

**[00:00:00] Bonni:** Today on episode number 382 of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast, José Bowen is back to talk about teaching change.

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**[00:00:12] Production Credit:** Produced by Innovate Learning, maximizing human potential.

**[00:00:20] Bonni:** Welcome to this episode of Teaching in Higher Ed. I'm Bonni Stachowiak and this is the space where we explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning. We also share ways to improve our productivity approaches, so we can have more peace in our lives and be even more present for our students. I'm thrilled to be welcoming back to the show José Antonio Bowen. He's been leading innovation and change for over 35 years at Stanford, Georgetown, and the University of Southampton and then as a dean at Miami University and SMU as a president of a USN&WR most innovative college until 2019.

He now runs Bowen Innovation Group and does innovation leadership and pedagogy and diversity, equity, and inclusion consulting and training in both higher education and for Fortune 500 companies in the healthcare, energy, automotive, and telecom sectors. As a scholar, Bowen holds four degrees from Stanford University in chemistry, music, and humanities, and has written over 100 scholarly articles. He was editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Conducting* and an editor of the six-CD set, *Jazz: The Smithsonian Anthology*. He received a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship and has a TED talk on Beethoven as Bill Gates.

In 2010, Stanford honored him as a distinguished alumni scholar. Bowen has long been a pioneer in education, classroom design, and technology featured in *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *the Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Newsweek*, *PBS*, *News Hour*, and on *NPR*. José, welcome back to Teaching in Higher Ed.

**[00:02:20] José:** Hi, Bonni, it's great to be here.

**[00:02:22] Bonni:** As we record this interview today, we wrapped up the first day of our new faculty experience, and as we are ought to do as educators, I spent my whole lunch having the greatest conversation with one of our brand new faculty. He had on his syllabus from the prior person who taught it, a man by the name of Michael Sandel. Some people listening may know who that is, others might not. Michael Sandel teaches political philosophy at Harvard University. I got to tell this brand new faculty member about his incredible videos that he has that also there's a book called *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?*

It's an incredible resource for educators. I got to tell him all about it and all the ways he might use it in his teaching. What I was talking to him about that I find so useful about not just Michael Sandel's work, but so much of our work is before we get to whatever the premise is. Before we get to the premise of your new book, *Teaching Change*, is that Michael does such a great job of trying on different premises for what the right thing to do is. He looks at different aspects of political and moral thoughts. He examines utilitarianism. Rather than telling you what's right and wrong, he'll ask you questions, and then we try on libertarianism and unfettered and all these things.

Then, at the end of his book, you start to see glimmers of something that he's tried on that fits better for him and his moral thought and all of that. I want to know from you, José, you have had a career in this, you've tried on different answers to the question. Higher education, more broadly, is trying on different outfits to see what works to answer the question, what is higher education for? Before you answer that question, would you talk a little bit about what we've tried on that you don't think quite fits?

**[00:04:24] José:** I'll start with my own personal journey. I think like most faculty, I started as a content person because the first thing you do is ... okay, you're going to teach X next semester, and the panic starts and it's like, "Oh, my God." I vividly remember thinking of a syllabus as a list of topics. That was what we did. We said, "Well, what am I going to do week one, week two." In fact, in the old days, maybe still for some, they started with a list of topics. That was the first thing we looked at.

I think there was the idea that content that we're trying to cover some material. I certainly tried that. Like everybody else, I think I started off with way too much material and tried to make sausage with students, which is you stuff them full of content and you snip them loose, that's a gross theory of education. Then I think there's a subtle move to, well, what I really want students to do is understand my discipline. There's the disciplinary model, which is that I want you to think like a philosopher or think like a historian, think like a musical historian, in my view, or think in certain ways.

That's a slightly bigger question of what are the disciplinary assumptions? What are the kind of things we're trying to do? I spend a lot of time with this sense of, what are the important questions that our discipline answers? That's really what we want. I still believe that intro courses are much better suited as introductions to disciplinary questions than it's repertoire courses. Because the danger we all have is we're going to teach art history. The student takes one art history course and they think, "Oh, I know what art historians do. They look at 5,000 slides a day."

If that's what the discipline is, and it's like, well, that's a totally wrong impression, but if the intro course looks like that-- There's the understanding discipline, then I think there's the personal growth model that what I'm really trying to do is help my students become adult thinkers, master their emotions to become logical thinkers. Then first cousin to that is what everybody knows, which is critical thinking. We are going to turn you into a critical thinker, which has a number of problems. Let's begins with, nobody can define it, or we don't define it. What does it mean?

Another problem, which I identify in the book, which is that it's prescriptive. It says, this is the right way to think, critical thinking, whatever it is, however defined, is the right way to think, and if you think in the wrong way, that's bad. I want to get you to think in the right way and that must be the way that I think as the teacher, and there's no way to get around. You can massage that and try to-- but it's a hard thing if you say, "This is the way to think, the way I think." That it's convergent, it's not divergent.

As an artist, I don't like that. I don't want all my students to sound or think like me. I want them to think in different ways. If I'm teaching critical thinking, I can't help but teach them my preferred way. Then there's a couple of versions of what we now call leadership, what we used to call moral education. I'm going to graduate students who are citizens, and the way that you become a citizen, is that you have a certain set of judgment, a moral compass. This is clearly the way a lot of universities in America were founded, even as seminaries.

That has some appeal, leadership, I want you to be a certain type of person, go out and conquer the world. I think as a teacher, I've probably tried all of those on. I think probably, all of us have ... those are big ideas that we're plugged in and out of our consciousness.

**[00:08:15] Bonni:** Tell us then you tried those on. Some aspects of them fit and still do to you. I can see in your work glimmerings of these, but you have arrived at a different premise. What's the premise of *Teaching Change*?

**[00:08:29] José:** Well, the premise of *Teaching Change* is that what we're really trying to do is, some of this is the musical idea, my job as a music teacher is to help you find your voice. Who are you and how can you be the most you you can be?

It's also about-- I remember from freshman reading Augustine about biography and ... it's about, "Who are you?" was, "Well, who were you and how did you get to be the person you are?" That requires change.

When I became a president, I did a corny little thing at the opening day where I'd say, "Take out your phone," because they thought that was funny, "And take a selfie. Take a selfie of you today on your first day of college because four years from now, I'm going to ask you to look at that picture and go, "Who is that person?" Because all students say, "Oh my God, I was this lame, stupid freshmen. I didn't know anything. Now, I've become this amazing senior."

College students are aware of the fact they change. Yet in the popular imagination, if you say, "I am here to change students," people immediately think you're indoctrinating them. "Oh, college is about getting people to think a certain way." Can you merge those two ideas? The idea that I want you to become your best self, and I want you to reflect and look at how you've changed and be ready then for a future which is certainly going to have more change.

Education, in my view, has always been about change, but now when we live in what I call the learning economy, where the jobs of the future are really unknown and they could change in 5 years, not in 50, and so what you're going to do has even less relationship to your major, which is good news for liberal arts, by the way, because it means that the liberal arts, the major is actually less important than it ever has been. Parents and students don't always know that, but I think it's possible to convince people that with the future as unknown that you were not in college to acquire a body of information, you were not in college to become a leader, you were not even in college to learn a specific method of critical thinking.

You are in college to figure out who you are and how you're going to keep changing for the rest of your life as you get new information and new data and discover that your assumptions were wrong, that things that you thought were true are no longer true or they were never true, or the discipline has changed the way it thinks, that you are entering a world of uncertainty, which for a lot of people is scary. The certainty or the less scary thing is to know that I am agile, I am nimble, I am able to change my mind. I think it encompasses a lot of the issue we had to start with.

It is about preparing for democracy. It is about preparing to be a citizen. It is about critical thinking, but it's about a specific way of thinking about what democracy really needs are politicians, but citizens especially, who can change their minds. What the economy needs, what corporations want are workers who can adapt to new conditions, to new markets. I do think that the primary objective of what we do

is to help students learn to change. It turns out that's really hard, even if we weren't scared of all those words about change and indoctrination.

**[00:12:11] Bonni:** I really love the work of Stephen Brookfield. When I share about him and talk about here's a man who has written more than 30 books about teaching in higher education, but if you ever hear him speak or you read more of his books as he comes out of them, he to me epitomizes the idea. We actually built a couple of years back an entire year's long event around the theme of becoming, that we're never done. Whether we're talking about racism or whether we're talking-- or becoming anti-racist, you never get done with that. Box checked, all done. Becoming more effective as an educator, never done.

Of course, this also brings to mind the work of the researchers Dunning and Kruger, the Dunning-Kruger effect. I was just telling our new faculty member, which we have an interesting crew this year because some of them are returning to teaching, and they taught way longer than I have. I'm teaching people that just got their PhDs, first time ever teaching, all the way to people who've taught far longer than I have. It's such a fun group to be with, but we're all explaining to each other, "No, see, we never get done with this. We're never done becoming."

That's what I loved so much about your book because it isn't that you're saying becoming a moral person isn't important. It isn't that you're saying becoming a critical thinker isn't important, because please, oh, we need it more than ever, it feels like to me. It isn't that becoming more personally self-aware. All of these things are important, but what I felt so much from what you've said today and also from having read it is just this emphasis on, yes, but when you graduate, you're not done. I'm not done if I haven't equipped you to keep doing this for the rest of your life.

**[00:14:00] José:** I think what brings us full circle to where we started is that if we start with content, we've just arrived at process, that if content is going to change, look, you need concrete ideas to think. We don't think in the abstract. We think with ideas, we think with real, tangible facts, but if all we do is teach content, it's like giving somebody a fish rather than teaching them to fish. The process is teaching a person how to fish. I sometimes think, as teachers, we have to make ourselves obsolete.

One of my readers really hated that idea. "Oh my God, you're going to tell us we don't--" No, we need teachers, but the idea is that I eventually want to be able to step back and say, "You don't have to keep calling me for this. You can figure these things out on yourself that this process of becoming, as you so eloquently put it, continues. This is who you are. You are going to be a person of becoming." We need to focus a little bit more, not entirely, but a little bit more on process.

I call this a new three Rs of relationships, resilience, and reflection because the old three Rs, of course, were content-focused. My three Rs are process-focused, and again, they don't mean that content doesn't have a place, but that relationships, resilience, and reflection is the process by which we change. You need all three of those things to be in place. You need to understand how they interact and how they work together to change. This book, in a sense, is trying to explain to teachers how they work in the classroom because in order to help students become those things, we've got to teach them.

**[00:15:46] Bonni:** It's reminding me a little bit of an interview I heard. I'm going to do my darnedest to find it for the show notes because I'd love people to listen. It was an interview that was done with the man who used to be-- his family and himself was involved in the Ku Klux Klan. He talks about then going to college and how, "Oh, no, I wasn't there to learn anything new. I was there to spread this hatred and this belief system." Including his professors, he was going to get in there and he was going to have all the right words, and he was going to convince more people to join him in this quest.

What changed his mind, you already know how the story goes, even not having heard the interview, but what changed his mind was not some wonderful lecture from the professor. It was not some fantastic cognitive argument from a colleague. What changed his mind came about through relationship. Again, I kept thinking of this article as I read *Teaching Change* because it just resonated with me so much to be true. You've told us then why it's hard-

**[00:16:55] José:** Let's go back just for a minute.

**[00:16:56] Bonni:** Oh, no, please.

**[00:16:57] José:** Because that's a great story and it makes me think, because if you tell potential students, "We're going to change you," they run fleeing, but if I say, "Look, you know you're going to change over four years, but the way you're going to change is not primarily through the classroom. This experience of being around new people." We're often afraid, like, "Oh, that'll insult the faculty if I tell them," but what you say is totally true. I took that religious studies course and learned about the religions of the world, and then I had Muhammad as a roommate. I can tell you which of those was more effective in terms of going, "Oh, I really do have to stop and think about this assumption." It is too easy for students to regurgitate stuff on tests, just everything about the way our classroom is set up.

I do think that roommates and roommate selection, there's some information in the book about how we know a bit about how this works, but we're reluctant to say, "Let's engineer this," even though that we know that having a more diverse roommate freshman year changes who your friends are by senior year, and it

dramatically changes your attitude toward other racial groups, which is part of why sports teams work because students that are on diverse sports teams are much more likely to have healthier attitudes about other races when they graduate.

Those who join, for example, religious groups or they join Hillel or whatever it is, the Newman Center, right away those students tend to get boxed in, and they don't have as many other relationships, they're not exposed to other things. That has nothing to do with what happens in class, but has everything to do with what kind of human being you become and what kind of thinker you become when you leave. I think we have to think of college as not just the classroom, but what's happening to these human beings that spend four years with us, and look unflinchingly at the research that often tells us, it's often relationships and roommates and sports teams and experiences and study abroad that make the biggest difference, and students will tell us this, and not which classes they took. The truth is, most people can't even remember what classes they took by senior year.

**[00:19:17] Bonni:** It's so nuanced and complex, too, because I used to take that information and I used to, when forming groups in classes, make sure that there was one of-- [laughs] We are the world in each of these groups. Then, of course, what you find out is, you might inadvertently take a value set that says, I can be more a part of something inclusive if people are exposed to people who are different than them, but then, depending on the type of university that you teach at, you could inadvertently perpetuate the kinds of lack of diversity that you don't want to perpetuate because you're going to drive away the students of color who don't feel then like they belong there versus I have had other times, by the way, I do not at all think I have this figured out, but when I stopped trying to be one of these in every group, it really did help.

Sometimes for them to be a part of their affinity groups, whatever that means. In terms of that, we don't want to take this so far that educating, and I'm just going to pick out the example, educating white people about how you cannot be as racist at the expense of the student of color who's the one token person put in that group and again really, really complex stuff here. Important for us to be both researching, talking about, knowing we don't have all the right answers because every class is different. Every group project is different, but trying to do this better.

**[00:20:58] José:** Absolutely. There's a big difference between understanding that diverse groups do better work and they outperform groups of highly competent homogenous groups. They also take longer because they have more conflict because they question assumptions. That's true and great, but it doesn't take into consideration that being the person in the group who says, "Wait a second, hold on, hold on. I don't think you're making the right assumptions. My people don't do

it." That's a hard position to be in. Those are two different things that we don't need to be the person who's going to educate the other people.

That is a hard thing. As a faculty member who spent as the first of me in many situations where it's like, "Oh, you can explain to us." It's like, "No, that's not my job or you can be the student rep for that." I say, "That may be closer to my job but explaining to you how all the people with my name or who look like me or whatever, that's not my job." That is something we really do want to avoid.

At the same token we can't then say we're not going to do any engineering of how campus relationships work. It's too easy to say, "I'm scared that I could get this wrong." Yes, we could get it wrong but we know that's what's happening on our campuses and that who people become friends with does make a big difference in how they think.

**[00:22:24] Bonni:** This brings us to continuing this conversation, which is what holds us back from being able to teach change? If that's the premise, we want to be able to become great at doing this as educators. What holds us back from being able to do it?

**[00:22:39] José:** Everything that we just talked about in terms of why thinking for yourself is hard, means that discussion is hard. As educators, we place a lot of faith in discussion. We think, "Oh, I'm going to get people of different views together and the premise sounds totally reasonable," but having recently had to go to jury duty, I can tell you that if you put a group of people together in a room and say, "Hey, what do you think?" The first person who speaks has way more power than everybody else. If the first person who speaks says, "Oh, guilty," I'm sitting over here going, "I was going to say not guilty, but I wonder if everybody agrees with that guy who just said guilty."

Now, if that person had said not guilty I would've had a confidence boost. I would've said, oh my goodness, everybody else agrees with me and I would've been really stuck in the not guilty place because if he says it, then everybody agree. Then all of a sudden, everybody must agree with me fine. We react to a person, male, female, taller, beautiful. Are they in a group that we want to be with? There's evidence. In a class, if I want to be on the lacrosse team and I really want to hang out with those guys and the other lacrosse player in my class says something, I am both more likely to believe him, I'm likely to want to agree with him.

All of the social stuff is happening and it's all gendered. It's all about race. It's all about who looks like you. All of those things are happening simultaneously. It turns out that--Anybody who's ever been to a faculty meeting know this is true. If you've been to a faculty meeting and you think, "Oh, this is just going to be a pleasant, a respectful exchange of ideas that will all be taken seriously." No. Again, the longer

you've been with the faculty, what happens? You know that Professor Jones is going to hate this idea. If I'm sitting next to Professor Jones, I'm probably not going to say that. If I can see him across the room scowling, it's like, "Oh-oh."

It's not like we're immune to any of that, and so neither are students. One of the things we can do is to have students write position papers before class. I'd love index cards. Write the one paragraph position paper. Polling. What juries do is they don't say, "What do you think?" They say, "Write down guilty or not guilty on a piece of paper." Oh my goodness.

We're evenly split. There are other people who agree with me and there are other people who disagree with me. It's very, very useful to know that you're not the only one and if the first person who speaks gets agreed with by the second person, I become increasingly less likely to speak up.

Even though I may hold the majority view, but because it wasn't the first view expressed, I start to lose confidence. If the first person agrees with me, I jump right and say, "Yes, I agree with that." We've got to be more structured about how we approach discussion. We've got to think about what should happen first, who should speak. Starting with how. Instead of saying, "What do we think?", "Are you for?", "Do you think he's guilty or not guilty?", let's start with how this works. How does the Affordable Care Act work? Not whether you're for it or not.

If you think about this, so much of academia is built upon, your essay didn't have a thesis. You're supposed to argue for something. I actually started to think, as I wrote this book, that we may have that backward. I know everybody hates the compare and contrast paper, but the idea that you need to argue for something does mean that you're looking for evidence. This is not going to help you learn how to be a person who changes. It helps you learn how to become a person who argues for a position.

This is called the illusion of explanatory depth that we all think we know how things work. We all think we know how a toilet works or a ballpoint pen or a radio or a computer because we use one every day or in the case of the toilet because we know a plumber. She knows how it works, but I don't really know how it works. Getting people to talk about how things work, anonymous polling, preparing opening statements, but also I think instead of being convergent because students don't know why we're doing discussions. I'm a big believer in rubrics for discussion. How are we going to have discussion? Here's the rubric, here's what we're doing, what's the learning outcome? Then I divide students into two groups.

One group talks, the other group, they award points. What's the statement that was the most connecting? Those sorts of things or even just different questions. How many different explanations can we come up with rather than what do you think of

Hamlet? How many different explanations could we come up with to explain this behavior? Let's make a longer list. Let's not worry about quality. Let's worry about quantity. Can you think of both an example and a counterexample? I think there are ways to have better discussions, but I think that we naively assume that discussions work. I think the evidence is that most of the time discussions don't work, they reinforce the idea of convergence.

Think about this. We all like harmony. We think that the opposite of conflict is harmony. No, the opposite state of conflict is apathy. We want to create more conflict, healthy conflict, and remember that conflict actually can only happen when there's trust. The first thing we have to do is relationships. Relationships, trust, community belonging. Once everybody feels that they belong, psychological safety, where more and willing to have the kind of healthy conflict that leads us in a productive direction.

I can then mind for conflict which is what good discussion leaders do. They look for ways that we actually have disagreement and do that thing that students hate. It starts with trust and relationships, and then it moves to resilience in the face of conflict, and then finally, we end up with reflection. You've got to give students a place to say, we had this discussion.

Now I need you to think about, did you encounter new evidence? Did you encounter an assumption that might have been changed? Maybe not one of your assumptions because if I ask you, do you have an assumption that needs to be changed? You get defensive.

Was there anybody in the group who had an assumption that turned out to be false? What happens when we uncovered the assumption problem or we asked a better question? Because we can't start by saying, "You need to change. Your assumptions are false." People don't do that. We just get defensive. It just doesn't work. Thinking with others is also hard because there's the tendency to group conformity to trying to get to the consensus. I think we need to think more about how do we get to divergence, which is not the point of most discussion and it's not the same thing as, oh, anything goes either. What are the rules? How can we clarify these things? That was more than you wanted.

**[00:29:44] Bonni:** No, I just love that. I love it. I'm feeling that it's very meta to me right now. There's what you're sharing with us about how valuable discussion is as a form of facilitating learning and that we sometimes give it more affordances than it may actually possess. Then what I'm also hearing you see, a little bit on a different track, is even just thinking about the kinds of questions that we ask and how we frame them. I have frequently told people to instead of say, "Does anybody have a

question?" To say, "Who has the first question?" That's something that people have regularly said, "Wow, that really was helpful to me in my teaching."

By the way, I learned that from my husband, Dave. He doesn't think as he's listening that I'm taking credit, pretty sure he's the one that taught me, "Who has the first question?" I just had a little epiphany on something related to that, José, and I'm 17 years into teaching in this context. I have many times asked students before over the summer always emailing, "Here's the textbooks for the class all that stuff, looking forward to meeting you, and also, before I see you, would you let me know why you're taking this class?"

**[00:30:58] José:** Great question.

**[00:30:59] Bonni:** Well, it hasn't actually worked out very well for me, because usually, "I'm taking this class because you're amazing and I had you before and I think you're incredible," which of course, I love hearing that, but that's actually not that helpful in terms of why I was asking the question, or I get a, "I'm an athlete, and you are teaching a class that fit with my practice schedule, or my work schedule, or whatever it is." That wasn't really helpful information. I changed it and I tripped over my way to what turned out to be a lot more helpful of a question. I said, "I'm taking a class about personal leadership and productivity because--

"I named the-- that's the smallest little nuance of a difference but, "Why are you taking this class?" Versus, "Why are you taking a class about personal leadership and productivity?" Then the second thing I did, which I've never asked another question after that, so I added an add-on, "When I am at my most productive, I ..." More than half of the class has responded, that's never happened in my whole time, and I have rich, real raw answers and the ones I don't know are super excited about taking the class ... I still got a little bit of the compliments, but they feel they might have a good relationship with this person that they don't know.

The ones who already know me still told me I'm looking forward to your class, but I got the information that I wanted, which is why are they taking this class. By saying this class in the past, it doesn't work, but if you actually name it, and then give them just a little bit of-- It's essentially what do they even think of when they hear the word productivity? I'm at my most productive when I, really turned out well. Anyway, you're getting me to think just about the power of the tiny, tiny, tiny difference in how we ask questions can have a magnificently big different result.

**[00:32:54] José:** Absolutely. I think that is something we can all learn the way. My favorite example, which I was asked not to use at one of my corporate clients is the difference between, "Can you make a nasal contraceptive?" and, "How would you make a nasal contraceptive?" Because the how has optimism in it. What are the things that you know that would allow you to do this? With one of my clients, do

they make cars? "It takes us two and a half years to make a new color." It's like two and a half years? I said to them, "Okay, here's today's assignment. We're going to figure out a way how could we deliver on the same day as the customer walks into the dealership, cars in any color cars in the color they want today?" I said, "How could you do it? It might take you 10 years, but what would you need to do?" By the end of the session, they were going, "Oh, my gosh, we can have the mood car where it changes color when you put your head on the steering wheel, and you're happy and the car goes yellow, when you when you're sad, it goes blue. Remember the mood ring," and it was like, "But two hours ago, you told me this was impossible."

All of a sudden creating that sense of optimism of possibility with questions but as you just showed asking students about themselves is always the best way to start. You build trust first. You said, "You matter," and I'm immediately more willing to ask, and then you're worried about the form of the question. I love that. Those are both great.

**[00:34:33] Bonni:** My recommendation for today's episode fits perfectly with what José and I were just talking about, but before I share it, I wanted to share quickly my words of thanks to today's sponsor, and that is TextExpander. I'm, of course, thankful to them for sponsoring the episode and sponsoring the longest sponsor of Teaching in Higher Ed, but I'm also thankful for the tool and what a difference it makes in my own productivity. I always talk about these things as saving us time, yes, but to free up our time to do the kinds of things that José and I have been talking about on the show, the stuff that has more meaning for me than some of the stuff that we might otherwise automate.

Examples of what I might automate is, I do all my email signatures, they all expand in terms of after me typing in what are called snippets using TextExpander so that the different roles that I play can share different kinds of information. Yes, by the way, email applications do this, but I can do it much faster and more effectively with TextExpander. Everything from my work phone number that I have a hard time remembering to the show notes for the podcast episode where I repeat the same kinds of information, what's the episode number? What's the title? Who's the guest?

You can have fillable forms that are really easy to set up and then have the blanket text expand, and you can customize it in different ways. There are all kinds of ways we can use TextExpander and I just want to thank them for sponsoring. If you want to try out TextExpander and get a little bit of a discount if you decide to invest in it, you can head over to [textexpander.com/podcasts](https://textexpander.com/podcasts). Thanks once again to TextExpander for sponsoring today's episode. This is the time in the show when we get to recommendations and this one actually fits with what we've been talking about. It's a nice transition for us.

I read Ken Bain's tweet, it was a recent tweet. I really got intrigued by the last sentence of his tweet. If you're not familiar with Ken Bain to listeners, I know José is, but to listeners, he wrote the first book I ever read about teaching in higher education called *What Great College Teachers Do*. One of my big takeaways from his work is always the importance of failure. He's, in this tweet, speaking to researchers, but he could really be speaking to all of us, of course, he says, "As a researcher, you're a learner trying to learn something no one else knows."

What are elements of the environment you expect? Do you offer the same environment to your students? Why or why not? Can they fail and get feedback and try again, for example, before any scores are entered on their work?" It was just such a reminder to me, and I guess, it really resonated from when I first read his book almost 20 years ago, and it still resonates today, all this time later, are we giving our students opportunities to fail, get feedback, and try again? Are we doing that in a context in which we don't have to-- You mentioned the evolution and all that, our little animal pea-sized brains that are like, "Danger, danger, run away."

Are we getting them out of the fight or flight that comes along with high-stakes assessment? Are we doing it in a safer environment where this isn't a make-or-break move I'm about to do as I know I'm about to fail? Anyway, it was just a-- I enjoy that he's on Twitter. I get a kick out of that, and I get a kick out of the things he has to share there. My recommendation is people go check out Ken Bain's tweet and think a little bit about failure. José, what do you have to recommend today or you're happy to expound on that?

**[00:38:13] José:** I love it. I'm going to continue with that. My recommendation is, learn something new, and learn something that you don't do well. First of all, it's humbling, it's good. I play soccer because I'm terrible at it and I like it but it's also humbling, and that's good. When I was first working on this book, I started to learn tennis again and it really changed everything because I was a beginner. I was the student and I was like, "Oh, no, no, you're giving me too much information. Feet, arms, head, racket, I can't do that all, just one thing at a time," but the insight I had that related to the book was that learning as teachers, you really want to be the tennis net.

That the ultimate teacher is not the coach going A plus B minus move your feet. It's the tennis net because it's like, Ken Bain just said it, it's about non-judgmental feedback but it's instant. I hit a ball, I immediately know it worked, it didn't work, and I hit another ball, and I hit some more. As teachers, we all know that there's a problem as experts that it's novices and experts think about things differently. Be a beginner at something and then think meta. Think about the process. It's not that you're going to go teach your students tennis, but you're going to think about how did it feel to be a student?

What were the things that worked, what didn't work, what was really essential, what does the framework look like? Probably the first cousin to that is get away from academia because we live in this weird place. We think it's normal and so other students come in and they go, "Wow, what are the rules? What are the conventions? What am I supposed to wear? What is this raising your hand stuff?" Being in a different culture and feeling like the outsider can also give us empathy for what students are like if they, "Oh, I might need a rubric for that because I didn't understand. what the rules were when I first went to this new place."

**[00:40:04] Bonni:** I'm thinking about what you said earlier about the Affordable Care Act and that if we--

**[00:40:11] José:** Don't try reading it. It's 7,000 pages.

**[00:40:13] Bonni:** I'm sure though you've seen the polls where if I say how do you feel about the Affordable Healthcare Act versus how do you feel about Obamacare, and they're just vastly different answers. If we can have that-- you said that about us being the tennis net, just feedback. Do you even know what the Affordable Care Act is? Then from there to teach change, then I think we become something other than the net because we recognize the net has its limitations and that if you equip learners well they're going to take you to places you never could have envisioned. It's like we're all of a sudden off the tennis court and doing Frisbee golfer. I can't come up with the right analogy here but--

**[00:40:55] José:** Well, I think, look, you start with the tennis that the tennis net is a great teacher. You can't learn anything without the net, but then you do need a guide. You do need a guide on the side. You do need somebody who's going to help structure. Well, let's only work on the forehand. Leave the back hand for now. Let's serve. We will get to the serve but not today.

**[00:41:14] Bonni:** I think eventually though don't we need just to recognize that they're going to be doing shots across the net that we never could have done ourselves? At some point, we're in the stands just cheering them on. To Ken Bain's example, if we're talking to researchers, don't you want them to invent things you never could invent or cure cancer or whatever it is?

**[00:41:38] José:** No, it's where we started that. Can we both help them learn to change and become more of themselves? Can you do both of those things at once to help people find their voice discover them? That's something that again as teachers we often think about but we think it's magic and it turns out there's actually a lot of research on what works and what doesn't work. Being a learner has a lot of benefits. One of those actually is it will help your research because you're going to discover unusual connections that you didn't think you needed. If you think

you know what you're looking for, you might find the wrong thing. I'm a big fan of reading widely.

**[00:42:17] Bonni:** José Bowen. Thank you so much for being a guest on today's episode and many other episodes in the past. It was such a delight to get to read this incredible book. Thank you for your generosity as a writer and as an educator. I'm just so looking forward to the next time we have a chance to talk.

**[00:42:32] José:** Well it's always fun to talk with you. Thanks for having me.

[music]

**[00:42:38] Bonni:** José Bowen. Thank you for joining me for today's episode of Teaching in Higher Ed Episode 382. If you'd like to visit the show notes for today's episode, head on over to [teachinginhighered.com/382](http://teachinginhighered.com/382). If you'd like to subscribe to the weekly email updates you'll get the show notes from today's episode along with some other recommendations just from my own browsing not from the show. You can subscribe @[teachinginhighered.com/subscribe](mailto:teachinginhighered.com/subscribe). Thank you for being a part of the Teaching in Higher Ed community. I'll see you next time.

[music]

**[00:43:39] [END OF AUDIO]**

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