

Bonni [00:00:00] On today's episode of Teaching in Higher Ed number 253, Jose Bowen joins me to speak about spaces and places and nudges.

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Bonni [00:00:22] 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 [00:00:50] Today's guest Jose Bowen is no stranger to Teaching in Higher Ed. I was looking at the episode numbers, he's been on all the way back as early as episode 30 which I didn't remember to share about his book Teaching Naked. And he joined me again on episode 136 to talk about his follow up book that he wrote with Edward Watson about Teaching Naked Techniques to put some of that even more into practice. And today's guest was reintroduced to me or reconnected with me through my partnership with the Association of College and University Educators or ACUE. And ACUE's courses and community site feature many of the teaching and learning's top experts, faculty developers, and practitioners to showcase evidence-based teaching practices. As I've spoke about before, my partnership with them really emerged when we discovered how many of the same experts, we were having conversations with and in their case building their course videos and such around these just amazing people. And I'm going to be linking in the show notes to some of the modules that Jose Bowen was the expert consultant on for ACUE and also an article that he wrote for them called Using Feedback from Students to Improve Your Teaching.

Bonni [00:02:06] But for now, a conversation with Jose Bowen about spaces and places and then because we can't resist- also about nudges. Here we go, a conversation with Jose.

Bonni [00:02:17] Jose, welcome back to Teaching in Higher Ed.

Jose [00:02:20] So glad to be here. Thanks for having me.

Bonni [00:02:23] One of the things that I think about so often when I think about your work Jose is just the thought and the research that you put into what I'm calling today's spaces and places. And it started really when I first became familiar with your work was your book about Teaching Naked and how all the thought that you've put into what we should do with this space that we call a classroom and then all the space outside of that. And I wonder if for those who are just becoming familiar with what you do, can you just give us a recap of what the message of that book was.

Jose [00:03:00] Well OK so.

Bonni [00:03:02] Yeah just in like 20 seconds.

Jose [00:03:05] Teaching Naked was really about thinking about all this new technology and how students have changed and how their sense of the classroom has changed. And so I do think that there's a place for technology, but I also think that if you're going to bring students together physically, which costs a lot of money and time and effort, then you should use that space differently than you should when students are at home. So I'm a big fan of Twitter and texting students "hey remember there's a problem set due tomorrow" and "hey here's a little encouragement to keep reading chapter 2." Because students do want to know that you care when they're not in the classroom, which is most of the time. But then trying to figure out ways to make the classroom be worth the extra effort it's always going to cost to bring students together physically.

Jose [00:03:49] And of course the other thing is the students are distracted, digitally distracted. And so, what can we do in the classroom? And my strategy is less about don't forbid laptops or technology, but make your class so interesting and have so much face to face and engagement that students don't want to check Facebook.

Jose [00:04:08] So that's how I kind of started thinking about- I was really thinking about technology and so now I'm thinking more about places because as president I can think about what about classroom architecture? What about dorms? What about dining? What about other types of procedures? And so the

next book is going to be about nudges and about the things that the campus can do more broadly.

Bonni [00:04:31] Yeah this idea of nudges- I first became familiar with that there's some experimentation that the learning management system that we use, Canvas, that they're doing around nudges. I do know that some of this topic is a bit controversial, the concerns around surveillance are concerns around automating teaching. And I know that would never be what you're about at all, but I really used to resist nudges, at least as I understand them, because I thought well this is something that you should be able to figure out, "when I was in college I could get the planner out" and I've completely come full circle on that that nudges can be really helpful. They're really helpful to me in my life, even something as seemingly silly where if I'm at work and I think "oh my gosh I put a load of laundry and I left. And if I don't move that thing over when I get home..." And just being able to go on my phone or my watch and say "remind me when I get home to do this." That's a nudge. That's a nudge. So what are you thinking in terms of where the controversy is? And why is it something that you're really feeling like we could better embrace as educators?

Jose [00:05:36] Sure. So the controversy comes because- so nudges just won the Nobel Prize in economics last year. And so I'll give you one example from economics which is retirement plans. Right. So the default tends to matter. Right. So if you're opted out of the retirement plan, most people don't have a retirement plan. But if I say the default is you're opted in but you want to opt out, you can call the HR office or you can send us an e-mail and you can change your status. So a real nudge means you have choice, but the controversy is that it sounds a little paternalistic. So a society where people are being engineered for one decision or the other.

Jose [00:06:16] And so the response to that in my view is that look you're engineering it anyway, right. There is no neutral. If the default is you don't have to have a retirement plan and the default is no, then fewer people will have a retirement plan. So you have a choice whether to set the thing to yes or no. And as an institution, you should set it to the thing that you think is better and then let people that have a choice.

Jose [00:06:42] Another example is in choice architecture. So the jam study is my favourite because they return to sell more jam and so if I have six types of jam and you have 36 types of jam. I sell 10 times as much jam because I only have six choices. So we get overloaded if we have too many choices. So I thought well wait a second, [in] college - what's the first thing we do? We say, "Welcome

to college, here a 5,000 courses pick 5." There's too many choices. So much better to say what are your interests? Do want to be premed? What did you do in high school? We already have information about you. Are you a morning person? All right. Because about 20 to 30 percent of cultures are actually morning people. But if you're not, putting you in an 8 o'clock class is going to be a disaster. So I can give you a default schedule. You can then change everything. But most students take the default. So the sense is - is it paternalistic? Is telling students yeah ok I'm giving you a default, but I'm not forcing you to [follow it], it I'm allowing you other kinds of things. So the question is, to me, how can we use knowledge of human behavior to help students do more of the work only they can do?

Bonni [00:07:50] I think another thing with nudges is that we get our timing wrong as educators and I hacked my way into nudging so I don't have the big fancy systems there's one that's free that is called Remind. And Remind us a way of outside of the learning management system and it is opt in, although I do ask that students do it. Because I say: "Wouldn't you like to get a text when class is cancelled if I ever get sick?" Yes I would like that. And they sign up. And I don't use it too often but I ask them- there was a time when I was going to be speaking at a conference and so we had some modified class structure for that particular week. Would you like to get a remind the day before so that she could plan out your day? And then would you like to get a reminder maybe like an hour before? Yes. But I also scheduled those to show up on their phones when classes don't happen at our institution. So we've got the 10 minute or the 15 minute breaks. I do not ever send a remind message when another class or event would be going on. And I think that that really helps. It's the little tiny things of having those nudges show up as close to the time when we want people to be thinking about them and also not disrespecting the fact that they're getting all kinds of them from all kinds of things that are trying to get them to pick up their phone, etc.

Bonni [00:09:07] So what kind of thinking are you doing or are you hearing about of when the nudges happen?

Jose [00:09:13] You've hit on to really really real critical things that people always get nervous about. And so one is timing. You're absolutely right that people want the nudge at a certain time. And so on Sunday afternoon you want to know: "Hey problem number 18 is really hard, if you get stuck there don't stop. Go on to problem number 19." And you want that information on Sunday at 6 o'clock because that's when you're doing the homework. Or on Monday night

before the exam, it's like "I realize that Chapter 2 is really important and I wanted to make sure you get that right."

Jose [00:09:45] And also equity is an issue here too. You want to be fair. If students come to your office hours and say "hey" and you give them hints. And you realize oh my god I just told the student that they should practice Chapter 2. I need to tell everybody. So people want the nudges when they're doing the work, which is often on weekends or late at night. It's the night before the paper is due. A nudge that I like is so "hey the paper is due Friday. It's Wednesday. You need to be finishing up your first draft. So you have 24 hours before you have to edit." Right. Don't don't wait until tomorrow to start because then your paper will be better if you on an A. Right. So that's one thing. So timing actually really is critical.

Jose [00:10:25] But the other is you can't send too many. And you have to let people opt out. So turns out that we can really change human behavior if your phone or your wrist device tells you that you still have 100 more steps to do today or you're over your calorie counts. But the question is is how intrusive is it? Can I get the information when and where do I control that? Are you going to send me 35 of these? Do you turn off? And so I take my cue from your phone. Because Apple is pretty good at this. They let you torrent stuff off you. When I get a text message, it blinks on my phone and it does it twice. But then it goes away. Right. So it gives me not just once, but just twice. So they figured out that OK I want to know. Oh there it is. I didn't respond to that. It'll still be there when I go back to my phone.

Jose [00:11:14] So I think for most people, we don't have you know the marketing department of Apple. But my advice for people is that tell your students what you're doing. Tell them why. And then give them a chance to opt out. But I would tell them what you're going to do and why. Try a couple and say "hey did it work? Did you like having a reminder the night before the midterm or that night for the quiz? Was that useful?" Then I'll keep sending those. And did you like having the reminder to do the reading? And they might say no, that was not useful. And some people might opt out and again if you really want to be sophisticated, you can categories like you do with other things on your phone where you want to get notifications about this but not about that. So I think we're just at the beginning of this but I think as long as people have a chance to opt out, they feel like they have some control. They understand what we're doing. But the truth is most people opt in for notifications, especially this generation.

Bonni [00:12:08] The other thing you probably wouldn't classify as a nudge- but I think it's really helpful to think about how we present information in the learning management system. And one of the big things that I know is a shift for Canvas- I'm sorry to keep using them as an example but I got to go to their conference for the last three years now. I learn so much every time. But they showed video and had done a whole bunch of research around how students use their app on the phone. Or how they engage with what we've set up in there. And I used to totally think of it as this is MY class.

Bonni [00:12:46] And so come into MY class and you'll see the weeks all laid out, I've got pretty graphics there for you. I'd get so frustrated. Like "What do you mean, what is due week three? Just go into week three." And I really thought of it in a very self centered way as far as using it the way I use it. Because that's MY class. I laugh at myself now, but I think it's helpful for me to admit my failure now publicly so other people can learn from this. Students don't look at the learning management system that way. They look at the calendar if that's a feature in your LMS. Or in the case of Canvas, there's a nice to do list that's showing up there on their home screen when they first log in. So if I can break any major assignment down into the little parts and pieces I wish they'd spread it out a little bit more, even if it's not something that I grade. But I consider that a nudge once you've opened up that app, the things that are going to like call your attention to what is there for you to help your learning.

Jose [00:13:44] Well it turns out- we've talked for decades about breaking up larger assignments into smaller pieces. The term paper, don't wait until the last week. So we've had to do nudges like turning your bibliography in Week 3, turn in your outline in week 4, those sorts of things. You've identified your learning management system is all about nudges. And so breaking up the project into what you should do. You should be working on this. You should be working on that. It is not going to work for 100 percent of students, but it doesn't have to. Because the student it is most likely to help and your first generation students, your students who don't have that other person to tell them "hey that term paper is going to creep up on you. I had this experience when I was in college." So letting them know that this is where you should be in week 2 and week 3 and 4. So breaking up things into a to do list, even if they're not really due is that a great nudge. And you might as well do it because again students can ignore it, but you're telling them where should I be. And not everybody knows. Where should I be in the process?

Jose [00:14:49] Again this idea that you need to finish a paper a day or two in advance so that you can have a fresh set of eyes to edit it the next day. Every

academic knows this is common sense and most students don't know that. And so not only do they not know, but they've never been nudged to do it. And so your LMS is pretty nudge neutral in terms of it's not invasive or you have to open up the app.

Jose [00:15:15] So but just thinking about your to do list. My other favorite nudge frankly is when the assignments are due. We haven't talked about my favorite topic of sleep yet but students need more sleep. And so one of the nudges is to not make your assignments due at midnight because that's the default in a lot of learning management systems is midnight. And so making them do at 9:00 or 8 or 5 or something else. And be consistent, so it's always the same. But if you leave it to midnight you're allowing students that extra space to do it. And you can always make an exception. You can always if you're going to have working parents, various sorts of things. But again getting people into the habit of not encouraging them to stay up to midnight. So that's a nudge that also works. It's something that every faculty member can do.

Bonni [00:16:06] Yeah I don't I do not do the 11:59 pm, I change it every single time and 9 pm is as late as I'll typically go. Unless there are multiple things due on a night. And I know I've conditioned them that oh boy every day this week there's a little something due. So if it's a little bit more than my typical week's work, then I might go as late as 10 pm. But I do not set any due date times any later.

Jose [00:16:28] Also one thing you can do with all of these learning systems is have the draft due the day before. You don't have to look at it but you can even say it has to be a certain word count. And you can automate all that. And then you say OK the draft is due and now you have a chance to edit it. Because we all know one of the problems is that students they think the all nighter or the last minute- And so getting students to schedule things and to space it out. And again we can take this cue from the nutritionists and the exercise people and all of the fit bits and all that sort of stuff because it is about the regularity. So the calorie counter that I use, if I don't do it on the same day that it's like "AH. You didn't do it." You have to. So it forces me to say "oh I haven't put my food for the day." And I do it as I go along. And that of course is better because I want to know before I have dinner how many calories I had a lunch. So it's just set up by default to nudge me into doing what will be better for me.

Bonni [00:17:31] I know you have had some tremendous changes on your campus and I do want to spend a few minutes so we can all drool vicariously try to just love the imagination and that student centeredness that you used for this.

And then after that, just for those of us that don't have the kind of budget that you might have had for these projects, I know we're going to talk a little bit some practical ways we could just take control of the things that are right around us. But let's start with big stuff, what's been going on on your campus and some of the tremendous changes that have happened there?

Jose [00:18:00] Sure. So I mean the good news is it mostly doesn't cost more money. It's about design. It's like the ATM machine. Somebody figured out that if the buttons were bigger, people would make fewer mistakes. And it doesn't cost any more money to have ATM machines with bigger buttons, it's just a design issue. You've got to think about "well what are we trying to accomplish? What is the goal?".

Jose [00:18:22] So on our campus we've kind of had an all out effort to think about student engagement and student success. So from the curriculum, we looked at our curriculum and we decided to focus more on process and content- partly because I mean we still have content obviously, but on a liberal arts campus, I don't care what your major is. I don't want to say well you should have this major or that majors. And students worry about having the "right" major.

Jose [00:18:45] So instead of having all the distribution requirements, we created a system where students take courses in complex problem explorations, where there's more group work. Because the top three things that employers want are complex problem solving in groups with people who are not like you. So I can say to parents, this is jobs! Jobs! Jobs! But it's still a liberal arts. So those complex problems might be immigration, disease, water, food. Students pick the topic, we don't mandate the topic. We focus more on the process. So there's the content. But we do have a new curriculum that was a pretty massive undertaking.

Jose [00:19:21] But we've also looked at the spaces and places on our campus where students interact. One of the issues today is that this is the first generation of students to arrive on a college campus with all of their high school friends with them on their phone. The first thing they do is they take a picture of their room, they post to Instagram and their high school friends comments on it. So they're still tethered to high school in a way that we weren't. That's true in the dining hall, it is true in dorms. So we built nudged dorms which means that rooms are smaller, they are doubles. And then we put bigger lounges, lounges on every floor. The staircases are on either side of the lounge so you have to walk through all four lounges to get to the fourth floor. The Wi-Fi speeds are faster in the

lounges than in your dorm rooms so there's reason to get out. There are quiet rooms at the end of the hall also assessed to Wi-Fi. And then there are social rooms in the middle of the lounges, kitchens in every place, the laundry room is a beautiful thing you can see and talk to people. So it's all about getting students out of the room. In the dining hall, students wanted to take food in a plastic, they want to take all the food to go, to go back to their room, they can sit on Facebook and eat and talk to their high school friends. So what we did was we redesigned the dining hall. We made the food a lot more interactive. Made the Wi-Fi speed faster. We put all of the good food together in the non-takeout area so that if students want stir fry made fresh, they can get that but they can't take it back to their dorm. So I know it's working because A) we're saving 50 percent more meals and B) students are protesting. Oh and C) the pizza delivery guys are really mad. Because students were ordering- so now there's more reasons to go to the dining hall and use the fast Wi-Fi and so on.

Jose [00:21:05] So those are all ways to get students to do more kinds of interaction thinking about place. We're thinking about library hours. We're thinking about where the students congregate, hallway space. Again none of these things cost a lot of money. In fact, reducing your library hours will save you money. But we know all nighters are not good for you, why should the library be open all night? We know that students work better, some students want to be quite and work at different times of the day. So we've done a lot of work on the class schedule. We have fewer, almost no 8 o'clock classes. Now we have more 7:00p.m. classes where adolescents tend to be time shifted and tend to do better there. That was certainly an effort that faculty don't like as much as students because- I mean some people do. And registration as I mentioned giving students a default schedule and then letting them change rather than saying "here's a blank slate." We are adding professional advisers who's part of their job is to focus more on the non-academic, because faculty always want to focus on Will how are your classes going? And really "well how is your roommate? Is your roommate keeping you up at night?" Because if your roommate is keeping you up and you're a morning person or your roommate is a night person or they always have the boyfriend or girlfriend over and you can't whatever, that's really going to affect your ability to do well in your classes. Where do you study? How do you study? Do you study alone? Are you keeping to a schedule? Do you have a job? Do you have three jobs? When is your job? When do you have time between classes to think?

Jose [00:22:34] So the self-awareness of students is really critical for their success but also because ultimately what we're trying to do is create self regulated learners. Our real job is to make ourselves obsolete so that students don't need

us forever and they can actually manage their own learning and so we're not talking about the metacognition and the pieces of how do you manage three assignments or four assignments at once plus your job? And faculty don't feel trained to- I don't feel trained to do that. I'm not a psychologist. But students need to have those kinds of discussions about how are you managing the stress from your job? And do you miss your dog? And and you know that. So we're adding that set of how and where do we have those conversations with students because they're really really important.

Bonni [00:23:19] Some of the reading that I've been doing and also people I've had on the show have even made me aware of just students coming to class hungry. And there can be a lot of reasons why students may come to class hungry. That doesn't matter. And the thing I'm about to share is maybe not practical for a lot of people but one of the things I just experimented with this semester is a couple of times I just brought snack stuff like hummus and carrots and some pita chips. And then yesterday it was kind of a big celebration in my class so I picked up some chicken at a place that a lot of the students like and some fries and I actually- and speaking of nudges, I'm sitting in the parking lot like like "oh wow I didn't know" I thought this was just going to be a drive thing but apparently it takes longer when they need to make that many of the chicken things. So I'm sitting in the parking lot that may send them a message. And I got I heard back instantly from a young man "oh thank you so much. I'm starving." And by the way, my class was from 2:30 to 5:30. So it's not like I would expect most of them. But if you missed a lunch, I mean that's all you can think about. And I don't think that this young man is probably at need financially but I just like to think sometimes about the things that might hold our students back from learning. And we do know there's a lot of financial pressure on today's students but also just something as simple as hungry. And can we do something as simple as bringing a three dollar bag of some popcorn or something. And even just the thought of it to me matters too. That was just one small way I could show them that I care. I didn't do it a lot this semester; I probably did it three times in 15 weeks but I think those students if you ask them, I think they would think that I care about them. Part of that was just a small gesture.

Jose [00:25:00] And we know that the researcher is clear students learn more when they when they think that you care about them. And so when you do care about them it matters even more. And so I think they learn more, they don't want to disappoint you. They want to do good things for you. But but you're absolutely right. It's very hard to learn if you need to go to a dentist in your teeth or you're hungry or you're sleepy. So we have a SWEET campaign on our campus which stands for sleep, water, exercise, eating, and time. It's something

that that Eddie and I talked about in Teaching Naked Techniques book. There's a lot of SWEET in the new book because sleep is not something that individual faculty can do as much about, dimming the lights and that kind of thing.

Jose [00:25:38] But water does matter. Right. So if you have an early morning class and when your students are all taking their coffee- Coffee is a diuretic, it dehydrates you. So anybody who's ever passed out(as I did over the weekend)... So if you're dehydrated and you're exercising (right?) and you do something... [00:25:55]your body clearly responds to not enough water in the morning. I had coffee before playing tennis... [2.5s]

Bonni [00:25:59] I was going to say is this involved with tennis somehow?
[laughing]

Jose [00:26:04] I was playing tennis early in the morning. I took my water with me but I had coffee because I wanted it. And the doctor was like, "No you're an idiot. That's why you're in." But if it works for your muscles, it works for your brain. Your brain needs water to build to make neural connections. So you learn better if you have water in the morning first. And then you can have a little coffee. And we're not sure coffee help, there's a whole debate about this. But what we know is that water helps. Sleep and water are really good for learning.

Jose [00:26:29] So there are a couple of interesting studies about having water for students in your class. And again just put some cups and a jug of water if you don't want to use water bottles. But again it shows that you care. It also helps them.

Jose [00:26:43] And you're totally right about student hunger. Students are sometimes hungry because they can't afford it but they're also hungry because they forget to eat or they were too busy. They had a 12 o'clock and didn't want to walk down the campus or whatever. So on our campus we did change the meal plans. So we went from the you get 100 or 150 or 200 meals a semester two 19 meals a week and it resets on Sunday. So clearly the students who were poor benefit because they just weren't. And it is a mandatory first year plan. But even students who had the money were hoarding meals. They found out, we will have a big party at the semester. And so we took away a choice, that wasn't really a nudge because we took it away but we did think about how do we structure meal plans so you're more likely to have three meals a day. And that also seem to be contributing to food insecurity on our campus. We've essentially eliminated that problem by changing the structure of a meal plan. And faculty

can't do all those things. But it is the case that thinking about the context of your students and their lives in your classroom makes a big difference.

Bonni [00:27:56] Before we go to the recommendation segment I'd love a couple comments from you then about things we could control about spaces and places as professors. And specifically probably in the classroom.

Jose [00:28:07] Sure. So I mentioned time so when your assignments are due is a giant nudge. So in the classroom the most important thing is how you set up the furniture. The newer classrooms today have more space. They have walls that you can write on. And so if you have one of those rooms and it makes you nervous, try it anyway. Try a room without a podium. It turns out that most of us have plenty of authority, students assume that you're smart and you have degrees and all of that. So you don't need to reassert that, you need to show that you care and that you really want them to learn.

Jose [00:28:37] So setting up the class in a circle. Sitting down- I had met a group of students yesterday and just by the fact that I sat down rather than stayed standing up, they commented on it and said "wow you sat down with us, it really mattered. I said, "really? The fact that I was seated?" So taking a place in the circle. So taking students outside when it's nice and yeah, you're right there can be more distractions. But there are different distractions. And especially if you have no Wi-Fi or something or the cell service is good, you know you'll change the conditions.

Jose [00:29:05] But we know that students are digitally distracted all the time. This is not a classroom problem. You can't have policies for those five hours a week that you see them and expect the rest of their lives if they've got their phones, they've got the kinds of things. So recognizing the way that you set up. And if you're set up in a way that people can look at each other, they're less likely to be on their phones. If you have students who want to take notes on their laptops or who have learning issues or disability issues or whatever, put the people with laptops together. Because the worst place to be in a classroom is near a laptop when you're not on a laptop because it's distracting. Because you don't have any control. So people with laptops sit on the left, people who don't want to use laptops sit on the right. I also think you should not just say "I forbid cell phones in my classroom." I think it's very easy to say "please close your laptop. I need you to really focus on each other for the next 10 minutes." And make sure that they're then doing something where they have to focus on each other and they will naturally put their phones away because they don't want to be rude.

Jose [00:30:06] It also turns out that if you're doing things in twos, sometimes threes, but if you're doing things in twos people know it's rude to use a phone when you're talking to another person face to face. If you're in groups of four, people will be on one person because there's actually a rule sociologists have noticed that Millennials and Gen Z, if they're at a restaurant with three people or four people, and three of them are talking, the fourth person feels ok to get on the phone.

Jose [00:30:29] So those are sort of subtle things that people can do. But I do think everybody in elementary school knows that if you paint the classroom bright colors and you put up some posters, turns out students actually do learn more and they pay attention more. So what are the things you can do in your classroom to make your classroom feel like a more secure encouraging place.

Bonni [00:30:50] I've written a post which I'll link to about teaching with stickies but I've never had anybody on their phone when they're asked to pair up with somebody, identify some things on stickies, and then go post them around the room. I've never seen phones out. And also fascinated by sorting exercises. So whether it's sorting things categorically or top to bottom. There's all kinds of ways you can do this but never see the phones come out with that.

Bonni [00:31:11] And I was mentioning the special class that I had yesterday that was kind of a celebration for us for the semester. And they had made board games and so the groups - actually they didn't all make board games, one group did a Jeopardy game- but no one was on their cell phones. And then the other tube had created their own board games, no cell phones out. And I mean actually once or twice there was something happening and it was for about 15 seconds and the phone went away. It's pretty nice.

Jose [00:31:36] This involves moving. If you have walls you can write on. That's great. But if you don't, stickies work really really well. I'm also a big fan of if you have PowerPoint in the classroom of putting your learning outcome on the slide. Put a colorful slide out that has six or fewer words that says what are we doing and why. Because then if I get distracted, like I took out my phone, and what are we doing and why? What is this thing that we're trying to do? And at 15 minutes it changes with some visual reminder of what we're trying to do. What is it? And not just "we're doing a sticky game." But we're trying to help each other put things into categories, some kind of explanation of what we're trying to do. That helps students too because they get distracted they forget. And you get distracted. So it helps me.

Bonni [00:32:22] This is the point in the show where we each get to share our recommendations and I want to start by encouraging people to watch a video of Bobby McFerrin teaching the pentatonic scale. And since I happen to have a music professional, I think you can probably attest as Bobby has shared that the pentatonic scale is one of the hardest things to teach in music, but boy he makes it look easy. And I'm actually going to play just a tiny bit of it and I'm going to describe what's happening. So he's at a conference and he's on a panel, it's the World Science Festival and I'll tell you what's happening but you'll hear a little bit from him.

Bonni [00:33:00] So he's inviting the audience with his hands and he's jumping up and down and he is getting them all to sing with him. And now he's stepped over to the side. Again inviting them to sing, singing along with them.

Bonni [00:33:23] So the last thing that just happened would probably fall into the category of prediction. We know how powerful prediction can be in teaching and in learning. So he's jumping to this *humming*. And that last one, he hasn't taught that yet but he jumps off to the side and you know where he's going. You don't have to be a musician, it's just kind of a visual thing. And in his case since he's jumping up and down and inviting them it's kind of a kinesthetic thing as well. So I'm going to invite you to watch this three minute video and write down some reflections on what you can take away from Bobby because I guarantee you no matter your discipline, there's a lot we can take away from that.

Bonni [00:34:01] And this also gets me to thinking about improvisation because of course Bobby McFerrin is a famous jazz musician and there's a lot of improvisation there. And recently I was trying to explain to my children why these swing dancing videos I was watching on YouTube the other day were so impressive. Because most of the time if you watch a dance competition, that dance has been choreographed in advance and that is impressive in its own right, but as somebody who did swing dancing in my 20s I know how spectacularly impressive it is when these dancers get together and maybe they've danced together, but this certainly was not a choreographed dance. Maybe they've heard the song before, maybe they haven't. And so I have a couple of videos on the show notes I'd love to have you go and watch. As you watch them, these dancers- in this case the man is performing the lead and the woman is follow as is often traditional in some forms of dance. And it's just fascinating as someone who did this, you have to be so aware and watching the eyes and every little cue that you're getting. And if you know the song, then you kind of know there's a break coming but maybe you don't know the song but you can feel those breaks coming and just be anticipating them. And as

you watch those videos, if you're so inclined, just be thinking about her own teaching because it reminds me of we have a beat going. In this particular music, a lot of swing is the eight count. And so you've got that beat, you kind of know I've planned out this class, I know where we're headed because I've done this before a little bit. But it's this constant back and forth that is so beautiful to be a part of. And it's just a fun thing but I don't think my kids really were ready for a lecture on 8 counts and why this is impressive and what Improvisation is. But they had fun watching the videos. They did want to watch more the next night. So that's my recommendations.

Bonni [00:35:49] And Jose, I know you've actually worked with Bobby so you may have a few things to say about this and then may have some recommendations of your own.

Jose [00:35:55] Yes Bobby is a fantastic teacher. And that's a great clip partly because he does naturally all the things that you should do as a great teacher. The first is he breaks it down right. As teachers we often think I have to make this distinction up at this level and we forget that this is hard for them. They're new to this. And so where is the entry point? What is the thing they really need to start with? So he doesn't start with five notes on the pentatonic scale. He starts with one note. He gets people to do one note. So first he breaks it down into an element that everybody can have success with. Everybody can figure out ok one note, one note, one note, one note. Got it.

Jose [00:36:34] And then he turns it into something fun. So the second thing is engagement. That engagement happens before learning. If you want people to improvise, whether it's swing dancing or whatever, you have to be focused. You have to totally be focused and you have to understand what the system is. You have to have some sense of what the options are and have some experience. So Bobby generates both of those things. So he says ok there's one note, one note. And then he starts jumping around and so you are focusing and you're engaging with him, he's having fun. Then he picks a second note, he picks the two notes and he spends a lot of time going back and forth between the two notes. And he adds the element of the visual visual, so you've got this whole thing. So you're engaged, you're focused, you're following. And then he jumps over and people sing the third note. But that only works because A) everybody's engaged, everybody is involved and he started at the most basic level. We don't know start there. We are always afraid we won't cover the material if we don't get to some place. And so you have to start with something really basic. Again I call it the entry point. Where where can you get people to relax and engage and just do the thing that you want them to do? But it means

that they'll go with you at a certain point. If you started a place where they're with you, then when you get to the hard part (the third note) they are with you. And if you get it wrong, you'll try it again because you had fun and you can laugh and you're engaged. So that's a great model of both that idea that you have to get people engaged and that you have to break it down into enough small steps. So for me, teaching is about design; it's about understanding what are the steps and how can I design better problem sets than you can or other kinds of things? It's not just about content. If we only focus on content then our unique value as a teacher and a unique institution gets lost. So that's a correct clip. That's a great recommendation.

Jose [00:38:21] Also I am loving Sara Cavanaugh's book on emotion and learning because I think it's got lots of practical stuff. But it also just reminds us that your emotions are really a key part of everything about the process. In fact, that's probably why we have emotions, to help us learn and to focus on what to learn. And so if emotions are guiding your brain in terms of what it should be doing, you ignore them at your peril.

Bonni [00:38:47] It has been so wonderful to reconnect to and I have this feeling already that when this book comes out we get to reconnect again. You're coming back. Yes? Look at this. I'd love to have you back and it's such an honor to have these one on one conversations that just get shared with a few thousand people. It's really great.

Jose [00:39:04] That's that's that's a big number. Again congratulations to you on a really significant accomplishment and project that you're making a real difference in American higher ed teaching. Millions and millions of students should be grateful to you for their improvement of their education. So thank you.

Bonni [00:39:19] Well it's only because of people like you saying yes that it was ever possible. So you're definitely a part of this. Thank you so much.

Jose [00:39:26] You're welcome. Thanks a lot.

Bonni [00:39:30] Thanks once again to Jose Bowen for being on today's podcast it was great to hear your stories and catch up on some of the big and seemingly small things that you're doing at your institution to serve your students.

Bonni [00:39:43] Well thanks to all of you for listening. If it's been a while that you've been listening to the show and you're taking some things away, I'd love to have you share that with colleagues or maybe on social media. You can

connect with me on Twitter @Bonni208. I'm also on Instagram @Bonni208. You could see adorable pictures of the kids. It's mostly personal stuff but I would love to you if you want to have your day brightened by cute kids and occasionally cute me. So I was holding an emoji card trying to imitate it recently. That's a fun - fun thing to see. Thanks for listening. I'll see you next time.

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