Ben Kahn: You're listening to UP TechTalk, the podcast from Academic Technology Services and Innovation at the University of Portland, where we explore the use of technology in the classroom, one conversation at a time.

Welcome to UP TechTalk. This is Ben Kahn at the University of Portland. Today, I'm joined by my cohost Maria Erb.

Maria Erb: Hey Ben.

Ben Kahn: Hey Maria. And we have with us in the studio today a recurring guest, one of our favorites Rebecca Gaudino from our School of Theology here at the university. Thanks for joining us Rebecca.

Rebecca G: Thanks for inviting me. I'm glad to be here.

Maria Erb: And you really are one of our favorites. For one of the reasons that we were just talking about a second ago because you really find this way to connect with your students that's very unique and very soul connecting.

Rebecca G: Thank you.

Maria Erb: I feel that's a really important thing and we don't hear a lot about it. It's really great that you're here, so we can talk about this topic.

Rebecca G: Thank you.

Ben Kahn: Yeah and so you're here to kind of talk about your upcoming talk that you're going to give as part of our UP Crossroads series with overarching theme of ethylism and technology and kind of how those two things go together or should go together. I think culturally, politically, societally, we're kind of in a moment right now where that's kind of coming to the forefront and it's getting a lot more attention than it has in recent years or in the past. So, I think we'd like to hear from you a little bit about how you approach just that broad topic of bring the humanity into your use of technology?

Rebecca G: Probably a good way for me to start would be to talk a little bit about my philosophy, what I think about all of this. Some of this comes after my reading about technology in the classroom by people who find it something that's not a good direction to go in our classrooms. They critique the use of technology as something that separates students that isn't social, something that can often be random, that can be very shallow doesn't call for some kind of deep thought. It can be scattered, moving from this to that, a very passive. They're just clicking buttons or boxes or whatever.

Those are the kinds of critiques that I read that I've come upon in literature over the last maybe five years or so. I've been thinking about that. I have a pedagogical theory that kind of undergirds my teaching, which is called Authentic Learning, capital A, capital L. Which talks about how to approach teaching in the classroom and students and how to

bring their learning and my teaching into dialogue with their lives. And what they are preparing to do with their lives.

That for me another area I'm interested in is educational or cognitive neuroscience. I've been reading a bit about that. That supports this, I think this Authentic Learning. And some of the things that I found in reading in this area of cognitive neuroscience, which itself, it's also relative new. But some things that kind of fall out and that seem to be generally true is that students learning is not, if we try to say it's all about cognition.

For example, it's about critical thinking and critical reflection and we try to separate out things like emotion and intuition and cognitive function. If we begin doing that kind of separation that does not support the way thinking and reflection happens. We are whole people and our brains work as a whole system. So, that emotion, sensory stimuli, thought, intuition, all of those things are a part of learning.

What I've found is that learning really is encouraged when students have multiple stimuli including sensory stimuli. Their learning is really encouraged when they can do active learning, when they're participating in the learning and doing things that teach them and that seems to be a part of a story that's very memorable for them. And also that they can make connections between the subject matter and their own life and their world. All of those things to me lead to my understanding of teaching and learning as about engagement. Engagement of the person, the whole person. Engagement with the community in the classroom and engagement with the community outside of the classroom. So, that's kind of my basis.

I have a couple of ethical principles that for me, are grounding all of that. One of those is about honoring the human being as a whole person; body, mind, everything, soul. Then honoring that the person as a social being as well and not just as the individual. With all of that, it seems to me that technology, it has a real opportunity to be a part of meeting those challenges.

For me then, I've thought how can I use technology very strategically to allow me to open up those possibilities? How can I build community in my classroom? How can I get my students to think about their own lives or how can I get them to tap into all of these different ways of thinking that we often don't always privilege in the classroom. Emotions, feelings, what place do they have in the classroom? Yet the research finds that changing people's mind involves not only critical thinking but emotion. So, how do we bring all of that in? Here technology, I think really has a lot of possibilities.

So for me, it meant going back and looking at how I'm teaching. I kind of thought in terms of a metaphor of a room with furniture in it. I thought okay, which furniture can I move out of this room? And, which furniture could I add to the room or what things are sitting on the wall that I would really like to be centerpieces in this room? It becomes those choices of what I want in that room, how I can space it out, what I could do without.

One of the first things that I did and I've talked about this before was just making space in my classroom for these kinds of things that would meet these challenges I'm trying to meet. That meant moving out lectures, moving out quizzes and those kinds of things. You all help me figure out how to do that and get some of those things online and get them streamlined so they're not taking up a huge amount of time out of class. That left me with this room. What's the furniture going to be in this room now? What can I add and all of that? That's where technologies been extraordinarily helpful to me because it's allowed me to bring in things and have projects that students work on together that involve technology. Together they create something. They know to bring their laptops to class and they'll sit in groups around a table and Padlet is one thing I've used.

For that, I give them in this one particular class we're looking at ancient text and ancient prophets. We're talking about texts that are well over 2,000 years old and how can they connect with them and make them connect with their lives today? Because they read this old language that's often and used as images that they can't necessarily understand. They'll read something like the rich are stealing the sandals from the poor and okay. I have them think about our world today. What's going on today? How can you bring that in today?

They open up Padlet and they share this. They bring in music. They bring in videos. They bring in newscasts. They bring in photos and it's fascinating to watch them as they very carefully choose the music that they want to represent what they're trying to say as they find the exact right picture. They'll be sitting, listening to newscasts and deciding this current event needs to come in. They make the connections and it's beautiful.

Then we look at everyone's Padlet to see what have we created and how does that bring this ancient prophet into conversation with our world today. It does it through the things that are important in their lives and they're doing the interpretations, the humaneutics, they're doing all of that not even knowing that they're doing it. It works beautifully and students love that class.

Maria Erb: Wow. What were you doing before you were able to do that in your class?

Rebecca G: Well, I always wanted them to make the connection with the contemporary world. They would get together and talk. What are connections that you see? It was more just verbal discussion. But adding the technology allows them to actually go out on the web and all of that and grab exactly what represents and actually listen to some things and follow those serendipitous links that you find and think about the things the music they're already listening to and realizing, oh listen to those actual words that this group is singing. It's very interesting and they find connections that they didn't even know were there in their lives already.

Then of course as they each share their connections with one another because they're working on this together, they learn and broaden the connections they already have. I just think it makes much more powerful and it's that sensory stimuli. There's the music. All of that, that's a part of that.

Maria Erb: What's the feedback you've gotten from your students?

Rebecca G: I've gotten great feedback on that assignment. I've only had one student ever say, "Oh, I didn't care for that." Everyone else says, "This is really neat. And what is this app? Do you think I might be able to use this in a special project in another class?" That kind of feedback. It's wonderful to be in the classroom when they're working on that because they're very busy working together.

Ben Kahn: Yeah. I think that's great. There's so much going on in your use of technology, so well throughout and so multilayered. I think a lot of the times, technology is sold as a way to make things more efficient or to kind of help us deal with things that we don't really want to deal with oftentimes whether that's going to the bank or keeping an eye on our students to make sure that they're not struggling in our course. There's all these things that can automate some of that away. I think that's often how technology is sold to institutions at a broad level and implemented. But then I think you're such a wonderful example of just an individual who is passionate about what they want to do in their classroom and has found ways that technology, really you can bring in the pieces that matter to you and really enrich learning for your students.

Rebecca G: Right. I mean you went point by point by what you were trying to do in your class based on your personal philosophy and your guiding principles. Then you were able to match that with a tool that would enable you to kind of bring out what you wanted to do. I feel like that level of thinking is what-

Ben Kahn: It's tough to do.

Rebecca G: It's really tough to do.Bbut it's also the approach that really needs to be taken in order to result in something that does what you want it do, results in the results that you want to get, furthers your goals, is in tune with your philosophy that really kind of checks all the boxes.

Ben Kahn: I should point out too. I hope we didn't gloss over it that there were those parts of your course that were still critical like the assessment and making sure students have done the reading and that kind of thing that are still important. But they're not the thing about the class, right?

Rebecca G: Right.

Ben Kahn: So, you did some of the hard work to use technology to streamline those things, get them out of the classroom for what you wanted to do. Yeah.

Rebecca G: Yes.

Maria Erb: Well like you said making space, I just love that and the furniture that you kept in the classroom was probably the stuff that you wanted to see. That was the most comfortable but also the most beautiful and functional.

Rebecca G: I read an article recently on neuroscience and religion classes. It's kind of an interesting article. It talks about moving from informational teaching and learning to formational teaching and learning to transformational teaching and learning. That, that's the ethical move. Getting the facts, learning this. Okay. How does that help to form us as people who have compassion for others? Who care about issues of justice and so forth?

Then the transformational piece is the generative piece. Now what do I do about this? How does this change my life and the possibilities that are open for me? It seems to me that if I can get students to connect with the material, see how it has ramifications in their own lives. Then I'm moving them towards that kind of generative or transformational learning as they see possibilities there. I think that technology allows me to put them in touch with their community local to global and that is very, very powerful.

It sure is. I mean I would love to read that article.

Maria Erb:

Yes!

Rebecca G:

We should share it with the episode for sure.

Ben Kahn:

Yeah. It's a good article.

Rebecca G:

So, you've implemented these ideas in one class at least. How about in others?

Maria Erb:

Another major class that I teach is a class on suffering and death. I co-teach that with

Rebecca G: different people. Right now, I'm co-teaching that with Barb Braband from the School of Nursing. We definitely use technology in there. One major piece that we are putting in right now and that we're actually getting something published on this. We have a manuscript in review and we're factoring that in. We've tried it out in Anissa Roger's class, Deaf and Dying, a new class.

What we're using is PhotoVoice. That is an amazing tool. One of the things we're finding through our research in the last few years that's super important to students encountering suffering, being people who themselves are often suffering is self-awareness and self-care. We're using that PhotoVoice piece to enhance an assignment we already have in place.

The PhotoVoice is asking students to go out and take photographs that represent their own thoughts and feelings in encountering the suffering of somebody else. The results that we're seeing from that are very moving. I think that's a really powerful tool that I'm now looking for how to weave into other courses as well. So, yeah.

So, the students go out and take photos and then what happens to the photos?

Maria Erb:

They bring those photos to class. They reflect on them with others in the class and we

Rebecca G: do this differently depending on the class. But they share that. What does this photo

represent? Why have I taken this? And they do that across a series of interviews that they have with someone who has undergone significant suffering.

Then towards the end of the semester, they gather those representative photos and they talk about their own story as the one who has encountered suffering and how they have hopefully grown and what they've learned. It's amazing in this manuscript we've prepared. We looked at what happens in these photos across the interviews. It's just amazing.

As one student wrote, "The photos allow me to get at feelings and thoughts that I don't know how to put into words." That's getting back to the idea that the usual cognitive model where everything is verbalized. Yes, that's beautiful. That's wonderful. But how can we expand that and enrich that so that we're looking at the person as a whole; intuition, feeling, cognition, everything?

Maria Erb: Are students printing out these photos? I mean, how are they bringing them in to share?

Rebecca G: They're bringing them in on their phones.

Maria Erb: Oh okay. So, then they're kind of sharing them around. Are they putting them in essential storage space that everybody looks at or ...

Rebecca G: It depends on which class. In one class they're doing them on Padlet. That's in a smaller class with fewer students so you can manage that. In the Suffering and Death class, we have up to 130 students in there. So, there we have students bring them on their phones and then when they share them, we're still figuring that part out. Right now, we're having them put them on a piece of paper and just print them on a piece of paper to pass. They show them only to a small group. It's not that they show them to all people. So, we're figuring out that part. But the Padlet one and the much smaller class of around 20, that can be shown with everybody's permission. There's challenges in this. But hey, we're moving forward. Because we just see it's such a powerful tool.

Maria Erb: Yeah. In the first class you told us about how long have you been doing sort of the new format of your class? At least a couple of semesters now?

Rebecca G: This would be my third semester.

Maria Erb: Okay. Where do you think you're headed with this?

Rebecca G: I'm going to continue to do this. I'm constantly looking. Now, I'm adding the PhotoVoice to that class. So, that will become part of the contemporary reflection part for their major paper that they write me. I guess, I keep developing that course and adding things and tweaking things here and then. That's just what I enjoy doing. Yeah.

Ben Kahn: Okay.

Maria Erb: Well, we hope a lot of people will come to the UP Crossroads talk that you're going to give and be inspired by what you're doing in your classroom.

Ben Kahn: We're all looking forward to seeing what you have to share and hopefully you'll show some of your apps that you use and some of the different work that you've seen from students. And we'll be able to leave inspired and full of ideas.

Rebecca G: Yeah. Thanks.

Maria Erb: That'd be great.

Ben Kahn: Thanks for joining us.

Rebecca G: Thank you.

Maria Erb: Thank you. UP TechTalk is a bi-monthly podcasts with cohost Ben Kahn-

Ben Kahn: That's me.

Maria Erb: And Maria Erb of Academic Technology Services and Innovation that explores the use of technology in the classroom, one conversation at a time.

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