instantly it knows that I've come in and starts to push advertising. To me that's geared toward what it thinks I might like etc.

Bonni [00:04:20] So there's lots going on that we aren't able to see. And one example would be the augmented reality. And recently I had lunch with a friend and she was talking about a location based chat service. This is not one

that I recommend. Let me say that to start. It's called Yik yak and yik yak... You can have it what chat is going on around me.

Bonni [00:04:43] But what some people see as it's upside is what I would say it's big downside and that is that it's very easy to be anonymous on it. You can also go and peek at other locations so I don't physically have to be in a location to see what chat is going on around me.

Bonni [00:05:00] But I can go peek so I went today to peek at Harvard's campus and gosh I hope I'm gonna be able to get the joke that someone made on it. It was the only place I know of where you can be openly gay but have to be a closeted Republican or something like that and so that may be offensive to you listening.

Bonni [00:05:22] By the way I'm not saying it was great humor I am simply stating that that's the kind of flavor the person's name is not associated with it but that's one of the tamest things I have ever read. So if that offended you we're in big trouble because there's just there's curse words there's a lot of sexually graphic content.

Bonni [00:05:40] A lot of unpleasant things to read. I had gone in and had read it because they had talked about with my university kind of seeing some of the cultural things that are going on now. Now of course my university is located as most universities are in an area where you wouldn't necessarily have to be affiliated with the university to start chatting about this so it doesn't necessarily mean these are our students but some of them are.

Bonni [00:06:08] And so it's just interesting to me to be thinking about the conversations that we don't necessarily get to have when we're in the room. Here's this professor with a position of power they're not necessarily going to speak that way thank goodness by the way because again it's not something I don't think it's worth you going and looking at because it's just so much foul language and sexual references and all that.

Bonni [00:06:30] But if you'd like to it's Yik Yak And that's a location based chat service. And the final one I wanted to share about is that my my parents have a nonprofit and they train search and rescue dogs.

Bonni [00:06:48] And so this is a whole process they've been going through for a long time but I've learned a decent amount about scent and a lot of surprising things about it. For example that if we were to be in a location and then leave

that location that our scent stays behind us and actually it'll stay behind us sometimes for weeks at a time just depending on the condition.

Bonni [00:07:12] To me that's just kind of a fascinating thing. There was this movie way back when called Backdraft some of you might have seen it that was about the science of fires and it cracks me up because I think about no one's probably ever going to make a movie about the science of send a thriller like that a drama but it sure would be fun.

Bonni [00:07:28] So if anyone wants to be a viewer. So another example of how there are things happening that we are able to see well as educators. There is so much happening in the classroom that we are unable to see outside the classroom we are unable to see if we try feebly to look at something like Yik Yak.

Bonni [00:07:49] We're not really seeing either because we're depending on the types of people who want to use that surface and what it attracts because of what's already there. I just found out today that I have an Olympic gold medalist and one of my cohorts and I say this on this podcast because he's just made public on Twitter so I'm not sharing anything. He wouldn't want people to know.

Bonni [00:08:10] But I thought it was funny because I talked with these doctoral students I taught a half day workshop with them and I like to have one when we're doing longer stretches like that in a four hour stretch to try to have people stand up throughout the class and stretch and just be conscious of not sitting there the whole entire time.

Bonni [00:08:28] And so I had mentioned about who wants to who's going to be good at leading us through a stretch break real quick so he can shift over to the next thing. And they jokingly looked at him and he's a physically fit man.

Bonni [00:08:37] So I thought that was the joke was he is physically fit. But I mean it's just kind of fun to know that about him and his history and have some way of connecting with him and finding out more.

Bonni [00:08:49] I mean you can only imagine how much that might have shaped his life possessions they might. Did shape his life. I have had students who have lost a parent. I have many students who are terrified of failure and it's debilitating to them. I've had many students whose parents are going through a divorce.

Bonni [00:09:06] The list goes on and on and these are all good things for us to know because then we have a context for why things happened back to that commercial that I talked about in the beginning instead of just seeing the face that I might presume is just angry an angry face a bitter face a bored face.

Bonni [00:09:24] It might really be a face that is struggling with something that I can't really imagine Emma and able to perceive so one of the ways that I try to combat that in my teaching is to have some kind of an online forum where students introduce themselves. Yes I will have some form of introduction where we start to get to know each other at the start of a semester.

Bonni [00:09:45] But for me wanting to know things where I ask a question that might go a little bit deeper early in a semester I found that these students who have really exposed a lot on social media are sometimes more comfortable sharing in an online forum than they are in the classroom with us those first couple of weeks.

Bonni [00:10:03] So I have a forum that I will have students do it has questions on their like. Tell me about your family. Tell me about how you came to our university.

Bonni [00:10:11] What's something you're looking forward to this semester or What's something you're fearful of this semester. What's something you're proud of. And it just helps me get to know a little bit more about things that are going on in their lives ways that I can connect with them early in the semester.

Bonni [00:10:26] And that's just a technique that I use that's been really helpful for me. I have a couple of things to say about this idea of all the things that we cannot see in the first one is that our perceptions really do matter.

Bonni [00:10:41] And there was a really really powerful podcast that just got released. I will link to the show notes and as many wonderful podcasts that are getting released today it was rolled out by This American Life and it's called invisible.

Bonni [00:10:54] And so there was a This American Life episode where they talk about the new podcast invisibility. They're promoting it and then they have a segment with the producer and the two cohosts and it's really really quite good. The very beginning of it and again I'll link to this and the show notes is only six minute segment.

Bonni [00:11:14] And you know how they'll do that on This American Life they'll have that six minutes before they get into maybe their three main topics like they typically do.

Bonni [00:11:22] And in this six minutes they describe some research that was conducted involving rats and then the reporters who tried to replicate the research in a very unsophisticated way but with some of their colleagues by smuggling the rats into the NPR headquarters in Washington and so admittedly they'd say it's an unscientific experiment but it's based on a famous experiment done by Robert Rosenthal a psychology professor.

Bonni [00:11:52] The original research by Robert Rosenthal was that he would have people that would be told that the rats that they were about to work with you're about to work with a really smart rat rats are really dumb.

Bonni [00:12:08] And as we can probably predict as educators you've heard stories like this before many of us have heard about the brown eyed blue eyed experiments from the sociologists back a number of decades ago are we told the brown eyed kids that they were the smart ones and the blue eyed kids they were the dumb ones etc.

Bonni [00:12:25] Just how powerful what we tell ourselves what we tell each other can be in affecting outcomes. And I would really encourage you to listen to the podcast by no means can I even do it justice other than to say I was once again just struck this week about the power of those things we cannot see.

Bonni [00:12:47] And then if we inadvertently start to speak into what we think we see when we're wrong just how detrimental that can be to our students education. I will say By the way the rest of the This American Life that kicked off the Invisibilia podcast is more of a fascinating look about a man who is blind but who lives a life that most of us would describe as a person very able to see in the world just not quite in the way we typically think of it.

Bonni [00:13:22] That's the best I can do without giving too much away but it's fascinating. And so as far as guidance for myself and for all of us I have found it helpful in my teen to do my best to assume the best because I don't know what's going on and what can be helpful though is to think that students want to do well in a class that they care about school or or at least that that they're not jerks.

Bonni [00:13:53] I have found that not to be a helpful label just to apply. I mean students will sometimes care more care less that kind of thing but but instead of putting labels that are about the person or their character to really try to assume the best.

Bonni [00:14:06] And to talk to the students candidly and openly and preferably one on one about when we see gaps it's see it seems like you are doing this but are you care about this you said. I always have in that same forum by the way where the students introduce themselves. There's a learning contract it's a quiz where I essentially quiz them on the syllabus but I also ask them questions like What is your goal in this class.

Bonni [00:14:33] How can you- how committed are you what are the kinds of things that you're going to do to support that goal and then how can I support you in that goal. And so I can bring that up and I can see you say that you want to get a B in this class.

Bonni [00:14:46] And you say that you're going to do this. It doesn't look like that's happening. I'm afraid that we might not be able to achieve that goal. Am I missing anything. And then just stop talking and let them be able to express back what I might be missing.

Bonni [00:15:01] And we did talk about this a little bit Dave to Haviv my husband and I talked about this and the conversation about dealing with difficult students so I'll put a link to that in the show notes too. But that's one of the things I have found to be helpful.

Bonni [00:15:13] And then lastly the second point about what we cannot see is that to remember that our students really are diverse and they really experience their education very differently whether or not we realize it. Now I've had a couple of students in class who were deaf for example.

Bonni [00:15:36] And by the way very different kinds of deafness so deaf as in having interpreters in the classroom who are doing all of the interpretation all the way to a deaf person with a cochlear implant and who needs to be able to see my lips moving in order or the lips.

Bonni [00:15:55] If it's a video or something like that in order to fully get the message that's being sent that's very sometimes obvious way I mean I'm sure we get it wrong in terms of how we work to support the students. But it is something that is more apparent to us as educators.

Bonni [00:16:14] But I get my mind just gets blown when I think about all the things that we can't see where we're missing our ability to really connect with our students to best be able to support them.

Bonni [00:16:29] So these are just some of the things that have been on my mind I would love to hear from you about what are some of the things that come into your mind when you think about all that we cannot see. And this is the time in the show when I shift over and talk about recommendations.

Bonni [00:16:46] Way back when Episode 1 or Episode 2. I'm not sure but I'll link to it in the notes Dave recommended an app what used to be called Lyft and it's not the car service by the way is different once a habit forming app but now they have changed their name to coach.me. That means you can go to a coach.me or you can download the coach.me app.

Bonni [00:17:08] And essentially it's an app to help us create habits and in my case I am trying to create a habit of stretching for 10 to 15 minutes every day and some of you know from past episodes or if you read the weekly blogs I have some difficulty with my wrists and my arms. Sort of like carpal tunnel syndrome but not quite and so I really need to make sure that I'm stretching and and that just makes such a difference in my life.

Bonni [00:17:36] But it's something I'm not really good at doing and the the coach Scott me helps me check off every day when I do it. Track how many days in a row that I do it and gives me encouragement along the way and I can connect with other people who will encourage me along the way.

Bonni [00:17:53] I can have private habits that I'm trying to mold that I don't want to share with other people or I can have public ones my stretching is a public one so anyone that wants to cheer me on can but I don't necessarily have to use it in that way. They've sort of shifted their business model since Dave talked about it.

Bonni [00:18:09] And they have coaches on there that you could pay to coach you on something a little bit more difficult than stretching although who knows there probably is a stretching coach out there that would coach. But that's how they've monetized their business.

Bonni [00:18:22] And it isn't something you have to use. I do not plan on using their coaches but that's something that's offered from everything you can

imagine from fitness related things to people to help on productivity and everything in between.

Bonni [00:18:34] So lots of options for people to find additional help on forming habits if they have found an area that they're struggling with that just checking the box isn't going to work for that would be my recommendation for this week.

Bonni [00:18:47] I do want to let you know we have lots of fabulous guests on the docket. We are early in January and I hesitate to say the names only because I didn't necessarily ask them for permission but you need to trust me some great people have already said yes and we've started to book things and it's going to be an exciting 2015.

Bonni [00:19:06] As always if you have any suggestions for guests the place to go for that is to go to teachinginhighered.com/feedback. I'd love to know about guests that you might recommend or topics that you'd like to hear talked about in future shows.

Bonni [00:19:22] And there also is an opportunity for you if you haven't already to subscribe to that weekly update and that's at teachinginhighered.com/subscribe. That'll get to the show notes. Every week.

Bonni [00:19:34] In addition to a teaching article. Or a productivity article just one email a week and it saves you from having to go up to the Web site to download the links and things like that will help you remember it and just thanks so much for listening.

Bonni [00:19:48] I'm looking forward to us growing as a community having lots of great guests and sharing our ideas together and becoming more effective at facilitating learning. Thanks for listening.

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