

**Bonni:** [00:00:00] Today on episode number 172 of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast, John Warner shares about values interdisciplinary knowledge and pedagogy.

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

**Bonni:** [00:00:43] Hello this is Bonni Stachowiak and I am so excited today to be speaking with John Warner. He's a writer and teacher of writing was 17 years of experience across four different institutions the University of Illinois Virginia Tech Clemson and the College of Charleston is a contributing blogger at Inside Higher Ed that's the Just Visiting blog.

**Bonni:** [00:01:08] I read every single post with such interest and passion - and really as I mentioned to John feel like I already know him from just reading every word. But I didn't know he also is a weekly columnist for The Chicago Tribune where he writes as his alter ego the biblioracle and an editor at large for McSweeney's Internet Tendency. He's authored five books most recently a short story collection: Tough day for the army and is currently under contract for two books which I can't wait to read. One with Johns Hopkins UP and the other with Penguin about writing and teaching that will be published in 2018 and 2019. He currently holds the position of faculty affiliate at College of Charleston and lives in Mount Pleasant in South Carolina with his wife Kathy and their dogs Oscar and Truman.

**Bonni:** [00:02:02] John, welcome to Teaching in Higher Ed.

**John:** [00:02:05] Thanks for having me. It's an honor to be here. I'm a regular listener.

**Bonni:** [00:02:08] Well it is an honor to have you listening and as I mentioned in the intro I read what I thought was every word of your columns but it turns out that you also write for the column so I have a bunch of catching up to do now that I know that about you but I feel like I already know you so much. And one of the things I wanted to share was you posted a article on Inside Higher Ed: April 26th 2017. It was entitled My "last class." and i'm just have to admit to you. I just started weeping when I was reading it.

**Bonni:** [00:02:44] I was so sad because I wanted higher ed to be - I don't even know what words to describe it - I wanted it to be flexible enough. I wanted it to be an institution that could make it work for you and I was just so sad. But I feel like that a lot's happened since then and that there's a lot of hope, especially I just read in the bio about you writing a couple of books, which I can't wait to read. So could you maybe give us a little bit of background for people that haven't read that post and don't kind of know about your column and of course after today will hopefully you start reading it and then what's happened since then.

**John:** [00:03:20] Sure so I've always been a sort of accidental academic. I did my graduate studies in creative writing, because I was just interested in writing and wanted to be a writer. And then did not go into academia immediately afterwards I had a "real world job" as a marketing research consultant in Chicago where I'm from and was doing well at that and thought I found a profession even with multiple degrees in English.

**John:** [00:03:49] And this is what I would do. But, during that time, I got married and my wife was in is a veterinarian who wanted to go back for additional schooling and become a specialist in her field and that meant leaving Chicago. I started teaching, really, because she was training on college campuses to do her internship and residency and I had made it as a graduate student and I'd always enjoyed it. I just hadn't considered it a viable profession.

**John:** [00:04:16] So everywhere she moved I went with... First the University of Illinois for her internship. Virginia Tech for her residency. And I taught and I loved it and it became the thing that I wanted to do more than anything. So when she finished residency and we moved to Greenville South Carolina worked at Clemson for six years when she changed jobs and moved to Charleston, I came to Charleston.

**John:** [00:04:39] But, it's always been as a "contingent" faculty member a series of full time instructor lecturer jobs, only teaching. But the whole time I've been

writing, as well, publishing books and the column started when I came to - the Inside Higher Ed [column] started when I came to Charleston.

**John:** [00:05:01] My weekly column for The Chicago Tribune around the same time so, in a lot of ways I'd been doing the work of, you know, a tenure track professor - it's just that my particular lives are not joined in that way. I publish and I teach, but my teaching - specific teaching position - doesn't put any value on my publishing. For many, many years, this was not a problem - wasn't necessarily a problem financially, even though you know what the pay is like for contingent faculty. But I was fortunate in that my wife is a professional and I earn money through my writing.

**John:** [00:05:38] But over time, disconnects between what I believe to be important about education and writing and students became a tension that got harder and harder for me in my work, you know, to the point where I calculated that I was making about \$11 an hour in my last year, teaching, only teaching one class as an adjunct. So I knew I needed to at least take a break.

**John:** [00:06:04] I needed to see if there's a kind of life for me outside the classroom where school and teaching is not the organizing principle of my day and it is possible. I actually wrote a blog post today about the things I miss about teaching which are real and significant, but I'm surviving. It's different.

**John:** [00:06:30] I've always spent a lot of time alone writing but this is you know sort of every moment is is me in my computer in my office and busy with these projects you've mentioned, which is good, you know. But as you said in introducing me I wish that academia had space for people like me too.

**John:** [00:06:47] And I know over the years I've met dozens and dozens of people who want nothing more than to teach and impact students and are dedicated to their work, but also it ultimately becomes impossible because the conditions under which they're asked to work and the reason I lasted so long is really a consequence of being partnered with somebody who makes a good income and with earning outside income.

**John:** [00:07:14] And a kind of mentality and it said just sort of put one foot in from the other and do the job. It's exploitive. I say this not to ask anybody anybody to weep for me. I have an excellent life that anybody should envy.

**John:** [00:07:29] But the kind of lost resources of human beings who are wanting nothing more than to do this work that many of us find so important is a kind of

ongoing tragedy. And that's kind of guided a lot of the writing I do about higher education is the disconnects between the values we claim to hold for education - sort of developing people and helping them become the selves that they desire to be - and the practice of it which is often not organized around these values. And in a lot of ways that became a really interesting subject for me to write about. So it's been I guess it's over six years now that I've been blogging regularly and I thought that would have been impossible at the time I started.

**Bonni:** [00:08:17] You write, "My biggest regret for the moments is that I've taught my final class just as my values have come into alignment with my disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical approaches. In short I feel like I really know what I'm doing and how I should go about doing it. This more than anything is what will bring me back into the classroom. I have unfinished business."

**Bonni:** [00:08:41] And that's what you and I have decided to talk about today is this intersection of your values your disciplinary and actually I think you take that to interdisciplinary knowledge and pedagogical approaches. And we thought we might just chat a little bit about that and just - I loved - you and I have talked about the same length of time it would appear and I kind of have similar feelings in terms of how when you do to start to kind of - - this doesn't come easy.

**Bonni:** [00:09:10] This is a really long road and I'm - by no means am I done or anything even close to being done. But it is fun when you do start to see those intersection. So, let's talk a little bit. Am I right on that that we have a shared Google doc and I'm looking at one piece of it and I'm thinking know I think he said interdisciplinary knowledge. Could you talk a little bit about some of these intersections that you see?

**John:** [00:09:29] Well you know some of it is, you know... First, I couldn't agree more that it's sort of this journey of teaching. I mean one of the things I love most about it and why I think I have unfinished business is this iterative process where we try something, you see how it goes. It succeeds to some degree; it fails to another, and you get to do it again.

**John:** [00:09:52] The hard part about teaching I think for for many of us is that our initial exposure to teaching at least this was very true for me and I think this is generally true for others particularly perhaps people of our vintage. You weren't given a lot of insight into teaching when you started teaching.

**John:** [00:10:11] My primary mode when I started teaching was modeling after the people who had taught me when - not that I had always had great experiences in those classes - but I just kind of thought like, "Well, this is what college instructors do. We lecture, and we grade, and we judge, and we manage classrooms, and that sort of stuff," and the process for me has been very much figuring out what I actually care about - what I think is important.

**John:** [00:10:39] Desegregating things like achievement from learning. One, you know, took me years to realize that that grades may not reflect learning and I don't know why it took me so long because I had believed it of myself as a student for many years where I had to learn things even when my grades weren't good or I got good grades where I haven't learned much.

**John:** [00:11:02] But when you're in charge and that for me that came with a lot of kind of institutional weight like I have to do it in the way it's done. So I'm going to try to do this while being also somewhat true to myself. But things started to change over time. Ken Bain, who I know you've interviewed maybe even more than once...

**John:** [00:11:23] When I read his What the Best College Teachers Do, I realized I could give myself permission to experiment. To do things like get rid of my attendance requirement which used to have me fuming with myself. I'd be in class of now some student was over my attendance limit and didn't they know that they were going to make me docked their grades and why are they turning me into this horrible person who's not going to give them a B just because they missed six classes instead of five. Then I realized they didn't enjoy being that sort of sheriff or jailer. So I got rid of it and all of a sudden I realized I could make choices consistent with what I think is important.

**John:** [00:12:07] And over time that led to a lot of changes things like grading contracts, changing how I approach assignments, and all that stuff in and out of the classroom. In a sense that it is interdisciplinary really is I think a combination of pedagogy has as its own discipline intersecting with the discipline in which you work. I was not introduced to pedagogy as a discipline ever until I sort of introduced myself to it. You know I had had some good mentors when I was teaching and they would help but it was a lot of emulation a lot of trial and error.

**John:** [00:12:46] And then I realized there's this whole disciplinary group of people who have thought about these things long before I did and I should avail myself of their experience and expertise and it's informed my thinking

about my own work. Ever since I think about writing as a discipline and I think about pedagogical practices as a discipline and how those things intersect and interact.

**Bonni:** [00:13:11] We had our kids both in a couple of different weeks have had their back to school nights and sometimes when teachers find out that my husband and I have doctoral degrees and have backgrounds in education they sometimes - I don't know if intimidate is the right word - but it just creates this awkward dynamic and perhaps that's more on my end than on their end.

**Bonni:** [00:13:32] But the preschool teacher starts to say, "Well, I mean you already know all this stuff, you know." And I thought like I thought first of all there's not time to have a full discussion about this but a lot of people just don't realize that we're not trained in this stuff. I sort of grew up in my career doing corporate training. But it's funny because most of my experience doing corporate training made me realize I didn't know anything about teaching.

**Bonni:** [00:13:54] I mean I had some discoveries that mostly what I was doing teaching computer training or teaching others how to teach computer training was really teaching people how to follow a series of steps and be entertained. I was only introduced to the idea of a more problem-solving type of pedagogy very late in that stint - in that career - and then coming into higher ed, like you, I mean it's not something that most of us get taught very well how to do.

**Bonni:** [00:14:19] One of the themes I think I'm hearing you say but also of course I know it's reflective of my own reading your column. I hear a little bit not just about changing your pedagogy but also changing your sense of identity. Am I accurate in hearing some of that?

**John:** [00:14:36] Yeah, for sure. One of the the things I struggled with and this was maybe particular to us being contingent faculty and kind of wondering if you don't have the title professor but you do the work of Professor who are you or what are you and what is your role? But a lot of it that early on was me sort of being wrapped up in the notion of my own authority as whatever my title was - it's the person in front of the room. The person in charge. And, you know, I went through phases in the initial phase where I really, really didn't know what I was doing as a graduate student. And I was bluffing. So I would wear like a coat and tie to class so I looked older and set myself apart from the students.

**John:** [00:15:18] I would - when I didn't know a question - I would sort of yammer on in a way that would dodge whatever I didn't know. That obviously didn't

enlighten anybody but also deflected the students from whatever they were asking long enough for me to move on to something maybe I did know. After that, as I gained confidence, I became a little drunk with my own power and knowledge and thought, "OK. I'm now training acolytes. I'm successful so the way that these young people are going to become successful is by becoming me," which was only slightly better than bluffing my experience with students.

**John:** [00:15:57] That collapsed pretty quickly. You know, within a semester or two I realized that my best approach is to help students figure out what road they want to travel - what they're interested in - where they want to go. Some people talk about sort of moving yourself away from the center of the course, or the center of the room. I just find myself moving further and further to the fringes of my own class of setting up what I call writing-related problems for students to solve where I give them tools.

**John:** [00:16:30] I am a resource. We have a process. But, so much of the work is on them, that hopefully by mid-semester I'm largely if not irrelevant, barely visible in the frame. You know, if you're taking a picture of the course you kind of have the students arrayed in the middle and I'm on the far East like near the flag in the corner, or something.

**John:** [00:16:57] And for me it became uncomfortable, at first, because you worry about students succeeding and getting grades but over time it became not only comfortable, I realized that the whole time - it had been natural. It fit much better with my personality, my view of how education and learning works. And I really only felt like I've figured it out in the last two, three, four years that I knew who I was and what I wanted to be in the classroom, which is you know one of these reasons why I feel like I have this unfinished business.

**Bonni:** [00:17:35] Could you talk about the distinctions in your experience between you playing a role of teacher and you playing a role as editor?

**John:** [00:17:44] Yes. So, when I'm "teaching me" I find myself telling students a lot of things. Like even in writing assignments, of relatively recent vintage, I would do a lot - have a lot of sort of dos and don'ts lists, or more often sort of like "be aware." Like be aware of this, or this is a frequent problem. And that's kind of the "teaching me." The "editor me" is much more the way I work when I do editing with professional writers as I do as part of my work, as well, which is asking questions.

**John:** [00:18:19] "What were you thinking when you wrote this thesis or wrote this paragraph?" Or, even something simple. You know, the struggle all writing instructors have is where students are writing sentences that are not fantastic. Rather than correcting those sentences or pointing towards a resource for how to use commas, or something like that.

**John:** [00:18:39] I just talked to the student and say what were you thinking when you wrote the sentence that I don't know what you're trying to say - and it redirects the student into asking that question of themselves and often their answer is, "I am not sure. I don't know." Which is fine that's how writing works.

**John:** [00:18:57] I it when I draft things I have plenty of sentences that I recognize as I write them are not wholly-formed thoughts. So that editor or coach or a sounding board is just a kind of attitude that says I'm not going to tell students what to do. I am going to respond almost always to their questions with a question that gets them thinking again.

**John:** [00:19:24] It's a slower process. It's a more time consuming process, in many ways. One of the things I had to get comfortable with was covering less. Saying, "I'm not going to cover everything. I'm not going to expose them to everything I think a student should know," because I'm going to make whatever we're doing in the moment as impactful and impartial as possible.

**John:** [00:19:49] And again, I would not say this should be an approach everybody uses one. Of my personal commandments of what teaching is: you have to teach in ways that are authentic to you. But for me it just felt true to what I want to do and how I work. And when I realized I was treating student writers in the same way I treat professional writers - the student writing got better. They certainly were more engaged with their own writing, which I think is kind of - the degree of engagement - is a good a measure of success as any.

**Bonni:** [00:20:21] In your post called "Teaching Sentences, Not Grammar," you pose three sentences: 1) I have smelled suntan lotion spread over 21 hundred pounds of hot flesh. 2) I have smelled what suntan lotion smells like spread over 2100 pounds of hot skin. 3) I have smelled what suntan lotion smells like spread over twenty one hundred pounds of hot flesh. And then you ask your students which is correct, which is best, and why? What kind of responses do you get from students when you pose that question and read them those three sentences?



**John:** [00:20:58] Well usually they stare at me for a while because they think it's a trick question. They think there is an answer. And one of the things I'm trying to alert them to about writing is that what we think is best is heavily dependent on our values. Those sentences are taken from an essay by David Foster Wallace called A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again collected in a book the same title where he goes on a cruise.

**John:** [00:21:27] And anybody who knows Foster Wallace's his work knows he's not the sort of personality who would enjoy a cruise. And he analyzes and dissects and seeks to understand the nature of these things. And if you know his writing - a very particular and idiosyncratic style - in some ways hyper-verbal, in some ways amazing and complicated, and occasionally hard, but always sounding like himself.

**John:** [00:21:54] So the students and I talk about the difference between a correct sentence and the sentence we think is best. The "correct" sentence is the first one - I think it was the first one in your list - the one that appeared in a serialisation of the article in Harper's where they fixed Foster Wallace's idiosyncrasies - where he repeats and smells and smelled like.

**Bonni:** [00:22:18] Yeah that number one sentence is, "I have smelled suntan lotion spread over 2100 pounds of hot flesh."

**John:** [00:22:24] Yes, so that's what Harper's did. The second sentences is my change where I substitute skin for flesh. And the third is Foster Wallace's as he wanted it to appear and did appear in his book. They immediately know that flesh is better than skin, because the sentence is meant to make you cringe. And skin - thinking about it spread over skin is gross, and flesh is grosser. So, we talk about why they say things like, "Oh, flesh. It's like meat. It's like zombies feasting on flesh." And then I'll start to tease them. I'll just say like, "flesh," over and over and over also like "flesh, flesh, flesh," and all their faces will sort of beg me to stop after a while. And I'll say things like, "moist flesh, "moist flesh," and they'll...

**Bonni:** [00:23:12] [laughing] That is so funny because I was thinking of the word that's how some people feel about the word moist.

**John:** [00:23:17] When you combine them with sort of the worst two words you can imagine in English language moist + flesh it just sounds horrendous. And I think it hides it long enough if I could get them to run from the room. So we we talk about why David Foster Wallace would want to, in the book that he had far

more editorial control over, he'd become more prominent and successful at the time the book was published versus the article in Harper's, why he would make those choices.

**John:** [00:23:45] So when I teach sentences I want them understanding that we write sentences we make choices. Our choices should be informed. It is good when we understand standard grammar. It is good when we understand the impact of variations from the standard on audiences and we should be writing in ways that are appropriate and impactful for audiences.

**John:** [00:24:12] And so in a way they're all correct. Harbor's being a magazine of erudition and educated wanted to sound a certain way. David Foster Wallace being idiosyncratic individual wanted to sound another way and the author is the one who gets to make those choices, when it is a choice.

**John:** [00:24:32] And one of the things I'm trying to give students permission to do is to understand that they're making choices - that they're not kind of aiming for a academic voice which is kind of one of the worst tortures instructors. A good experience for students to kind of imitate what they think academic writing sounds like and create what I call pseudo-intellectual B.S. which I have a post about as well.

**John:** [00:25:00] And we've all seen it where there's sort of herefores and wherefores and thuslys show up and student sentences. They don't need to write that way unless they are addressing an audience that really wants to sound pretentious and overblown.

**John:** [00:25:16] The goal is to communicate. The goal is to communicate with an audience with a specific need, with different attitudes, with different degrees of knowledge, and that these things are complicated. There's no specific target. You both have to set up your own target and endeavor to hit it. Sometimes we do; sometimes we don't.

**Bonni:** [00:25:36] One of the other things that comes up a lot in terms of our identity really - I guess I see it as just making ourselves bigger than we really ought to be.

**Bonni:** [00:25:47] And I have been there. I'm getting better at it now, but, is the idea of there being distractions in the classroom and phones and you have one, I mean, you have a number of wonderful posts about this, but one is "The False God of Attention."

**Bonni:** [00:25:59] And you say sometimes not paying attention is the most important part of learning. Could you talk a little bit about what advice you have for us when we so much want to control and want to be that center of attention and get angry at the phones but more angry at the students for - how dare you look at Instagram as I am professing my wisdom - and maybe what's been helpful for you. Because I don't I don't want to act like I've am above it now, completely, and always have been. So I certainly have had an evolution in my teaching and I just find him a better teacher when I'm not so big, if that makes any sense.

**John:** [00:26:33] I think that's a good way of putting it. You know my thinking on this has evolved almost into a 180 over the years. You know I used to have an outright ban on technology. I would show the YouTube video to Professor smashing a phone in a lecture the first day of class.

**John:** [00:26:52] You know in a, "Ha, ha, ha, I'm warning you," type sense. I saw the phones as a danger, as divided attention, as bad - which they can be. There's there's no doubt that these these tools can be misused and are misused although not only by students. Anybody who's been in a faculty meeting will notice many of their colleagues and even themselves looking at their phones or they have their laptops open in front of them and are awfully distracted.

**John:** [00:27:25] But ultimately I realized that a more - as I do in class say - I quote Uncle Ben talking to Peter Parker as Spider-Man: "With great freedom comes great responsibility."

**John:** [00:27:40] We're allowing students the agency to to decide whether or not they're going to look at their phones is ultimately just a reflection of what's going on in the world. I want them to not feel compelled to check Instagram although everybody's checking Instagram. I sometimes think what is going on that whatever we're doing is so funny engaging that they need to be involved with this other thing.

**John:** [00:28:06] I also became much less worried about when there are can be moments of downtime in a class where we're doing things and different people do them at different speeds and that there is not a lot of harm in letting a student look at their phone when they're simply waiting for the transition to the next thing and will look at it and put it away.

**John:** [00:28:28] Attention, by itself, is not a function of learning. We learn all kinds of things when we don't pay attention. Daydreaming is an important part of my own writing process. One of the things I do when I'm in my office at home and as a much younger person - I play drums in a band and now I have an electronic drum set set up in my office.

**John:** [00:28:50] And one of my most important on blocking tools is to sit down at them, crank up my iPod, and play along with Led Zeppelin, you know, destroying what remains of my hearing but at the same time forgetting whatever it is I was supposed to be paying attention to.

**John:** [00:29:06] So I can I can clear my brain. So, you know, to kind of regiment the classroom period - be it fifty minutes or 75 minutes or three hours - as a place where we must be paying absolute attention begin to feel to me just a bucking a kind of humanity that we have that we should be allowed to have this kind of freedom.

**John:** [00:29:31] I do worry. I worry that occasionally my giving of this freedom to students can be to their own detriment because they do miss things and they can be missing out on it. But then I try to reassure myself that that's their choice. They get to decide if their behavior is to their own detriment.

**John:** [00:29:47] I am not there to kind of loom over them as a taskmaster because I'm not there I'm not there when they're writing in the rooms and not there when they're doing the homework. My role is to make them mindful about the choices they're making in class and out as they write and make recommendations. I tell them, you know, when you're drafting your essay, turn off your phone or turn off your notifications, at least so you're not being constantly interrupted.

**John:** [00:30:16] And then when I advise them to do that. We come back to class and I ask, "How many did that? And how did it go? And do you think you want to do it differently?" But to make rules and mandates it just feels like a sort of you know shouting into the wind.

**John:** [00:30:31] The world is going to keep moving inexorably upon us and to kind of pushing against this immovable force, as a dictator, it just seems kind of fruitless to me and untrue to the lives we live. Why should class be any different than any other space in that sense?

**Bonni:** [00:30:50] I've tried to change the language that I use because I know that there was a lot more of a desire to control. In my earlier teaching days and now the language I use is to invite. So I have a post I'll link to in the show notes called The Invitation and I do think there are times we absolutely need to put our phones and our laptops away and talk and listen to each other.

**Bonni:** [00:31:11] But that is a two-way thing and that's where I'm teaching a class of 17. What a luxury. I mean it's a beautiful thing and we're all sitting around in a circle and there aren't things in front of us except a paper and a pen and we're all listening to each other and we're all talking to each other. But I'm discovering what they're learning and they're teaching me in the process. And it's an invitation I try to have there be something surprising every week. It's a long class. It's a three hour class, but they say it doesn't feel like three hours. It felt like it just goes by and it does for me too because we're having fun together and we're we're co-creating through the learning. They're doing the reading. We actually had a whole conversation where we talked about, "How do you want your learning to be measured in this course?"

**Bonni:** [00:31:54] "And one of the things that is really important is that we read these books. What should that look like if we're all doing the reading? How would we hold each other accountable for it," and it was a really cool experience.

**Bonni:** [00:32:02] But I just think instead of trying to control, we invite. And we create. We set this amazing table that is an experience they haven't had before and maybe they didn't have that modeled in their families that was one of the things I really took away from the book Alone Together that I was to be so mad at the students. "Why won't you put that away?" And then got informed that actually they grew up wishing their parents would pay attention to them and yearning for the full focus from their parents are not getting it. So it's pretty revealing. By the way, I know that Alone Together - I learned that it's a very - some people have some concerns about that book and its research, but it was one real takeaway I took from having read it was just this idea that they necessarily didn't have it modeled for them, either, what someone else being fully present for them meant.

**John:** [00:32:53] Yeah I think you know the idea that the classroom belongs to the student as much as the instructor, which you're describing perfectly. Theirs is important because a lot of particularly before I teach a lot of freshmen so so their acculturation when I see them is is you know K-12.

**John:** [00:33:13] A lot of it does encourage a kind of passivity of waiting for the teacher to kind of tell me what to do and invitation and that's a great word. I'll be stealing that word. Making it an invitation into this thing that they are in charge of, I think, can make a significant difference I think you mentioning the size of this class also plays a big role in how these things work where you have 17 students.

**John:** [00:33:39] I was thinking of the writing workshop I taught last semester where it was a 20 person class but we only had 10 students in the workshop discussion at a time in a circle looking at each other. Nobody ever looked at their phones. Nobody even - it didn't occur to anybody to look at their phones.

**John:** [00:33:57] And so I think as people within higher ed who have far more influence and power than me, or you, or other instructors, look at you know the impact of technology and phones on it - let's look at the conditions under which we're putting students. If you put a student in a 600 person lecture, it's going to be very difficult to keep them off their phones. I read the college newspaper in my large lectures in college.

**John:** [00:34:23] If I had a smartphone I would have been looking at that. I would read books for other classes, or just for pleasure and these classes. Attention - I don't want to see it has to be earned. I think the invitation is a better frame, sort of, "Hey. You have you you have the floor. I don't have to get your attention because you're you're in charge." I think that's a great route of not focusing on the question of attention or distraction, but of engagement, in interchange, in conversation.

**Bonni:** [00:34:54] And if it was a 600 person class I'd be leveraging the heck out of attention so that the apps that they were on at least some portion of the time was one that allowed them to engage in a way that technology affords us that the in-person just doesn't.

**Bonni:** [00:35:09] Well this is the time in the show where we get to give recommendations and we've been talking a little bit about the invitation and I think I want to frame mine as inviting some of our colleagues to have more of a collaborative approach.

**Bonni:** [00:35:21] And we've had some conversations happening in our university lately and, you know, you get the e-mail that says, "Hey, can you go and give some feedback on this and that?" And so I've just started, "Oh, great. Thank you for inviting the 15 of us to all reply to you, individually. I set up a shared Google

doc and it has a link and you don't even have to have a Google account." It's just something you know very simple to do from a technological standpoint.

**Bonni:** [00:35:49] But a lot of people just don't realize oh I can actually type right into it. That's funny the first time I did it, everyone kept making comments. They fell like, "Oh, my gosh. I couldn't possibly just type into this," and I'm slowly starting to model for them how powerful it can be to have a shared document which for many people listening to this show might just be old hat to you, but - and it is to me as well - but to encourage more of that culture in our universities and to have influence where we might otherwise not have it.

**Bonni:** [00:36:19] I mean this is not projects I'm in charge of... I'm just more trying to subtly say, "Hey. There's this whole world out there that we don't make use of anywhere near enough at our institutions." So that was one thing I was going to suggest was that we invite people to collaborate more like that - even if we don't think we have the power or influence to do it - just do it anyway and see what happens.

**Bonni:** [00:36:40] And then the other thing is I'm so grateful to Robert Talbert who's been on the show a number of times now and I had recently written a post called Tools for Travel and Robert went up there and it was like a little mini blog post in the middle of my post and he had some great suggestions for travel that I hadn't even thought about including getting the TSA pre-check - which is \$85 for five years. I'm already signed up for my appointment, but I can't officially recommend it because I don't recommend things I haven't done myself yet but...

**John:** [00:37:08] Well I did that and I can concur wholeheartedly. It has saved me multiple times from missing a flight or the stress of missing a flight. So you get the shorter line you don't have to take your shoes off it's fantastic.

**Bonni:** [00:37:25] So that's what my husband is so excited by my husband. Like wait a second. I missed that part we don't have to take our shoes off? And our kids under 12 - if you have kids under 12 - they can stand in the line with you. And there is some accommodation for kids over 12 but since our kids aren't over 12, of course I don't remember it. I just remember the part that was relevant. So, anyway, check out Robert Talbert's others suggestions all link to that and the show notes. And John let me pass it over to you for your recommendations.

**John:** [00:37:50] So I have a few. I'm going to take advantage of the opportunity. But starting speaking of travel - starting with that. At the start of the

semester because I wasn't teaching and I knew I was going to freak out about it. My wife and I scheduled a vacation and we've we've had some good opportunities to travel since we've been married and we went to Italy but we went to a part of Italy I think not as many people go to which is The Lakes District. And we even went not to Lake Como, which is where George Clooney lives, as everybody knows.

**John:** [00:38:20] We went to Lake Maggiore. So I'm recommending Lake Maggiore. It's a place to go and hang out. It's very relaxed. It's beautiful. The food is amazing. And you can even get a BRBO quite cheap in the city of Stresa, which is on the lake. So I'm recommending that for travel.

**John:** [00:38:39] I'm also recommending the novels of Tom Drury. D R U R Y. The first of which is called The End of Vandalism. I do this because he's probably my favorite living writer. He's only sort of culturally popular and I want more people to read his books. So publishers will continue to publish when he writes about the Midwest where he writes about people trying to do the right thing in the world, but the world often stands in front of them, or their own natures get in their way. And I just think he's a beautiful writer and people should read his books.

**John:** [00:39:15] The last recommendation I have is education-related. And that's a book called Bad Ideas About Writing, edited by Sheryl Ball and Drew Lowe. And that's put out by a West Virginia University Press. It's free and it's filled with dozens of essays about writing, premised on this idea of "bad idea," where it tackles many of the things we've been told about writing, taught about writing, things about grammar or mechanics or audience or practices in teaching, things like rubrics. And these individual authors of the essays question them and see what holds up.

**John:** [00:40:00] What deserves challenge? What's complicated (and as it turns out a lot of this stuff really is complicated). So it's not like "a rubric's bad; a rubric's good." It's more like "rubrics, when?" When should we use it or how should we use them?

**John:** [00:40:14] And even as somebody who I feel like I've dedicated a lot of time to both reading about and thinking about writing and teaching writing, as I've been making my way through it, and there's so much sort of parceling it out for myself bit by bit. You know, thought-provoking insights that cause me to reflect and alter my own thinking time after time after time.



**John:** [00:40:37] And I think a lot of it can be applicable to disciplines outside of writing, as well. It's really a kind of awesome resource of a lot of different people reflecting on the work they do in the classroom. And I did I find it inspiring. I think anybody should read this book.

**Bonni:** [00:40:54] John, thank you for all three of these recommendations. And on a broader scheme, thank you for being on today's show. And even broader than that, you really - even though you're not this semester in a traditional classroom - you are teaching so many of us and I just so appreciate your work. You are a brilliant teacher and it's amazing to me that you could have taught me this much just through your words - your written words - and then it's so fun to get to talk to you in person today.

**John:** [00:41:21] It was great fun. I could go another three hours but we will - - maybe, maybe in the future.

**Bonni:** [00:41:27] I was going to say speaking of invitations maybe we can - because I could talk to you for hours and hours, too, we can just continue this so I'll invite you back on the show and you can share even more because I don't think we've even skimmed the surface.

**John:** [00:41:38] Absolutely. I'll look forward to it.

**Bonni:** [00:41:39] What a treat it was to talk to John today and I neglected to ask him to pronounce his alter ego for me and it's - or on the air, I should say -it's biblioracle. So I mispronounced it in the intro but you can go check him out on Twitter and his couple of regular writing responses that we can all look forward to 2018 and 19 where we will get to see those books on teaching that he is working on.

**Bonni:** [00:42:06] Thank you again John and thanks to all of you for listening. If you want to go to the show notes they'll be at [teachinginhighered.com/172](http://teachinginhighered.com/172). And just thank you so much for the community that we're building I'm hearing from so many of you and it's always just so fun to hear what you're doing in your teaching and how you're taking things away from the show and putting them into practice. Thanks again for listening and I'll see you next time everybody.

*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.*