

**Bonni:** [00:00:00] Today on episode number 244 of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast, Michael Britt shares about how to create online mashups that ignite curiosity.

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**Bonni:** [00:00:24] 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.

**Bonni:** [00:00:51] Today on episode number 244, I'm thrilled to be welcoming to the show Michael Britt. He is a fellow podcaster and is the host of the popular podcast, The Psych Files, which has been running since 2007 and was a MERLOT award winner in 2014. He obtained his Ph.D. in Social and Industrial Psychology in 1991 from the University of Albany. Michael taught psychology full time for 10 years at Marist College before moving into online work with Pearson and now with Cengage. In 2016 he authored his first book Psych Experiments- a book that gives psychology teachers 50 ideas that students can conduct do-able research. He's tech obsessed, as you're going to find out in this episode- a "tinkerer" and loves experimenting with online learning tools. Michael, welcome to Teaching in Higher Ed.

**Michael:** [00:01:47] Hi, Bonni. Thanks for having me on. I'm very excited because I'm a huge fan.

**Bonni:** [00:01:51] Oh I'm really enjoying getting to know your work too. I was chuckling when I saw that you were a MERLOT award winner. I am as well. And when I got their email I thought it was spam. I almost didn't do anything with it because I thought "well I don't drink wine" and I think their a little... Just, I didn't

quite get it you know and it was one of those inferiority complex. "No, I could never win an award." But lo and behold, here we did. We did it.

**Bonni:** [00:02:17] We have other things in common too, we like to experiment with technology. I wonder if you might share a little bit first kind of how you started to get to do this and some of maybe the early iterations of your work in tinkering with online tools.

**Michael:** [00:02:32] Well one of my earliest memories is having a tech support guy come to my office because I needed some work on my computer. So he's looking through my computer and he says "have you ever seen a program you did not download?" I just like- when new little doohickeys and widgets and things come out, I'm like "I wonder what I could do in a teaching way with that little thing." And so I just download a bunch of stuff.

**Michael:** [00:03:00] I mean I always the first pedagogically, what is it I want my students to get out of this? And then I think OK so what tools do I have at my disposal?

**Bonni:** [00:03:10] You are a better person than me because I start with "oh my gosh isn't this amazing?" before I get to the- I have to get the playing part out of my system and then I can settle myself down and actually ask the real question.

**Bonni:** [00:03:23] They are so fun sometimes what people come up with that you can do. And one of the things we're going to be talking about in this episode is the idea of doing what you call a mash up. I mean you're not the only one who calls it that but just this idea of mashing two tools together. Would you speak a little bit about maybe your earlier memories of when you started to do that?

**Michael:** [00:03:44] I think one of the first mashup tools was probably If This, Then That (IFTTT).

**Bonni:** [00:03:49] Yeah.

**Michael:** [00:03:51] It is a really cool tool where you just connect different services to each other to get something that you want. It really works well with RSS feeds. If you want news of a particular type, you could actually kind of plug in and using IFTTT and there is another one called Zapier, and you just move the little blocks around and you tell it like I want this information from the New York Times, this from CNN, I want this from over here. And it kind of puts them all together in one pipe and sends it to you. And that started in the maybe that

early aughts or something like that? That's what I call them. What do you call the early 2000s?

**Bonni:** [00:04:34] Early 2000s. I like your way better it sounds fancy though. The If This, Then That- if people ever wanted to experiment with one of these, it's a great one. I have a real simple one set up. If the forecast calls for rain tomorrow- we live in Southern California It hardly rains here, so I want to remember to bring an umbrella and a raincoat if it's going to rain. And so it will just send me a quick e-mail the day before a forecast calls for rain. And that's a really simple one you could set up in less than a minute using If This The That. And then you can start to get a little bit deeper. You mentioned Zapier, that's when that I'm really planning on diving into in terms of automating some of the podcast work flow.

**Bonni:** [00:05:17] And the other thing I want to mention is that they have now a Microsoft equivalent of this. My my school is an Office 365 and so one of the things that was bothering me is that I use a different task manager, I use one that's Mac specific and now I was able to hire an administrative assistant so she's using Planner, it's Microsoft Planner which is inside of Microsoft teams. And it was sort of bothering me that I'd have to log all the way in and then enter a task or she would have to do the same thing. And I found that on Microsoft Flow, which Microsoft Flow is very similar to If This, Then That, I could set it up where if I set send an email that shows up in a certain place that has starts with a subject line of todo: and then anything else can follow that and any notes that I want associated with that task or that she does. It's really fun to play with these tools. And you can start small and then get really big.

**Bonni:** [00:06:16] You've got a lot where you've gone beyond what I can do with many of the tools you're going to talk about today. But I encourage people to take kind of a playful attitude with it and experiment with them. And they're not going to break. I mean if it doesn't work, it doesn't work. A lot of it you could run a test and if it doesn't work, you just kind of tinker and then they have so many good communities too of people up there that have shared their own recipes or whatever they call the little steps on these various services.

**Michael:** [00:06:43] You're really doing computer programming. You're just doing if and then and or statements, you're just not doing it with curly brackets and parentheses and all the other raw computer.

**Bonni:** [00:06:55] Yeah, we get to skip that part. Which I like. So let's talk about- Why don't you just introduce one tool that you like to tinker with in the mash up

and then maybe another tool that you like to match it up with just to give us kind of an example of how this how this might work?

**Michael:** [00:07:12] Ok. Well I think maybe I'll go from one that uses just one tool to one that uses maybe three or four. One that was really a lot of fun recently was using Microsoft Excel online. So you can create a sheet as you would do in excel but you can embed that sheet. So you've got to go through a couple of clicks but you can get the embed code and you can tell it to allow people to edit the excel sheet without changing your original. So this is cool and so I found some data. I mean I try to follow the suggestions of Ken Bain. You know I became obsessed with his book and I think that's one of the ways I became obsessed with your podcast is because I wanted to watch it and hear all things Ken Bain. And so because he's on Vimeo and he is on YouTube and and then I found him on the podcast.

**Michael:** [00:08:11] So I just love his idea of teaching a topic by first kind of drawing students in with a really interesting question. And then before you tell them ok, here's the answer. You draw further or actually draw them out to find out "well what is it you think about this topic? What if this would happen? Or what if that would happen?" To really get into it rather than just saying like from Ferris Bueller, "Anyone? Anyone?" after you ask your questions.

**Michael:** [00:08:48] For many years are taught introductory psychology, statistics and research methods- you know the interesting stuff. Teaching stats was great in that it really challenged me to come up with something interesting or else I'm going to lose them.

**Bonni:** [00:09:02] Yeah.

**Michael:** [00:09:03] But that data set showed that - well actually this summer I watched Mission: Impossible- Fallout and I noticed something I've noticed before which maybe a lot of your listeners have which is that I know Tom Cruise is in his late 50s but his love interest is always about a 32 years old or something like that.

**Michael:** [00:09:22] So sure enough someone else had noticed this and she just went into the Internet Movie Database and extracted Tom Cruise's age at each one of his movies from like 1980 or something and the actual age of his love interest in the movie. And...

**Bonni:** [00:09:39] I feel like this is not going to a good place.

**Michael:** [00:09:45] I mean first, you could ask your students if they've noticed this about Tom Cruise but it's so interesting if you plot it, you find that it's actually a correlation. The overall correlation is .72. So it's not that bad. But what happens is, up until the age 40 it's a stronger correlation than, like .8 something. And then after Tom Cruise turns 40, the correlation starts to go much lower to like .37. So the data is interesting. So what I did simply was to put these 30 rows of data into an excel online sheet and then plucked out the embed code and that's probably- the embed code and iframe, there isn't much for all of these mashups. There isn't much in the way of coding that you have to know.

**Bonni:** [00:10:36] I think most people listening will know this but the embed code- knowing what an embed code is changes your life as an educator whether you're teaching online classes or in person that you want to enhance with online things because it just lets us have a picture frame that sees another part of the web but in an environment I'm already in. So I'm already in the learning management system, or I'm already on your website or whatever and then this embed code just shows me a picture of somewhere else on the web. The classic one would be embedding a YouTube video. But in this case, you're talking about embedding an Excel online sheet. You don't want me to have to click over to excel online, get out of in the middle of what I'm doing because you're you're presenting this mystery to me and it's a playful mystery of what do I think that would have happened with the aid of Tom Cruise's costars?

**Bonni:** [00:11:26] And then you were talking a little bit about how it lets us edit the spreadsheet without messing with your original. I'm curious more about that because I have not played with that very much. All the things I've tried with embedding Excel or Word or PowerPoint, it allows them to edit or it doesn't. Like it's one or the other. So tell me more about this I can mess with the data as a student but I'm not going to mess your original up.

**Michael:** [00:11:48] Right. It's an option when you go through the steps. I think I have a video on this that shows oK click here and here here. And it says "allow editing but preserve original." Then it finally gives you the glob of embed code which if you look at it, a lot of it is like oh ok, width equals 600, height equals- it's not too complicated. The rest of the stuff you don't even really have to even look at it, just take the glob of text and then put it into a page on here in your LMS or whatever it is, your blog, whatever you're using. And what it does, it just shows the students the spreadsheet and so that's cool, but again- and again trying to go with Ken Bain, what could students do with this? .

**Michael:** [00:12:33] So you could ask them to remove some data. So remove all the data after you age 41 for Tom Cruise. What's the correlation before that? What is it after that? And then you could even say look let's create a negative correlation. Because if you're teaching correlation, you can see the multiple choice question. Maybe you had a scatter plot and you ask them what it is. But instead, in this case, do they know how to create a negative correlation between crime and ice cream sales? Or whatever you want to do to demonstrate and talk about correlations. And they can. And they can just change the numbers and the scatter plot will change along with it. And that's just a great- if you're teaching online especially so you don't have any in person contact. There's ways-.

**Michael:** [00:13:22] I was so discouraged I read a survey results from I think EduCause a few years ago. And the overwhelming majority of professors just use their LMS just for, you put your syllabus there, PowerPoint files and then some YouTube video. Well it can be more than that. So that's what the mashups are about. So that's probably the easiest one just excel in you LMS or your blog.

**Bonni:** [00:13:50] One of the other techniques that you're mentioning is someone closely associated with Ken Bain and that's James Lang in his book Small Teaching, he talks a lot about using prediction. So you might ask what do I think has happened with Tom Cruise's age of costars as he has aged over the years? And you do that before I might even know anything about correlation, before I might understand those numbers.

**Bonni:** [00:14:17] But you're just asking a question of something that I might not be desperately curious about, but you're definitely going to get a chuckle out of me. And then you might have them if you're teaching students that are younger than you and maybe Tom Cruise isn't their celebrity you could have them think about well and how do you think that's different or the same with who are your couple of favorite celebrities? And that might be kind of a fun thing to have people predict but that really draws us in to the exercise.

**Bonni:** [00:14:43] So in terms of this skill set that you're talking about, I would need to know how to build a spreadsheet. I would need to understand that excel has both a version that's on my computer, but also one that's online. And then I would need to know how to grab the embed code. So it's an option under the share button and away I go. I can now start to have it where they see it right inside of the learning management system without having to go out of it and they can type into it and they can do it and I'm not ruining my original there.

**Michael:** [00:15:10] You can do test questions like that. You can have your students play around with that data. It's fun.

**Bonni:** [00:15:18] Another one I know you enjoy using is ThingLink and I've seen and played with other people's ThingLinks, but haven't created by one of my own yet and I probably should think about that for the spring because it's relatively easy to do and something that is different and unexpected that comes out of it. Why don't you talk a little bit about ThingLink.

**Michael:** [00:15:36] Yeah definitely check this one out. There's a few of these that I pay for and ThingLink is one of them. They have an educator account, it's not expensive at all. But at the very basic level you just take an image and you can pop little dots on it and then you could put links to other things or another image could pop up. They now do it with video. So now the video pause and you can ask the student questions. And then again all you do there, you could just simply grab the link. But as you mentioned, this means if you put that link in your LMS, you're sending them off to the internet. God knows what's going to happen out there. So the more that you grab the embed code, the more you keep them right in the learning environment. So ThingLink, it's a cool one. I use that actually I playing with that with the Koko, the gorilla one.

**Bonni:** [00:16:28] Yes, although I must say this is the saddest moment I may have had on the podcast because you did exactly what you have promised, you drew me in. I love Koko. I love Koko. I have loved Coco since I first heard about. I was going to call Koko an elephant. Koko is not an elephant. Koko is a gorilla or a chimpanzee? Gorilla. Anyway, you totally drew me in.

**Michael:** [00:16:52] Hey look I'm a big fan of Koko and Washoe. So when she died of old age, there were a lot of headlines "Koko the Gorilla Who Mastered Sign Language." And so when you dig and you find out that she didn't master sign language at all, I mean she did have a large set, I think a couple hundred of signs. But when you dig in there, you find out that if you watch the videos really carefully and if you're not- a typical video would be one where you are watching Koko, but there's also this wonderfully wonderful classical music playing in the background and the narrator is attributing thoughts and feelings. This is what Koko wants. She wants this and she wants that.

**Michael:** [00:17:37] And I try to talk with students about anthropomorphizing all the time. If we're going to be scientists, we have to be able to look at things in some objective way. It's going to be hard to know how much and in what ways Koko really thought and felt. But if we watch the videos, we do see some

reinforcement, some modeling, sometimes Koko will say something that absolutely has nothing to do with what's going on with her. And then the trainer will just say "oh stop being silly."

**Michael:** [00:18:12] So anyway, I wanted my students to just kind of think about this whole thing. And so I think it's an interesting topic so there's that sort of the Ken Bain part of it. But how do I organize my resources? And so that's where I first used to call Padlet. I then moved on to a tool called Wakelet. The "let" part I guess is what lets you know these are all small. But it's really in the planning. So you say to yourself ok, what do I want my students to see first or to think about first? And so I found the URLs to YouTube videos of Koko, the kind that with the music and the narration.

**Bonni:** [00:18:54] At this point, you're trying to set a stage. So you're either trying to surprise me. You're trying to bring me in. In this case, if I'm familiar with Koko, I've seen some background of "oh I know who that is!" And then if I don't know who Koko is, then then you're trying to familiarize me and so you're thinking really I see in everything you've sent me really trying to evoke some kind of emotion there.

**Michael:** [00:19:21] Right. I could just say look here are the problems with the belief that Koko was... and I could lecture on it and I probably would because I did too much of it. But instead I think in this case you would say Koko just died. Let's take a look at some of the videos. And then getting to what you just said, the next step in that process is really getting learning or getting students to bring out of them so what do you think? What do you feel?

**Michael:** [00:19:49] Before I get into any of the somewhat more pessimistic interpretations. First I want to hear what students think. Now online you can do that with a survey, so you can use a PollEverywhere for example. You can use Google Forms. It's great because it's so easy to use.

**Michael:** [00:20:07] So first I'm thinking through what I want the experience to be. Watch these two videos, commit on a one question survey to a ten point scale, to what degree do you think Koko uses language the way human beings do? Ok. So we have them. Then what I want to have happen, well I don't want to come out and say well now you're wrong or whatever. I said well what videos might plant some doubts in your head?

**Bonni:** [00:20:30] Yeah. And by the way you're saying videos. These are incredibly short.

**Michael:** [00:20:36] Right. And so knowing that little bit of code that you can add to a YouTube video "and start equals" and "end equals" is really valuable. Because your students are not going to sit through these long videos, find the 30 seconds to minute video that says what I want to say.

**Michael:** [00:20:56] And so I've got a video of- one of them was BF Skinner where he trained pigeons to play ping pong and he explains that he did this using reinforcement. The pigeons appear to be playing ping pong with each other, it all looks so wonderful. They get a little green board they're not going to ball back and forth. And then you learn that they were trained separately simply to peck the ball in the other direction. And so that's one. Then I showed them a brief clip about Clever Hans -that's the horse who supposedly counted by hitting his hoof against the ground. However, they found out that he was actually looking to his trainer to when to stop.

**Michael:** [00:21:38] And then one third video was just about a movie that I found online that was about a tire. The whole movie about a tire and just the way they moved the tire around, it makes you think the tire is mad now. I mean we can anthropomorphize to just about anything. So without lecturing- I start thinking I think maybe Padlet is right or Wakelet is right. Because what it allows me to do is put the videos in, put a survey in, then put these in. And then just say students with a little bit of text, "ok consider this now" and then throw a couple other videos at them and then another survey I'll go to Google Forms, so easy. And then I'll say to them "now what do you think?" And they can vote. And then look at what other students voted. It's anonymous. From there you can go anywhere you as the instructor want to go, they can write a paper on it, they can answer some questions about it, a short paper kind of thing. But what you've done is you've created with this mash up of Google Forms, Wakelete, YouTube, you've just created a little package, a little learning experience.

**Bonni:** [00:22:48] How much are you tracking the completion of various activities? It would seem not a good use of time to track every little thing, every click or every input inside of the learning management. To what extent is it important to you to track that I as your student have done something inside of this exercise?

**Michael:** [00:23:09] Yeah. When you mash together tools, then all of the analytics on your students behavior are not all going to be in your LMS anymore. .

**Bonni:** [00:23:19] Nor would you want them to though, right? I mean you're walking me through something, you're igniting my curiosity, but I would imagine just in terms of you want to think about in advance as you're designing this, what do you really want and need to track?

**Michael:** [00:23:33] I mean you could use this mash up in person when you're just displaying it on the screen. But every semester all you've got to do is pick up the code there and slop it in to somewhere else and you could change things if you want. Or you can take and I can give you links to some of these things- you could take what I put together and just grab my link. Create your own Wakelet account and then say well I don't want that video, just change it, it's yours now. So a lot of playing around to be had there.

**Bonni:** [00:24:08] Well this is the point in this show where we get to give recommendations and I'm going to recommend that people experiment with. If This, Then That or with one of the tools that you shared about. There is Zapier and I also mentioned Microsoft Flow but just getting to be a little bit playful but also starting small. So if you haven't yet set up a rule in If This Then That about if it's going to rain tomorrow, that's a handy thing to know at least if you don't look at the weather as infrequently as I do. So that would be something I would recommend.

**Bonni:** [00:24:38] And I wanted to mention that today the sponsor for the episode is TextExpander but I haven't talked about them yet and the reason is because unbeknownst to Michael, he wanted to recommend TextExpander without even receiving any financial remuneration from them. So I'm going to pass that over to Michael for his recommendation of TextExpander but also thank them for sponsoring today's episode.

**Michael:** [00:25:01] Yeah I've been using this for at least five years. There are some tools when you start using them you're like "what the heck? Why didn't anybody tell me about this?" TextExpander really is something where you just create little it's really they're like abbreviations, but they could even be rather complex fill ins. In fact, I will send you a link to a video I created where a show instructors how they can- especially if you're sending the same message several times, with a few keyboard clicks, you just have to change the student's name, change the grade that you're giving them maybe and it fills in, in this case example an email to them. Well I don't even write out the word psychology, I just write "py". I don't have to remember my links to various things. So it just saves so much time. You got to try it and then I'm sure you'll be like "ok, this is cool."

**Bonni:** [00:25:58] Yeah. They've even got a teams edition where you could if you had a group of people you needed to work with and needed some consistency around the language that you used whether that's with students or whether that's with clients I mean it makes a big difference. And really you can iterate over time and refine those snippets because as you make the language better or improve things or perhaps even automate more.

**Bonni:** [00:26:21] I learned how to now type in the subject line and then have it come down and hit the tab key which essentially brings that down into the body of the email. And then you can have variables come up like you mentioned the name of the student, so "dear" and then a box will pop up "student name" or "podcast guest." It really automates things and some people think that's really impersonal. But to me, it frees us up to be more personal. Sometimes people say "how do you do the podcast?" Well first of all it is a lot of hard work. I won't say that it's not, but there are ways to make it easier when we have tools like TextExpander. They are great. Try them out. I would talk about them and we did actually talk about them on the show, that's how they found out about us because we talked about them on the show before they ever helped us out with our expenses on the show. I know you've got more though, I'm excited to hear your a couple of other recommendations.

**Michael:** [00:27:09] Well of course everybody should be using a password manager. If you haven't been hacked yet, you will. Don't try to remember the same password and don't use the same password again and again. You install this program on your computer and it creates random passwords. You really, you've got to protect yourself. And if you're logging into your LMS and then your logging in to Google, then you're logging into something else, you're wasting so much time. So have that private information held by a password manager.

**Michael:** [00:27:39] And the other thing you've got to have, at least I think, is a clip board manager. I don't know if people know what that is. I mean you know that if you get control C or command C, your computer remembers just one thing. But if you have like a whole bunch of things you want it to remember on this page and then you need to go over to that page, well clipboard managers, they just they remember the last 50 things you did. And so now you don't have to go back to that web page. Oh where was that? And then you got to look for it again. And again it's all about timesaving. I know your into productivity. The clipboard managers you just go yeah that's what and you're saying a crap load of time.

**Bonni:** [00:28:18] What blows my mind is that a lot of the clipboard managers are both on your computer and they're on your phone at the same time. So if I copied something on my phone, in many cases with the clipboard manager, it's available on the clipboard on my computer or vice versa. And that's just remarkable to me.

**Michael:** [00:28:35] Yeah. Great tools.

**Bonni:** [00:28:36] Well thank you so much Michael for getting in touch and suggesting this episode on creating online mashups that ignite curiosity. You've given us so much to think about. I was actually afraid to talk to you today because I thought oh gosh I have so much that's not the fun stuff to do part of my job. So I thought when I get off the phone with him I'm going to want to just instantly go and started to play. But I have to just sit on that temptation and instead put that off as my reward for when I finish the stuff that I'm not as energized about doing, but I've just loved the conversation and the imagination you have is remarkable.

**Bonni:** [00:29:10] That's why we do these podcasts. I've been podcasting a long time. It's fun, but it is a lot of work. But if anybody's listening or anyone is saying "I'd like to try that but I don't know where to start" just feel free to get in touch with me. And I blog it at Cengage blogging community. I've got my podcast. If you just put Michael Britt psychology, you'll probably- I mean I've been online for a lot of times so you'll find me.

**Bonni:** [00:29:34] Thank you so much, Michael.

**Bonni:** [00:29:38] Michael Britt, thank you for coming on to Teaching in Higher Ed for episode number 244 and giving us so much inspiration to be even working harder at igniting our students curiosity. I've got lots of things to think about for upcoming classes.

**Bonni:** [00:29:54] And thanks to all of you for listening. If you'd like to get the links to all of the things that Michael and I shared during the episode, you can go to [teachinginhighered.com/244](http://teachinginhighered.com/244). I think an even better option is to sign up for the weekly newsletter where you automatically get those show notes and also an article about teaching or productivity authored by me. You can subscribe at [teachinginhighered.com/subscribe](http://teachinginhighered.com/subscribe). Thanks so much for listening. And we'll see you next time for episode 245.

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