

[00:00:00] Bonni Stachowiak: Today on episode number 267 of the Teaching in Higher Ed Podcast, Don Saucier shares about Trickle-down engagement.

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[00:00:22] Bonni: Hello. Welcome to this episode of Teaching in Higher Ed. I'm Bonnie Stachowiak and this is the space where we explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning, we also share ways to improve our productivity approaches so we can have more peace in our lives and be even more present for our students.

Today's guest was introduced to me through my partnership with the Association of College and University Educators ACUE.

ACUE's courses and community site feature many teaching and learnings, top experts, including a lot of the ones that we've had on the podcast before, faculty developers and practitioners to showcase evidence-based teaching practices. I've been partnered with them for more than three years now and they send me great guests and today's guest is no exception, Donald A. Saucier, PhD from University of Vermont. A professor of psychological sciences and a university distinguished teaching scholar at Kansas State University.

He's a fellow of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, the Society for the Psychological Study of Social issues, the Society for Experimental Social Psychology and the Midwestern Psychological Association. His research examines the factors that contribute to expressions of antisocial and pro-social behavior and his teaching philosophy focuses on maximizing the levels of both teacher and student engagement in the classroom. Don welcome to Teaching in Higher Ed.

[00:02:05] Don Saucier: Thank you so much for having me. I'm looking forward to this.

[00:02:08] Bonni: When I first started to read your materials, one of the first things that stood out was your teaching philosophy. His teaching philosophy focuses on maximizing the levels of both teacher and student engagement in the classroom. I'm only reading part of it but I was instantly thinking, wow this is a person who has done a lot of reflection on his teaching and has really been able to articulate your teaching philosophy. I wonder if you would talk a little bit about what that process has been like for you.

[00:02:39] Don: Sure. Thank you. I like my teaching philosophy too. I think one of the things that really impacted my teaching philosophy was me having had a lot of experiences as a student with good and bad teachers. One of the things that really occurred to me is that some teachers I just could not resonate with, I just couldn't get into their classes and I had a really hard time learning their information, but other teachers it was just so natural.

I wanted to be there, I know that they wanted to be there and they wanted to share their information with me. When I had the first opportunity to start teaching as a graduate student, I suddenly realized I wasn't prepared to do that, so I very met a colleague who went through these experiences and said, what works for me as a student and what didn't.

There's one professor in particular, his name was Edgar Carrion, he was a neuroscientist at Colby College where I went to school. He taught this class at 5:00 in the morning, it's ridiculous, probably wasn't 5:00 in the morning, but felt like 5:00 in the morning.

[00:03:32] Bonni: [laughs]

[00:03:33] Don: He was talking about the brain, I'm a social psychologist, the brain isn't really what I study and he loved it, he absolutely loved it. I would show up to his class and I would just be enthralled in him describing function and structure of the brain. When I became a teacher, I said, that was a course I didn't care at all about, but I was there and I got through that course because that teacher was thoroughly engaged about that. I started with that realization and then I started to think more, I would have thought of other teachers that I really resonated with. They did the same thing, they brought their love for their content into the class.

They wanted to be in that class, they wanted to teach me and then as a student I got engaged and I learned too. Over the years, I started to play with this concept of letting my students know that I was engaged. I would explicitly tell

them this, I would say, "This is going to be great content. This could be interesting content. This is going to be important and valuable for all of the reasons and I love it and I love that you're here. Let's do this together." My students responded really well to that. It was probably five or six years into my teaching career where I said, "I'm going to articulate this, I'm going to write this down, I'm going to think about this, I'm going to collect some data on this." I came up with what we call the Trickle-down engagement model.

It very simply says that the engagement of the teacher is going to affect the engagement of the student, which is then going to ultimately affect their learning. If the teacher is more palpably engaged, the students are going to be more engaged and then they're going to perform better on their assessments or exams or quizzes, their papers what-have-you, they're also going to come to class more because they're having that engaging experience. This is something that my reflections of having been a student and then my early practice as a teacher developed this. I didn't start out doing this but this is something that became my teaching philosophy over time.

[00:05:21] Bonni: One of the books that I read for my doctoral program was by Daniel Goleman. Most people associate Daniel Goleman with multiple intelligence theory but in this particular instance, he's going into looking at social intelligence. I'll admit that it was a little bit of a too dense of a book for me at whatever time I was trying to read [laughs] I was going like, "What's the point?" This might sound cavalier but when we've all been through stressful experiences like trying to finish a doctorate, I was like, "Let's nail this down. What's the point?" The point is that our emotions are contagious.

[00:05:56] Don: Absolutely. Our emotions are absolutely contagious and the good ones and the bad ones. Knowing that, one of the things that I think we should do is reflect on why I want to teach that concept. I think sometimes we're not as thoughtful about why it is we're including something in our class. Often times what we do is we say, "All right. I'm supposed to teach this at this point." Or "Someone told me that on their syllabus, they have this here." or "The textbook has this chapter and therefore I have to teach that."

What I think we can do is, we can be a little bit more thoughtful and intentional about whether or not that should be included and if it should be included, why? If it's not interesting and it's not important for the topic, then maybe it shouldn't be included. I really think that what we should be doing is being excited every single day because we're invested in the "Why" that we're teaching. I think sometimes if we're not sure or if we don't think that content is very exciting, then we get a little

bit bored with it. Where lectures are a little bit drier, the conversations that we're having a less stimulated, our students are going to sense that.

I think sometimes we think that our students aren't as emotionally intelligent as they are and they're going to go off our vibe. If I come in and I'm loving it, I think they're more likely to love it too but if I come in I'm saying, "We got to get through this." I've heard colleagues say this, "We got to get through this today. I know it's going to be boring but bear with me." If you do that, you're setting it up for a disastrous class because they're going to reflect that, "Oh my God, I got to be here." Rather than, "Oh my God I get to be here."

[00:07:26] Bonni: I hear you talking about attention and attention between whenever I hear myself or other people talk about covering the material, I know we're in the danger zone of what you're talking about where we're not going to be as engaging versus, so many people have talked about this but one that comes to mind is Ken Bain and, he writes about instead of the topics I'm going to cover, the questions we're going to explore. So many people that have been on this podcast before have talked about really the mysteries we're going to have them solve, the questions we'll explore, the puzzles we'll try to unravel. To me, that can make me so much more excited because then it's different every single time. Watching the students as they get curious, that to me is a way of fueling that energy that you're describing.

[00:08:19] Don: I love that. One of the things about questions, it allows students to be collaborators in the learning. I think when people go in and they say, "I had a great class because I finished all my slides."

[00:08:28] Bonni: [chuckles]

[00:08:29] Don: It's just like you said, that's the problem zone, that's the danger zone, that's not a good thing but if you ask them questions, they get to give you answers they get to think through the processes that you're trying to teach them because really, I think more often than not, the content is the vehicle for professional development. If you want your students to be critical thinkers, you give them content to think about, you ask them questions and you see if they can critically evaluate that. If you want them to apply the information, you ask them to apply it.

By doing this, by using all of these active learning techniques, your students now get to contribute to their education and get to tell you why it's valuable. One of the questions that I love to ask my students is, "Why did we talk about this today? Why did we learn this?" One of the things that I'm always so gratified to see is they usually give me better answers than the ones I was planning to give them

because they're so personal for them. They'll find that nuance, that nugget that they can take away with them that I never anticipated. I love the vibrancy of the class where you ask questions.

[00:09:31] Bonni: You said we should be excited every single day, that's a pretty tall order, can we behave our way into feeling differently than we do?

[00:09:41] Don: I think we can. I'm a social psychologist. A lot of social psychology basically says that, " We have all of these processes of self-perception and social perception and cognitive dissonance and all of these things that talk about the connection between what we do and what we think. There is a connection. I think that if you come in and

you prepare yourself and we did that study to show that award-winning teachers do this. If you prepare yourself to show your engagement, so you come in preparing to say, "Today, we're going to talk about research methods."

The way I say research methods is a lot of time students don't see that as the most exciting thing that you're going to talk about especially not in the psychology classes that I teach. If you prepare yourself to come in and say, "Today, we have the opportunity," right?, "The opportunity to learn about research methods because research methods is the tool kit by which we discover information about the human condition." The students look at it differently. If you come in and say, "Today, we get to learn about independent and dependent variables and we're going to learn about experimental studies," they're going to tune out.

If you're going to say, "This is the opportunity to acquire knowledge about the human condition," that's a scripted way to describe why this is important. Now, emotion is contagious. It's contagious both ways. So if you script this statement and you come in and you deliver it well, your students are going to sit up a little straighter. They're going to lean forward a little bit. They're going to repair themselves to write.

They might even smile and when they do those kinds of things, it affects your engagement. It makes it easier now to really invest in that information. I think the classroom is an oasis. It's the place that we go to get away from everything else and I look forward to that every single day regardless of the topic that I'm teaching. Even if the topic isn't the thing that I love the most, I'm still engaged to be there and that's something I think that all teachers can do.

[00:11:37] Bonni: What happens when we make the work too easy for our students?

[00:11:41] Don: Easy work does not work well. Students know that we're giving them busy work. I think that what we need to do is challenge our students. There's a lot of work on optimal experience or what- high costs low and what that says is that when students are getting the most engaged or anyone is getting to be most engage in any activity is when their skills are just barely meeting the challenge. All right. They're having to invest all of their cognitive and emotional, and behavioral energy into the task but they're succeeding. We need to find that flow channel, that channel of optimal experience for our students. If it's too easy, they tune out and they will do the bare minimum.

Now it's important to understand, they're not doing the bare minimum because of stereotypes about millennials and people don't work hard. They're doing the bare minimum because they're smart. They're understanding that they have a lot of things to do and if they don't have to invest the energy here, they can invest it somewhere else and maximize their overall productivity.

What we need to do is inspire them to invest the energy and the assignments we give them. One of the ways we can increase the difficulty of the assignment or the rigor of the assignment in an appropriate way is to ask them to apply it creatively. Don't tell them how to do it. Give them that balance in which they can be creative and make it valuable for them because if it's too easy, they're going to give you something that they didn't engage in and then coming back your engagement as a teacher, you're not going to want a grade.

[00:13:08] Bonni: What are some ways that you've seen faculty invite their students to apply something creatively or you've done that in your classes?

[00:13:15] Don: One of the things I love to do is I like to give missions and the way that I define a mission is I have a social goal. I'm a social psychologist, I teach about things like prosocial behavior, I teach about things like prejudice and discrimination. I give them a mission. I recently gave them my advance social psychology class a helping mission. I said what are you going to do for this mission is you're going to go out in your world and you're going to get others. Not yourself, you're going to get others to engage in prosocial behavior. You're going to find a way to apply the theories of social psychology to make others more helpful.

That's all the direction I'm going to give you. I want a one-page report telling me what you did, what you found, why you thought it would work theoretically and convince me that you did something theoretically and practically worthy. They go a lot- They do a lot of different kinds of things. Some of them create group me, funds, some of them create a social media campaign, some of engage inside

wall campaigns. I had one student who went to get people registered to vote so that they can help people through their votes in November.

What I think we can do is we can give them parameters and then let them go and apply it in some way that we never thought of. Now, one of the things that I always get a little nervous about is they'll ask me for an example and I don't like to give an example because once I say one student did this then a lot of students will say, "Oh, that's what I'm supposed to do." So some students particularly those who wanted to achieve and succeed really, really well, they'll sometimes get a little bit uncomfortable. What I'll let them do is bring examples to me for feedback.

I think if we're going to provide these parameters, we have to be open to having conversations with our students to optimize their engagement on the assignment. If you don't want to talk to your students, you probably shouldn't give them creative opportunities but I think we should.

[00:14:57] Bonni: I get so sad. A couple times a year, I teach a doctoral class. Primarily my teaching is an undergrad but a couple times I have that opportunity and I get so sad that it's at that level that I get more than ever did I do this right. Is this what you're looking for? I think, "Oh, gosh." There's so much I'm learning that has to happen there to recognize, I don't-- You're in a doctoral level. This is where the biggest agency should be shining through and it's just really, it saddens me that that is not always the case.

[00:15:28] Don: I think that's really actually understandable because I mentor doctoral students too is they're really good at being students. One of the things that good students do is they follow directions well and when they don't have directions, they're just not sure. Oftentimes they're risk-averse. They're afraid of making a mistake, they're so motivated to succeed and excel. They feel like they need to have direction and one of the things that I think we can do to attenuate that, to help them get through this fear of risk is give them parameters in which to be creative.

We say, "I want you to apply these principles to this thing in a way that you like." I've given you two out of three. It's that third one you have to invest because I really think that we shouldn't put our students into a situation which is too anxious. On the flip side, I don't think it's completely inappropriate to make our students a little uncomfortable in college.

[00:16:25] Bonni: That's great advice. Thank you for that. That's a helpful thing for me to remind myself of too and of course, when you're working out in this particular program, it's a dual-track thing. They're both working on portions of their dissertation such as coming up with their research questions and then their

literature review, so on and so forth. There's a lot of rules around that APA formatting and margins, I don't know, all the stuff. Then here I am coming in and trying to have them both engage with both kinds of follow every single rule to the literal letter [chuckles] and then on the other hand, exercise our agency. That helps me think about it that way.

[00:17:05] Don: One of the things that I tell my students because my students sometimes struggle with these creative endeavors too is I'll explain why I'm putting them in that situation. I think sometimes we can be more explicit in our intentions for why we're asking our students to do the things we're asking them to do and letting them know that I want you to become more creative or with my doctoral students, "I want you to become more autonomous and innovative because you need to make a name for yourself as a scholar."

"So you can't be a mini-me and you shouldn't be a mini-me. What you've got to do is you become you and you get to decide what kind of style you want to be, what topics you want to be known for, how you want to be in classroom, what that teaching philosophy is going to be. You get to create that. That's wonderful and it's also scary. It's what you came to graduate school for or is what you took my undergraduate class for. What I'm dealing whether you knew it or not is doing what you paid for."

[00:17:58] Bonni: Is this part of what you talk about when you share about the power of the individual?

[00:18:03] Don: That's exactly what I mean with that. I think and I tell my students this on the first day of my classes, there is nothing more powerful than their voice and their voice should not be an echo of my voice or anyone else's. It needs to be individual and I'm going to give them through my assignments, through my discussions an opportunity for them to develop that voice. The voice may become to in writing, the voice may come through orally, but I want them to become their own person.

What that means is they should critically evaluate what I'm saying. They should critically evaluate the mentoring that I'm giving them because they need to decide when I'm done with this, who am I going to be. I expect much like with David Attaran is one of my college professors, they're going to look back at their experiences and they're going to pick and choose, and the creation of themselves as a scholar and a teacher. Yes, I think the power of the individual is exactly what I want to nurture in my students because I want a society of people who know who they are or at least they can become in feel like they have power and autonomy over their own lives.

[00:19:07] Bonni: I'd like to circle back to the idea of crafting a teaching philosophy. When you spoke of it earlier, you spoke of the meta cognition that you went through and formulating that almost picture just you wrestling to become the teacher that you are today. Let's talk a little bit about how that writing can show up in a little bit more of a transactional way but it is the reality for us academics. It might show up as needing to write something like this to apply for a job. It also might show up for us in our promotion some portfolio we need together. What advice do you have for us as we craft that teaching philosophy to something less for our own reflection and to share more broadly?

[00:19:48] Don: This is a wonderful question. I've had the opportunity to apply for jobs a number of times, to go for promotion and tenure but also be in the hiring committees. One of the things that I often see is that the teaching philosophies are all the same. People are dropping in buzzwords like 'active learning'. They're dropping in words, like 'engagement'. They're talking about that they're accessible to their students. Those are all important, but those are the minimums. Those are the standards you have to hit.

What I want to see in a teaching philosophy, and this is how you craft a teaching philosophy, is think about what experience do I want to create for my students in class? For me, with trickle-down engagement, I think I want to create an engaging experience for me, that trickles down to my students and helps them learn. Therefore, when I want to create that experience, all of my practices are derived from that experience. A teaching philosophy for me as an evaluator should give me a sense of what your students experience when they learn from you. When I advise teachers and when I advised my graduate students who're creating teaching philosophies, I think about what is most important. What are your priorities? Who do you want to be as a teacher?

That might be aspirational, it might not be who you are now. I'm not who I was when I was writing my first teaching philosophy. I've grown a lot, I've discovered a lot and I've made things a lot more cohesive now in my teaching philosophy than I once were. I want to know who are you? More often than not I know that you teach and I know that you're saying the things you're supposed to say in a teaching philosophy, but I want to see your personality come out. I want to see the things that are important to you come out and if you can name them.

There's a lot of ways that I could do in my teaching philosophy, but I wanted something that really nicely encapsulated in a short phrase what I'm all about. It happened on trickle-down engagement, for me that worked. Once I was able to do that I could flush that out. My practice is reflecting that. My core structure reflects that. What I do on the first day of my class reflects that. I can revise that.

It was later on in my career where I got more comfortable in myself as a teacher and I was more comfortable managing discussions that the power of the individual grew into part of my teaching philosophy.

Earlier on I was a little bit more afraid to hear what students might say. I was afraid to ask them a discussion question or let them ask me a question that I might not be able to answer. That's something as I grew in comfort as a teacher that I said, "This is something that's important to me. I haven't done it enough. Let's see where this goes." One of the things about a teaching philosophy or a teaching statement as we often call it when we're looking at job applications is this should be a living document. Your teaching philosophy is going to be dynamic. It's going to change as you learn more and you experience more.

[00:22:33] Bonni: As I think about the interviews I've been a part of lately, a big thing for me that's important is for people to be able to identify failures that they've experienced as teachers and also to incorporate now how that is reflective of changes they've made in their own teaching. It's not something that people often feel comfortable with and so I have two questions for you. It's a little preview. The first question is going to be just how much do you see people being asked to share about their failures in the kinds of searches that you've been a part of. Then, you know I'm going to have to ask you about one of your failures. Let's start. [laughs]

[00:23:08] Don: Sure. I would say that number one, I'm at a research institution and what happens is for worse- I won't say for better or for worse. For worse. we frankly don't evaluate the teaching credentials of our applicants as much of their research credentials, and this pains me. I'm always the one asking what's your teaching philosophy and other people say, "They'll learn that along the way." Often our applicants don't have much of a teaching history when we hire them to some of the areas of my department and that makes me very sad. We don't ask them about these failures as much. Typically people are very guarded about sharing these failures.

[00:23:41] Bonni: Yes, of course.

[00:23:41] Don: What's happened is we don't talk about our failures that much. It's always astounded me and now I love these experiences when I hear teachers that I know, and respect tell me when they messed up because we mess up and we grow from those experiences. The worst experience I ever had failing, and I have all range of experiences, the worst one is I actually got a graduate teaching assistant slapped in a class. I'll give you a setup for the story. I was a graduate

student at the University of Vermont and the social psychology Professor asked me to come in and give a lecture about altruism.

The social-psychological definition of altruism is that it's selfless helping. It's helping with no motivation that you're going to get anything back from that experience. I came into a class cold. This was not my class. I had no rapport with this class. I did not know the students and they didn't know me and I didn't take that into account. I came into that class and I came in firing hard that altruism does not exist. The research showing the existence of the lack of existence of altruism in the social psychological literature is tough. We basically defined it stupidly.

Rather than saying it's less selfishly motivated, we said it's completely non-selfish. It's really hard to show that there's no possibility of selfless motivation. I came in armed with this research that they could tell me any example, I could come up with a selfish reason for why they helped in that situation that they might not want to admit or even might not be aware of. I came in and I challenged them and I'm just shooting down their examples. What's happening is I'm having these students respond, which is hard enough in a class and I'm destroying their answers.

This is not a great teaching dynamic. This is something I would never do now, but they're just coming in and I'm shooting them down. Finally, this one student stood up to respond. If a student ever stands up in your class to respond, that should make the bells and whistles go off as something has gone wrong here. For whatever reason, I didn't get this. The student stood up and she started to talk through all of the volunteering that she had done and how it is completely not selfish. My response was, "Yes, and I'll bet it looks great on your resume."

She did not respond well. She started to storm out of the room. The graduate teaching assistant tried to intercept her - and she hit him. I reflect back on that moment and say, "Oh my god. I got somebody hit in my class." I'll tell my students this. They'll be like, "Oh my god. I can't believe that happened." I can't believe that happened. I never thought something would ever digress to that level, but what happened is I learned that's not how you do it. Now what I do when I talk about this topic in my class and I let them know this is a hard topic to show empirically exists, what studies would we do to show that it empirically exists?

[00:26:34] Bonni: Love it.

[00:26:34] Don: Because really smart people over the decades of tried and failed, you tell me based on what we know about research methods and theories of helping and pro-social behavior, you tell me how we can verify the existence of altruism." Even give them extra credit for the best answer.

[00:26:51] Bonni: I love that.

[00:26:51] Don: I now having learned this awful failure is I need to respect their voices. I need to respect their pre-existing beliefs. I need to respect their experiences and their worldviews. In that moment, I decided that I was going to win the intellectual argument because I was more well-read. Being the expert is not the same as being an excellent teacher and in that moment, I didn't know that.

[00:27:16] Bonni: When you were talking about being at an R1 and I don't think we talked about this. I'm at a teaching-oriented institution so it's very different for us as you could imagine although we still don't focus as much on teaching as I wish we did in the hiring process. You were reminding me though of the importance when we are applying for jobs, or when we're doing promotion of making those attempts to partially mirror what we are seeing, what's being modeled for us to the extent that we can get that information and yet still wanting to maintain a voice of a unique person and someone who has something distinct to offer.

It's just a really careful balance because you don't you want to just pair it with what you're hearing and what you're seeing, but at the same time, I'm thinking specifically about a cultural acceptance of speaking about failures and some of the larger more R1, more bureaucratic institutions. That's just something that would be heresy to speak about versus I feel like some of the teaching institutions it's maybe a little bit more acceptable to be in a place of struggle. I might not be making a fair comparison, but I did think that you wouldn't want to volunteer information and go on and on about your failures if that was something that was culturally, you're completely shocking them. That would be something to have in your pocket to talk about if welcomed to do so, but you don't want to necessarily drive and have that be where you start.

[00:28:37] Don: I absolutely agree with that. There's a difference between being human and being incompetent.

[00:28:42] Bonni: Yes. [laughs]

[00:28:43] Don: If you can ever follow up legitimate failure. Sometimes we ask people for failures, they're coached to tell us things that really aren't failures. It's like when you tell someone, "What's your biggest weakness as a teacher?" and they say, "I care too much." That's not really a weakness. I could see how that could be pitched as a weakness, but I knew that you found the answer that you were comfortable giving and you didn't really want to answer my question. I think what we've got to do, any time we talk about failure is you're going to be able to follow it up with a question.

In this case, what should I have done and then turn it around? This is going to be safer after you've been hired, so when you're looking for mentoring and I had a class that maybe didn't go as well as I wanted. What would you have done in that situation? What should I have done in there? What could I have thought about? Understanding that it's always easier after the effect to come up with strategies. On the interview, when I ask someone, "What's the biggest hurdle that you ever went over in class?" I want them to tell me a real failure, but then what they learned from it.

How are they going to make sure that the failure doesn't repeat, because in essence when I ask that question, I want to know is this a problem? If you come in and say, "Yes, I wasn't prepared one day and students ask me questions, I said I didn't know the answer and I didn't look them up." That's horrible. But if you say,

I came in one day and I just didn't understand how creative my students were. I didn't know the kind of questions they would ask. I spent a lot of time learning to answer their questions and I came in that next day gave them the answers.

I let them know that sometimes we could discover this stuff together. We turned this into a brainstorming in front of the class activity or an exercise in learning how it is we acquire knowledge in science. How we explore the primary literature. How we design research questions. If this failure becomes something thought for and something metacognitive, something that they're so uncomfortable with, that they did not want repeat, that's a wonderful way to show maturity as a teacher. If you just tell me how you messed up and you don't have anything to follow that, that concerns me.

[00:30:46] Bonni: That's what so beautiful about your story, is that it has that. It's very memorable. I'm not going to forget that part of this conversation for sure and yet it completely transformed your teaching. It's still speaking to you today. It is still alive in you as a teacher today, in that you've turned it back into the questions that you're going help your students explore. What studies would we do? That's absolutely brilliant.

[00:31:12] Don: One of the things that I've learned-- I was an athlete long before I was a teacher. It was one of those things where film study on Monday. After a football game, you sit down with the coaches and they go through the film. I do this as a teacher. I don't necessarily review the film - but I sit back in my office and say, "What went well today and what didn't?" I think if we're intentional on developing ourselves as a teacher, we try to promote the things that worked and reduce the things that didn't.

Most of the time when I think back about it, the things that didn't work as well, were preventable. I just didn't anticipate enough to prevent them. You'd mentioned a little bit about this climate about discussing failure, we don't discuss failure. As assistant professors and particular on the tenure shot, we don't discuss failure. We're so afraid that, that one comment is going to get us fired. That one time where I said, that the students had to stay in class. I didn't know how to respond becomes the, everyone thinks I'm a bad teacher and then I don't get reappointed or I don't get tenure.

I think what we need to do, is we need to have a climate and a culture where we have more discussions about teaching generally. One of the things that is most gratifying for me, is when I have a colleague on my campus. Who is a high-level teacher say, "Don, I had this issue in class, what would I do?" It makes me feel like less an impostor sometimes. Impostor syndrome is real and it doesn't go away. Sometimes we think that we're a phony in a position [until] we're found out.

When I had one of the teachers that I most respect, come to me and say, "Hey, what happens when your students are on social media during class and you can't get their attention back?" Then you say, "Oh, my God I thought that was just me." These are the kind of conversations we need to have more of. I don't think we should hide our failure. I don't think we should hide our attempts to engage other people about issues and problems we face with our students because we all face them.

It doesn't mean we're not doing our job. It doesn't mean we're not trying really hard. It doesn't mean that the job is not wonderful. It does mean that, if we find a collectively border through these things, we're going to get to better answers. That we don't ask those questions near enough.

[00:33:17] Bonni: Part of what you're reminding me of too, is sometimes we can't do it at our institutions, it's just too grave of a risk for us. We don't have that safety. Really, can we get better at things if there's zero safety? Then we're not really allowed to experiment. If you're going to try to get better at something, it's better if you're not terrified of then making another mistake.

There's things like teaching in Higher Ed Slack Channel, which people haven't heard about before. That's a more private place. Twitter while, it isn't private. It is at least a place where you can get outside of your own institution and make those kinds of connections with people. Then I did even start about six months ago writing an advice column for EdSurge. I'll put a link in the show notes for anybody who wants to post a question. You don't have to include your name or any kind

of identifying information. That's another way where you can get some external perspective if you don't feel like you can have those conversations internally.

[00:34:13] Don: A couple of things I would mention to you is that a lot of organizations have Facebook pages and things like that. I know the Society for teaching psychology, has a place where you can just say things like if someone did that this week, "I'm having hard time grading attendance, what do I do?" Then in a matter of minutes, you will have 25 people, who will tell you what they do. My graduate students and I have engaged in Stage Teaching Channel. Where we talk about our thoughts in teaching and little things you can do to make your teaching more engaging and to deal with different issues with students for instance.

The comment sections of those videos are really good places to ask other people these kinds of questions. The comment you made too about, "We can't achieve if there's no safety." I think also applies to the classroom. One of the things that we've got to think about is, "Do we provide a safe opportunity for our students to demonstrate the learning and to empower them to use their voices?" If we start to empathize with these evaluation concerns, with these concerns about being impostors. It allows us to empathize with our students. I think sometimes we forget that we were students.

The only difference between my students and me is that the time I've spent in this field is longer. They're just me at an earlier developmental stage. I'm not more intelligent. I'm not more creative. I'm not more cool. All I am is someone who has been doing this longer. The anxieties that I have are the anxieties that they have. If I don't want to talk about failure, why would they want to talk about failure?

If I'm afraid of getting it wrong of course, they're going to be afraid about getting it wrong. I think empathizing with them in that human experience is important. I also think that we as associate professors and full professors need to understand what our assistant professors are going through. One of the things that I try to do more, is I try with my assistant professors to share things like, "Hey, I screwed up and got a student hit. How did your week go?"

[00:36:01] Bonni: [laughs]

[00:36:02] Don: Then what we can do, is we can have a bit more candid discussion. If a faculty member, if one of colleagues ever comes to me with an issue, no judgment. I must deal with the issue. I think it's important that we provide that safe space as colleagues. If we keep that tenure process very, very mystical and we try to keep it very mysterious not let them know what's up with that, of

course, they're going to be scared on that. I think we make them less scared; we make them more able to achieve both as faculty and the students.

[00:36:31] Bonni: This is the point in the show where we each get to share some recommendations. I have two today and then I'll pass it over to you. The first one is that, I got intrigued by the idea of using 360-degree cameras in our teaching, by watching a woman who teaches in an NBA program. She presented at the Canvas Instructor Conference. I don't know if it was last year or the year before. It stayed with me that whole time. I think of 360-degree cameras as what you are used to when you want to check out somebody's house that is for sale. You can look around the entire room. You can just zoom and go where you want. Of course, this is coming into teaching as well.

For me, we ended up buying what's called a Meeting Owl. First of all, it is the cutest little thing ever. It is called an Owl because it has little two, little owl eyes that make it look like it's looking at you when you turn it on. It looks similar dimensions as the Amazon. I'm not going to say the name because I don't want to start activating people's devices all over the world but the Amazon A-- I can't even spell. A-L-E-X-A. It looks about that same size but of course, it's fabric on the outside because it's an entire speaker. Then very, very top is a little 360 degrees, smart video camera.

I say smart because if you use it either on its own or if you use the video conferencing tool like Zoom, whoever is talking the camera automatically goes and focuses on that person. It's activated by the sound of the voice. Then if someone across the room starts speaking, then it focuses that part of the camera. We're used to that on Zoom, if you've used it before because it hears you talking and makes your camera show but, in this case,, it's a single camera. That's able to focus on every part of that room. It's really pretty remarkable. It's also adorable.

It's so funny when I carry. I don't have a carrying case for it yet, so if I carry it across campus or if I'm sitting in a room, a few minutes earlier it always gets the attention. It's just the funniest thing. It's a very cute device. They also have very cute marketers on April First, they said. Which in the United States it's April Fools Day. Apparently, it's funny for us to make fun of people by tricking them into things. [laughs] Not my favorite tradition but there's was very cute. They said they had a new children's version of the Meeting Owl. Then that turned out that so many people were interested in that but it wasn't a real thing.

They sent out a stuffed owl to people who wanted to receive it, so it was really cute. They have really cute marketers. Then the thing I want to also mention just about video conferencing in general. It's happening more for meeting. It's

happening more for our teaching. We also need to up our game, when it comes to how we're going to present ourselves in those environments that I wrote a post about some tips for when you're in a video conference. Things of like being aware of where the lighting is coming from. If you've got like coming from behind your head and you have this darkened face and you can't see your expressions. [chuckles]

It's just all kinds of things that we can really do to make a big difference in either the positive or the negative direction and experience for our students or for those that we're joining together to collaborate on a project of some kind. Those are my two recommendations and Don I pass it over to you, for yours.

[00:39:36] Don: Your recommendations are amazing. Mine are going to a lot be less techy. I'm not very tech fluent myself. The recommendation I'm going to make and this is easy. It's something that you do all the time. Is to thank the students. I had mentioned this notion that the classroom is an oasis. It's a way to get away from all the other things, the review has savaged your manuscript or an impending grant deadline or the cranky kids at home or whatever. I

thank them for that opportunity. I'll comment and say, hey, I wanted to thank you for making the choice to come to class today.

We have some amazing stuff that we're going to do together and I'm so glad that you're here to share this with me. I'm glad that you created this opportunity away from all the other noise and chaos in my life. If you do this often, and if you mean it, it resonates really well with the students. It changes the culture, it changes the climate and what it does is I really think we have the best job in the world it really reinforces that for me because I know how it feels to be thanked and I've never been thanked as a student.

When I first did this there's this room with 200 people, there was a lot going on and at that time outside of the class for me, we had had a flood and my basement was underwater and my kids were cranky and I was dealing with all kinds of things. I came and I said, you know what? I'm just glad you're here. I'm glad that we get to do this together and thank you so much for this experience, and they applauded. I was completely flabbergasted by this and I wasn't going for that reaction, but some students said, we really felt like you cared. I said, well, I do and I care all the time, but sometimes that explicit recognition that you are providing me this opportunity.

I'm at a research one school and without the undergraduate students in my class as there is no research one school. Some people look at teaching as a necessary evil, as something they've got to pay the price to do their research. No, it's the

greatest thing that we do. My recommendation is appreciate that and tell your students that you appreciate that.

[00:41:35] Bonni: What a perfect opportunity for me to say thank you right back to you, Don. Thank you for investing your time in this community today. It was such a joy to get to talk to you and to feel that contagion of your positivity about teaching.

[00:41:48] Don: Thank you so much for having me. I really enjoyed this.

[music]

[00:41:53] Bonni: What a pleasure it was today to have the opportunity to speak with Don Saucier. He has lived up to his reputation, his teaching philosophy of this contagious passion for teaching, and I just love the ideas that he shared with us today. If you've been listening for a while and have not had the opportunity to subscribe to our weekly update, you'll receive the show notes with the links to all the things that were shared on today's episode or whatever episode it is along with an article about teaching or productivity written by me.

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[music]

[00:42:47] [END OF AUDIO]

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