Transcript

[00:00] [music]

Derek Bruff: [00:02] Welcome to "Leading Lines," a podcast from Vanderbilt University. I'm your host, Derek Bruff, the Director of the Vanderbilt Center for Teaching.

[00:12] In this podcast, we explore creative, intentional, and effective uses of technology to enhance student learning, uses that we hope point the way to the future of educational technology in college and university settings.

[00:24] In our last episode, we talked with Vanderbilt librarian and Leading Lines co-producer, Melissa Mallon, about her new book on digital literacy. As a follow up to that, I thought we would share, in this episode, some audio from a panel on teaching with podcasts that I helped organize last fall here at Vanderbilt.

[00:40] The focus of the panel was student-produced podcasts, that is, podcast episodes made by students as part of course assignments. The discussion of the panel illustrated some of the ideas that Melissa mentioned in our last episode on digital literacy.

[00:54] One of the panelists was John Sloop, Professor of Communication Studies at Vanderbilt, Vice Provost for Digital Learning and another co-producer of "Leading Lines."

[01:02] You've heard his voice several times on this podcast, interviewing other faculty and administrators about teaching with technology. In this episode, we get to hear from John about his own teaching in communication studies and his experiments with teaching with podcasts.

[01:15] [music]

Professor John Sloop: [01:15] My approach and what I have, the lessons that I can draw today that might be helpful, are ones of failure. I am going to talk to you about things that have gone wrong and how I'm correcting and learning how to do this better to go along.

[01:35] I'm going to end today with where I'm at in the process and some steps I still need to take. Now, I'm going to use this opportunity to go back to even before I was teaching in the classroom and how failures have driven this process.

[01:47] Three years ago — and some of you know this story and I am glad to see Elie Movic here today because he's part of this part of the story — I was taking this position and I was also thinking at that time that what I wanted to do in my classes was to teach podcast as a way of rethinking how to express ideas.

[02:05] I was going to have my students continue writing papers — that's a valuable process, continue researching in traditional ways — but presenting our ideas in new ways.

[02:13] I've never done any podcasting myself. I was sitting in my office, and as a faculty member, I thought, "How do I learn to do this? What are the resources available to me?"

[02:23] I thought, "I've got no clue." I tried to think what would I do in this process normally. Try to search a little bit. It was hard to find anything at Vanderbilt that pointed me in the right directions. I was thinking, "I might just quit at this point if I was not in this position, but I need to push and drive on this."

[02:41] I finally found out that the resources at the time, and these resources change — any of you who are here know that the resources of the university move and shift — the resources at the time was...I had just missed...I finally found it online, a seminar taught at the library, that was on podcasting and how to use podcasting.

[03:00] I called the library. I said, "Oh, I'm so upset. I just missed this seminar. How many people showed up?" They said, "Seven people." I said, "Who were they?" "All librarians." Not just I missed it, but everyone did, because we don't find these things so easily.

[03:15] When I took on this job, one of the things that I did was working with the Institute for Digital Learning. OLLI was working with the graduate fellows there and Gayathri as well. OLLI had a lot of this project. We decided to put together a resource.

[03:29] I'm highlighting this right now, which is a resource that allows a faculty member to ask, "I want to do this. How do I get help?" It's the Ed Tech Finder. We'll make sure to highlight this later, vanderbilt.edu/edtechfinder. It's a very simple name.

[03:43] It really is set up so that you can say, "I want to learn to podcast," and it's going to give you resources. We have to keep it updated. Where do you go? Who do you turn to? That's my first failure. I didn't know how to do it.

[03:54] I went to the library with this seminar. I've learned. I'm learning a little bit more. I decide in my senior seminar, "Communication, Culture, Consciousness," which is a media ecology class, to assign podcasting for the first time. I'm really not thinking very hard as an educator, about what this needs to do.

[04:13] I just think, "This is a great idea. I want to do this. The students will love it." My assumption is the students are digital natives. They're all listening to podcasts. They can't wait to do this. They're going to have so much fun. I take them to the library. Ed Warga was working here at the time.

[04:28] He took them to a seminar on how to use Audacity. He gave them a website to do it. I'm so full of excitement about what's going to happen. We get back and I tell them, "The assignment is, at the end of the semester, you're going to turn in a final paper, and you'll turn in a podcast of that paper."

[04:46] I find out, as the semester goes along, that only one of the students in the classroom has ever listened to podcasts, none of the rest of them. I was wrong about that assumption. They don't care about podcasts, and I assign it.

[04:58] What happens is at the end of the semester...Can somebody guess what I got at the end of the semester? Anybody want to guess? They did all the assignments. They turn in their papers. They turn in their podcast. Oh, it was terrible.

[05:09] [laughter]

Professor Sloop: [05:09] There'd be a little sound at the beginning, because they had some cool music they wanted to include, and then they read their papers and ended with a little bit of sound. It so disappointed me.

[05:21] It so disappointed me, but all I could do is listen and be....I'm going to confess, I quit after a while. I mean, I listened at the beginning, I'd read the paper and say, "Oh, it's this again."

[05:29] Failure on my part, a couple of failures. One of the failures was I did not think about where my students were starting from. I was making an assumption based on a truism that we say all the time, which isn't actually as true as we think.

[05:43] The students aren't what we think always and the faculty aren't as backwards as we think always. We're all starting at different positions. We have to start off with, where are the students? How far along are they, and what do they know?

[05:55] Secondly, I had to give them better directions about what I expected from these podcasts, which is going to take you to what is the beginning of a success story. I'm not quite there yet.

[06:07] I don't think we ever perfect our teaching, but this is a process for me where I can tell you here are some things that I have to do, I have to put into place, and I still haven't gotten there yet.

[06:16] Last semester, I taught a first-year writing seminar. At this point, the library had a gap. Ed was gone. They didn't have a person who did this so I could either do it myself or find someone who knew what they were doing.

[06:29] I could do it a little bit. I'm now producing a podcast with Gayathri so I'm starting to learn what I'm doing. I'm starting to get there. But I needed somebody who could answer questions quickly and not have to bumble around with editing, etc.

[06:40] Again, without naming a resource, because I'd had to ask a friend to come in and I don't want that person to get asked by everybody, I had to say, "Will you come to my class and teach this?"

[06:48] The person did a marvelous job, but the person also made it clear -- and I like this -- at the end of it, "I am not your resource on finishing these projects. I will not be here for you the rest of the time. Here's where you find information."

[07:00] The students were set up. I talked to them. I found out, again, in this class, which was a first-year writing seminar that was dealing with podcasts, it was "Communication, Culture Consciousness, and Podcast," — it had that in the title —

[07:14] Only 2 of the students of those 15 listened to podcasts. Some of them knew what they were. One of them had listened to some sermons at his home church. That was it. Again, I didn't have students who were interested in this.

[07:26] What this meant was, and this was easy to do in this class, is I was not only going to make it clear in their assignment. "You were going to do the same thing. I want to see a paper in your final paper," it's a first-year writing seminar.

[07:37] But I also want to see a representation of these ideas in a different form because the whole idea was a different modal, performance of ideas. I made it clear. "I don't want you to read your paper, and I won't accept that." I made it very clear what this was going to be.

[07:51] Also in the class -- I think this is very important -- we spent a lot of time listening to samples of podcasts, of a wide variety of them in focusing on sound, on focusing on editing, but in focusing on how they were persuaded by those in different ways.

[08:07] What was the performance, and what were the tertiary texts? We talked about the text around online they could look at for a variety of podcasts. I was trying to get into a very strong motive of critical digital thinking.

[08:19] Then my assumption was that the practice and, something Derek talks about a lot, turning the students into producers of knowledge was also going to make them better consumers and vice versa. Making them better consumers, would make them better producers, etc.

[08:35] In fact, and I'll play you a sample in just a second, what I got, they weren't perfect. These were students who are, for the first time, using these tools. The class wasn't about these tools. The class was about ideas, and they were doing this on the side. They still came up with...

[08:49] They're our students. You know that with some good steps, they're going to come up with some remarkable ideas and some interesting things. What I'm going to do is have Derek

play a little bit of one sample that I got. Not even necessarily the best one, but I want to play this and I want you to help talk to me about a couple of things about this.

[09:06] Then I'll tell you about my final failing.

AJ: [09:09] This episode of digital is brought to you by "Forget Your Paper. Make a Podcast."

[09:15] [music]

AJ: [09:29] So my family and I went out to dinner a few weekends ago. Nothing super fancy, just Olive Garden. It was spring break and that meant there were a lot of families eating dinner, not to mention my mom insisted that we go at 6:30 to make sure we get to "experience the atmosphere," whatever she means by that.

[09:51] At the restaurant we get seated, and the waiter brings out our drinks.

[09:56] We noticed a few tables over a family who's been there since we walked in. My dad kept pointing out how all three of them were too busy on their phones [baby crying] to shut up their crying baby, let alone say three words to another. A little while after some chatting, our food comes out sizzling.

[10:13] We all get excited to eat until the waiter walks right past our table, and brings it to the table with the still screaming baby. That's when I said, "Look at what those phones have done to that family. Good thing mine's not like that."

[10:29] When I turned back to pick up the conversation again, I couldn't help but notice a few little things. My brother discreetly checking his iWatch just to make sure he didn't have a new text message. My dad occupied with a new email from his work. And my mom who preferred to look at a digital menu when she could have easily asked for one.

[10:53] It made me think, "How different are we from that other family? How's the digital age affecting families like mine?" My name's AJ, and this is "Digital."

[11:09] [background music]

AJ: [11:10] We're going to explore just how different the family is in the digital age.

[11:16] [music]

AJ: [11:25] I decided to begin with my mom. When I was younger, she used to teach me my ABC's and read to me. Help me learn to count. She was a pretty active mother.

[11:38] AJ's Mother: Well, I figured that it would be a lot easier if I were to just speak to you, and teach you all the knowledge that you needed to know as you were growing up.

Professor Sloop: [11:55] When I was listening to these, one of the things that was remarkable to me is students who did not know this genre replicated it almost immediately. And do a pretty good job. He's got the sound effects. He's using Audacity for the first time. He goes from this beginning narrative part, which we've heard before, then to slices of interviews, these breaks.

[12:17] It follows a genre that he's picked up on and can mimic immediately. I don't think he intentionally is mimicking it. He just now thinks this is what a podcast is. A couple of things from that.

[12:28] First off, I do think it's a nice job. I did like what he did. It was a nice job on a first attempt of doing something like this.

[12:35] Secondly, it got me thinking about how I needed to talk more about genre in the future. Because this is creative, but it's creative within, instead of actually thinking about how otherwise this might be used.

[12:46] Now third, here's the biggest failure in where I should have turned to Stacey or to Derek beforehand. This is something you've really got to think about. Larisa already did think about it in her classes.

[12:57] I got it and while I could say this is quite beautiful, I had not given much thought as to how to assess it, seriously. The point is you've got to put a lot of thought into this. You can't put a lot of thought into it until you understand what goes into the production of this. I tried to take short cuts that can't be taken in a classroom.

[13:22] I was looking for some way that I could have a different experience for the student. It seemed to be actually just the easiest one, the easiest one to reach for, because podcasting

can be pretty complex, you can do all types of things with it. The initial entryway, as I found out from people just recording their papers, isn't that hard.

[13:43] I thought it was going to be this perfect medium outside of writing for them to do something different with and learn as they were going. I could be wrong. There could be some other examples people would point to. It still seems to me to be the case. The tools are pretty easy to learn the fundamentals of and you can get more complex and learn a lot more.

[14:04] I just thought it was going to be perfect for that. Quite frankly, they're fun and addictive, and all the things that you think of. I've learned some of the process the students did as well. I would spend some time really thinking about...

[14:15] [background music]

Professor Sloop: [14:16] What is it you're expecting? What do you want out of these? How to assess them?" I'll shut up at that point. Thank you.

[14:21] [music]

Derek: [14:24] That was John Sloop, Professor of Communication Studies and Vice Provost for Digital Learning at Vanderbilt University speaking at a panel on teaching with podcast organized for the Vanderbilt Center for Teaching and the Vanderbilt Institute for Digital Learning in November of 2017.

[14:37] For more on John and his work, check the show notes for links to his faculty page, his digital learning blog, and his Twitter account. We also have a link to that Ed Tech resource finder that John mentioned.

[14:46] For more on teaching with podcasts, have a listen to episode 27 of Leading Lines which features an interview with Gilbert Gonzales, Health Policy Professor here at Vanderbilt. Gilbert shares his experiences with student produced podcasts in the episode. His story inspired me to try my hand at a podcast assignment.

[15:02] I have a new blog post all about that experiment, including how I handled the grading and assessment question that John left hanging in his comments. I find that a lot of faculty trying out a new assignment like this for the first time aren't quite sure how to go about

grading. John is hardly alone in his conundrum.

[15:17] It's important that if we're trying to build particular perspectives and skills in our students, that we construct an assignment structure that lets us know if we've achieved those objectives and provide students useful feedback on their own learning.

[15:30] I'm a big fan of rubrics, and you can see my podcast assignment "Rubric" on my blog post. Check the show notes for a link.

[15:37] Find those show notes as well as past and future episodes of Leading Lines on our website, leadinglinespod.com. Follow us on Twitter @leadinglinespod or send us a voice mail with your thoughts on this episode at leadinglinespod@vanderbilt.edu. We'd love to hear from you. We're also on Facebook. Just search for Leading Lines.

[15:54] Leading Lines is produced by the Center for Teaching, the Vanderbilt Institute for Digital Learning, the office of Scholarly Communications, and the Associate Provost for Digital Learning.

[16:01] This episode was edited by Rhett McDaniel. Look for new episodes the first and third Monday of each month. I'm your host, Derek Bruff. Thanks for listening.

[16:09] [music]

Transcription by CastingWords