Transcript

[0:01] (music)

Derek Bruff: [0:06] This is Leading Lines. I'm Derek Bruff. As higher education moves into its second full semester of pandemic teaching, most of us are facing teaching contexts, much like we did in the fall. For some of us, that means more online teaching. For others, some face-to-face teaching with masks, physical distancing, and students participating remotely. And for many of us, whether we're remote or on campus, we'll be teaching on Zoom a lot, which is why I'm very excited to share a lively conversation I had last month with Dan Levy, author of the new book, *Teaching Effectively with Zoom*.

[0:43] Dan wrote the first edition of the book during the summer of 2020, drawing on both years of experience fostering active learning in a variety of settings, as well as interviews with colleagues practicing their teaching on Zoom. It's been a busy year, both for educators figuring out new ways to use Zoom to engage students, and for Zoom itself, which has rolled out several new features in recent months. That's why Dan has just published the second edition of his book, a second edition of the same book later in the year. Well, that's 2020 for you.

[1:17] That's also Dan, who is remarkably productive and quite passionate about teaching and learning. Dan Levy has been a faculty member at Harvard University for 15 years and currently serves as the faculty director of the Public Leadership Credential, the Harvard Kennedy School's flagship online learning initiative. He co-founded Teachly, a website aimed at helping instructors teach more effectively and more inclusively. He is passionate about effective teaching and learning and enjoys sharing his experience and enthusiasm with others.

[1:48] In our conversation, Dan talks about the challenges of teaching with Zoom. He shares ways that instructors are thinking about new forms of class participation, thanks to Zoom.

And he describes several strategies for engaging and assessing students on Zoom. As you'll hear, I was impressed at the creativity Dan has brought to this topic. I've been facilitating sessions on Zoom all year and I learned several new approaches to engaging participants and students during our conversation. (music)

[2:20] Well, Dan, thanks for being on the podcast. I'm excited to have a conversation with you today.

Dan Levy: [2:26] Thank you very much, Derek.

Derek: [2:28] I know you're a podcast listener. That's always fun to have someone who listens to the podcast to be a guest.

Dan: [2:33] Thank you.

Derek: [2:35] And I want to start with a question that I've started asking a lot of our guests, which is tell me about a time that when you realized you wanted to be an educator.

Dan: [2:46] So the earliest memory that I have about this is when I was in high school. My math teacher asked for volunteers to help the students who were struggling in the class with some tutorials after class. And I volunteered and I started doing that. And I was just thrilled by what I can only describe as the most intellectually stimulating and emotionally rewarding experience that I can have in my life, which is to help someone else learn. So that's how, that's how it started. And that's what I feel every day when I teach.

Derek: [3:35] That's just beautiful.

Dan: [3:37] Thank you.

Derek: [3:38] And I have to say that's probably the answer I've heard that's closest to my own story. I was in college, but I started tutoring calculus my first year of college and had a very similar response to, here's someone who's struggling in their calculus course and I can sit down with them for half an hour and somehow ask enough good questions and explain things in different ways that they, the light bulb comes on and yes, it's cognitively stimulating but also emotionally rewarding.

Dan: [4:06] Yes, yes. Thank you.

Derek: [4:07] I definitely relate to that.

Dan: [4:09] Thank you.

Derek: [4:10] Well, I want to ask, we're here to talk about your book on teaching with Zoom and initially as I was writing down my questions, I thought, why write a book on teaching with Zoom in 2020? But I think our listeners probably know why such a resource would be valuable. So instead, I'll ask, why were you in a good position to write this book? And also, how on earth did you write a book this year?

Dan: [4:33] Sure. So I have been teaching at the Kennedy School for over 15 years and for the last ten, I've been trying to get our school to move to do more online teaching. Most of my efforts have been focused on asynchronous online teaching. In my own teaching, I had been using online modules in preparation for class, and I had seen the potential for this kind of blended model. I confess, I hadn't done much synchronous teaching when COVID hit. But perhaps because of that and my interest in online teaching, immediately after COVID hit, I started asking a bunch of colleagues, can I go and observe you teach?

[5:26] And at the time, I wasn't thinking about writing a book. I was just thinking about learning how they were doing. And one of the things that became very clear is how creative and innovative many of them were being in what I can only describe are early efforts to try to as best as we could deal with the constraints of the online teaching environment. So I think after seeing that, and frankly after seeing some other experiences that were not that good for the students, I said to myself in mid-May, I want to write this book because I think the likelihood that we'll be doing this in the fall is high. And I think it could be helpful to people. I had seen my own daughters go through Zoom sessions in in school. And so that's how it happened.

Derek: [6:27] Yeah. Can you say a bit about the writing process because I mean, it is a lot of writing to do in a short time.

Dan: [6:39] It is. And as you know from the preface, I had been inspired by your book, by a book that Jim Lang wrote and by others. This is a bit of a different kind of book. I couldn't have written in four to six weeks the kinds of books that your team write that have a lot of

background research that you do on the topic. This book is meant, was much more meant to be like, okay, you have to teach now with Zoom, here are some experiences of instructors.

[7:13] I would like to think that the book is based on principles of effective teaching and learning. So I don't cite the literature very formally, but hopefully the principles are reflected there. But the realities that I knew that this book was going to be helpful on July first and was now going to be as helpful if I waited for a year to write it. So in some way, how did I do it, it was just like the pressure of a deadline, which I'm sure most writers can relate to.

Derek: [7:50] Yes. And I think also, I mean, I can imagine you're someone like me who likes to experiment with active learning in synchronous class sessions.

Dan: [8:04] Yes.

Derek: [8:05] We've done that in classrooms in years past, using technology, using other pedagogical moves. And so thinking about the space of how to use the affordances of a synchronous video platform to teach? That's, I don't know. That's I mean, this has been a hard year, but that piece I imagined was kind of fun.

Dan: [8:27] Absolutely. In fact, I have a friend who's not in education, but who told me after reading the book, he told me, "You told me that you wrote this book in a month and a half, but I read it and I know that that's not true. You have been writing it in your mind for the last ten or fifteen years. It's just that you sat down to write it in a month and a half," and I think there's some truth to that in that yes, I wasn't teaching with Zoom 5-years ago, but some of the ideas reflected in the book come from experience having tried to do active learning in the classroom for many years.

Derek: [9:10] Yes, I love that quote, "you've been writing it for years." And you also draw on some of the experiences of your colleagues in the book as well.

Dan: [9:19] A lot, a lot. In fact, one of the most exciting things about this upcoming second edition is when I wrote the first edition, it was literally the colleagues that I could go and observe teach. But since the first edition, a lot has happened this last fall, a lot of us have been experimenting. I put out a request for tips on teaching with Zoom and readers from all over the world responded. And so now some of those boxes of in practice, you know, here's an educator doing this have both benefited from the wisdom of more time for all of us to

experiment and from a wider range of voices.

[9:59] The realities, yes, the majority are still my colleagues at Harvard University. But there, you know, there's one from someone teaching in Mexico finance. There's another one from someone teaching high school in Venezuela. And so those are, I don't know, I found that part to be super exciting to be able to reflect a wider range of educators in the book.

Derek: [10:27] That's great. And you know, you mentioned my book and Jim Lang's writing and I think Jim does a great job of that too. And that's kind of one of my goals is I love to speak about my own experience teaching, but I know that's only going to be so relatable to readers. And so I try to pull in a lot of stories from a lot of different educators.

Dan: [10:44] You do that very well. I mean, you know this from the preface of my book, but your book about classroom response systems or clickers, as they used to call them at the time, had so many rich examples that I've benefited from it, you know, for the past ten years I've benefited from it.

Derek: [11:05] That's great. Well, speaking of other educators, why do you think some instructors are finding it challenging to teach via Zoom this year? What are some things that make that hard?

Dan: [11:17] Many. I think one of the distinctions, I have a colleague from whom I learned a lot of things about how to deploy technology in the interests of teaching, Teddy Svoronos at the Kennedy School. And as we were teaching together this fall, he made a distinction which I think was very important, which is teaching online versus teaching during a pandemic. And we're doing both. And I think they're both getting conflated as we are teaching.

[11:51] So teaching in a pandemic, it's unprecedented. We are both ourselves and our students are dealing with lots of things we weren't dealing with before. And so that adds like a degree of difficulty to the task that's immense. More to the sort of teaching online, I think at least one aspect of it, which I think is important is of course is a huge disruption, we basically need to do things in a different way than we normally have to do it. And the question is how to adapt to this environment. And what I would say, to me, has been the most difficult is yes, I miss the physical presence of the classroom, but I also miss the spontaneity that happens in a classroom that I think is much harder to reproduce over Zoom.

Derek: [12:47] Yeah, yeah. Well, and I hear that from my faculty too, that there are a lot of faculty who I would say, I mean, you've done a lot of reading, a lot of studying about your own teaching and about others' teaching. I work with a lot of faculty who haven't done as much reading, but have an intuitive sense of how they navigate the physical classroom, how they engage students, how they lead discussion. And a lot of them are telling me, yes, they rely a lot on eye contact and body language and some things they don't even, aren't always aware that they're doing actually to engage students. And so when you take out some of those elements and you move over to Zoom, a lot of faculty have kind of felt themselves a bit of a loss, like the tools in their toolbox don't work anymore and they need some more tools.

Dan: [13:37] Or they need, I think some of it is you need new manifestation of those tools in the environment. So faculty associates, I think most of us associate students participating with our students speaking, but in a live online session, students can participate in many ways, other than speaking, and some of those other ways are more effective than speaking. So we need to allow for a different vehicle for that to happen.

Derek: [14:10] Yeah. That's one thing that I think I've discovered this year too, is faculty thinking about participation in new ways, which is kind of exciting really, right? Because I think the having just one way to participate is a little bit limiting. And they're going to be students who for a variety of reasons, might not speak up much in a typical classroom, but might be able to participate via text quite enthusiastically.

Dan: [14:33] Absolutely. And in fact, one of the, my perception is that one of the things that's hardest to adapt to is the fact that the verbal communication is the one that degrades the most when we move from a physical classroom to the online classroom. But yet it's our default communication in the physical classroom. So I think part of the challenge of moving to the online classroom is that now that default is not that effective. And there are other ways for students engaging that could be more effective both in terms of drawing them in and as you just said now, drawing in students who might not be drawn in.

Derek: [15:22] Yeah. Let's talk more about that. One of the things I like about your book is that you have a section on basically ways to engage your students...

Dan: [15:30] Yes.

Derek: [15:31] ...before the section on how you're engaging on Zoom.

Dan: [15:34] Yes.

Derek: [15:36] And unlike some readers, I'm one of those weird people who reads a book from front to back. (Dan laughs) So I like that you put the student engagement before the kind of instructor presence. What are some of the strategies that you've seen to be effective for engaging students on Zoom?

Dan: [15:53] So first that choice was very deliberate because the most tempting thing is to say is all right, how do I present my slides on Zoom? And that's only chapter eight of the book. So I think in terms of how students can engage. So one way that they can engage, I think in some ways much better than in the physical classroom is by writing. And I know that we as instructors, use, ask our students to write, but here they can do it live. And your chat is controversial, and I speak about that controversy can be distracting and all of that.

[16:33] But I think it's an amazing vehicle for communication with the students. And it can be used in a number of ways. So, you know, my own personal teaching, I used to struggle with doing the one-minute paper at the end of every class. And even though I know how important it is in terms of everything that the science of teaching and learning tells us about retrieval, about metacognition, all of that, I know that but yet when I'm teaching, it's like the last two minutes of class, I have too many other things that I want to do.

[17:09] Whereas here, you know, at the end of every class it's like, okay, just put in the chat, what was your key takeaway from today's class? And it's just like so frictionless that I was able to do it much more. I love your example in the podcast that you had with Jim on the "ready, set, go," that you learned from your wife. That's another great example of everyone processing at the same time and you being able to discover that very quickly.

[17:38] Or maybe sometimes you just want, "give me an example of this" and now ten responses come. Or "what questions do you have?" And then you have five questions and you can prioritize which question you deal with first. I think all of those things to me seemed like better online than in person. So that's one example. I think working in groups is another example where I think there are aspects of it that actually work better in the online classroom than in the physical one.

Derek: [18:10] Do you have any advice for faculty who are either worried about the text chat getting off topic or maybe they've got a hundred and fifty, two hundred students. Are there

ways to use text chat in a much larger class?

Dan: [18:24] The main thing I think about teaching online in general is the importance of establishing norms. In our physical classroom, those norms have been established for many years. In our online classrooms, they're beginning to be established, but I think it's important to do it. So I think part of it is being super clear with the students why you're using chat and for what purposes. I think obviously if you have a 150 to 200 students it's going to be really hard to read all those comments.

[18:54] So one thing that I speak about in the book, alright, can you get someone else to help you processing that? So maybe a teaching assistant or someone who can process that. The other thing that I could imagine you doing, which I don't think we do enough, is, well, what if you had, divide the classroom into groups? And you sort of say right now group seven, everyone write your comment in the chat. And so now group seven is writing their comments on the chat and you get 20 instead of 120.

[19:29] Or there may be other ways, maybe not through chat, you do it in some, with some other technology. Maybe you do it through a Google slideshow or a Google Doc. And then although Google Docs after a number of uses also get too congested. But I think there are creative ways of thinking about how you get them all to engage without you having to process all of it at the same time.

Derek: [19:56] I love that. That's such a simple solution to have groups within your class and just say group seven, it's your turn on this question because their answers are gonna be at least reasonably representative of the rest of the class, right?

Dan: [20:11] You teach statistics. So if it's a random sample, you'll probably get within some sampling error close to what the rest of the class thinks.

Derek: [20:19] And all the other students, maybe it's a little less engaging for the other students, but they're still getting the chance to compare their own mental answer to what they see in the text chat.

Dan: [20:27] They could. Or you could say, group seven, you go first land the rest of you type it, but hold it. And then group seven goes first. Then you read and process that, and then the rest of you then do it and then you get the benefit of everyone but only process a few.

Derek: [20:46] Yeah, yeah.

Dan: [20:48] By the way, I've been also been thinking about that for one of the things that I find, if you ask me, one of the things that I miss the most in a physical classroom has been the sound of the classroom. If you have a big class, obviously everyone is muted. And so what if subgroups of students could unmute themselves in segments of the class? I experimented with that, but I don't know that that worked extremely well, but I'm looking for solutions.

Derek: [21:18] Yeah. Well, and it reminds me a bit of a technique that we were endorsing a lot this summer with our faculty, which is the fishbowl. To have, you know, a handful or a small group of students be the discussants and ask them to turn on their mics and maybe their videos. Everyone else turns their video off and then you just see those students on your screen. And what I love about the fishbowl, one is that when you have a smaller group of people on Zoom, I think you get more fluid and natural conversations.

Dan: [21:50] Yes.

Derek: [21:51] But also if you're not in the fishbowl as the instructor, your students really have to carry the conversation. And I think that's really productive to kind of stop yourself from talking too much.

Dan: [22:01] I love that. And so a colleague of mine was telling me that he was doing that. It's a great way of engaging the students.

Derek: [22:12] Right, right. And again, in some ways it's easier to implement in Zoom than it would be in the physical classroom.

Dan: [22:19] Yes.

Derek: [22:20] Especially in a larger class because you have to have six students come to the front of the room and move around. So let's talk a little bit more about group work because I do think a number of our faculty and our campus have found the Zoom breakout rooms to be pretty useful. Can you say a bit about that as a tool and maybe share some examples of kind of good ways to use breakout rooms?

Dan: [22:41] Sure. So I think I'll say a few things. One, I think it's incredibly powerful to be

able to use breakout rooms in Zoom in combination with other tools that allow you to measure what the students are doing. So, for example, I've seen instructors use breakout rooms in combination with Google Slides or Google Docs, where the students are documenting the work that they're doing in the breakout rooms. And I think that can be incredibly powerful. And in some way better than in the physical classroom.

[23:21] Because in the physical classroom, you're circulating to try to see what each group is doing and the classroom is noisy. You're not really seeing, when you step close to a group, they might be a little bit hesitant to continue the conversation, whereas here, while they're in breakout rooms, you could sort of see, alright, I can see that breakout room number seven hasn't written anything on their Google Slide. In five minutes, I'm going to go and check in on them to see what's going on. Or you can sort of say, wow, this group number three really made a very interesting argument in favor of x. Now group number eight actually is making the opposite argument.

[24:03] So all of that you are being able to see and digest while they are doing the work. And so when they come back, you're armed with so much more information to lead a discussion than you would have been otherwise. So I think that to me is in essence an example of how they can be incredibly powerful. I will say that based on my conversations with students and with colleagues, there are few things that are important to make breakout rooms successful. And I go through some of them in the book.

[24:40] But one it's super important to be clear on what the students are expected to do in the breakout room. That sounds super obvious, but in Zoom, a lot of those details get lost. Or if you, you know, if you have a slide, this is what you need to do. If you've asked them to fill in a slide, be very clear where they're supposed to, write. That's number one.

[25:02] Number two, I think it's important to give them enough time. I think that was one of the main concerns that students had that in our effort to manage our class time, we give them too little time and then we call them in too early. Again, that's where I think the Google Slide or Google Doc can help us see, okay, most groups seem to have finished and others not, but I can call them back on.

[25:27] And the third thing which I actually discovered this fall and was different from the spring. In the spring, most of us got caught in the middle of a semester. So when we assigned students randomly to breakout rooms, they already knew each other and it was very

easy to start conversations. In the fall, a lot of us didn't I think quite realize that our students didn't know each other. And so putting them in random groups made the interaction a little bit less efficient. So I think the choice of whether you assign them randomly or in a more deliberate manner is one that I think deserves more attention, that at least, I was able to give this semester. This is based on student feedback.

[26:11] And then the last thing I would say is that Zoom now has the ability to let students choose their breakout rooms. And that I think opens some range of possibilities that I think are I don't know, I'm fascinated by how many things now can be done because of that.

Derek: [26:29] Yeah, yeah. And I had just heard about that addition to Zoom and I saw it as a solution. My understanding is the pre-assign mode of students to breakout rooms in Zoom has been challenging for some instructors. It depends on how the Zoom is set up at your institution and how students log in and things like that, but if you do have persistent small groups in your class, you could easily set those up and then let students just join their own small group.

Dan: [26:57] That's certainly perfect for that, but it's also perfect for other things. You could start class in breakout rooms and give students a choice if you want to do this, go to this breakout room. If you want to do that, go to that breakout room. So that's one possibility or, you know, my colleague, Teddy Svoronos, came up with this ingenious way of doing it. Sometimes we pause class to ask students to work on a problem. This is, I'm sure true for classes like yours and many others. So you could have students, you can tell students, if you just want to work on your own in a quiet space just stay in this room, in the main room. If you want help from a teaching assistant, go to group one. If you want to work with another student, but not a teaching assistant, go to breakout room two.

[27:54] And so now not only do you have the choice of which breakout room to go to, but you have the choice of whether to go to breakout room. And you could also go from one breakout room to the other. I'm going to go to a TA to ask him or her a question and then I'm going to go and work on my own. And so all of those now become possibilities because you as the instructor are no longer the person having to assign students to rooms.

Derek: [28:19] Yeah. I hadn't thought about that. This is the kind of creative thinking I love to do. I love that. And you've got my creative juices going, right? I sometimes do a class debate in my writing seminar. And so I like to assign students to a pro or con side, but I can imagine

situations where you might have one or two or three different perspectives that you want students to explore. And you let them decide which side they want to kind of start with. And I might jigsaw it, right? There might be a part two where I bring those perspectives in conflict with each other, but initially giving students that choice.

Dan: [29:00] I know you like cryptography. So maybe you could even have one student who's a spy in the other group, against group. (Derek laughs) And so they go and hear the arguments and bring it back to the pro group. All of those are possibilities. So I think we're just beginning to explore. And also you give students more agency, right, when you give them the possibility of choosing where they want to go to.

Derek: [29:30] I love that. Well, so I'm going to ask a couple of questions. Well, one big one I think that I hear a lot from faculty. There's just kind of consternation over this, over having students turn their videos on or off, or requiring students to turn their videos on. I think some faculty are concerned that, again, a lot of times these are faculty who were used to a certain kind of visual feedback in the classroom they used to assume their students are engaged. And I chose those words carefully. We don't actually know that they're engaged. They just look like they're engaged. So how do you think about that choice of asking students to turn their video on?

Dan: [30:14] So I don't claim to have the right answer. I think for most of us, it makes a huge difference whether you're teaching and, in your screen, you see the faces of your students, you see the reactions. I think it also makes a difference for the students who are there to be able to engage. But I also know there are legitimate reasons why a student might not be able to join. So the way I struck this compromise, I'm not saying that I have it right is to tell students, please use video unless you have good reasons not to and I kind of enumerate some of the reasons.

[30:56] And I do think that recently I was asked to give a talk. There were 200 people and there were only like seven with their video on. And it was a very challenging experience. I felt like I was talking to the other side of the ocean and had no idea of what was happening. So I can understand from the instructor's standpoint, but again, you know, there might be some students who really cannot do it for legitimate reasons. And if that's the case, that's fine. But hopefully most of your students will be able to have the video on.

Derek: [31:40] Yeah. And I think it's also a nice occasion to think about other ways of

participating.

Dan: [31:46] For sure. Yeah, they could do it through the chat, they could vote. And you wrote a whole book about this. But the voting is another aspect of, I mean, this you can do in a regular classroom, fine. But there's, I'm sure you have experimented with this, but Zoom allows two types of voting, and one of which I don't think we use enough in the physical classroom and I would love to see us be able to do it. So Zoom has a pretty basic tool for multiple choice kind of polling. And that's fine. But you could also use the "yes," "no," "go slower," "go faster," buttons to ask students to express their votes.

[32:37] So you could sort of say, alright, if you think the answer is "a," press "yes," if you think the answer is "b," press "no," if you think the answer is "c," press "go slower" and so on. And now not only do you see a count of how many students voted for each option, but you can also see who voted for each option. And so you could sort of say, "Derek, I noticed you voted no on this one, can you tell us why?" And then, "Maria, I noticed you voted this thing, what do you think?" And so now all of a sudden, you not only know where the students are, but you know where each of them is and can orchestrate a very different conversation than if you just have the counts. And of course, you could also do that in the classroom. But just having that permanent fixture there is super-helpful to orchestrate a conversation.

Derek: [33:30] Yeah. And I've seen classroom response systems that had some feature kind of like that. But that's actually not, I don't know of one that's kind of popular now that allows you that granularity, not with that ease of use. You can run a report in the middle of class and find out who said what.

Dan: [33:47] But here it is, you see.

Derek: [33:49] It's right there in the participant list.

Dan: [33:50] Right there in the participant list. Or you can ask students to rename themselves like in your case, if you have the pros and cons in a debate, you can sort of say, put one before your name if you're a pro and put two if you are a con. And now all of a sudden you can see your participant list ordered by who they voted for or who they're representing and then that also allows for a lot of interactions that would have been harder to do. I mean before you could do it, but can you tell me who voted for this? They'll raise their hand, but then you're relying on your memory to remember, it's twelve minutes into the discussion

whether, you know, John voted for yes or no.

Derek: [34:47] Wow. I mean, I have to say as much time as I spent on Zoom this year, I haven't thought of using the participant list as an active learning instructional tool. That's really, really clever.

Dan: [34:50] Yes, it is an amazing tool. I'm sort of thinking about how we can do this in the physical classroom. Like I want name cards that are digital dynamic in the same way that Zoom is.

Derek: [35:06] Yeah. I mean, I have heard many faculty talk about the value of having students' names right there in their window on Zoom. I think Jim Lang talked about that when we interviewed him about the ability to call on a student and know their name, but I hadn't thought about the ways to manipulate that.

Dan: [35:27] You now have a lot of information and by the way, I think we're barely scratching the surface. Imagine if you could overlay information about the students in your Zoom screen. Right now we're just looking at the participant list. But imagine you could color-code your students' background or something with whether they have participated a lot in class or not. That's not yet there.

Derek: [35:56] Right. But that kind of, you know, educationally tuned version of Zoom might have tools like that. I'm reminded of something I heard your Harvard colleague, Eric Mazur, say years ago. I forget what platform he was working on developing, but he noted that in a traditional physics classroom during class, you see a student's face and you might hear what they have to say, but you may not know their name. And when you get their exam, you have their name and what they've written, but you don't know what they look like, right? And so on Zoom, you have this ability to kind of have all three things. The name, the face. And I would say even if students turn their videos off, they could still have a profile picture of themselves which helps a lot too. Well, are there any other, is there another kind of feature of Zoom that you think more people should know about?

Dan: [36:53] So I think one that I feel we're not using enough is how students can share their work with each other and with us. So for example, in this segmentation of the book, I sort of tell this anecdote from this professor in Mexico who's teaching finance. And she has her students work in Excel on their own. And then when they come back to class, she asked the

students to share their screen. So I don't know how often we're doing that. I feel like we should do more of that. But then she uses Zoom's annotations tool to essentially comment on what the students are doing. So she might sort of say, you know, draw an arrow from one Excel cell to another, sort of saying, notice that the relationship between these two things.

[37:53] So I think allowing for that kind of more direct interaction where the students are showing us work and we're reacting to it or other students are reacting to it is one that I think it's under explored. I don't know for how many people this would be a useful thing to do, but I think it's an under explored. And then going back to the discussion we were having before, I think if you could ask your students to be, to master one Zoom thing, it is very simple, but it's to learn to rename themselves pretty quickly. And there are lots of places in the classroom where their renaming themselves could allow you to classify or code the students in a way that allows you to have a much richer conversation in class. So those are two things that come immediately to mind.

Derek: [38:46] Yeah, yeah. And again, part of that is that the participant list is going to be sorted by the participant name. So if you ask students to add some type of tag or codeword in front of their name, then you sort by those code words.

Dan: [39:01] I have one example just for you or anyone who teaches subjects where there's a lot of heterogeneity. So sometimes I'm sure you're teaching math or something like that. And you have some students who have had a lot of prior exposure and other students who haven't had much. So one thing that I experimented with is for one class where I knew that this was going to be a big issue, I said to the students, if you have a lot of prior experience with this, put an asterisk before your name. And so what that meant is that the experts in the room were identified both for me and for every other student in the room immediately. And so that allows a lot of things to happen.

[39:44] So, you know, when you're leading a discussion, you can decide when to call on the expert, not too early in the conversation because you want the conversation to happen in a way that the expert doesn't give you the right answer immediately. Or when you send them to breakout rooms, you could ask students, if you are a little bit lost, make sure you go into breakout room where there's at least one student with an asterisk and can help them. And so now the students with an asterisk, perhaps are a little bit more patient with you because now they are part of your teaching team. And so those are ways in which I think renaming can help.

Derek: [40:18] Yeah, yeah. Or I can imagine in some classes where, you know, you might ask students who've had a certain type of internship experience to kind of denote that for similar purposes.

Dan: [40:30] With asterisk or whatever you want and then it's very easy for you. You don't have to remember. And by the way this compensates the fact that in Zoom, the students are moving in the screen. In a physical classroom, you're like, okay, second row left. I know that this person participated in this internship, but in Zoom you don't have that so it's nice to have the names to, the renaming to help you with that is pretty helpful.

Derek: [40:58] Yeah, larger classes are hard to manage on Zoom, but this is a tool that kind of gets more valuable even in larger classes. So we've talked a lot about all the intentional things you can do on Zoom to engage students in the class. Are there things that we, are there teaching moves or kind of learning elements that maybe shouldn't happen on Zoom that instructors could kind of intentionally move elsewhere to asynchronous activities or something?

Dan: [41:28] Yeah. I think teaching on Zoom, in some way, for many of us, has made it even a clearer what the comparative advantage of being all together is. And I think there are many things that we tend to do in a physical classroom and now in Zoom that don't belong there. So, you know, if you want students to watch a clip of 20 minutes or 15 minutes, unless you feel like there's an emotional response that you want to leverage in a classroom, you could ask them to do it beforehand. Anything that has to do with direct transmission of knowledge or leveling is something that could happen before class.

[42:17] My favorite section of the book was based on a conversation I had with a student who, in my university, most of the classes get recorded. And I asked her how does she decide whether to watch the recording of the class or to engage in the class live. Her name is Beatriz Vasconcellos. She's a fantastic student from Brazil. Her answer was super revealing. She said, I ask myself if I can fold the laundry while this class is going on, I watch the recording. If I cannot, then I attend the live class.

[43:03] And while I think we should strive for learning experiences where no one can be folding the laundry, whether they're synchronous or asynchronous. If your students can fold the laundry while you're teaching the live session, you should probably move that out of the live class session. So much, I like this example so much. And actually, many teachers have told

me that they like it that I label that the "laundry test" (Derek laughs) for deciding the synchronous versus asynchronous material.

Derek: [43:36] I love that, I love that. And it circles back to what I said earlier, right? The laundry test is really encouraging faculty to think about what are their students during class? What is the learning like, not just the teaching, but what is the learning that's happening? Yeah, I love that.

Dan: [43:56] Derek, I am sure we need to close soon, but since you are amazing educator in your own right, I know you're supposed to be the one asking the questions, but I want to ask you the question. So what have you discovered on Zoom that you would like to take back to the physical classroom when we go back to normal? Or what is it that you are doing on Zoom right now that you're like, oh, that's great?

Derek: [44:18] Yeah. I think for me it is the use of a collaborative document of some sort with a breakout room. And so I had done a little bit of experimentation with having a Google Sheet open while my students are doing group work where they all get to contribute to the same Google Sheet at the same time and each group takes a different row and maybe they answer different questions in the columns. I've done that to have students generate elements of a rubric collaboratively, right?

[44:50] But now that I've been doing that more regularly with Zoom breakouts, I think I'm going to be able to use that technique a lot more in the physical class of having students work in small groups, but reporting out as they're working in some way that I can see it because you're right having that insight into what all the groups are thinking and doing while they're working so that I can prepare for the debrief or the report out or the discussion that follows is just so useful.

Dan: [45:16] Yeah. And you can also protect their work. It's right there. You have it on our own device?

Derek: [45:24] Yeah and it's a spin on the polling idea, right, and the classroom response system, right? We're trying to have, we're trying to make more visible the student learning as it's happening, but that's been super useful. So that's a good question. (laughs)

Dan: [45:40] Thank you.

Derek: [45:41] I love that you turned the tables on me. Well, thank you so much, Dan.

Dan: [45:45] Absolutely.

Derek: [45:46] This has been really delightful and really inspirational. And I know our listeners are gonna get a lot of ideas out of this conversation and hopefully out of your book as well.

Dan: [45:53] Thank you so much and thank you for all you do to help many of us teach more effectively. (music)

Derek: [46:02] That was Dan Levy, Senior Lecturer in Public Policy at the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government, and author of the book, *Teaching Effectively with Zoom,* now in its second edition. I'm thankful for Dan for taking the time to speak with me and for all the creativity and energy he has brought to the challenge of teaching remotely during this pandemic. As you heard in the interview, I picked up some new approaches for teaching with Zoom that I plan to use in future classes and workshops. I can't wait to see what I can do with the participant list and the renaming tool.

[46:44] For more on Dan Levy and his work, see the show notes for links, including a link to his second edition, *Teaching Effectively with Zoom*. It's packed with useful ideas and strategies you can make use of as you teach this spring. Leading Lines is produced by the Vanderbilt Center for Teaching and the Jean and Alexander Heard libraries. You can find us on Twitter @leadinglinespod and on the web at leadinglinespod.com. This episode was edited by Rhett McDaniel. Look for new episodes when we publish them. I'm your host, Derek Bruff. Thanks for listening. (music)