

**Bonni:** [00:00:00] Today on episode number 218 of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast, Alan Levine shares how he creates courses as stories.

**Production Credit:** [00:00:12] Produced by Innovate Learning, maximizing human potential.

**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 and 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:** [00:00:49] Joining me on today's episode is Alan Levine, who I have admired for a long time and I'm so glad to have him on today's episode. Alan Levine is recognized for applying new technologies to education. He is a pioneer in the web since the early 90s and an early proponent of blogs and RSS, which is real simple syndication. Alan shares his ideas and discoveries at CogDogBlog, which is totally worth a look. Among his recent interests are new forms of web storytelling and creativity, as you'll hear about in today's episode, including 50+ Web 2.0 Ways to Tell a Story, pechaflicker, and StoryBox), leading and teaching the open digital storytelling class, ds106, teaching and building sites for connected courses like Networked Narratives and an leasing these strange things called SLOs. You can read more of Allen's impressive and eclectic biography at [teachinginhighered.com/218](http://teachinginhighered.com/218).

**Bonni:** [00:01:58] But before I bring him on the show, I want to mention his personal interests include digital photography, bending WordPress to his whims, and randomly dipping into the infinite rivers of the Internet. Alan, welcome to Teaching in Higher Ed.

**Alan:** [00:02:13] Awesome it's great to be here. I'm honored.

**Bonni:** [00:02:15] I have been following your work for so long. And one of the things that has come up more recently is your Net Narratives class and I really want to focus in on that a lot today. But before I get too excited and start diving down into some of the details, could you just talk a little bit about how it came about and some of the ways that it's different from quote on quote "normal classes?"

**Alan:** [00:02:38] Sure. It really came about from my colleague the first time we taught it in 2070, Mia Zimora, who does a lot of electronic literature and great work at Kean University in New Jersey. We got to know each other through digital media lab project and she started messaging me that she would be interested in sort of co-teaching a class that would combine elements that she teaches in electronic literature with stuff that I've been doing with media is ds106. And we had some back and forth over the summer and then we met at DML conference. We just were at this table. We were running around so many wild ideas, people were coming over to see what all the commotion was. We just got a lot of creative ideas. The metaphor of alchemy kind of came out of that and we wanted to be playful and mysterious. It came from that. And because of some of those ways, and I'll talk more about the format, in which it taught, we had a latitude to be creative in the class structure.

**Bonni:** [00:03:43] Tell me more about alchemy and how that for you two just came to represent that playfulness.

**Alan:** [00:03:49] I've sort of been on the digital storytelling thing since the mid 90s and it's been the thing that I have kind of woven in everything I do. And definitely it came into ds106. We were talking about earlier that there always seems to be- people want to talk about what makes stories work? Why are stories important? They show the cave walls. And they talk about campfires. And so we start saying like what if we pretend there's like this magic sort of element, or potion, or essence that we can't fully understand but we start to harness it?

**Alan:** [00:04:24] And so that somehow lead to thinking about the idea of alchemy is sort of a metaphor for experimenting and trying to create things with digital content as opposed to air or fire and water. My knowledge of alchemy was not very deep, just enough to sort of latch on to that as a metaphor. And this is kind of come into the way I go about my projects, some of my other projects that I'm involved with- two of them are this professional development project in Mexico at the University of Guadalajara. The first time we went there, we're talking about like the broad aims of the program and I was responsible for

building the website design and helping design the program. I was like "wait a minute, we can't start until we have a metaphor. I can't do anything yet."

**Bonni:** [00:05:11] Yeah.

**Alan:** [00:05:12] So I have the thing to wrap, weave and tie everything to. I think a lot too in film with the idea of continuity. So it's got to be something that is flexible that you can bend and leave with it, but it also ties it together from beginning to end.

**Bonni:** [00:05:31] That really, to me, just exemplifies what you are so gifted at doing. Bending things, stretching them, changing them, yet there still is something holding it together. And I don't think that's easy.

**Alan:** [00:05:45] To me is kind of fun. And I would say like the Internet, especially Twitter, was just made for kids like me who were labeled "smart asses" in school and just got in trouble because they did everything that was sarcasm. And it's an ideal place to be able to play with the ideas and like you know "is he pretending or is he real?" Or to wear different identities. And so it just seems kind of natural.

**Bonni:** [00:06:12] One of the places that you do that on your site and of course I want to hear more about just this framework that you use, but I can't resist talking about in the upper right hand corner you have- for listeners, in case you're not familiar, with this term a "hamburger menu"- and you've probably seen a hamburger menu, you just might not know that that's what it's called. So on mobile devices, in particular, if the menu is too big to show all the way across a screen, then they've now transferred that to be little 3 horizontal lines stacked right up on each other. And we now have, most of us have been trained, "oh that's something I could click on" and then it drops down.

**Bonni:** [00:06:46] And so you have in the upper right hand corner a hamburger menu. So I know instantly I can go click on that, but then right next to it you have the words "Do not click."

**Alan:** [00:06:57] You're I think the first person who asked me directly about that. And actually I love that you know it's the hamburger menu of course because you're in the field. But I think it's in this WordPress theme that I use. And I used it on another site. And I found that people- so I knew that it's a menu indicator, but some people didn't.

**Alan:** [00:07:20] I started fiddling with the CSS and the theme for the site just to put a little open text next to it, so people get a little idea that it's something to click. And then just with the whole idea with NetNarr about trying to make it mysterious. It just was like this funny thing for me. If you say "do not click" I would think a lot of people will click. And then sometimes I change content in there. And actually there's probably some bad links now. But I would throw like some message in like "congratulations you have proven your ability to click and explore." So it was a little bit- there are some places where you can do stuff that aren't essential and I have been wanting to write about this for a while.

**Alan:** [00:08:04] And Mia and I did this. Every week we did the series of short intro videos. Generally videos are- most interesting, they're content or they're introductions. And so we did these videos that were really non-essential. We just were creating the story element. And so we would get together once a week on a Sunday or weekend and I would tell Mia "OK. You're going to pretend that this box on your desk is sort of affecting your brain." And we just adlib and over time we improved the story that there were these alchemists from another dimension who were trying to hack us. So that whole story emerged as we went along. But those videos we did were totally non-essential to the course.

**Alan:** [00:08:49] But for Mia and I, it kind of helped us while we were talking, you know we got together every week to talk about it. But it kind of gave us again that thread that we wanted to tie our course to instead of the driving thing of course being the syllabus. And that's what I've been wanting to write about is that having a plot drive your course rather than the syllabus.

**Bonni:** [00:09:09] Talk more about that. Share with us the structure then- I love this idea that we don't have to take ourselves so seriously. Guess what. There are going to be non essential elements of our class and we can be more playful with them. If we try to act like every word that we might assign in some way is sacred, then it really diminishes the value of that which really is fundamental.

**Bonni:** [00:09:35] So tell us then a little bit more about how did you- what were some of the "plot points", to use your analogy, in the course and then how did you bend it and make it more flexible as you went?

**Alan:** [00:09:49] Again, I'll credit Mia. She introduced me to this idea of course spying.

**Bonni:** [00:09:52] Yeah. Talk about that.

**Alan:** [00:09:54] We do have a syllabus and it's got policies and important information. But it doesn't have the course sliced and diced into these weekly chunks with readings, etc. Not to say that that's not important. And so we do have some latitude with this course because it is a creative course. And honestly the spine is basically we set aside these periods that are generally about a month that we wanted to have these broad themes.

**Alan:** [00:10:21] So the first two weeks are always getting set up and oriented, students are creating social media accounts and setting up blogs, getting to understand how we work. But then the first theme was, we did something like digital art. And so we knew we wanted to do four weeks of activities and conversations around digital art.

**Alan:** [00:10:40] And then the next one was something about connecting to the world. The third one was this concept that we called the mirror world, where we explored a parallel universe that students inhabited. So we just set those out broadly in the beginning as these general things we knew we wanted to do. But largely, we were kind of inventing, we had somethings that we knew we had planned.

**Bonni:** [00:11:05] One thing that worked really well, in February we had these weekly studio visits. So we would rather than inviting guest experts to come into our course to present, we would go in and have conversations by Google Hangout. So we met with Leonardo Flores in Puerto Rico who's a poetry expert. We had two women who run a great podcast on fanfiction. And Howard Rheingold and his daughter.

**Alan:** [00:11:35] It was a chance to bring some voices into the class but more in a conversational mode like right now. And then in March, we had these virtual bus tours. So we set up times for our students to visit other students in other classes. So some with a colleague in Mexico and we did Maha Bali in Egypt. And my friend Kate Bells in Australia. Sort of with a general theme that we wanted to talk about, but also a chance for students to talk to other students in the other part of the world.

**Alan:** [00:12:07] And here's the thing I learned from this experience. Around the world, the most common topic that came up as a problem in schools was parking on campus.

**Bonni:** [00:12:15] No matter where you go, there are some things we have in common.

**Alan:** [00:12:23] At least in New Jersey, Mexico, Cairo, and Australia.

**Bonni:** [00:12:29] That's really funny. I work at a small, private institution. I don't actually know the acreage, but it's very small so I do chuckle at my students who are like "Oh the parking" and I'm like Oh, did you have to walk three minutes instead of two to get to your class? I also want to take him over to the University of California Irvine where I used to work and be like now that, that is a parking problem where you are going to spend 25 minutes to walk to your class that's a little different. Or take a shuttle on your way there. Yes, that's great.

**Bonni:** [00:12:58] And I want to step back a little bit. When you talk about virtual bus tours, what most of us would have called that was a webinar or what would normally be called? A guest speaker. We have these words that we have created in academia and they don't generate any sort of excitement or a sense of anticipation, but the moment I heard a virtual bus tour. I just wanted to join. I didn't know anything about it but it just sounds fun and interesting. And like we might go somewhere cool.

**Alan:** [00:13:34] And we did have sort of activities that were done before. So I run this like a version of the ds106 daily create where there's a daily media exercise. And some of the ideas that came out of a conversation with our colleague Jeff Gervalt who just retired from running the Vermont Young Writer's Project. He talked about this thing- we wanted to sort of- it was 2016, the election stuff was looming. We wanted to roll some civic imagination things in the course. But in the conversation when we're planning the course, he had talked about sort of this idea about people sharing what's important about the place they live, their neighborhood and we talked about some experience with connecting kids in Vermont with kids in urban northern New Jersey. And they had common bonding over things like trees in their neighborhoods.

**Alan:** [00:14:23] So we wanted to think about what people could talk about. So like for the Mexico visit, we had a food theme. So we had a photo exercise where people took a picture of their spice cabinets. So we talked about different spices that people have. Then we asked them "what's your favorite local restaurant?" Then we have for the students in Mexico we asked them to look up New Jersey to try to find a good restaurant. And then asked the kids "is that place really good?" And they be like "No! It's terrible. It's assembly line food." So doing some things of connecting over that for part of the visit. But in that one, there was this really beautiful moment where one of our students asked the

students in Mexico just like "how does it feel to hear the stuff that's coming out of the United States about Mexico?".

**Alan:** [00:15:14] And there was like this all the little pause. And then they gave this really beautiful kind of honest but genuine response. And that was really a beautiful moment in terms of getting people to talk to each other face to face and not just at this level of shouting across social media. And so the more things we can I think get people to understand each other. That sounds like you know a Kumbaya sort of thing- I had this great moment happen Bonni. There were a class, they were sitting in the professor's office in Mexico.

**Alan:** [00:15:49] And so we could see on the wall it was very bright. There was sunlight coming in. And my students were in New Jersey where it was like snow outside. And someone else said "show us what is outside your window!" Just totally spontaneously and we could see one of the students took us down the hallway. She was cradling her iPod like she was hugging us. And she walked out on this patio and showed us the view out towards the beach. And then they were like "show us your window!" And our students are turning the laptop to show snow and the cold. I mean that's really simple.

**Bonni:** [00:16:23] Yeah.

**Alan:** [00:16:23] But again for people to connect over commonalities. And that was one of the goals we wanted to aim at the course is just instead of thinking about the world through these headline news stories, think about it through the experiences that people have living in these different communities.

**Bonni:** [00:16:42] I took I critical pedagogy classroom Sean Michael Morris and he had us do something similar where, just show us this space where you are taking this class. That was not something as grand as what you just described, but it made it to me feel a little bit more that we could connect with each other. That we're not just this- no one who would sign up for a class like that is just trying to get through it, because you wouldn't do it otherwise- but I wonder if you could talk a little bit more about DS106, the daily create as a potential way to help those of us that feel ill equipped to do this kind of creative work that we might just be able to gradually build on these small exercises.

**Alan:** [00:17:29] Yeah. Well there are so many things I love about the DS106, but that's one of my favorites. I've used that in so many projects. It came in the beginning because in DS106 we start teaching telling stories through pictures and helping people improve their own photographic skills. There was a thing

that was going on at the time by two professional photographers called The Daily shoot. And so every day there site published a chance like take a picture of contrasting colours or take a picture that shows converging lines.

**Alan:** [00:18:01] So it was kind of something I was doing my own daily photo project. But this kind of gave you a specific thing to look for. And then you participated by replying in Twitter. So we used it for a year or two in DS106 when teaching visual skills. And then they stopped doing it. I think they are tired or the photographers moved on. And so we get this idea like what if we build our own?

**Alan:** [00:18:26] And Tim Owens, who was at UMW at the time did the first version of the daily create. And so instead of just being visual, we kind of made it around different kind of media themes. And so since then, I've kind of rewrote it as a generic WordPress theme that anybody can use. But the idea is basically every day it published. You schedule a couple of days in advance, a different kind of challenge. For my students when I'm teaching, I'll say "your requirement is to do 3 dail whatever's a week." In NetNarr, it's Daily Alchemy.

**Alan:** [00:18:59] And so they get to pick the ones that they do. And they're low stakes. So they're not- my frame is it should be something you can do in 15 minutes. Like you read it in the morning, you think about it, you can go take that picture or you can mash up two sounds together or you can write up your haiku. And so in some ways they're meant just to have people try some things they haven't done before but also get creative with how they interpret it.

**Alan:** [00:19:26] And since they're not really graded, it doesn't really matter. So it's low states. And generally there is what this arc of excitement that students get to. And then I find about two thirds of the way in the semester it starts to become a chore. And so I start to drop it off as a requirement. But generally I do things like during the semester you have to contribute because there are former people can make their own two dailys to the mix. So they get to see their challenge come out of it.

**Alan:** [00:19:54] But I just think the whole idea of having sort of something small that you do everyday to practice getting better at something, whether it's media, music, talking to an interviewer, whatever you want to get better at, you get better at by just practicing. And not like rote practicing, but stuff where you're kind of free to explore and so on. I try to pay attention and teaching when it starts look like it's becoming a chore to the students.



**Bonni:** [00:20:25] One of the key things you just pointed out- it isn't necessarily just the practice, but something happening after the practice whether that's some form of feedback or an opportunity to revisit that in some way. I think that's essential. You talk about interviewing, or podcasting, or whatever it is. Sometimes it looks easy, like I will say I go and I look at some of these- and by the way we haven't mentioned, DS stands for "Digital Storytelling." So this is a class that- I don't remember exactly what year it was started, 2014? Is that?

**Alan:** [00:20:58] 2011.

**Bonni:** [00:21:00] Okay so it's been around for a long time and various iterations of it have been taught. But it's also an open class. So there are people who signed up for this at an institution, but then people like me could join in whether it was for a single daily create or to witness other people creating daily create and never put something other of my own.

**Bonni:** [00:21:23] But just this idea of practicing- and then that we don't have to do it every day. So it's called the Daily Create, but I could say "well I'll just try one" or that kind of thing. What are some of the ways that feedback then happens as whether your students are doing the daily create or they're doing other things in your class? Talk about how their practice is informed by feedback from you, from Mia, and from the world at large.

**Alan:** [00:21:59] The year I started was the first open when I was a participant. And there was a lot of commingling of the Open participants and so that alone is an interesting element. In NetNarr, we've had luckily your contacts sometimes maybe 5 to 10 to 20 open participants, which is not massive but these are people- and there's a guy Kevin Hodgson, he's @dogtracks on Twitter. He's heavily involved in CLMOOC. He's a sixth grade teacher and musician and that guy, he comments so much, he gives students feedback. I think just that aspect of the class being more than the people in the room even if it's a virtual room is a radically different experience for students.

**Alan:** [00:22:50] And so that's why for all of some of its works and pains that Twitter works really well that able often for students to sort of expand their interaction and get feedback support from people outside the class. And with any class, the thing you want to cultivate is people kind of playing off of each other in terms of things. And not like "oh you have to do three comments per week" which I hate doing.

**Alan:** [00:23:17] Sometimes I'll design media assignments that require them to build off someone else's work or try to come up with some ways that doesn't force people, but makes them have to leverage their work off of the work that other people in the community are doing.

**Bonni:** [00:23:34] I'll have to go find it because I'm not seeing it right away but I really appreciate the way that you introduce people in the very beginning to these opportunities to engage. And again I will link to this because it's just masterful. But it reminds me a little bit- I don't want to minimize it- but it reminds me a little bit of a Choose Your Own Adventure kind of style. So I go in and I'm being introduced, which for some of the student you encounter, I'm sure this is just entirely new. And it says do you already use Twitter? And do you want to use your account? Great. Click here. Do you want to use Twitter but do you want to use a fictitious account? Well that's kind of interesting. I use twitter but I've never thought about having an alternate ego on there. Let me go see what that's about. Do you not use twitter but you'd like to? So I really need to be oriented to what this place is all about. Or do you not use Twitter and don't want to?

**Bonni:** [00:24:30] So could you talk a little bit about, well I think the first one is obvious. I use Twitter and so I'm going to engage in that way. But could you talk about fictitious accounts and how they might enrich someone's learning? And then we'll go through the other two as well.

**Alan:** [00:24:43] Sure sure. That's a part of the set up of the course because we want to create Twitter accounts, we have them create Hypothesis accounts and then blogs. They have to figure out things like RSS feeds. So it's a lot to do. So breaking it down in a series of questions and giving them options instead of mandating.

**Alan:** [00:25:02] So my last time around, most of my students, I'd say three quarters had Twitter accounts. It wasn't like Twitter was new to them. I do like to say for people who haven't done it before or maybe know of it but haven't created accounts, that when they just do some thinking ahead of time, they handle that you choose, the act. That's something they are kind of stuck with.

**Bonni:** [00:25:22] And so you don't have to use your name or use identifying information or when you set up your blog, don't call it "NetNarrBlog18" or something. The name is like a great opportunity to be creative. I always nag my students about making creative blog post titles, like don't bore me with your title. But with their name, there's no reason for this class that they have to identify "use Bonni in your name."

**Alan:** [00:25:48] And so generally a lot of students have nicknames they use in other spaces or they're free to pick something else. And so I see about half my students will do something creative and some of them will use their name. But I really want to give them the options because it's not really important in the Twitter space for us to know who they are and to give them experience to figure out how much they want to reveal as they go. If they want to put their name not on the @ part, but on the profile or not. And what they want to put in their profile. They can be mysterious. And the thing that we did the first year when Mia and I taught the course- in the mirror world part, there was a whole choosing characters and they had to create a second Twitter account that was their alchemist's alternative character that had to have a creative name. So we had a couple name generators. And it was really fun to see the creative names they came up with.

**Alan:** [00:26:45] Again, I just want to make sure that we're not forcing people to do Twitter. And I never had a student say I didn't want to do it. And I really only had one quazi negative experience with kind of a creepy character who was doing some commenting. And basically one of my students told me about it, we had a conversation and basically it was don't respond to this person, block them and don't engage them because that enraged them. I think they got bored whoever it was and they disappeared. I've been very fortunate in that aspect. But I'm rather vigilant about watching for that stuff.

**Bonni:** [00:27:21] And with regards to blogging, has it been the same experience as well that people are willing to give it a try?

**Alan:** [00:27:26] Yeah. Yeah. At Kean, especially in the writing studies program, where this is situated, they have a fair number of classes for students. It's not necessarily new to them. Sometimes it's more assignments than what we were doing. But a fair number, half generally it is pretty new and so they start with "this is my blog post." And by the end of the semester, I've seen some wonderful growth in terms of what I want them to be doing is less writing about "here's my assignment" and more writing about "this is why I chose to do it. This is where I got my materials from. This is my influences. This is what I was hoping to achieve. This is what worked. This is what didn't work." I'm wanting them to be writing about their process, not just showing me their media pieces they created.

**Alan:** [00:28:15] Getting students to stop reading like it's a homework assignment and more to- I had one student who just was remarkable in her ability, she got a whole kind of writing voice and a style with cross out of words and playfulness in

the writing that is really the gem to see. But for people new to it, like my own self it's like it took me like three or four years before I kind of found a way that it was more me than me just writing into a box.

**Bonni:** [00:28:47] I am embarrassed as I reflect back on my teaching. I started teaching educators probably four or so years ago and I didn't have the appreciation for those who would just be vehemently against any kind of sharing. And I'm much better at it now. But where I want to take myself even further is for there to be a real rich opportunity to share in a more private way. And so that's why I am enjoying it.

**Bonni:** [00:29:17] I think one of the things that I need to work on doing is to try to do some of my teaching outside of the learning management system because if I try to have it there- I will say it is nice because they're used to it, having assignment dates and there and then they can subscribe to the calendars and have it sharpen their calendars, there's a lot of benefits to providing you talk about the spine, have some of the spine within an LMS is particularly some of the dates, things that have points associated with them, I'm not opposed to that.

**Bonni:** [00:29:48] But since I'm trying to get them to unlearn some of this stuff, like you're saying, I don't want it to sound like a homework assignment. I want to get you to think about me less as an authority in your life and I want to mix up our thoughts of what it means to be a teacher, what it means to be a student.

**Bonni:** [00:30:03] And so I think if I could put it in something like a wordpress like you and have it more where they could prescribe how they want to use it... But then I've got to really improve on ok so what is the option for people who don't want to be on Twitter? They don't want to blog in a public way. Where can I send them so that it can be a rich experience? I don't know if you have any thoughts on that?

**Alan:** [00:30:27] Yeah yeah. It's because and I did listen to your episode with your student who was talking about how the LMS really helps her.

**Bonni:** [00:30:34] Yeah.

**Alan:** [00:30:35] The thing is to me, the reason my courses do this openness thing is because I want my students to have the experience of the network and understand that the network is an add. And it's not just I'm doing this because it's cool to be doing this in the open and I hate the LML. Our course is called Network Narratives. We're trying to understand how storytelling is enhanced

when it takes place in a network environment. And that's part of the curriculum or the design that we wanted to do.

**Alan:** [00:31:06] If I was teaching a course in mineralogy, I'd have to think about what is it that my students are gaining? Are they connecting with extracts around the world? Are they using open research? Are they publishing things that other people are going to use? So you know it has to have a purpose in the open space.

**Alan:** [00:31:25] And as far as the alternatives, I had some thoughts if the student did say they didn't want to do Twitter. So first of all, you don't need a Twitter account to read Twitter. So you can still participate in Twitter unlike some of the other social media platforms. So it's not like they couldn't get part of the experience. And I would probably think of some other way that I want them- so on the daily site, they respond to something they respond to a Twitter account with a hash tag and that's how it goes the site. If they don't want to do that, there's a comment thing at the bottom and they can still participate in the daily thing without having an account. Or it can have them write up their stuff in a different site.

**Bonni:** [00:32:08] You know there are cases and I've heard students in previous classes- I had one student who had an abusive spouse who was stalking her. We had to talk about things like spoofing your IP and it's like you find a way. And don't make everything so prescribed that it has to be done in one way. That's my motto. It also ends up being a lot of work.

**Bonni:** [00:32:31] I've started to use discussion boards just a little bit more. I can't stand them actually. I talk about having to unlearn things, they are just notoriously bad. And we've just ingrained "reply to three others" and I just, UGH. Anyway, I will use that as a means for sharing publicly to the class. So share your reflection paper there.

**Bonni:** [00:32:52] But if they don't want to then copy that and put it on their blog they don't necessarily have to. So just options different different levels of types of sharing. But I didn't realize that you could read Twitter without having a Twitter account, so that's an interesting thing for me to think about too because sometimes there are legitimate reason to not want to be on social media. Absolutely.

**Bonni:** [00:33:12] And then there are fears that are not substantiated that if you could see what was happening there, it might actually be interesting to you. So that that's a neat thing for me to contemplate a little bit about.

**Alan:** [00:33:23] Yeah. You don't get a stream but someone could follow the link to a search string with the class hashtag. And they can see what's going on. Some other way. Also the thing I use a lot, I use e-mail a lot. And sometimes we had discussions back and forth by email, it works. So there's there's lots of possibilities for the way you interact with students.

**Alan:** [00:33:48] And I should add the unique thing about the class the first year taught it, Mia was on the ground with the class, they met in a classroom in New Jersey. I was co-teaching remotely from where I was living in Arizona. So I would come in by Google Hangout and I was just like this head on the wall. We did this thing, I had a conference I went to in Toronto in late April. And I knew from past trouble that there's a direct flight from downtown Toronto into New York. So Mia and I planned this thing where we didn't tell our students. And I showed up in person and kind of popped out of the closet in the classroom. And the looks on their faces... It was one of my most precious moments in teaching.

**Alan:** [00:34:30] And then this past year, Mia had a Fulbright fellowship in Norway. But she arranged that I could still teach this class remotely and two of our previous students who were TA's in the class, Haley and Marissa were instrumental in facilitating. It was really hard and I would not want to do it that way again. It's really hard to read the room. And I just had to rethink most of the ways I did stuff and most the stuff we did in class time was activities that we designed and conversations. We did Twitter chats we did live hangouts. There is very little me talking to them.

**Bonni:** [00:35:07] This is the point in the show where we get to give some recommendations. I wanted to give two recommendations, one I already mentioned and that is go to the link that I'll have in the show notes and click on the "do not click" in the net narratives class and click on it a number of reasons. One just to see this kind of course design where there is if you go and look in the main body of his site, there's definitely structure, there's checklists. Checklists, a good way to- there is the spine idea that is throughout it. But then there's this playfulness and the sense of the unexpected. And you will be surprised how much you can be inspired by this course. So go go click on the "do not click."

**Bonni:** [00:35:45] And the second one is I wanted to recommend a blog- actually it was a keynote given by Sean Michael Morris at the University of

Warwick. It's entitled Imagination as a Precision Tool for Change. And I ended up reading his article of all places in Chuck E. Cheese which you know is where all the greatest intellectual work happens. If anyone is not aware of that because you're outside the US and you have not been exposed to this level of hell, this is a children's pizza restaurant where there's just games and overstimulated children and all this stuff. And I'm sitting there just weeping as I'm reading this beautiful, beautiful post and just thinking about my own failures in teaching. It was a very moving work, it's definitely worth a read but maybe read it when you've got tissues around and when you're not in the middle of Chuck E. Cheese because it's gonna take you on a trip. A really great post.

**Alan:** [00:36:41] That's how good Sean is, he can still get you to go that deep emotionally in Chuck E. Cheese. My course is about media and so I basically went through my pinboard bookmarks and there were 2 interesting tools that I came across. One is called Descript. You already do audio transcription. But it is a fee based service so I probably wouldn't use it because we don't have a budget for it. But what I liked about is they had this interesting concept that you submit your audio, it gets annotated, when you get it back, you can actually edit the audio by editing annotated text. So you remove a paragraph and it disappears from the audio and that really intrigues me as a way of editing because audio is the thing that people really struggle with. And until they understand that you can manipulate audio like text, audio is very intimidating.

**Alan:** [00:37:39] And the other one is this tool called InkleWriter, which comes from [inklestudios.com/ink](http://inklestudios.com/ink). It's sort of open source web tool for building Choose Your Own Adventure games which are some things that we explored in Networked Narratives. It replaced another free tool that was really good for it. Easier to use than Twine for doing these. You basically create these Choose Your Own Adventure games by editing a text file. There are certain codes for indicating someone making a choice. Basically these developers who use it for their commercial, I think their mobile games, released it as open source. I'm always looking out for different kinds of relatively simple tools that people do interesting things with.

**Bonni:** [00:38:29] Well it has been hard to keep myself only somewhat within the time for our interview because I so enjoy just getting into watch your work. Thank you so much for your time today and for listening to the episodes that you did and just being a part of this conversation.

**Alan:** [00:38:43] And thank you very much. I've been eager to be on the show.

**Bonni:** [00:38:48] What an honor it has been today to have the opportunity to talk to Alan Levine. You are such a creative educator and I feel like creative doesn't even do it justice. Thank you so much for how you inspire us and teach your courses and such an open way that we can actually digest some of it and use it in our classes as well.

**Bonni:** [00:39:08] And thanks to all of you for listening and being a part of that Teaching in Higher Ed community. If you want to get all the links to the great stuff that Alan shared- and I've got a lot of them this week- you'll want to be on the weekly email and you can subscribe at [teachinginhighered.com/subscribe](https://teachinginhighered.com/subscribe). And if you haven't been on the website in a while, you might want to check out the recommendations that's [teachinginhighered.com/recommendations](https://teachinginhighered.com/recommendations).

**Bonni:** [00:39:34] And Sierra and I are working on compiling all the recommendations that have ever been made on the show. So go check it out and see what's there. Maybe pick up a book, or some music, or a movie. See you next week. Bye.

*Teaching in Higher Ed transcripts are created using a combination of an automated transcription service and human beings. This text likely will not represent the precise, word-for-word conversation that was had. The accuracy of the transcripts will vary. The authoritative record of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcasts is contained in the audio file.*