

Transcript

[0:01] (music)

Melissa Mallon: [0:05] This is Leading Lines and I'm not Derek Bruff. I'm Melissa Mallon, another of the Leading Lines podcasters. The podcast team spends every summer brainstorming new and exciting interviews for the upcoming Leading Lines season. When I heard that our lead producer, Derek, had a new book coming out, I jumped at the chance to interview him and I even finagled my way into recording the intro for today's show.

[0:27] Even before I arrived at Vanderbilt, I was a fan of Derek's approach to thoughtful pedagogy. Derek's new book, *Intentional Tech: Principles to Guide the Use of Educational Technology in College Teaching*, is published by West Virginia University Press. In today's interview, we spend time talking about its seven principles that will inform and inspire instructors interested in incorporating educational technologies into their teaching. One of the things I like best about this book is the stories and case studies Derek shares, the lessons and technologies he chose to include are inspiring and also really showcase student learning in unique ways. Derek talks through the intentionality in selecting these examples and their alignment with the instructors' pedagogical goals. I'm also interested in hearing how busy academics fit writing into their lives and I know that Derek is very productive. So I asked him to walk me through his writing process, so you all can stay tuned to find out his favorite Nashville coffee shop for writing. It's a big scoop. Okay, without further ado, enjoy the interview. (music)

Melissa: [1:39] I'm very excited to talk with Derek about his new book that is coming out in fall of 2019. It's called *Intentional Tech: Principles to Guide the Use of Educational Technology in College Teaching* by West Virginia University Press. So Derek nicely gave me a little preview of the book. I'm excited to read the full thing when it comes out. But I, this topic is so interesting in many different ways. I think the parallels between your book topic and the Leading Lines podcasts are very in line there. So how do we use technology in our teaching in

a way that makes sense?

[2:24] So I wanted to talk just a little bit about the big picture of your book. Of course, we want the listeners to buy it and read it or check it out from your local library, that would work. But your new book covers seven principles that you say inform and inspire the use of educational technologies. And I wondered if you could talk a little bit about how or what made you approach the book in this way.

Derek Bruff: [2:53] Sure. Sure. And I'll start by saying that I'm very excited to be on this side of the microphone on Leading Lines, having done a number of interviews and hosted, I think every episode of Leading Lines so far, it's kind of cool to get to be the interviewee for change. Yeah, so the principles. So on the one hand, like it seems like if you're going to write a book on teaching in higher education, you should have seven principles. Like that just seems like...

Melissa: [3:23] Right, yeah. Everyone knows that. (sarcastically)

Derek: [3:24] But more importantly, I think, I work with a lot of faculty both here at Vanderbilt but at other institutions, as well, as I travel and I interact with them online. And I get to talk to a lot of fun folks for interviews, for Leading Lines, for the podcast. And so what I've found is that to use technology well in one's teaching, it needs to be aligned with one's pedagogical goals. So I often use the example of the classroom furniture, like when I walk into a classroom to teach, I really like it when the furniture has wheels on it, because then you can move it around and make it do what you need it to do for, for whatever you have planned that day, for whatever kind of learning activities you have planned.

[4:13] And so what I, what I've learned in working with faculty is that if we can identify a rationale, a reason, ideally a kind of research-based reason for why to use, why one would use technology, the faculty member ends up using those, using the technology in much more intentional and really more effective ways. And so, as I've talked with faculty in lots of different disciplines, in lots of different institutional contexts, I've seen patterns emerge in why they're using technology. And so, and some of them are really tied to kind of how technology works. So for instance, technology is really good at connecting people across time and space right? And so one can use technology in one's teaching to connect students with authentic audiences for their work across time and space, right? And so that's one of the principals in my book, is using, is connecting students with authentic audiences to kind of

motivate them to do more meaningful work, to do deeper work, to take it more seriously. And I have a lot of examples in that chapter of faculty who are using technology for just that kind of purpose.

[5:25] And so all the chapters have a key principle, as well as lots of stories about how to use, stories of actual faculty members, actual instructors in different disciplines using technology, kind of in that service. Another example is, I think technology, and this is a little more, a little more in the educational context. I think technology can be really good at making visible our students' learning? And kind of capturing student learning, kind of in the moment, as it's happening, making visible parts of student learning that we don't often see, maybe in their final product.

[6:04] And so I have a chapter called "Thin Slices of Learning." This is a term that I heard Randy Bass at Georgetown University use a while back. This idea that there's so much learning that happens between, he calls it the intermediate space between novice and expert. And a lot of it's not visible to us as instructors. It's kind of happening as they're reading the text or as they're working on a project and they're figuring things out, or they're making small choices in the design of some final assignment. And we can see the output of that. We can see the, the presentation, or the video, or whatever it is they produce. But we can use technology to surface some of that learning as it's happening. Because then that allows us to be more responsive to that learning and meet their needs. And so those are the kinds of principles that I'm looking at, like why use technology? Don't just throw some technology at something because it's cool or shiny or new or different. But to be really intentional about what we're trying to accomplish with that technology.

Melissa: [7:02] I like that you mentioned Randy Bass and I feel like the statement you just made fits really well with his philosophy that there's always some sort of chaos going on with learning. And the key is to kind of hone in on that one little piece. And maybe the technology is a way to capture some of that chaos so that then you can focus on the actual learning that's taking place and what that means for your research purpose or how the students are learning, whatever that looks like.

[7:34] So I think, I like that you mentioned this idea of getting to the rationale of the technology. So why, the why, and when you were talking with the subjects in your book or just the faculty that you work with at Vanderbilt, how do you lead the instructor to get to those questions?

Derek: [8:04] That's a good question. So usually faculty come with one of two types of questions. One question is, "something doesn't seem to be quite working in my teaching," or the kind of positive version, "I think I could do more of this thing, right?" Like, how do I go about creating more of a sense of community among my students so they're actually listening to each other during discussion and learning from each other, right? So there's kind of a teaching question. And then some faculty come. Now for those faculty, sometimes we end up having a conversation about technology, right? Oh, there's a tool you could use to help solve that problem that you've identified in your teaching or to kind of meet that opportunity. And other faculty come with the tool or the technology in mind, they're like, "oh, like, wow, I just started using Twitter last week."

Melissa: [8:56] Now what?

Derek: [8:56] Like this is so cool, what can I do with, it right? And that's where sometimes it's kind of entertaining. A couple years ago, my favorite example, a couple years ago, Pokémon Go came out. And all of the sudden, I remember that night I was in Centennial Park here in Nashville. I was walking around the park and there were just like pairs of people everywhere, but they were all on their phones looking for virtual Pokémon in the park, like no one was actually there to enjoy the park. They were all just searching for Pokémon. It was very creepy. But I saw these memes around online of like, how is this going to change education. Yeah, I don't know that that's going to change education, right? I mean, virtual augmented reality, there's some utility there.

Melissa: [9:34] Yes, the technology underlying Pokémon Go, but maybe not, Pokémon Go, specifically.

Derek: [9:40] Maybe not that particular app. And so sometimes we see these kind of shiny objects, these new technologies, and we get excited and we're not sure what to do with them. And so then I can sit down and say, okay, well, let's look at this technology and kind of see what it's good for, what it's not good for, and does that line up with some things that we know need to happen when we're teaching. Students need practice and feedback, right? As they're learning things, is this a tool that can give them that? Right? Students often learn better when they explore new areas through multiple modalities, audio, visual, other types of things. So is this a kind of digital media creation tool that they might use to kind of learn more about the material in your, in your discipline, right? So in either direction we're kind of matching technology with pedagogy, right? We're matching practice with principle.

Melissa: [10:28] One comes first in some situations, right?

Derek: [10:30] Yeah, yeah. Because sometimes the faculty member who has a teaching challenge, sometimes there's a technology that can really help and help them do something pretty amazing or something that would be really hard to do without the technology. And other times, the faculty member comes with some technology and yeah, it could be really awesome or it could be a total waste of time. And so you need to be thinking intentionally about why you're using this technology and how it's gonna help you accomplish your goals.

Melissa: [10:57] Yeah, that's great. This also sort of got me to another question that you mentioned.

Derek: [11:05] I was going to add, I think there's also faculty who, faculty who might pick up a book like this, just want to teach well, right? And they're interested in helping their students succeed and learn more. And they're just looking for ideas and inspiration for doing that. So you don't have to have a teaching problem or a technology opportunity. You might just be looking for new ideas for how to evolve or change your teaching over time.

Melissa: [11:29] And that actually gets to what I wanted to talk about because there's so many great examples of faculty using technology intentionally, within the book. And I think that sometimes we can get so many ideas just from our colleagues and observing what's happening elsewhere, even beyond our disciplines. So and you did sort of touch on this a little bit earlier, but I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about the examples that you used in the book. There are a lot of really good ones. How did you decide what to include and were there any moments where you had to go out and search for something?

Derek: [12:08] Yeah. Well, I do feel like I am a collector of teaching stories. Like this is something I've done for quite some time. And when my first book came out, gosh, ten years ago, *Teaching With Classroom Response Systems*, I realized I needed lots of examples of practice, right? And I needed a diversity of examples, so different types of students, different types of faculty, different types of institutions, different disciplines. And so since then I've continued to collect stories, right? And so I'll meet someone here at Vanderbilt or elsewhere and I will try to capture their story in some fashion. Leading Lines has been a big part of that, right?

Melissa: [12:42] Absolutely. So many good stories.

Derek: [12:45] Right. I hear of someone, you know, Tim Foster, here at Vanderbilt, was having his students write for Wikipedia. And he was really articulate about why he was doing that and what came of that. And so that was a story I kind of collected. So I had a bunch of those, right? I had some stories from my first book that were still quite relevant for this. I had a lot of stories from Leading Lines, a lot of examples that we had done here. Others I just read about or picked up, you know, a couple of folks who just blogged about their teaching on Prof. Hacker and I thought those were really great stories.

[13:18] But I tried to actually talk to everyone that I profile. There's a couple of folks who I kind of just write about based on their own writing. But I tried to conduct interviews with everyone. I also realized that there were some gaps, right. And so I did kind of do some fishing through my professional network to try to find folks who were using certain types of technologies or accomplishing certain goals.

Melissa: [13:45] What were some of the gaps?

Derek: [13:48] So I had, so a couple that come to mind immediately. I had heard a lot of good things second hand about the tool VoiceThread, which allows you to kind of upload an image or a video and then annotate it with text or audio or video. And so it's this real kind of multimodal thing. And so I sent out a call on Twitter a while back saying, hey, who's using VoiceThread in interesting ways? And so I was connected to Ashley Hasty, who is at Indiana University and she teaches merchandising. And she has this really interesting class where the students are designing window displays for businesses, right? And, and I like it because, well, and the VoiceThread connection is she's having students upload photos of their displays and then use audio annotations to describe their design choices and why they did things certain ways.

Melissa: [14:39] Did they create real displays?

Derek: [14:41] They did.

Melissa: [14:42] For real businesses?

Derek: [14:43] Yeah, she has this kind of service-learning component to her course where they do, her students do actual window displays for local non-profits that have storefronts, some non-profits don't, but a lot do. And they often can't afford to hire a professional

merchandise to create their storefront, right? And so her students were working with real clients. They were working in groups and she found VoiceThread a really useful way to have students annotate what they had created. One of the issues was that often they were making design choices that were kind of, they were not good design choices, but they were requirements by the client. There were kind of design constraints they ran into and she wanted to know how intentional those choices were on the student's part.

[15:25] And she also knew they were working in groups and she wanted to know kind of how each member is contributing. And so the group would design a window display, but the students would annotate it individually. And so I talk about this in my chapter on "Thin Slices of Learning." She's making audible the kind of learning process for the students. And I thought it was a really great example. It's a tool that I knew a lot of instructors used well and I wanted to have a really good, interesting example about it. She's also in a discipline that we don't have at Vanderbilt. And so I love that I have this kind of creative arts piece to that chapter.

Melissa: [16:05] Yes. Yeah. Are there other areas or disciplines that you are able to provide examples for that were maybe a little bit outside of the box or I mean, there's a lot of humanities examples. And I think it was maybe towards the introduction you talked a little bit about, you know, humanists tend to use Twitter in their work. And there are kind of typical technologies that lend themselves well to different disciplines that people tend to use. And so I wondered if either in the book or just sort of in your experience, you have come across any really surprising match ups or uses of technology that you never would have thought, but then it just seems to work.

Derek: [17:01] That's an interesting question. So I can think of a couple of examples in the book that surprised me in some way, right? And one of the things I was trying to do, this is the other, I mean, I wanted to include some of my favorite stories of teaching with technology. So there's ones that are, just blow me away every time I think about them. But then there were some that I found in the process of writing the book that were a little surprising. One is in a discipline that I don't know much about. I was looking for examples around the use of concept maps in teaching and kind of multimedia concept maps. And I ended up connecting with Chris Schaeffer, who I've known for a while via Twitter, and he's taught at a couple of different places, but he taught a course a few years ago at the University of Colorado, a fully online course in music cognition. So it was this kind of intersection at music theory and neuroscience, that was just fascinating.

Melissa: [18:03] You mean, you're not super in depth into that discipline? (sarcastically)
Derek, this is a surprise to me.

Derek: [18:08] And you know, we have a school of music here and they teach courses that are kind of in this ballpark. But it's just not an area that I interact with as much. And he had this, and it was a fully online course too, which was kind of interesting. And he had this really great scaffolded assignment where students were asked to pick concepts they were learning. And a student would pick a concept and then create a two-minute video explaining that concept to their peers. And it's a music cognition course. So that video would involve some music of some sort, where they were illustrating something, right? And so in the first week, students had, each student had to do a couple of these, and then they share them with their peers. In the second week, they're leading toward a concept map, right? So the second part of the assignment was a student would have to pick two videos on two different concepts that their peers had created. And then they'd have to identify the relationship between those two concepts. What that required them to do, was to review their peer's work, right? But they also were going to make more videos themselves. So this was a sequenced assignment. So one of the things that happened was as they saw how their peers had explained these concepts via video, their own videos got better because they kind of learn some tips and tricks. They saw examples.

Melissa: [19:26] They could model from their peers.

Derek: [19:28] Yeah, they were modeling off their peers. And so they continued this process, making these short explanatory videos and then identifying connections. And at the end of the process, Chris was able to kind of put all that together in a big old concept map, right? So you've got all these concepts connected by lines. Each concept is represented by one of the best videos that explain that concept. And then those lines between the concepts were the best descriptors of how those two concepts were connected, right? And so they end up with this. And I put this in my chapter on learning communities because the students are really teaching each other at this point, and Chris is directing and shaping this process.

Melissa: [20:07] Helping to put it all together.

Derek: [20:08] Helping put it all together, giving feedback along the way, right? But he scaffolded this so that the final result was this really interesting video concept map that the students have built themselves. And they were learning from each other as they went, the

whole time, right? And so that was really cool. That was really slick.

[20:23] The other surprise that I found was, so this gets at the writing process. So I turned in the first draft of the book. And chapter one was brief, right? It's my chapter on creating times for telling, these kind of experiences where students are primed to learn and using technology to do that. And I had a bunch of examples of using clickers and classroom response systems for doing this because that was a big theme in my first book. And I turn in the draft and I looked at chapter one and I'm like it's half the length of the other chapters. It just needs more, right? Like it's fine, but it needs more. And so I thought what I'd really like are some faculty who are having students play games, as a way to prepare them to kind of experience something and learn something, and make sense of something.

[21:16] And so I again, I went to Twitter and I started asking around like who's using games and simulations? Does anyone use this video game or whatever? And it really was, I think Kylie Korsnack, who's one of our grad fellows here at the CFT, who's been on the podcast, she connected me with someone she knew who connected me with someone he knew. And so I ended up talking to Alisha Karabinus at Purdue University, a graduate student in English. And she has her students play this game called 9:05. It is an old school text adventure game. You can play it. You can just Google "9:05 game," and you can find it. You can play it right there in your web browser.

[21:55] But all the interface is entirely text-based. So you see this little description, you wake up, it's 9:05. You're in an apartment, there's a bed, there's an alarm clock, things happening, right? And then you give, you type in commands to your character, like "get out of bed" or "walk into the bathroom" or "take a shower," right? And one of the things that her students struggle with is that you have to be super explicit in your commands. So you can't just get in the shower, right? You have to take your clothes off, you have to take your watch off. You have to put them on the counter, right? You don't want to go into the shower holding your clothes, right? And it gives you this feedback along the way, like "I don't know what you mean" or "why would you take a shower with your clothes on," right?

Melissa: [22:35] Which has to be really frustrating for students because we can use Siri to basically do anything now, right?

Derek: [22:41] Right, now, I'm old enough where I played these games in the eighties and I knew this kind of interface. You have to, you have to look, you have to tell it, you have to be

very explicit. And so her students kind of struggle with this. And they have this kind of, individually, they have this experience of kind of struggling with us. And then when she has them debrief it during class, this is in a writing course. And the point she makes with them is that your readers are just like you were playing that game, right? Like your readers cannot read your mind and you have to tell them what you mean, right? And so if this idea is connected to this other idea, you need a transition that makes that connection really clear. And I really love that kind of light bulb moment for the student when they realize, oh, right. Like this level of description or being explicit is going to be necessary if I'm going to take what's in my head and convey it in a way that someone else can follow.

Melissa: [23:34] And that's more than just her telling them, this is the process of writing. They get to experience it. Technology helps with that.

Derek: [23:43] Yeah. And she was telling me this story and she gets to this point. She told me all about the 9:05 game and how her students struggle with it. And she said, and I use this to teach about transitions. And I was like wait, what? I was not expecting that to come out of that. So that's an example. And this is another thing that we see in the book is that you have technologies that are designed for educational purposes that are often very useful when used intentionally, but you can also have technologies that are not designed for educational purposes. Sometimes you have to think more creatively and more intentionally about how to use those, but those often, those can also play a role in teaching.

Melissa: [24:18] Which hopefully this will give, the book will give educators out there those ideas to think outside the box. I mean, I think having so many great examples and the principles which, as we know with teaching and ed tech, you always need to look at the foundational principle versus the tool, first. I'm thinking that this is going to be a really good way to get people excited about processes and pedagogy that they maybe never would've approached before.

Derek: [24:53] Yeah, and it's, and the other thing that's important about teaching is context matters, right? What you're teaching, what your discipline is, your own skills and experience as a teacher, who your students are, the classroom, the classroom size and classroom configuration like all these things are important. And so I can't just come in and tell a faculty member this is what you should be doing, right? Like they have to figure out what's going to work in their particular context and for their learning goals. But if you've got some principles, like oh my students are going to need time to practice and get feedback on that practice.

That's always true. Now what that looks like and how you go about that, that's where all the context variables come in. And my hope is that readers will get enough inspiration that they'll be able to take some of the ideas and the examples in the book and then adapt them to their own teaching contexts in ways that really make sense.

Melissa: [25:44] Yeah, absolutely.

Derek: [25:46] And I know this is true, so I'll share one other quick example.

Melissa: [25:58] Good, please.

Derek: [25:49] My favorite example of using Twitter in teaching. We actually, what was on our podcast about a year ago, we had Margaret Rubega on. She's a biology professor at the University of Connecticut. She teaches an ornithology class. And she has her students tweet about the birds that they see, right? And it's just this great, easy filled work assignment where they're transferring what they're learning in class to the birds that they see as they go to their jobs or their apartments or where have you. And this idea of using Twitter as a kind of field work tool, to promote transfer, it's just a beautiful match of technology to teaching.

[26:31] As I'd share that example in workshops, I've known other faculty who take it and run with it in their setting, right? I've known education faculty who will have their students, their pre-service teacher students are in schools observing. And they're tweeting their observations, right? What are the learning dynamics they see? Or we had a colleague here at Vanderbilt who was teaching civil engineering. And so she had her students tweet photos of examples of civil engineering they saw, right? And connect it to some of the core concepts they were learning. That's where, you know, if you ask me like, what is Twitter, good for in teaching, like, that's a really open-ended question.

Melissa: [27:09] Yeah, there's so many.

Derek: [27:10] There are so many ways, but it's nice to have some examples that you can then adapt and then work for your context.

Melissa: [27:16] Yeah, I love it. Do you mind if we switch gears a little bit? Okay. So you are a full-time director at the Center for Teaching. You are a math lecturer. So you teach on a regular basis?

Derek: [27:33] Yeah.

Melissa: [27:34] You have a family?

Derek: [27:35] I do. Yes.

Melissa: [27:36] How do you make time for all of this writing? Can you take us through your process a little bit? Well, I won't spoil for readers. But I like in your acknowledgements that you call out a certain coffee shop in town. So just if you wouldn't mind taking us through some of this, I mean, you're very intentional about your pedagogy in your use of technology, but then how do you apply that to your scholarship too?

Derek: [28:08] Well, so part of it is this kind of story collection piece, right? So that I knew. So, you know, it's been a few years of documenting interesting stories around teaching, right? And so through Leading Lines, through my blog, through other sources. And so those are some of the ingredients. But then I needed to kind of sit down and write a book that connected these stories in really meaningful ways and found interesting and useful ways to explain some of the core concepts. And so the, the first step was actually to draft a chapter, right? Because I had to pitch this book to my publisher, right? So I've got a chapter on multi-modal assignments.

Melissa: [28:50] Was that the one you drafted? That was your proposal?

Derek: [28:51] No, I'm sorry. Knowledge Organizations. Yes, that was the first one I wrote was using technology to help students see the big picture in the course, kind of relationships among things. And so that one I felt like I had collected enough stories, I could just sit down over a week and I could draft a decent version of that chapter. And so I did that, I sent it to Jim Lang, who's the editor of the series. He's also a fantastic author himself. He wrote *Small Teaching, Cheating Lessons*. He writes for The Chronicle on Teaching. And he's editor of the series Teaching and Learning in Higher Education for West Virginia University Press.

[29:27] And so I kind of, I sent him a sample chapter as a pitch and he loved it and they wanted me in the series, so that was great. And so then, then I had to write the rest of book. And so honestly, my first attempt was to block out a couple of hours, every couple of days to kind of sit down and write and kind of chip away at. And after a semester of that, I had not written anything. I mean, it was I had written a little bit, but nothing useful. So I realized I

spent a whole semester and I haven't made any progress on this book. I need some other way to kind of approach this. And I happened to be at an event here on campus with professor of English, Ifeoma Nwankwo. And I was telling her about this problem I had and she said, "Look, Derek, when I need to write stuff, I have to go away for two or three days." And so she'll go on a writing retreat somewhere, locally, usually. She's not going someplace too exotic.

Melissa: [30:20] The Bahamas, you know.

Derek: [30:24] And I said, okay, well, let me try that. And so that's what I started doing. I would block out, every couple of weeks, I would block out two solid days out of the office, to go write. And what I found was during the first half day, I was just putting out fires and catching up with my work life, right?

Melissa: [30:40] Right. Because that still exists.

Derek: [30:41] Right. Because there's all this stuff has to get done in a timely manner. But by lunchtime on that first day, I had cleared the deck enough that I could focus on writing. And I find that when I write, I need to get kind of a head of steam going, right? Like it takes me an hour or two to get back into the writing process. And so that meant that by the second day of these little mini retreats, I was really cooking. And, I could crank out, you know, thousands of words, right. But it really did take this dedicated time. Luckily, I have a job and I had a boss who was ammittable to this, right? And I worked with my staff here at the CFT to let them know when I would be gone and why I'd be out of touch, how to handle things, right? Because that can be disruptive, to just disappear for a couple of days or a couple of weeks. I did realize I needed to not be in my office. Like there's just too many interesting people here asking me interesting questions all the time.

Melissa: [31:36] Telling you stories? (laughs)

Derek: [31:39] Yeah. Right. And so, I ended up landing mostly at coffee shops around town. And so yes, Frothy Monkey was one of my favorites. It's been my favorite coffee shop for a while. And I would just take my laptop and put my headphones in and listen to some high-energy music and just write, write, write. I found that I really loved it and I didn't know that I liked writing that much. Writing the first book was, I think a lot of hard work. And I'm glad I did it, but it didn't, it didn't feel like I was a writer. It felt like I was assembling something,

right? And so, and then since then I've done so much blog writing that I think I've developed a kind of looser, more informal style. And so when it came to this book, I could take that style that I was comfortable with and just spend some time being creative in how I told these stories and how I represented these ideas.

Melissa: [32:26] And I think as a reader, that approach is so welcome, because this can be a bit of an overwhelming area to jump into, if you're not familiar with technology or you just, you know, you don't know what's out there. You don't really mix it up that way. But it's written in a way that I mentioned earlier, that I just, I can't wait to get my hands on a physical book so, I can just sit there and read it. But it just feels so welcoming and not only the tone of the book, but just also that, hey, I can do this. I see application to my life and my work. And I think that's, the Derek is showing through, I think.

Derek: [33:09] Yes. And that was really, there was this, it was intentional. So you know, the first book that I wrote, I don't think I used any personal pronouns at all.

Melissa: [33:20] Yeah, you had to make that call. Do you or don't you?

Derek: [33:22] And I was taught be objective. But I thought no, I need to tell stories here and I'm going to be telling my own stories, both stories from my own classroom, stories from my own life. And so I just adopted the first person pronouns throughout the book and just kind of leaned into that. Again, I'm working with, with Jim Lang and that's how he writes.

Melissa: [33:43] So that helps.

Derek: [33:44] That helps. And it's the style that they're taking for this whole series at West Virginia University Press. They want kind of teaching. It's like books about teaching by actual people, real people.

Melissa: [33:58] That have set foot in a classroom. That's good.

Derek: [34:01] Right and so I knew I wanted to write for him and for this series because this is the approach that he takes. And so it's been a lot of fun and it's been fun to work with him. And in fact, I'll do another little behind the scenes. So I was coming down to a deadline to turn in the first draft. And I had about a day left to write the conclusion. And so I just vomited some words on the page and it was terrible, like, I will own that. There was nothing there.

And so it went out for review and one of the reviewers came back and he's like the conclusion was a little weak. I'm like you're right because I wrote it in two hours. And he said, but the reviewer said that there were all these kind of personal stories throughout and that I needed some kind of touchpoint there at the end, as well. Because it honestly felt like, I think the words were something like it's like the party was over and I was kicking them out. Like please leave. And so then I thought, okay, how am I gonna wrap this up? But it was really nice actually to have that response that said, the stories you tell about yourself, Derek, are really interesting, the human connection you're making here is working and you should actually kind of lean into that and not shy away from that.

Melissa: [35:12] Yeah, that's great. So what's next? What do you have? Do you have anything in the pipeline, any projects that are begging to be written?

Derek: [35:23] (laughs) I don't know what's next. I do talk about podcast a lot in the book. I do want to write a kind of a short thing on teaching with podcasts, because that's been a big piece of my work here through Leading Lines and through my other podcast, Vandy Vox, for a while now, I'm really interested in teaching with games and simulations, right? This was something that I had been interested in, but after doing some interviews for my book, I'm just kind of more invested in this. And so I'm thinking about trying to pull together some type of symposium on that topic here on campus this year.

Melissa: [33:54] Yeah, that's fantastic.

Derek: [35:55] Because I think there's a critical mass of faculty here who would be interested in that. I don't know what I'm going to write next. We're doing more and more work with active learning classrooms. And so I think there's, there's a need there for some more practical guidance on how to make good use of active learning classrooms.

Melissa: [36:10] This could be the moment to talk about your wheels on chairs and some deep, deep discussions, right?

Derek: [36:20] Yeah. And so, and not unlike other uses of technology, I think faculty walk into an active learning classroom with all the movable furniture and the table, and the whiteboards and the displays. And they're like, what am I gonna do with all the this, right? It's almost like too many options, yeah. And so I think the storytelling approach that I take could be helpful there. So we'll see, we'll see. I'm also interested in how teaching and learning

changes happen in universities and colleges, right? How kind of shifts in innovations happen. And so that's another space that I might spend some time digging into.

Melissa: [36:53] Great ideas. We'll look forward to the next iteration of, however, if you write a book or more blogs or podcasts or whatever, I'm sure you've got another podcast in you probably, right? I think so.

Derek: [37:07] I'm sure.

Melissa: [37:08] Is there anything else that you want to make sure readers know about the book? If you had a takeaway that someone who is maybe trying to decide what they should read as they're planning their classes for this academic year, why they might want to pick up this particular book?

Derek: [37:27] That is a good question. I think I would say that teaching can be a very creative act. I think often when we start teaching as grad students for junior faculty or other instructors, we kind of teach as we're taught, right? But there are so many options out there and so many ways to connect to your students and so many tools that one could use, it does I think benefit from some creativity. And so that's one of the goals for the book, is to help instructors think a little more creatively about how they teach, what they're trying to accomplish, what tools they could use. And I just want to encourage people to be creative and to try some things out and to realize that it may not work the first time. And that's generally okay, right? I mean, don't blow up your class. You know, if you try some new tool or some assignment and it doesn't quite work the first time, generally that's okay. You can recover from that and tweak it and change it. Because if you're not willing to be creative and you're not willing to take a few risks, then you're just going to keep teaching the same way forever. And so maybe that's fine. Maybe you're meeting your goals, but there's just so much more potential for the impact that we can have on students when we keep learning and growing. And that requires some experimentation and some practice and getting ideas and kind of seeing what works in your, in your class.

Melissa: [38:55] And it is more fun, right?

Derek: [38:56] It's way more fun.

Melissa: [38:57] Way more fun. Well, Derek, you know how we wrap up these podcasts?

Derek: [39:02] I do.

Melissa: [39:05] And I could've sworn that you would have been interviewed before in the podcast, but you have not. So you get the normal question.

Derek: [39:12] I am a first-time guest here.

Melissa: [39:14] First-time guest.

Derek: [39:15] Long time listener.

Melissa: [39:16] Long time listener and host. So we like to ask all of our esteemed guests what their favorite analog educational technology is. And I'll throw in a little spin that if you want to talk about a digital technology used intentionally, we'll allow it for this one time.

Derek: [39:40] I'll go analog. And it's one of the things I talk about in the book is that there are analog technologies. We're often more comfortable with them so they don't feel strange and unusual and so we know what they're good for and what they're not good for. And so it's the digital space that we end up kind of obsessing over more because it's new and different. But also in the interest of intentionality, sometimes an analog tool is the best tool to solve the problem that you have. And so, gosh, I've got to go on record and say wheels on chairs.

Melissa: [40:17] (laughs) I mean, this is the moment to submit the wheels on chairs.

Derek: [40:21] My favorite analog educational technology is moveable furniture. Because again, you walk into a classroom and you make it do what it needs to do for your purposes that day. And it's just so powerful and it's so, especially a classroom with movable furniture, I think makes it so much easier to have meaningful interactions with your students and for your students to have meaningful interactions with each other. And learning is such a social phenomenon that we need tools for doing that. Yeah, so, wheels on chairs.

Melissa: [40:49] I think that's good. It fits in with a lot of the principles that you talk about in your book, right? So there are some purposes out there that you might not need technology and just want to use a good old chair, with wheels.

Derek: [41:02] With wheels.

Melissa: [41:03] Well, Derek, thank you so much for taking time to talk about your new book. It's very exciting and it's a great monograph. I think it's going to help a lot of people, change a lot of classrooms. So thank you and good luck when you embark on your next project.

Derek: [41:23] Well, thanks for chatting about this, Melissa. This has been a lot of fun. And again, I got to give a shout out to Leding Lines and the colleagues that we have and our team because I learned a lot about teaching from you guys. And some of that is in the book, right? Thanks so much.

Melissa: [41:40] Thanks, Derek. (music)

Melissa: [41:44] That was Derek Bruff, director of the Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching and a principal senior lecturer in the Vanderbilt department of mathematics. Many thanks to Derek for sitting in the hot seat and sharing about his book and his writing process. If you enjoyed Derek's first book, *Teaching With Classroom Response Systems, Creating Active Learning Environments*, then you'll definitely want to check out *Intentional Tech*. Derek is one of the best educators I know at sharing ideas for innovative pedagogical strategies, which he does on Twitter at the handle, @derekbruff and on his blog, Agile Learning. You can find these show notes and information about both of Derek's books on our website, leadinglinespod.com

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