

Bonni: [00:00:00] Dr. Stephen Brookfield shares about The Skillful Teacher on today's episode of Teaching in Higher Ed.

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Bonni: [00:00:20] 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: [00:00:47] This is Bonni Stachowiak And I am thrilled to be welcoming back to the show Dr. Stephen Brookfield. He is the John Ireland Endowed Chair in the School of Education at the University of St. Thomas. He began his teaching career in 1970 and he's worked in England, Canada, Australia, and the United States in a variety of college settings. And he's also written and edited 18 books on adult learning, teaching, critical thinking, discussion methods, and Critical Theory. Stephen Brookfield, welcome back to Teaching in Higher Ed.

Stephen: [00:01:27] Thank you Bonni.

Bonni: [00:01:29] It is such an honor to get to talk to you. And when you were last on the show I looked it up. It was back in September of 2014 for Episode 15. And anyone listening should definitely go back and listen to that episode because today were going to be talking about some different things, but I want to know what have you been up to since September of 2014. What's been going on in your life.

Stephen: [00:01:52] Oh gosh so much. Well you know I play in a band a punk rock band lead a punk rock band called The 99 as the sixth album is in the can. So we're releasing the first single next week and that's a big part of my life

although it has nothing to do with the higher educational side in my more professional capacity.

Stephen: [00:02:16] I've been working on the second edition of a book called *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* that came out in 1995. So that's way overdue for some updating and then I've been doing a lot of work around the issue of getting students to talk about issues of race in particular and the dynamics of how we do that as white teachers and a largely white institution on how you understand the reluctance to engage in that conversation and what needs to be done really to create the conditions under which it's happening.

Stephen: [00:03:00] So I expect that in a couple of years there will probably be a book on that whole issue because it's been taking up a lot of my time both in practice and forth over the last decade or so.

Bonni: [00:03:15] That was one of the things that struck me so much about your book and somebody recently on iTunes wrote a review about this podcast and said that I really was very passionate.

Bonni: [00:03:29] I'm trying to think of the word that they use they said though that I didn't gush too much, and I think I might gush too much on this sound as I talk about what your book has meant to me. I did not read the first edition and you did talk a little bit about it.

Bonni: [00:03:42] What the changes that you made but it is such a powerful book and I think one of the reasons that I love it so much and I will reread it and I've been recommending it like crazy both on the show and to people in person is that you speak so much just about the pain of it all and the challenge of it all.

Bonni: [00:03:59] And especially you have this chapter about race and as a Caucasian woman it's I mean is some of the things that will come up and you just articulate it so well so I'm glad that you're doing work on that. I would absolutely treasure a book so if it matters I know there'll be a lot of people that

will want to read that and we'll get so much out of it. So thanks for that update. I'd love to have a conversation with you about that some time as well.

Stephen: [00:04:27] Yeah. That would be great. And thanks to you or your approval. You know you write this I don't know how you feel about writing but I write to be helpful to people and to do it alone.

Stephen: [00:04:40] And you send it off to the publisher not even as a paper file now it's all you know an e-mail transaction and you have absolutely no idea if this means anything to anyone unless someone actually bothers to e-mail you or tell you in person that you just did that this means something to them and that's really the emotional fuel you need to keep going writing things because I don't need to write anymore.

Stephen: [00:05:12] And I keep telling myself this is the absolute last book I'm going to do and then something else comes up and I think wow that's really intriguing how am I going to work with this problem. And that's how you know another book starts to take shape. But I write mostly to be helpful.

Stephen: [00:05:33] You know that it's not like I feel I have anything particularly profound to say it's just the people I work with are all doing this difficult work in increasingly difficult circumstances as we get this consumerization of higher education and the greater constraint we're under increasing pressure to increase tuition revenues and to go out and seek a lot of grant money.

Stephen: [00:06:03] And so you're working with a bigger and bigger groups and more and more diverse populations and then you have the culture of entitlement that a lot of my colleagues complain about. And you know it's hard work.

Stephen: [00:06:18] So I think the more that any of us share the struggles that we have. And whatever paths we create to find our way out of those you know that I always like to read things like that. My colleague so that's really what I'm trying to do.

Bonni: [00:06:35] One of my colleagues invited me to tea the other day which felt like something different cause I don't drink coffee and it was fun that he has these really fancy tea cups in his office.

Bonni: [00:06:44] And we both we found out through that conversation have a lot in common about our politics. And he sent me an email after that tea that

we shared and signed his email in solidarity. And I felt like your book is just in solidarity with those who just have such a passion for being skillful teachers.

Bonni: [00:07:07] And today I know we're going to look at four different assumptions that you are making as you articulate throughout the book and throughout your work what a skillful teacher is in the context there.

Bonni: [00:07:19] And the first one is actually your fourth one but I'm going to I'm gonna start out with it today. You assume that college students of any age should be treated as adults. And I would just like to start with asking what does it mean to treat a person as an adult. What does that mean.

Stephen: [00:07:38] Yeah I know I'm fact I would say that and it is a normative statement just infused with value judgments which I'll try and clarify. I actually think that anybody of any age should be treated like an adult in the way that I'm framing it. So I think that when I was raising my kids and I speak to friends kids no matter what their age I try and treat them like an adult.

Stephen: [00:08:05] And I know old well you don't know all of it but I'm not aware of literature on the student development model development cognitive development which documents the real difficulty people with the nation and if we're talking about Traditionally students but typically that they have a moving from a binary dualistic way of thinking through to an awareness of relativistic multiplicity reasoning.

Stephen: [00:08:33] And then being able to get past that to a stage of informed commitment and I know that that kind of reasoning is is hard and a lot of students are not that and have not really being prepared well to move through those more adult modes of reasoning.

Stephen: [00:08:56] But I think that we have to treat them else. And by that I mean that too. First of all have to have an interest in what it is that the other person is thinking or experiencing or feeling.

Stephen: [00:09:10] So I think at the core of all good education is finding out what's happening to people as that in your classrooms and as they're grappling with whatever material you are giving them.

Stephen: [00:09:25] So I think really an adult conversation or adult communication is one which is based on that level of mutuality that you are not

just working from your own knowledge framework or your own set of assumptions you're trying to connect with somebody else and to find out.

Stephen: [00:09:43] Well how are you responding to these ideas that we're discussing or what difficult is you having with the skills that you're trying to learn and a genuine interest in how people are experiencing those things. I think the foundation of adult communication.

Stephen: [00:10:01] And if you look at it I don't know how much money to go into all this money but you know in critical theory a big influence in that area has been you are going to have the critical fearism and and critical theorist.

Stephen: [00:10:14] He has argued in the past that the sign that you're entering adulthood is when you stop universalizing your own experiences and you stop thinking that the way you experience the world the way you experience a particular learning unit or module it is the same as everybody else and you start to realize there are multiple ways of interpreting this and responding to it and different people create meaning around it in different ways.

Stephen: [00:10:44] So so I think helping students understand that their experience while it has generic elements is is very particular to them and understanding there are multiple realities in the room. That's the beginning of at least from how the masses viewpoint and I find this very helpful thing this way the beginning of becoming an adult.

Stephen: [00:11:09] And I think you can do. You can begin that journey at any age. So you know with kindergarten with elementary school a big part of teaching people is to realize that we're not a group of separate islands. We live in a community.

Stephen: [00:11:28] And part of negotiating all the different interests that we share is understanding that people are experiencing the world differently. And my gosh you know from that point of view there is very little adult dialogue on the in the political sphere these days at least in terms of campaign rhetoric

because the the awareness and the generosity of understanding that people see things in different ways is almost completely absent from that.

Stephen: [00:11:59] Instead there's this pre adult insistence that the way that I experience the world the way that I read it is the way that everybody else must see it.

Stephen: [00:12:09] So for me that's the basis of treating people as adults is trying to get into into a subjective understanding of how cold it whole perspective taking is Jack. Jack Mezirow, who I worked with for many years called it - realizing that your particular take on something is not the universal one necessarily.

Bonni: [00:12:36] Back on episode 62 there was a woman on named Rebecca Campbell and she just briefly had mentioned during the episode in fact it may be that Ben and the recommendations piece of it because it was very short that we should never refer to our students as kids.

Bonni: [00:12:54] And I've occasionally heard colleagues do. That's never something that I have been felt any temptation to do or a slip of the tongue that kind of thing and I have always it has come easy to me to maybe not to treat as adults.

Bonni: [00:13:07] I mean in the sense of that word treat maybe I don't always treat people that are in their 60s as adults in terms of you are so right. There's so much to unpack here.

Bonni: [00:13:17] But at any rate after she mentioned that in the episode I talked about it with some of my students who who do mostly fit that 18 to 22 demographic and one of the things I was so surprised by I think maybe I thought maybe this is one where I get to say gosh you know I do I do treat you as adults and I don't call you kids but that a number of them said I don't feel like an adult.

Bonni: [00:13:40] In fact I'm not an adult. And so we talked about what would they see as if they were an adult. What would that look like. What would their lives look like and as you might expect they would say well someday if I get married then I'll be an adult if I have children then I'll be an adulterer if I own a home.

Bonni: [00:13:57] They had they had some external references to things like that. But that does lead me to ask one other question about this treating college

students as adults. Is it important to have a conversation about us treating our learners as adults. Or would that just be too big to unpack and should we just model them for them.

Stephen: [00:14:20] Oh no I think we need to have an explicit conversation and be very public about this. You know I visited junior highs high schools in the Twin Cities where there are publications (oh, sorry, not publications that was probably a scholarly, Freudian slip)... There are conversations with students about how are we going to make decisions that affect us as a school community how are we going to treat each other how are we going to talk to each other.

Stephen: [00:14:54] And those sorts of conversations. My gosh if you want to foster any kind of democratic spirit in people that you absolutely have that should be a major part of the school curriculum. So I think you do make it very explicit.

Stephen: [00:15:10] So I think that this word "adult" is a big normative word and a lot of people I imagine think that being an adult means being completely in control - not being thrown too badly by circumstances - knowing what to do in every situation - having a lot of wisdom to draw on that guides our actions to successful fruition, you know.

Stephen: [00:15:37] And by that definition. Well I guess I'm an adult sometimes that there's a lot of times when I'm not and I know it's sort of I think tied up with some of the impostorship that when we might touch on later.

Stephen: [00:15:50] That I don't feel adult at all I feel at sea - and just I think in the first chapter of the skillful teacher I use the metaphor of muddling through - informed muddling through.

Stephen: [00:16:01] That's really how I think about my practice as a teacher. I'm muddling through it. I think what a lot of traditional-aged college students resist though is being asked to have an active voice and role in determining their own future.

Stephen: [00:16:20] And in small ways you know like asking group when you think we should take a break or a big is like working with a class to say well you know what would be the most important things for us to consider in this course.

Stephen: [00:16:35] Help me construct the curriculum with you. You ask a group of 18 year olds those things and they just look at you as if you know well you're

supposed to do this. You get paid the not so big bucks to do this you know I'm just a student.

Stephen: [00:16:50] I show up. That's all I've got to do and it's this... Over a four year period it's a socialization or an initiation process in hopefully getting people to be more and more comfortable with that.

Stephen: [00:17:05] But I've seen exactly that same response in colleagues when we go to a faculty meeting and the dean or the Provost says well you know we're all adults. I'm not going to lay this out for you I want you to generate what the universities or the schools response should be to this problem.

Stephen: [00:17:25] And you know I and my colleagues say well you know - "...to hell with that - you get paid money to be the dean and the provost and you have more knowledge of this than me. So, you know, you go ahead and do your job."

Stephen: [00:17:43] So, I think that this is not just a matter of chronological age we're talking about and I see adult behaviors in myself and I see very adult behaviors in myself even though I'm 67 and you'd think by now would be behaving in an idle way and in many ways I'm the anti-adult without giving too much away of my personal life... [laughing together.]

Bonni: [00:18:13] As the mother of two small children and just how much they teach me everyday. I wish we all could also be treating each other as children from the sense of how fun it is to watch young children get so curious and the way that they've taken the world it would be just so fun to be with 18 to 22 year olds who had somehow been able to navigate through the educational system while still maintaining that curiosity and passion for learning the next assumption you have is that skillful teaching is whatever helps students learn what are some surprising approaches that you have found that help students learn that weren't initially apparent to you when you first started teaching?

Stephen: [00:18:58] Gosh, well, there's so many. I think one general one is the power of silence and how over the years I've been more and more aware of the need to create very deliberately moments where students not talk and just to think through something and process them information and and maybe write something in response to it not necessarily and not a writing teacher.

Stephen: [00:19:30] And I'm sure that's used a lot in writing classes. But I think I internalized the assumption early in my career that my job was to talk and to

"profess" - and that if I wasn't talking it meant either. I really wasn't earning my money and I should be up front and center doing the job you know and I still feel like I fight against it constantly.

Stephen: [00:19:56] And I know that from a student's point of view there are times when that's helpful. But there are also many times when it's much more helpful for them not to do something so I've become a lot more interested in non-verbal exercises in the classroom and I use social media a lot to create an anonymous back channel of communication.

Stephen: [00:20:16] In every class I teach I use a tool called Today's Meet - which is free - and creates a channel for students to post questions and reactions and so on. And I read that constantly and go to that and work a lot from that.

Stephen: [00:20:34] And if we're actually moving into a classroom discussion I always precede any discussion with a period of silence. I use chalk talk a lot which is a visual tool where people respond to a question only in visual ways on a big chalkboard.

Stephen: [00:20:52] So that's been one thing that I think I've incorporated into my teaching another that I talk about in the book is the power of former students voices to build a case for learning to new students.

Stephen: [00:21:11] So I had to teach a lot of courses early in my career - in study skills - to students who weren't who were deemed not ready for prime time, in terms of their academic abilities.

Stephen: [00:21:24] And you know a lot of people didn't like being told they were remedial as it were or developmental and so so I realized after a while that my telling them these courses were really important wasn't working that well.

Stephen: [00:21:43] They would - they really wouldn't hear me but if I could get two or three students who were in the class beforehand and who themselves said thought this class is a waste of time. But by the end of the semester had changed.

Stephen: [00:21:58] He had actually come up to me and said, "I'm really glad it took this course because now I feel much more equipped you know to get

further in my studies" and if I hadn't taken the class I would never get it through got through my first year and freshman year.

Stephen: [00:22:13] And so if anyone says that to me I like to invite them to come back and be part of a first day panel. And I'll introduce this panel of former students - former resisters - to the new students and I'll just tell the panel you know tell the new students: "What do you wish you had known when you were in their shoes? What you were feeling? Pass on any advice about how to make it in this class."

Stephen: [00:22:37] And when I introduce that panel, as I say in the book, I walk out of the room. So often the first class of a semester I leave the room and leave the students, which on the surface seems a very unprofessional and risky thing to do.

Stephen: [00:22:52] But in my mind it's definitely an act of justifiably good pedagogy because by doing that the new students here the former students tell them good or bad things about the class and they can really trust that the comments that those former students are making whereas if I was in the room I think that the new students would feel it was a bit of a setup. I was there to monitor the former students - [who] only said good things. So there are lots of other examples that I could give but those are two that come immediately to mind.

Bonni: [00:23:33] When people hear about new approaches like this they sound so good. I mean especially Chalk Talk. I realized I actually had done Chalk Talk without realizing that that's what it was called. But as you bring it up again I thought, "Gosh! You could even incorporate that more."

Bonni: [00:23:46] But one of the things that happens is we go when we try it and we think this is going to be fabulous. This is going to be great. And what we get is resistance. Talk about how resistance plays a role in our teaching as we try to incorporate some of these new approaches. And how does that relate - or maybe not - to our failure as teachers?

Stephen: [00:24:10] Well I think that resistance is probably the thing I spent more time thinking about than any other facet of teaching and that's why in *The Skillful Teacher*, you know, I have a chapter (maybe two?) - I can't remember because I'm so much into the other books I'm working on now - but specifically

dealing with resistance and how you respond to it. And I'd frame it not as you know dealing with resistance but more responding to it.

Stephen: [00:24:43] So I used to say dealing with it. But but then I realize that dealing with it has the implication that somehow you successfully remove it from the environment and that's not usually at least in my experience. What happens the resistance doesn't go away.

Stephen: [00:25:04] What I have to get worked out in my head is is how to why do I respond to this so that it doesn't completely derail the efforts of a majority of students in the class.

Stephen: [00:25:17] Because sometimes resistance comes from a small minority but it can block the learning of a much greater group of students particularly if you get sucked into constantly trying to please a small group of hard core resisters which is something that I fall into that particular trap in the past.

Stephen: [00:25:40] So I think the thing for me with resistance is getting the best insight that I can into why it's there. And that goes along generally with what I was talking about earlier that you know treating students as adults means being interested in the experiences that they bring to the classroom.

Stephen: [00:26:02] So if I find out that resistance is due to something that's happened bureaucratically that's completely beyond my control then I'll take a different approach to responding to it than if I find out the resistance is due to a particular personal habit of mine or my preference for a particular technique that doesn't fit let's say the racial or cultural background of the students that I'm working in.

Stephen: [00:26:36] Like I've had over the years increasing numbers of Southeast Asian students in my classes and they've come with a certain conception of what being a good student represents which is diligently reproducing whatever the teacher says or demonstrates and in my classes if I'm asking them instead to think critically about things that I've said and you know if I say that critical thinking involves also critiquing me as a teacher which is a very westernized conception of critical thinking then of course there's going to be an enormous amount of resistance to that which is not bloody mindedness.

Stephen: [00:27:22] It's just a cultural disjunction. So in the book I try and look at all the different possible causes of resistance and say this is way too complex a phenomenon to think that if we adopt five best practices that we will wash our

classrooms free of the stain of negativity. That's the metaphor I use in the book and I really like you know that it's applying a pedagogy stain remover and you just you know remove the stain.

Stephen: [00:27:58] I think a lot of us - and I include myself in this - have thought of resistance as irredeemably a dirty thing and I think a lot of resistance actually is quite justified.

Stephen: [00:28:10] If I haven't built a good case for learning, it doesn't surprise me that students are resistant to it. If I'm using a method that doesn't really match their cultural formation, it's not a surprise. If there's some racial suspicion that because I'm white and a male - that's not a surprise. If I've misjudged their level of readiness and I'm asking them to do things before they're really equipped to do them and I really haven't laid the groundwork properly, that's another thing. Maybe I haven't modeled adequately what I'm asking them to do so.

Stephen: [00:28:51] So the way we deal with resistance from me is very contextual and really we will depend on that initial assessment which is why one of the other assumptions that I know we're going to look at you know the the assumption that the core knowledge you need to do good work is an awareness of how students are understanding what's going on. You need to know that to make a good informed response to resist.

Bonni: [00:29:19] Yeah. One of the things you share about is that you talk about dying a hundred small deaths every time you teach a class through the practice of this constant connection with how your students are experiencing their learning and perceiving your actions.

Bonni: [00:29:35] And one of the questions I actually had around that assumption is how do we protect ourselves from these hundred deaths or is it even possible or or valuable to do?

Stephen: [00:29:48] Yeah I've been thinking about that a lot lately because I've really got interested in the dynamics of team teaching and how team teaching can help us or help me - I'll speak personally - keep the tendency to self laceration in control because I do - I'm very hard on myself as a teacher. I have

this streak of perfectionism in me which is you know certainly well in some ways and is an absolute killer in other ways.

Stephen: [00:30:22] And in my personal life, I suffer from depression and anxiety and that's all bound up with this feeling that I need to be in perfect control all the time. And in my head I'm only a good teacher if everybody leaves that class feeling like every moment was a wonderfully informative and uplifting experience in that classroom of course that's a completely unrealistic expectation is never going to be to be met.

Stephen: [00:30:55] But it has a real hold on me and you know, my gosh, I've been teaching since 1970 so it's probably never going to go away now in 2016. But when I mean I find it really helpful - those few occasions I can have the luxury of doing this because my partner as I am you know leaving the room and talking about what a terrible job I did and all the usual self flagellating thing that I get into, my partner will just be often a voice of reason and point out things that went well. Things that I've missed will give me a different interpretation of what I saw was maybe a critical or negative student comment will point out questions came up on today's Meet feed that were really excellent and showed how someone had really understood the material at a very deep level of understanding so.

Stephen: [00:31:57] So I think the more we can bring our practice into a collaborative mode for multiple reasons the better and keeping the self emotionally grounded to me is a big advantage of teaching and I don't have time teaching then you know it's just good to hear from colleagues in other settings or to read things that say you know this is this is what I do and this is how I feel I screwed up.

Stephen: [00:32:32] And if I respect those colleagues and think they have something to offer it's so reassuring for me to hear someone that I admire say you know I really lost it here and I made a rookie mistake or I just can never seem to work out what to do in this situation.

Stephen: [00:32:49] So I don't actually get a solution from that but I feel a lot better because I realize that my experience is not unique to me as a flawed individual actually. It's a generic response to difficult work.

Bonni: [00:33:05] This is all shaped by your final assumption which is that skillful teachers adopt a critically reflective stance toward their practice. Would you share a little bit about what a critically reflective stance is? And I guess what it is

in contrast to in terms of other stances we might be tempted to adopt toward her own practice as teachers?

Stephen: [00:33:29] Yeah absolutely what. To me being critically reflective means that you acknowledge that probably most of the decisions you make as a teacher the micro decisions in the middle of a class the more micro decisions you have about grading policies or how to construct the curriculum or develop a syllabus. All those actions are based on assumptions we have about the world and how it works and how we're going to achieve the consequences we want to achieve.

Stephen: [00:34:02] So being critical or effective is just the process of constantly checking your assumptions against some external data. To say, "Is this assumption: for example - putting chairs in a circle will increase communication amongst learners and make people feel that their experiences are respected and therefore lead to deeper discussion. Is that a valid assumption? Just to use a very basic one that I've looked at a lot. I think the way that we are able to check our assumptions is by bringing in these external sources of data so we get feedback from students about how they respond to the actions that we take.

Stephen: [00:34:50] Do they find particular assignments, particular explanations, classroom activities, and so on... the way we've sequenced the curriculum. We have done all of those things assuming it's going to be that they're going to be helpful. Do students have that same experience? And then I think involving colleagues getting them to team teach with you or maybe observe you sometimes or just chatting with colleagues about things that are going on in your classroom. They can help you become aware of a lot of assumptions that you have and maybe you're unaware of.

Stephen: [00:35:28] And they can shine a light on a situation and bring a contrasting experience to it and then I think that if we read theory on research that pertains to a particular problem we're dealing with - that can provide another helpful window a lens into our world that - through which we can view our practice and that helps us become aware of some assumptions.

Stephen: [00:35:55] I've read a lot on the phenomenon of resistance, have read a lot around racial identity and communication, and read a lot around power. And that really helps me understand those things and I think a better way.

Stephen: [00:36:12] When I take the time to do that and then the final lens is our own personal experience I think a lot of what we do springs - without us

acknowledging it - from our experiences as students. So, I know that the way that I teach, which is very much geared towards structuring maximum participation, is a result of my experiences as a student where I've felt that, as an introvert, I faded into the background.

Stephen: [00:36:42] And I'd never really felt that acknowledged or recognised as a student. In fact, for a while I just gave up going to class and just read the textbooks and took assignments and consequently didn't do very well as a student.

Stephen: [00:37:01] So I think critical reflection really is intentionally building in this constant scrutiny of the assumptions and just checking that the assumptions you're making about how best to foster learning are reasonable and accurate.

Stephen: [00:37:16] And a lot of the time you find indeed that they are and your judgment is confirmed which is very valuable to know. And then at other times, you find that you've misread something and hopefully you can make an adjustment and reframe your assumptions, so that it better fits the context that you're working in.

Bonni: [00:37:39] Share a little bit about feeling like an imposter in your teaching.

Stephen: [00:37:44] Yeah well I'm you know I was born in a very tough working class area of Liverpool called Bootle - "brutal Bootle" as it was known. And you know I've never did well as a student because I can't take tests. I think it's bound up with my depression and anxiety. I just freeze in exam situations whereas if I'm allowed to take control of my learning, work at my own pace, and so on - I do better. Which is why when I eventually got to doctoral student status I was really happy because in England that's what being a doctoral student is... You're basically in charge of research.

Stephen: [00:38:28] But you know I failed my master's exam. I failed to get into college initially at 18. Failed my SATs, as it were, in England and had a history of not doing well. So when I finally get into a teaching role and I feel constantly like I'm one step ahead of the students. They're going to see through me. They come to realize that I don't really know what I'm doing. And this is the the hidden difficulty of team teaching because although I love team teaching, when I teach with a peer, I'm also aware that oh my god - now someone that I respect and admire is in the room with me. And they do the same work and they're going to realize very quickly that I don't deserve to be here. So I've had this feeling throughout my career as a teacher. When I started talking publicly

about how students feel this, which is what initially drew my attention (adult students coming back or coming into a higher ed for the first time have a lot of impostorship) and then I started thinking about yeah but it's not just them - it's me!

Stephen: [00:39:42] And then I start talking about how I feel like this and so many colleagues... One of the things I've written about that I think are generated the greatest response - so many colleagues comes to me and say you know when you wrote - described what it feels like to be an impostor - that's exactly how I respond.

Stephen: [00:40:01] And one of the signs that you know you suffering from this is that if you have been teaching 100 students in a class and you get the course evaluations and 98 percent of them are glowing and 2 percent are negative - the only ones that you think about and take seriously are the 2 percent of the negative ones.

Stephen: [00:40:22] And part of that is because you feel that that 2 percent somehow are written by the smartest students in the class who have seen through your façade of assumed competence and they - they realize that in fact you don't know what you're doing and so you know if you obsess about that 2 percent as I do that's one of the sure signs that impostorship is alive and well. And I think our methods of teacher evaluation underscore this because you get good performance evals - at least in my experience - when you get high student evaluations that basically say you did everything flawlessly and that everything you explained was clear as day and that all the pacing of the course is just right. And the assignments were really helpful...

Stephen: [00:41:20] So we have this sense that good teaching is flawless performance and most of us know that that's not who we are.

Stephen: [00:41:31] We try and do good work. But this is so complex. You're constantly thinking, "Oh I missed that" or "I need to watch out for this on Thursday" or so...

Stephen: [00:41:43] I think the unrealistic sense of teaching effectiveness also contributes to this widespread sense of impostorship. But, no one talks about it unless someone gets the ball rolling. So that's I think part of my job now as

someone who has is endowed chair and you know has some credibility. I need to talk about this as much as I can in public settings.

Bonni: [00:42:14] And also what I've taken away from you, too, is that while that feeling of being an imposter can be so debilitating, it also can help us to connect with our students who feel like impostors in college as well. So thank you for that ability to at least find some good out of such a painful experience at times.

Stephen: [00:42:36] I also think a controlled sense of impostorship is a very good thing. You know you don't want to teach with someone who thinks they are flawless.

Stephen: [00:42:47] I want to teach with someone who is aware of things that they don't do well because that person is always looking to do better and improve, as hopefully I am, too.

Stephen: [00:42:59] So to feel that you've got this all down... I don't know. I think you're either in denial or you are a massive egomaniac. It's just that if impostorship - you spend your career thinking I'm the only one who feels this way and everybody else seems to be fine - you know that can become waring and demoralizing.

Bonni: [00:43:26] This is the point in the show where we are going to give our recommendations and back on episode 62 I had recommended a TED talk by Bryan Stevenson and since then Rebecca Campbell on the show has said that he had written a book called Just Mercy that they were using for their freshman reading group.

Bonni: [00:43:46] I ended up reading in the last month or so and it is a incredibly painful and hopeful book to read all at the same time and rather than even try myself to articulate it. I'll just read what Desmond Tutu had to say about it.

Bonni: [00:44:03] "Bryan Stevenson is American America's young Nelson Mandela, a brilliant lawyer fighting with courage and conviction to guarantee justice for all. Just Mercy should be read by people of conscience in every civilized country in the world to discover what happens when revenge and

retribution replace justice and mercy. It is as gripping to read as any legal thriller. And what hangs in the balance is nothing less than the soul of a great nation."

Bonni: [00:44:35] Stephen, what do you recommend today?

Stephen: [00:44:38] Well completely unrelated to teaching I recommend the TV show called Better Call Saul which is a precursor to the breaking bad series but without so much of the violence and is more a character study which I find very gripping.

Stephen: [00:44:55] I've been reading an interesting piece I found online in fact that intrigued me so much I asked my university faculty development center to send it round to everybody and our newsletter and they've done that. It's by Stark and Freishtat.

Stephen: [00:45:13] And it's a little article called An Evaluation of Course Evaluations. It's in Science Open which is an open online journal so anyone can download this. It's a piece that argues that most of the student evaluation of teaching forms that we use are statistically invalid.

Stephen: [00:45:37] It's written by two statisticians and by invalid I mean they don't measure the teaching effectiveness that they purport to measure. They conclude that these are statistically reliable because they tend to generate the same responses across multiple groups but they're statistically invalid. They actually don't measure teaching effectiveness. They measure more - they tell us more about students learning. So, that that's a good and provocative read.

Bonni: [00:46:11] Thank you so much for all of those recommendations. I watched season 1 of Better Call Saul and absolutely loved it and need to get on the ball for now Season 2.

Stephen: [00:46:20] Well there's so much good TV. You know I my wife laughs when I say this but I tell her we're living in the golden age of television right now. I

just don't have enough hours in the day to binge watch all the series I really want to.

Bonni: [00:46:37] I'm like it wasn't bad enough until now Netflix and Hulu are coming up with their own original content as well it gets even worse and better all at the same time.

Stephen: [00:46:45] Yeah I know. I just found something on Hulu and I'm thinking my wife would kill me if I say well now we need to subscribe to this.

Bonni: [00:46:52] Stephen, thank you so much for investing your time. I mentioned that I got to actually see you speak in person at the Lilly Conference and that was such a thrill to - [there's] something different about being in the room with someone - and was so pleased when you actually emailed to ask for my sketch notes from that session.

Bonni: [00:47:08] And then I thought I've been meaning to invite you back to talk about the Skillful Teacher and just thanks so much for you investing your Friday afternoon with me to have this conversation.

Stephen: [00:47:19] Oh it is an absolute pleasure Bonni. Anytime.

Bonni: [00:47:25] I already recommended it on a previous episode but just can't end this episode without once again suggesting that you go out and get yourself a copy of The Skillful Teacher. This is really just the beginning of the depth and breadth of that wonderful work.

Bonni: [00:47:41] And thanks to Stephen Brookfield for all the vulnerability he showed in writing it. Thanks, also, to all of you who have been writing reviews on iTunes or giving [the podcast] a rating... whatever service that you use to listen to the show because it really does help us just grow and connect the

community and apparently with those algorithms makes the biggest difference when you do that.

Bonni: [00:48:04] So thanks to all of you who have been doing that. It's also just a joy to get to read how the show is impacting you. Thanks so much. And those of you that haven't done it yet. It's not too late. Thanks for listening. I'll see you soon.

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