Bonni: [00:00:00] In today's episode I give an update on some of the new EdTech tools I experimented with in Spring 2015.

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Bonni: [00:00:17] Welcome to this episode of Teaching In Higher Ed. This is the space where we explore the art and science have been more effective at facilitating learning. We also share ways to increase our personal productivity approaches so we can have more peace in our lives and be even more present for our students.

Bonni: [00:00:45] Hello this is Bonni Stachowiak and I'm still reeling a little bit. I thought I don't know if reeling is the right word. Reeling in a good way? From the episode with Scott Self the last one I recorded that was number 48.

Bonni: [00:00:59] He had so many great ideas about how to use Evernote in the classroom and also with personal productivity it was such a pleasure to get to talk to him and I've been thinking a lot about other EdTech tools that I have used during the spring of 2015 and wanted to give you a little bit of an update.

Bonni: [00:01:16] The last time I recorded an episode by myself I had a cold. And here I am again just getting over another. So I'm having one of those days today though where I'm thinking I'm on top of the world because I went and exercised this morning

Bonni: [00:01:31] Finally feeling well enough to do that and my foot has healed well enough from my foot surgery so I feel like I'm on an upswing now so my voice may be a little hoarse today but I'm definitely on an upswing and excited about life.

Bonni: [00:01:43] And excited to be healthy once again. Hopefully it sticks this time so I've got a rule which I've spoke about before on the podcast which is I only try one new educational technology tool at a time.

Bonni: [00:01:55] I don't think it really helps us to get overwhelmed with trying new things even though I get really tempted so I have to keep a list for myself so I'll assure myself I won't forget about them.

Bonni: [00:02:05] And I also don't want to overwhelm my students either so I don't think I think they like that we keep up with what's going on out there but they don't want us to be they want to be our little guinea pigs on every little cool thing that we find that maybe works and maybe doesn't.

Bonni: [00:02:19] So I've got my rule for that and I broke it a little bit this semester. Not not really but in my classes I used a tool called slack and so I'll talk about that today and how that worked for my students that I used it with and what they use case was there. I also used a tool called Piazza.

Bonni: [00:02:37] Which is a Q and A platform. But I use that not with my students but with a group of Teaching In Higher Ed listeners who wanted to read the Getting Things Done book that was revised by David Allen, which we've talked about a couple times on this show.

Bonni: [00:02:52] And so we all decided just to use Piazza for that even though it's not a perfect use case. But I'll be sharing about our experience there and how that worked for us. And by the way very positive on both fronts - spoiler alert - I have some really good things to share about both of those experiences.

Bonni: [00:03:10] And then I did realize that it was actually my first full semester using the task manager called OmniFocus and that's a Mac only one I will not be spending too much of the episode on it.

Bonni: [00:03:21] But since that was my first full semester using it I wanted to share just a couple of resources. And again I won't spend too much time on that piece of it since I know we have many windows listeners as well.

Bonni: [00:03:33] And then I have got a recommendation at the end so that's where we're headed today talking about some of the EdTech tools. Let's begin with Slack. Now, Slack is not showing up too much yet in the educational space.

Bonni: [00:03:45] It is primarily showing up in the business world you might have read about them in Fast Company or Wired Magazine talking about how so many businesses are just challenged by communicating via e-mail that it's difficult for people to communicate the way that they want to.

Bonni: [00:04:03] And so trying to rethink what would email look like today if e-mail had never existed because there were some limitations at the time way back when that no longer exists. But sometimes we're you know we're sort of trapped behind our perceptions of what a particular kind of communication looks like.

Bonni: [00:04:20] And so from their website they call themselves "Team Communication for the 21st century." Imagine all your team communication in one place instantly searchable available wherever you go.

Bonni: [00:04:32] And if you're like me you might be thinking oh well but that's kind of like e-mail me my e-mails on my phone and it's on my computer and I can share messages and they're searchable.

Bonni: [00:04:42] Well this is an entirely different way visually than looking at e-mail. It's a little bit more like looking at Twitter or Facebook as far as a stream of a conversation or we can divide those conversations instead of just by individual e-mails by what they called channels in a channel starts with a hashtag.

Bonni: [00:05:01] So it looks a bit like something you might see on Twitter categorizing things. Channels include messages, files, comments, inline images and video, rich line summaries, and integration with services you use every day like Twitter, Dropbox, and Google Drive.

Bonni: [00:05:19] So as an example one of the channels that we created for my business ethics class that I taught was a channel for the project management that was happening around our business ethics competition and I had three people who were the event planners for that competition and they had to do things like find what case studies were going to use.

Bonni: [00:05:41] And find judges from the business community and promote the event and select the teams. And all of that type of thing and so we had to have a channel where we had a private channel for just the group of us because we didn't want the other people in the class who might participate in the business ethics competition.

Bonni: [00:06:00] Hearing what cases were going to be used and getting to have a preview of them in advance. That other team members who weren't in the class wouldn't have the advantage of seeing.

Bonni: [00:06:09] So you can have public channels that everyone can kind of keep tabs on even if they're not necessarily working on that particular project or things related to that channel or you can have it as private we chose private for the event planning.

Bonni: [00:06:20] Everything else was public in our class. And so imagine for that particular event we were working on the agenda and Slack integrates with services like Dropbox.

Bonni: [00:06:32] So instead of if if I were to email someone the file of the agenda email the three people who are our event planners okay here's the latest agenda. And then they were going to open on their computers and then e-mail it back. The problem is that no one would know who had the latest version of it.

Bonni: [00:06:49] Well if it's integrated with Dropbox all the changes are thinking back and forth with Dropbox so we always know that we're looking at the latest version unlike if we were on e-mail together. So it's one big advantage of Slack and something that worked very well for us.

Bonni: [00:07:05] I also had the default channels. There's a general channel that slack sets up for you automatically and a random channel. I liked that because it gave me a little bit of freedom.

Bonni: [00:07:15] I try to really respect students time and attention and sometimes I'll have something that'll come up that maybe doesn't deserve the same attention that something else might. But I still think they might think it's neat.

Bonni: [00:07:28] I'll give you one example. We had a lizard come into our class at night when I got this really funny picture of one of the students holding the lizard really close to his face and just this close up picture of the face and the lizard it was really a good shot. If I don't say so myself.

Bonni: [00:07:44] And so I didn't put that in the general but I put it in the random one and thought that that was just a good way for people to kind of build community who didn't already know each other. That type of thing.

Bonni: [00:07:56] And then the first class I had an exercise where I put a bunch of eight and a half by 11 piece of paper taped up all around the classroom and then they went around with sticky notes and paired up with someone and responded to things to two these questions that were posted around.

Bonni: [00:08:12] Like who do you consider to be a particularly ethical person and why. And one person by the way had shared that there's a boyfriend girlfriend in the class and said oh it's her because she reports her taxes even for her babysitting money.

Bonni: [00:08:23] And I thought well that's really certainly something to admire and good ethical thing to hold up. And I took a picture of some of those responses the sticky notes and put those in the random category as well so people could see and have a memory of what we shared on that particular night.

Bonni: [00:08:43] So we had again #general #random.

Bonni: [00:08:45] I had a channel for movie nights. We had some movie nights at our house and that's where I could include our address and people could go out there and arrange carpools. And it was really nice because I guess in the past I have always been particularly sensitive to people who may not have cars. And this time it just worked so well they could...

Bonni: [00:09:03] I didn't feel like I had to necessarily babysit the process. They all just really were able to use the tools so quick and oh what time do you get done with class and it all just happened so quick and collaboratively it really worked well.

Bonni: [00:09:16] And then for a future movie nights they could always just go back to that channel and they knew that's where the address was of our house. And that kind of thing and then on that night if anyone got lost or was late or whatever I mean.

Bonni: [00:09:25] Or it was just a nice place for us to communicate anything about the movie nights that we had including can somebody bring bread cause we realized we didn't have enough bread for our Italian dinner and someone got the message in time off of Slack and was able to bring the little bit of extra food that we needed it was great. And so Slack turned out as far as the

feedback from students. They really liked and they liked the search ability of being able to go back.

Bonni: [00:09:51] They liked the different channels and how easy it was to use particularly Slack shines when it comes to mobile devices. So pretty much any mobile device that somebody had in the class it connected to it. We did have one individual who as he said himself had a dumb phone. Not a smartphone. And so he was able to have the advantage of the immediacy as one big downside and he also had to remember to go check Slack.

Bonni: [00:10:20] So I will say that I continued using the service called Remind. And Remind I've shared on other shows but that's just an easy way to send a text message to everyone in the class whether or not they have a smartphone its text based.

Bonni: [00:10:34] Or it can be text based that's the way I use it primarily. So nobody gets left out. So if it was a crucial message that had posted on slack or if I sent out an email I would I could send that remind message and say: "Hey, I posted my address. Make sure you go look for it," or what have you.

Bonni: [00:10:50] So that worked well so that nobody in the class got left out of really crucial communication. But that certainly was a downside. But the student would self admittedly say it's a downside for a lot of his life as a student not having a smartphone when everybody else in the class has one.

Bonni: [00:11:06] Certainly he doesn't have the kind of immediate communication that other students get the benefit of that was something that came up but I don't certainly say that this is something about Slack it's just more about any communication tool we would have used that relies on smartphones something beyond a text message.

Bonni: [00:11:23] Thats just always going to be a downside that people have to go check things. But I did have some students when we were giving some feedback at the end of the semester. Again this is not specific about Slack.

Bonni: [00:11:33] There was nothing but positive things said about the use of Slack but just that different professors use different tools and a number of students mentioned it was difficult to remember all these different places they had to go check.

Bonni: [00:11:47] So if the a lot of them in the class they have the webapp and they had it set up where they would get a notification there or how they think it's their preference whether they get a notification or not. What that notification looks like how distracting it is for them I mean they have full customization of the app.

Bonni: [00:12:04] Like that and how it's going to behave. So again the ones with smartphones that's something they really really liked but some of them that don't use their smartphone are or they were just more oh had to remember different places to go and look.

Bonni: [00:12:18] And again that's just something that we all get into. I was thinking I wish I could remember where I had read about this but someone was talking about how easy it is for all of us as professors to lose that sense of empathy for our students and what it's like.

Bonni: [00:12:33] And actually originally it was Grant Wiggins who wrote the book Backward Design. It turned out his daughter had written an article about going and sitting in class and just how physically painful it is to sit for that long.

Bonni: [00:12:49] And she had forgotten that. And so that was a big conversation that was happening a lot on social media. And then someone more recently again and I wish I could remember who this was but was saying you know the one of the best things we could do is have our sabbaticals where instead of going.

Bonni: [00:13:03] And doing some big research project we go back and get in touch with what it's like to be a student and take a full load. And boy that just kept percolating in the back of my mind I thought oh my gosh what would that be like?

Bonni: [00:13:16] Quite frankly at this season of my life with two small children, I just think it would be horrible. Think it would be really really challenging. And even just the thought of it has made me be a little bit more empathetic to what it must be like for our students.

Bonni: [00:13:31] I don't know. It's something that I sort of toy with maybe at some point when our children are a little bit older to maybe revisit [because] I think that would be a hugely powerful experience that would really raise the awareness of exactly what it is our students go through as they go through school.

Bonni: [00:13:50] The next tool I'd like to share about is Piazza. And as I mentioned this is a Q and A tool. And it was recommended by Doug McKee back on episode 35 and of course one thing I want to mention right upfront if any of us were to incorporate Piazza.

Bonni: [00:14:07] It is yet another service for students to have to have a log in for to remember to go and check or at least to discover how to customize their email preferences and set it up for what's going to work the best for them.

Bonni: [00:14:21] And I did keep Slack as my one tool for students but she did a little bit and experimented with Piazza as I mentioned at the beginning of the episode with a Teaching In Higher Ed book club.

Bonni: [00:14:34] So we had a rough reading schedule that I kept pinned as opposed to the very top post so people can kind of keep track on where we were and any of us myself included could post a question or post information and could do that around different categories it could be I had.

Bonni: [00:14:52] I had divided the book has this is how David Allen divides his book into part one part two part three posts so I had part 1 part 2 part 3 as 3 different folders if you will of different messages people could post or I could post and then I had one for resources and a last one for logistics.

Bonni: [00:15:12] So what Piazza does is you have different question posts and you can categorize them around these different folders so that they're grouped appropriately and kept organized. And when someone answers a question a professor could answer a question.

Bonni: [00:15:28] But students could also answer questions and one of the things that Doug had said in that episode was how nice it is to have that kind of collaborative learning and that in his classes he saw it as a way to deepen the learning.

Bonni: [00:15:42] When students start answering each others questions and the way that Piazza is designed is say I was reading another student's post and I'm a student in the class too and I go oh they didn't quite get it right.

Bonni: [00:15:54] I can actually edit to their original post in a wiki style fashion so that we cultivate together the best answer to someone's question. Well in our

case for the book club we weren't too keen on having other people edit our posts.

Bonni: [00:16:11] A person had expressed some concern over that so we decided to do was just agree to a norm that we wouldn't edit each other's posts even though there isn't a way to turn that functionality off at least not yet. As of when I last communicated with the people over Piazza and that worked just fine although one person accidentally edited someone else's post.

Bonni: [00:16:33] But the thing is it's just like a Wiki. You can go back in history and return the message back to how it was in its original form so it's not too much of a concern if someone goes in and starts going crazy editing things and breaking other people's answers.

Bonni: [00:16:48] You can track back through all the different revisions that have been made and get it to be back to its original or maybe two steps in or however you want to do that. And so it really was a pretty easy tool to get started on.

Bonni: [00:17:04] The one thing that came up for us was that I told people, "Well you can either get invited by going to this class link," and I would post the link to the individual class we had set up on Piazza, "or I can invite you via e-mail."

Bonni: [00:17:19] So the people who went via the class link it wanted them to have the same .edu email address as my institution and wouldn't let them in. So I didn't know that in advance. And so now I'll know that either I have to tell students hey you can use this class link but you have to use your our university .edu email. Or to invite all of the students via there their custom invite and then anybody can use any email address that they want to.

Bonni: [00:17:50] So that was a little bit of a stumbling block just because I didn't know that in advance but that was not something that kept us back too far and once people were in the system it was smooth.

Bonni: [00:18:00] A very nicely designed tool. It's very user friendly. It works just like Microsoft Word as far as typing a post and is super clear. And I think it will work nicely for future classes to be able to have this as a tool for people to ask and answer questions.

Bonni: [00:18:20] And I think the big thing for me from my history if it's any indication is to then insist if I get an email from a student I'll have to be good

about writing them back and saying this is something that the whole class would benefit from.

Bonni: [00:18:33] Please post it on Piazza and I'm sure the first couple of times that will be irritating to students. I can have. By the way a text expander snippet to make sure that I am explaining why and thanking them for their question.

Bonni: [00:18:45] I certainly didn't want to sound rude over email but just funneling people into Piazza. So we start to build this real community of learning together. The one downside that I can see and I haven't talked to Doug about this yet but the one downside I could see is I wish because I already know what the Frequently Asked Questions are.

Bonni: [00:19:04] In the classes that I've taught a lot of times. I wish there were ways to carry questions over and their associated answers so that you could have sort of evergrowing wiki of questions and answers.

Bonni: [00:19:18] It seems to me like you can copy some things over like I could have folders of things that had posts in them. Maybe I have 3 posts about when you start your business plan and 3 posts about finance and accounting or whatever it is that stuff will carry over but the questions that students have asked get blanked out and you're starting over from scratch almost like having a little baseline template.

Bonni: [00:19:44] But I just kind of didn't see a way of having frequently asked questions that come across every time I teach a class for the next time. That was something I didn't see and I think is a downside. And my early views of the tool to how it might work but I will self admit that only using it for the bookclub.

Bonni: [00:20:03] I'm sure I missed out on all kinds of great things that it can do so I'm still open I was super impressed. I mean I can't say enough positive things about both Slack and Piazza as great tools to consider using with your students.

Bonni: [00:20:14] If you have a use case that they will be good fits for and the last one I'd like to just share briefly about is Omnifocus. I'm not going to spend too much time because I don't like this to be a Mac only podcast but since I was my first full semester on it I wanted to mention that in the show notes which this is the forty ninth episode.

Bonni: [00:20:33] It's crazy. We're going to do 50 here real soon and have some feedback from you on what you've gotten out of the show but if you go to teachinginhighered.com/49 I will have all the show notes.

Bonni: [00:20:45] And one of the things that's in it. Are all of the posts or the bookmarks that I have saved on Omnifocus. And if you wanna check those out articles or videos that I have found helpful as I've gotten up to speed on Omnifocus.

Bonni: [00:20:58] If you recall I was somewhat reluctant to make the change I was using a tool called Rememberthemilk.com and really liked to they had my mobile app all set up I had the web service set up. It was completely customized for how I managed my time.

Bonni: [00:21:14] And there were some things that didn't carry over to Omnifocus because I had to rethink how I did certain things and one of the resources that I found tremendously helpful is a man named Tim Stringer who runs a website called learnomnifocus.com.

Bonni: [00:21:33] And he has a couple of ways that he can offer support. He has a membership where you can on a monthly basis have access to a bunch of articles and videos that he's created.

Bonni: [00:21:44] He also does coaching, I paid for an hour of coaching with him and he just completely transformed the way I was thinking about some of these things as I was making that transition really helpful.

Bonni: [00:21:55] And one of the other things that was so helpful about the coaching that I did with him was afterward he sent me a sample database and then I could tinker around with it and see how he had set things up and just branch out how I was thinking about approaching the structure of it because that's so key there.

Bonni: [00:22:13] So Tim Stringer and learnomnifocus.com is one of the best resources I could recommend. Whether or not you wanted to do individual coaching or whether you wanted to think about the membership program that he has is very reasonably priced in a good way to get up to speed.

Bonni: [00:22:28] And even if you're not in a position right now to pay to do any kind of membership program he has a lot of resources on the site that are free and continues to add those for marketing purposes.

Bonni: [00:22:37] So he's a great great resource there. This is the point in the show where we do recommendations I should say I do recommendations because no one else is here with me today and I wanted to talk earlier when we were saying the different places that students have to check for things it's one other Web site they have to go.

Bonni: [00:22:57] One of the big things I see whether it's my undergraduate students all the way up to my doctoral students is really both a security issue and also an issue of effective management of our time and that is how people treat log ins and passwords.

Bonni: [00:23:15] So many of us know the dangers of having the same password that we use for different sites. And what happens if one site gets hacked and then all of a sudden if we've used that same password on other websites what that could possibly mean for all of the various accounts that we have.

Bonni: [00:23:34] It's really a dangerous thing for us to do. And today it is so easy through programs like the one I'm going to recommend today which is called 1Password to have exactly what the name says one single password.

Bonni: [00:23:48] That then gets you into a system that has all the powerfully created passwords that are unique from each other and have the right number of characters to not be easily guessable and we'll really really up your game. And 1 password is incredible.

Bonni: [00:24:05] I could spend an entire show just telling you about all the features of 1Password. I like it because it's one of those tools you can start out real small with and get even more maximizing the value of it. As you learn more about it as you go along and so instead of me explaining too much of the features I'm just going to play a real quick it's a just over a minute video.

Bonni: [00:24:28] Obviously you're not going to see the video but you're going to hear the audio so that you can hear from the people who make one password agile bits a little bit about what their tool does.

Bonni: [00:24:38] And by the way I'm recommending 1Password but there is another good one called keypass. There are a number of services that are like one password that will allow you to protect yourself and also save so much time. I just love that everything that's password or credit card or identity or secure note related is all in one tool so here's a quick bit about one password.

1Password Video Audio: [00:25:06] You have hundreds of accounts for websites apps and services. And each one gets a password. Most of us take something easy to remember our dog's name backwards. Plus the year of our first kiss and use that for everything. Easy. Sure. Secure. No not at all.

1Password Video Audio: [00:25:23] If one account were to get compromised your whole life could be turned upside down. The smart thing to do would be create a unique password for every account. Right. Secure. Sure. Easy. No not at all.

1Password Video Audio: [00:25:37] So what do you do. Write them in a notebook. Sticky notes make up a song. Now what you do is use a super smart super simple app called one password with one password. All you need is one password. What the app does is collect all your unique passwords into one super safe place and locks them up behind something only you know your password and it's integrated right there in your browser.

1Password Video Audio: [00:26:03] So when it's time to log in just click the button. Enter your one password and you're in. Here's another cool thing. You come to a new site that asks you to make a new account. 1password will generate a new secure password for it and save it where it needs to go. Next time you want to go to that site just hit the button. One password will do its thing. And you're in.

1Password Video Audio: [00:26:26] And it's not just for passwords it's for all sorts of information you need to keep safe bank numbers credit cards top secret ideas files anything all locked up or no one can get to them with you with your one password.

1Password Video Audio: [00:26:40] And your passwords are with you wherever you are because your one password syncs automatically between every computer and device here. So it's always up to date no more sticky notes no more dog names just you and your one password.

Bonni: [00:26:58] He said it better than I ever could have said it and a lot more concisely so I'm going to leave off now with my recommendation of 1Password and hope that you will consider it if you're not already using it.

Bonni: [00:27:09] And I also would love to hear from you on the show notes that teachinginhighered.com/49. What edtech tools did you try out this semester or

this academic year that you'd recommend that people might want to check out for our next academic year.

Bonni: [00:27:29] Once again thanks for listening to this episode of Teaching In Higher Ed. Come on over to the show notes at teachinginhighered.com/49. Let us know what EdTech tool you tried out this academic year so we can be thinking about that. For those of us that have the summer off and want to consider incorporating something new into the fall and next episode is Episode 50.

Bonni: [00:27:52] So I'm looking forward to sharing what so many of you have called in or emailed in to say that you've gotten out of listening to the show and I'll look forward to the next 50 episodes.

Bonni: [00:28:03] As always if you have not yet subscribe to the weekly newsletter that gets you all the show notes with the links of everything that we talk about in the shows. And also a weekly article except for the last two weeks on Teaching that said teachinginhighered.com/subscribe I'll see you next time.

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