

**Bonni:** [00:00:00] The unexpected on today's Teaching in Higher Ed podcast episode 109.

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

**Bonni:** [00:00:44] When Dave and I were getting our doctoral degrees they did a pretty good job of bringing in guest speakers regularly. I hate to admit they were generally about the same flavor. Lots of entrepreneurs lots of people doing impressive things in this world. But one of them stands out above the rest.

**Bonni:** [00:01:03] He looked about the same as the others but how he arrived or should I say what he had with him when he arrived was quite different. As he walked into the room he had three brightly wrapped packages and he set them up in the front. It was very creative. The sense of intrigue exactly what is in these boxes and they seemed quite delicate as he placed them very carefully up at the front and well I was very engaged and interested in what he was saying throughout the whole time he was there as a guest speaker. I also had my curiosity piqued. What was in those packages? Why are they so carefully wrapped and why has he said really nothing about them yet?

**Bonni:** [00:01:47] And even though he made sort of this demonstrative action of bringing them into the rooms and carefully placing them he hasn't said well what are we going to do with those and what exactly are they there for creating a sense of the unexpected inner teaching in our life can be such a wonderful gift to have.

**Bonni:** [00:02:07] And I took that little lesson by the way what was inside those three brightly wrapped packages were his three favorite books. And I suspect that they were the very inexpensive paperbacks probably less than \$10 each but they weren't wrapped to look like books and they created just this sense of mystery and doing something a little bit different.

**Bonni:** [00:02:31] And I've taken that away to think about as I am invited to speak at different places and and in my own teaching as well I think I probably think about that more in teaching because when you teach in a structure like I do with 15 week semesters that's something that we do need to get better at doing since you're trying to sustain students through that length of time.

**Bonni:** [00:02:53] But for me I try to bring it also into just speaking when I'm invited to do one half workshops or to give a presentation at a place where maybe I only will see those people that one time. And in this episode we're going to be looking at how to create the unexpected in our teaching.

**Bonni:** [00:03:08] And there's a little bit of unexpected in the episode as well I've got a couple of clips to play for you and a couple of listener questions that somewhat relate to the theme of the unexpected. And I've been thinking about it so much because Dave and I had an opportunity to go to a conference this past week we were away with the kids and the kids went and stayed with Grandma and Grandpa in Chicago and Dave and I went in to town and got to experience a podcasting conference.

**Bonni:** [00:03:38] And before you press the stop button because you have no interest in podcasting conferences I'm only going to be sharing things that relate to creating this sense of the unexpected and some of these podcasters are masters at this. And one of them is Glynn Washington. I don't know if you've ever had a chance to listen to him. I have listened to his podcast called Snap Judgment a number of times and it is a wonderful storytelling podcast. And I'd like to play a small clip from one of his Snap Judgment episodes called the Golden Man and what it says to us about that sense of unexpected.

**Glynn:** [00:04:31] I was driving on the Golden Gate Bridge it was a beautiful beautiful day and all of a sudden I couldn't breathe. I felt like. There was a. Squeeze around my neck. I'm trying not to panic trying to get some air I can't pull the car over. I'm on the bridge get it together, you've got to get together. I was finally able to pull over into a beach parking lot. I opened the door of my car I flopped on the ground. And. This woman she she looks over at me and she runs over us and runs over and she's like what's wrong what's wrong with you.

Are you okay? Can you tell me what's wrong. And. I did know what was wrong. But no. I couldn't tell her. Because the truth was. The truth was. I had broken the Golden Man... Welcome.

**Bonni:** [00:06:01] What Glynn Washington does there so well is an aspect of what Derek Bruff introduced back on episode 71 called Time's for Telling. And Derek Bruff did not coin that term he was quoting Daniel Schwartz and John Bransford in an article that they wrote called A Time for Telling.

**Bonni:** [00:06:23] And in the context in which Derek was describing that he was talking about doing a little bit of a different thought process as we think about the flipped classroom and his words and his advice are still really resonating with me today. So if you have not listened to that episode it's a wonderful one to go back and listen to but right now all of us are wondering who is this Golden Man that's the last words that Glen Washington says I had broken the Golden Man. And he's just created this whole sense of the intrigue.

**Bonni:** [00:06:58] And and it starts out from something really simple he says. I was driving and he's captured us from the very beginning a couple of other things. I think he does well to create the sense of the unexpected that we could learn from to put into our teaching is in how he even just buries his own style and his own approach within this one story. Some of the time he speaks very quickly get it together get it together get it together I think that's what he says. I may be misquoting him there but he speaks so rapidly in that part and then he has the pacing where it's slower.

**Bonni:** [00:07:39] And were forced to think about what he's saying and the other really unexpected thing that I thought we could take away from our teaching is how he both tells the story but also acts the story out at the same time he's describing how he lost his breath and where he's losing his breath as he shares the story. And those are all things that we can do in our own teaching to create that sense of the unexpected.

**Bonni:** [00:08:09] And I just love thinking about ever since Derek introduced me to that phrase times retelling and how I might be able to do that better in my teaching and would love to hear how you're thinking about doing that or have already done that in your own teaching. And if you have anything that you'd like to share you're welcome to put that on the show notes at [teachinginhighered.com/109](http://teachinginhighered.com/109) or send me an email. Easiest way to do that is [teachinginhighered.com/feedback](http://teachinginhighered.com/feedback).

**Bonni:** [00:08:36] And I have a couple of listener questions they are both coming from the same person a very gifted artist at that this is Ari Purnama I apologize if I'm not pronouncing either of those names correctly but I know we have just met over email and he is a cinematographer and has a couple of questions he asks about the best techniques to use to get students to introduce themselves on the first day of class in such a way that it won't be too boring for the other students or effective enough for us as lecturers to remember them.

**Bonni:** [00:09:09] And he says he'd like to know their names and favorite TV series but it would be really time consuming for a class of 20 students to share this one by one and consequently will drive the other students to boredom. I wonder if you know innovative techniques to solve this conundrum. I am so glad that you've asked this question and especially I'm glad that you are cognizant of the fact that having 20 students do that is not creating that sense of the unexpected it's kind of one of those things where we come up with something really creative like oh I can know their name and then their favorite TV series and isn't this great.

**Bonni:** [00:09:42] And the fact is that in most instances not at all but in most instances the name of their favorite TV series is not relevant to the class that we're teaching now. Since you are in cinematography that may be not necessarily the case for you but nonetheless we want to make sure that whatever it is we're having them do during that first day of class is not just in alignment with our own objective to learn their names but also is in alignment with that objective of creating the sense of the unexpected and the mystery and the excitement and passion that we have for our own discipline and specifically for this particular class.

**Bonni:** [00:10:21] We want to make sure that what we're doing is somehow relevant. One of the things that I like to do is start out by it I teach in business and management I like to start out talking about businesses that got started by solving a problem and I've talked about this on a prior episode but I'll just share what I show this little. It's a gif it's animated gif and it's of a product I don't tell them what it is but since I'm describing it to you orally I need to. That takes butter instead of using a butter knife. It actually just scrapes off a layer of butter so it makes it easier to spread on the bread.

**Bonni:** [00:10:58] And so I'll just show them this animated gif and say what do you think. This is what's problem solving. And I have another one that is a animated gif of someone using a product that tells physicians and other medical professionals if they've washed their hands enough and they wave their hand

over the product and it will indicate whether or not they need to continue to wash their hands and of course what problem does that solve.

**Bonni:** [00:11:23] And then the next thing I do as a means of introduction back to your question is I have them share problems that they've had either since coming back to our university if they're returning student or since many of them in this particular class are going to be brand new freshmen. What are some of the biggest problems that you've experienced since coming to school for the first time and what this does is create a level of engagement that they can decide how much risk they want to take for some lower risk one would be I couldn't find the class I was looking for this morning and all the way to the high risk ones where people will share. I didn't get to have my family drop me off at college and I was alone that was actually one of the most heartbreaking and memorable responses that I got to that question.

**Bonni:** [00:12:11] And it really helps me get to know the students. But but it also helps them get to know a little bit more about my own teaching style by the way they're doing this on sticky notes and I have a blog post that I linked to about teaching with sticky notes and it's just a way also where they get up and they're moving around the classroom.

**Bonni:** [00:12:30] And sometimes I can walk around too and get a chance to catch some of their names there. I do not try to learn all of their names on the first day my classes are typically around 35 students and there are all that I know who could walk into a room and after 50 minutes could know all 35 names backwards and forwards and would do an exceptional job. I am not one of those people but there are a lot of things I can do to get their names.

**Bonni:** [00:12:55] By week two or week three and I try to take a little bit of the pressure off of that first day of having that be the number one priority. Realistically some of them will drop some of them will add if that's my sole purpose for being there on on that first day. It's a little bit self-centric for me and my perspective to have that be you know the checkmark I want to get done as opposed to I want to check off that check mark that says wait a minute this is something different. I'm intrigued already what what's this going to be like. I'm kind of excited about what this class might cover for me and I and that's to me the higher priority.

**Bonni:** [00:13:29] So I'm so glad that you asked this question. I hope some of those techniques are helpful. You also want to think about that time factor like you talked about and to me. If in your case if you've got 20 students in the room

instead of trying to focus on all 20 what have you walked out of there and three or four of them we really got to hear from.

**Bonni:** [00:13:53] And we got to know something about three or four of them and felt this real connection that you had with between three or four of them. There is something to be said about a feeling of even when one person connects with just another person at the same podcasting conference I was at I had a chance to hear one of my absolute podcast in Idaho switch is Alex Blumberg and he shared about some podcast that he likes to listen to that was completely the most random thing ever heard of.

**Bonni:** [00:14:25] I wish I had that in front of me but I didn't plan on telling that story. And he wanted the characters on this completely obscure podcast that he listens to was actually there in the audience and they had a little bit of interaction and even though he wasn't trying to connect with all 2000 of us at once he connected with one of us and it it felt like in that way that he was able to break down that wall and actually have a conversation with us even though he never spoke to the 1,999 of us.

**Bonni:** [00:15:01] It was really a powerful thing and I'd encourage you to think a little bit about connecting a little bit deeper with a few people and really creating that sense of dynamic power there instead of trying to connect with others. I know you had a second question Ari about having more topics or wondering if we've addressed the topic of intercultural the international classroom.

**Bonni:** [00:15:24] And although most of our our guests have been from North America we have had Mary Jean Saudelli who teaches in the middle east and she was back on an episode about international higher education in the 21st century. And then Steve Wheeler from the U.K. also talked about his book learning with E's. That's the letter E apostrophe s.

**Bonni:** [00:15:48] And then Maha Bali had it from Egypt has just been on recently actually since you had written about collaboration and I invite anyone that has ideas for how we might expand to more of the international classroom although I'll also say I probably have a little bit of a bias that focusing on more global themes that would apply to all of us will be helpful as opposed to perhaps if we emphasize too much on the international class.

**Bonni:** [00:16:21] I've had some other ideas coming in and so far I want to make sure that that I'm I am addressing episodes to people that are applicable to

most of us and are teaching that just looking for creative ways to do that if anyone has ideas. And thanks so much for your questions Ari and for the kind words about the podcast. Its always so encouraging to get ideas for the show and to get questions. I really appreciate it.

**Bonni:** [00:16:45] I want to talk just a few more minutes about creating the unexpected in our teaching and have another clip to share as well. Back to my takeaways from the podcast movement conference that would apply to you as teachers in higher ed Glynn Washington who we heard from in the beginning was just so powerful in the idea of giving a real context and creating a sense of the unexpected out of that.

**Bonni:** [00:17:15] He played this phenomenal video of these young men dancing and it had just such powerful music to it it had such powerful expression and I wish I could put a link to it in the show notes but I looked on his Facebook I looked on his Twitter I looked all over and could not find the video even though some of the other videos that he played at this conference were made available.

**Bonni:** [00:17:40] And oh my goodness. It was incredible to watch. And so he just played it it was very early in his talk and you're just hearing the music feeling the beat listening in to these magnificent dancers. It was one of those types of things where one of them would dance and then almost pass the energy over to the next one and the next one would dance and then pass the energy over to the next one. It was a magnificent performance.

**Bonni:** [00:18:04] And when he was done he shared the context of the video. He said that the young man who created the video that the dancing was filmed and done one day after his brother was killed. And you shared the story that his brother had said to him you're good at that dancing thing. Keep doing that.

**Bonni:** [00:18:31] And just hearing that story after having watched this magnificent dancing that was so expressive and then to know exactly what was being expressed through those young men's dance moves made it even that much more powerful. I think so much about context and how sometimes the importance of creating the unexpected is to put the context in the beginning.

**Bonni:** [00:18:54] But so many of them are masters at creating the unexpected put that context at the end and then it's almost like a double dose of whatever lessons were attempting to be shared through whatever it was that was being

shared. The other thing that Glen Washington really emphasized was this idea of letting people create their own unexpected.

**Bonni:** [00:19:18] As a storyteller he says that one of his big frustrations is that at the end of one of the powerful clips or a story that someone might share is that whoever is sort of the host like how he hosts the Snap Judgment podcast that's full of great storytellers will come out with their own idea about what that person's story meant and kind of give the little golden nugget.

**Bonni:** [00:19:41] And he says at the end of what someone says you translate you steal the story away. If I tell you what the story means. Him as the host. I rob you of the vicarious translation. And I thought that was so powerful because as an educator I think sometimes I try to spell it out too much you know let me tell you what that meant and I'm probably doing that a little bit that today in the podcast.

**Bonni:** [00:20:05] But just how powerful it can be when we let stories speak for themselves and we let the meaning become so much more personal because that person can connect it with their own memories and their own emotions and their own joys and their own fears. He also talked about creating the unexpected from the simple things. He said quote The best stories come from the simple things. And he shared with us this magnificent story that begins with such graphic language and then transitions over to telling a story about something relatively simple I'm going to play a bit of the clip and then encourage that you go watch the full thing on your own.

**Glynn:** [00:20:53] How do you enjoy life. As the world burns when the planet is on fire and the country is falling apart and the cops shoot another teenager and half your neighbors are getting evicted or deported. And Bill Maher is still speaking out loud on television. What do you do. I go to the water park. With my nephew Myles.

**Bonni:** [00:21:24] That's how he begins his story. I go to the water park with my nephew Myles and again I'll encourage you to go watch the full clip it's really just a beautiful example of storytelling. And one of the things Glynn Washington shares about that story after it finishes as he says quote He didn't try to convince us of anything. He told us what happened to him.

**Bonni:** [00:21:47] And one of the other speakers who I was just so thrilled to be able to hear from as I mentioned earlier was Alex Blumberg and he started with this really interesting way of sharing about his talk. Usually I record the podcast a

few weeks in advance and in this particular case I'm recording it two days in advance.

**Bonni:** [00:22:08] And so this is just last week when we had all sorts of violence in our country and horrific events and this is the podcasting community here of 2000 people who are hurting and grieving and angry. And he recognized that and he started out with just the sensitivity of what a challenging time it's been then.

**Bonni:** [00:22:28] And I can't remember exactly how he began his talk but it was he said something about well we're going to laugh a little together we're going to do this and there's a little genocide in there in the middle. And then but it gets better and he uses it.

**Bonni:** [00:22:41] It provided this sense of a mood and a tone of really knowing that we're going to experience the full range of emotions together and we're in this together. And but but you're in trusted hands because I will guide you through this and it will be worth the pain that we experience along the way and I just thought it was such a beautiful thing if you've not had a chance to hear him.

**Bonni:** [00:23:07] One of the things I particularly enjoy is his early episodes of the Startup podcast even just Season 1 Episode One is phenomenal for talking to our students about startups and businesses and that kind of thing I use it all the time but it was just really a beautiful beautiful example of I literally wept during his talk and I laughed and experienced every range of emotions in between them.

**Bonni:** [00:23:33] This is the time in the show in which I give a recommendation and my recommendation to you is going to be to create something unexpected in your teaching and I'd love to hear from you as to either what you've done or what you're thinking about doing so that we can all sort of start to really wrestle with this idea of how we could do this. Is it that you're going to bring in a brightly wrapped package to one of your classes and have that create the sense of unexpected.

**Bonni:** [00:24:00] Are you going to bring in some kind of a prop or a poster or have students go for a walk during the class have them get out of their seats whatever it is. I'd love to hear about it and you can leave a comment at [teachinginhigher.com/109](https://teachinginhigher.com/109) to share any stories that you have of creating

unexpected I'd love to have a collection there. And again you're welcome to email me with those as well.

**Bonni:** [00:24:24] And I want to also let you know that speaking of the unexpected there will be a new rollout of a new teaching in higher ed Web site and I'm super excited for that to happen. I'm not going to commit to a date right now or the person that I'm working with who's designing it for Slash with me which would be very unhappy.

**Bonni:** [00:24:42] So I'm just going to say it's super exciting and will be I think a great way for people to rediscover some of the content on the site some of the episodes that are from long ago but still rings so true today say long ago a dramatic thing to say. This podcast started in June of 2014 and has been running every week ever since but June of 2014 was not that long ago but it feels like it sometimes cause some of those older episodes aren't listened to quite as much as the newer ones and it would be fun to go back and have you rediscover some of the old ones. Thanks so much for listening.

**Bonni:** [00:25:16] I look forward to hearing from some of you about how you're creating the unexpected and your teaching. There are some expected and unexpected guests on the coming weeks that I'm very excited to have you hear the conversations.

**Bonni:** [00:25:28] And as always I would love to have this community continue to grow and one of the best ways is to subscribe to the show on iTunes even if you don't listen to it on iTunes because that just helps their algorithms move it up further in the rankings.

**Bonni:** [00:25:42] And also, if you're willing to put a rating on the show or leave a review that's another great way for helping people discover their show. Thanks so much for listening and I'll see you next time there's some great guests coming up.

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