

Bonni Stachowiak: Today on episode number 385 of the *Teaching In Higher Ed* podcast, I start the first of two episodes all about tools for learning.

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Bonni Stachowiak: 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.

Each year, Jane Hart puts together the top tools for learning. In recent years, she broke them out into top tools for personal learning, top tools for workplace learning, and top tools for education. I know that some of you don't love top tools for anything, and others of you love them. For me, it can also be difficult to break things out into personal versus workplace versus education because I am such a person-oriented toward learning. In general, they all seem to blend together.

The nice part about things like this is hearing about what other people are using to either facilitate learning or to experience it ourselves or most often these things, of course, happen simultaneously, I find can be inspiring and can help us discover some new ways of pursuing learning, so to that end, I am beginning today a two-part episode on tools for learning and my response to Jane Hart's question, or her challenge, I really should say, for us to list out our top 10 tools. I'm going to be taking this, as I said, over two episodes because it's difficult to even think about getting through five of them in a reasonably lengthed episode. [chuckles]

All right, so let's begin with my first pick, and that is Raindrop, Raindrop.io. Raindrop is a digital bookmarking tool, and I find it absolutely essential. I am saving things to this digital bookmarking tool. Whether I'm on my phone, on a tablet, or on a web browser, I can access it anywhere I go and be able to quickly, as I am reading or wanting to read something, be able to save things there and to apply what are called tags, and so I can have a bookmark. Let's say I found an episode that would be good for a class, an episode of a podcast that would be good for our class, so I

might give it a tag that was related to that class, so I can go back later on and find the things that I think might be really good for that class.

Then I might also apply, in fact, I would apply a tag of audio because sometimes I want to go not just to look at a specific class, but I also might want to say I just want to find something that would be a video or just something that would be an audio or just something that would be an article, so being able to access things by type, and then I also would apply other tags of what is this related to, what are the topics. It is so great to be able to save things to a digital bookmarking tool, access them wherever I am, and be able to resurface things later on as a part of my personal knowledge mastery, my PKM system, which you can listen and hear more about, and there's a bunch of episodes about that topic of prior episodes of *Teaching In Higher Ed* as well.

A related tool is all about how I get my podcasts. These applications or apps are often called podcast catchers, which I think is an adorable name for whatever tool it is we use to go out and automatically receive, if we set it up this way, automatically receive the most recent episodes of whatever podcasts we've subscribed to. I use one called Overcast.

Despite during the pandemic really coming down and how much time I have for podcast listening, I still absolutely treasure podcast episodes that I am able to consume, I continue to just be overwhelmed in a good way at all of the amazing things that are out there for us to be able to learn from and discover. One of the reasons I use Overcast is that it has something called a smart speed function, and so it'll reduce the amount of pauses that show up in some episodes, and a lot of podcast catchers can listen to podcasts faster than they were recorded.

Now, there are some podcasts that I highly recommend against doing this on, especially the various storytelling ones. I think about podcasts like *This American Life*, or there's another that I've recommended a lot in prior episodes called *Scene as in S-C-E-N-E, Scene on Radio*. Those are such exquisite storytelling audio pieces. They're just masterpieces, if you will, such that I don't think we should ever change the way that they were designed to be listened to, but in a lot of other instances, I will speed things up and enjoy listening to things that way. I really enjoy Overcast a lot. It has a lot of customization for how we listen.

Next up, this won't surprise you. If you've been listening to this podcast for any length of time, I really get a lot out of Twitter. It is a microblogging and social media network, and I use it often for my personal learning, and it's all about who it is we follow on these social media that can help us in our ongoing quest to learn.

Back on episode 53 of the *Teaching in Higher Ed* podcast, Peter Newbury talked about his method for who he follows on Twitter, so this would have been back in

2015 that he said this to me, and here we are in 2021, and just imagining that I'm carrying forward with me his advice, which was that we should connect with people who are like us and also with people who are not like us.

When I go on Twitter, I often experience a feeling of being in solidarity with a network of people from all over the world, and I'm also challenged by ideas and ways of thinking in really healthy ways, and I have found it to be a tremendous asset to me, particularly, in all of the difficulties that so many of us have been experiencing in the last year and a half. I also should say that, of course, Twitter is also a cesspool, [chuckles] it can be both-and, and it's helpful for us to be also recognizing that not everyone experiences these social media in the same way and not everyone has the richness of benefits that some of us may have, so yes, it is both-and for sure. [chuckles]

The next tool I'd like to share about is called Readwise. When I first heard about Readwise, I didn't really understand its value. It was only once I started using it on a regular basis. Many of us enjoy highlighting as we read. I will often read books on services like the Amazon Kindle or Apple Books, or there's a read it later service called Instapaper, or even just occasionally, I will get advanced copies of a book or an article, and it'll be just on a file privately on my computer, and I can highlight there.

Wherever I might highlight, those highlights go into one centralized service, and that is Readwise. It is a way of resurfacing those highlights on an ongoing basis, so I'm able to come back to books I may have read 5 or 10 years ago, and have those highlights get resurfaced. For example, they can send out a daily email. You set this up so you don't necessarily have to get it daily.

You don't necessarily have to get just five highlights, you can adjust those things too, but I'll get a mix of highlights from books that I have read, and I can decide if I want to save those. I don't mean save them, but accept them or keep them as ones I want to continue to have resurfaced for me so I can be continually refining the system. I also can share those quotes out to social media, which I find very helpful just to be able to resurface that reading that I've done over many years and to continue to have those books, those things that I really have treasured, continue to edify my life.

The next tool I'd like to share about is another reading type of app, and it is called Inoreader, but rather than thinking about reading something as linear as a book, unless it's a choose your own adventure book. By the way, most books work of reading from start to finish. Services like Inoreader are what are known as RSS feed aggregators, so let's first talk about what an RSS feed is.

Real Simple Syndication is a way of essentially allowing us to create our own custom newspapers. I can still recall when I was in my 20s that I just really enjoyed every Saturday morning taking a walk to a local bagel shop and sitting there and reading a printed newspaper. I would regularly take out the sports section because they had no interest in it. There was a little table there, a little tray that they would have where you could leave your newspapers for other people to enjoy after you were done.

I had to do that every week. I had to take out the sports section and customize it for myself, not to mention, get newsprint all over my hands, and with RSS feeds, we're allowed to say, "Hey, I'm actually really interested in what this individual person has to say, and I'd like that to come into my personal newspaper every time that they publish something."

My dad, for many years, would post a new photograph on a service called Flickr. It's a photography website. Every time he would post a new photo, it would show up all aggregated together, all collected together in one place. RSS feeds and these aggregator services have been a huge part of my ongoing learning. I first heard about Inoreader from Laura Gibbs. She's been on the show before, and she shared about how, not only does it contribute to her learning, but also in her teaching because you can really trick it out where you could have your students blogging, for example, and have Inoreader bring those feeds from all those different blogs together, and then have its own little RSS feed that could show up inside of a learning management system, for example, or even you could invite students to subscribe to it.

All different kinds of ways that you can mix and match feeds that are coming from all these seemingly disparate conversations that are happening across the web, and you get to bring them together in a meaningful way and also have an option to share them as well. Highly recommend RSS feed aggregators in general. The one that I use is called Inoreader. Once you have an RSS feed aggregator, you can just read your feeds off of it, but many of us use separate apps to consume that content that all comes together.

I really love an app called Unread. What Unread does is it lets me use my Inoreader feeds. They all come together in there, but I can actually operate that entire list of feeds. I have folders. I can go and read each folder and then mark it as read. I can do it all with a single thumb. I know that sounds super weird to say, but I enjoy reading at night laying down. I don't have to click and tap in a whole bunch of different parts of the screen. I can just be having my hand rest on the side of the iPad and be able to control my reading that way. It's just such a tremendous experience. It's hard to describe, but it's really a great way to read.

This is the time in the show where I get to share my recommendations. I wanted to just revisit what I had shared earlier when I talked about how important Twitter has been to me in my own learning, and I'm convinced that one of the reasons why is because of what Peter Newbury said back on Episode 53, which I mentioned earlier, that we should follow people on Twitter that are like us and also people who are not like us. I mentioned really being able to learn so much from Twitter in general.

One of the things that I did to continue my own education was to create a list of people within the disability community. I would like to recommend today that you consider following that disability list on Twitter and get exposure to some voices of people who may be like you or who may be not like you. I encourage us to just continue our learning, and one of the ways we can do that is through lists on Twitter, which is just one way of collecting a series of voices and reading them in concert with one another.

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Thanks to everyone for listening to today's episode of *Teaching in Higher Ed* number 385. If you'd like to access the show notes for today's episode, you can most likely read them in your own podcast catcher like I talked about earlier, or you can also head on over to teachinginhighered.com/385. Each week, I send out the show notes from the most recent episode, along with some other recommendations and things that don't show up on the episodes. If you'd like to subscribe to that weekly update, you can head on over to teachinginhighered.com/subscribe. I'd love to have you connecting with the community in that way, and thanks to each of you for listening. I hope you have a wonderful day.

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[00:15:15] [END OF AUDIO]

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