



Episode 15

The Research is Pretty Clear That There is One Thing and Only One Thing That Across The Board Improves Teaching. Do You Know What That Is, Steve?

STEVEN ROBINOW: This is Teaching for Student Success. I'm Steven Robinow.

Today, we will talk with Dr. Jessamyn Neuhaus, author of *Geeky Pedagogy: A Guide for Intellectuals, Introverts, and Nerds Who Want to Be Effective Teachers*, published in 2019 by West Virginia University Press.

For all the geeks, introverts, and nerds out there, this episode is for you—so much so that this book creates a new acronym—at least new to me: G-I-N, geeks, introverts, and nerds. So we will be talking a lot about GINs for the next 45 minutes or so. And there is of course some likelihood that all of my listeners, or a great many, already self-identify as GINs, or others, such as your partners, children, or students, might identify you as one, right?

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yes.

STEVEN ROBINOW: So keep listening for a special episode specifically to discuss how geeks, introverts, and nerds, those who might not want to play the extrovert role in front of the class, how you GINs—or more accurately, us GINs—might adopt practices that can help us to be more effective teachers, resulting of course in improved rates of student success.

Welcome, Jessamyn. Thank you so much for joining us on Teaching for Student Success.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Oh, thanks for having me. Thank you.

STEVEN ROBINOW: I'm looking forward to this. Dr. Neuhaus is a professor in the Department of History and the interim director for the Center for Teaching Excellence at the State University of New York in Plattsburgh. For those of us who have never been there, Plattsburgh is on Lake Champlain, in the northeast corner of New York state, on the border of Vermont, and about 60 miles from Montreal, Canada—about 25 miles from the Canadian border.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: That's right. Yeah.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Jessamyn has written extensively on race, gender, and sexism through the lens of American culture. The titles of her publications are so intriguing. Here's a sampling of some: “‘A Little Bit of Love You Can Wrap Your Baby In:’ Mothers, Fathers, Race and Representations of Nurturing in 1960s–1970s Pampers Advertising.” That's a great one.

Here's another: “Dad Test: Gender, Race, and ‘Funny Fathers’ in Disposable Diaper Advertising from the 1970s to 2012.” I'll just read one more. “Marge Simpson, Blue Haired Housewife: Defining Domesticity on ‘The Simpsons’.” It's a 2010 publication.

Jessamyn's more recent and future publications seem to be focused on student learning and student success. Today, we will talk about *Geeky Pedagogy*. In the future, perhaps we will come back to talk about her upcoming anthology *Picture a Professor: Interrupting Biases About Faculty and Increasing Student Learning*, coming out in the fall of 2022.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah.

STEVEN ROBINOW: And her current project, *Professor SOS: What to Do When Things Go Wrong in the College Classroom*. I think that's definitely going to be a need to read.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Things don't always go 100% perfectly, Steve; is that what you're saying?

STEVEN ROBINOW: That might be true. They may not be always perfect.

I'm wondering, Jessamyn, firstly, did I reasonably represent your academic work on race, gender, and sexism as viewed through American history?

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yes. Yes, you did. I do have to give a shout out to my two previous books, which were on the history of cookbooks and gender in modern America, and the second one was on housework and advertising. That was the theme you picked up on there.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Yeah.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: So I'm a big, big nerd about prescriptive literature. So I can spend hours upon hours giving you examples from advertising and etiquette manuals and marriage manuals about how gender norms were reinforced at different points in US history.

But this isn't a podcast about prescriptive literature, as much as I would enjoy that.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Yeah. Maybe when we need those lessons, we'll come back and talk about it. What motivated you to move into the world of teaching excellence and student success? Certainly, this wasn't how you were originally trained as an academic and a scholar, as you point out in your book.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: That's right, Steve. I think it is changing a little bit at the graduate level, where there is more attention paid to pedagogy and teaching. But it was true for me, and it's still true for a fair number of people, that getting your PhD did not mean also being trained or even reading, studying, reflecting about teaching. The focus in my graduate program was all on the research and the scholarly projects creating knowledge, but nothing about teaching.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Right.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: So when I did begin my teaching career and saw really how much of my job was going to be helping students, I started to feel underprepared. I do have a bit of a perfectionist streak, and I was not immediately good at it. Unlike many aspects of being an academic, I still remember the exact moment in 10th grade when I learned how to format a footnote. Because I thought it was so awesome and it came to

me so naturally. It was like speaking a language, a brand-new language, that I already knew.

Teaching was nothing like that. I fumbled and stumbled and really felt like I was falling short of where I wanted to be as an educator. So really, my entryway was reading and learning for myself as a teacher and to be effective as a teacher. And I had graduated not even knowing there was this whole field, this whole scholarly field, on teaching and learning.

So once I started reading some of that, I was like, wow, this is really cool. And I was really fortunate—early on, when I was working as a contingent instructor at numerous colleges and universities, I was fortunate enough to encounter a teaching center at Case Western Reserve University. And they were so, so helpful and supportive and encouraging.

So when Plattsburgh—I started my tenure-track job here in 2004—and Plattsburgh got a teaching center—it's a center of one, but a teaching center—in 2005—and I was the first person to call up the director and say, can you please come to my class, and can we talk about my syllabus?

So the problems and the, I guess, complexities of teaching just started to interest me more and more and more the longer I was teaching. So that's a good stopping point.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Once you open that door, it's a fascinating world to explore. And you started out clearly being reflective of your own teaching, which led you down that road.

So let's talk about your book.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: OK.

STEVEN ROBINOW: *Geeky Pedagogy*, this book, this guide, this instruction manual is clearly laid out in five themes: Chapter one, awareness. Chapter two, preparation. Chapter 3, reflection. Four, support. And five is practice. So awareness, preparation, reflection, support, and practice. We won't have time to deeply discuss all of these, but let's start at the beginning. Let's start about awareness.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: OK.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Can you please talk about your intentions with this chapter and some of the most important issues there?

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah, sure. But first I just have to—I'm going to pick apart your words a little bit. I wouldn't say instruction manual, and this is why. Because some really good scholarship of teaching and learning, some good teaching advice, makes the mistake of kind of presenting teaching as a do X and Y and Z, and you will be an effective educator.

And that's just not complex enough. It's not nuanced enough. It doesn't take into account an instructor's individual teaching context, which can really vary. It doesn't take into account disparate teaching realities—that's sociologist Roxanna Harlow's term—for the fact that embodied identity and systemic exclusion, racism, and stereotypes and assumptions about academic expertise are always at play. So there are disparate teaching realities.

And I guess the other reason I would avoid instruction manual is that one thing I really, really want readers to take away and that I—also, this blew my students' minds, the ones who are going to be future social studies teachers—I'm teaching a class this semester—and I said, listen, you are always learning how to be an effective teacher. From your first class to your last, you're always learning. There's never going to be a finish line. There's never going to be a certificate awarded to you—you're done. No. You're always learning about effective teaching.

And if I could write an instruction manual that would magically give everybody, bing, bang, boom, you're a great teacher forever, hey, I totally would have. But that's just not how it works.

STEVEN ROBINOW: No, I appreciate that. That's perfect.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: So the awareness chapter lays out four realities that I think effective teachers always have to be aware of. And the first is the one we just were talking about: that embodied identity always matters. It's just the reality that the same stereotypes, assumptions, biases that exist everywhere outside the classroom don't stop when you walk into the classroom. That is a reality for instructors and for students: embodied identity matters. It always matters.

The second thing that I think we always have to be aware of is that learning is hard. And that certainly has increased, I believe, a billion-fold in the pandemic era: that a tired, hungry, traumatized, scared brain doesn't learn well. But even when all other conditions are ideal, learning is hard. It takes a really, really long time. It takes a lot of

feedback. It takes trial and error. It takes repetition. It takes practice. That's learning anything, how to do anything new. So when we go into our classrooms, always being aware of that fact, that learning is hard.

And the other two realities that we need to cultivate constant awareness of is who our students are and who we are—things that are always changing. Even in the exact same institutions, teaching the exact same class, your student population is always changing. We're living through some really significant, dramatic changes in who our students are, what kinds of things they need more assistance with, being aware of who they are.

And finally, being aware of who you are. That your authenticity, that your teaching persona, the things you choose to do assignment-wise or course design, they need to work for you. The best, most evidence-based teaching strategy in the entire world might work with your students and for you or it might not. It really might not. So being aware of who we are and who our students are.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Good. Let's come back to embodied identity for a second. Because that's a bit of jargon. It's a little jargony for some people.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: OK.

STEVEN ROBINOW: So do you want to suss that out for us?

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Sure. It just means your body, the identity that others can perceive on you and how you perceive other people. So race, ethnicity, but also speaking voice, gender expression, and gender identity, abilities—physical abilities—

STEVEN ROBINOW: Is it limited to what's visible, or does it include things you can't see about people?

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah, that's such a great point. And it's on my mind. Because you mentioned in the introduction the anthology, the collection that I am currently editing that will be out in the fall. It's essays by instructors who navigate those stereotypes and biases about what a professor, quote, unquote, looks like.

That collection does not include essays on the experiences of instructors who may very well meet certain stereotypical images of a professor, but nonetheless are from historically minoritized groups or living with disabilities that are not visible.

But certainly, yes, that would be part of embodied identity. It's part of how you move through the world and how you interact with other people.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Right. It's an iceberg. There's things above the waterline and there's things below the waterline.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah. Yeah. And the reason I liked putting it first in that chapter on awareness is that it is the reality of our existence. It's not saying, so we just give up. Oh, well, people are prejudiced. But when we go into the classroom—when I go to class tomorrow—the reality is that we bring in our biases and assumptions that we live with, that shape how we all exist in the world.

So the awareness chapter is really about attention: paying attention to what is. I have—I'm looking at it. It's on my shelf right in front of my eyes. It's a little plaque that says, It is what it is.

STEVEN ROBINOW: It is what it is.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Which drives me bonkers when people say that. But on the other hand, it's true. Sometimes there is just the reality in front of you.

So to take like the last example—who we are—I am not ever going to be a performer. I'm too self-conscious. I am an introvert. I don't enjoy having every eye on me and having everybody's attention. That's just the reality. That's not going to change.

So what do I do when I'm designing classroom activities, when I'm looking at my courses, when I look at assignments? How am I going to communicate approachability to students? How am I going to demonstrate my enthusiasm? I'm not going to be in there with pom-poms rah-rahing. Because I'm never, ever going to be a cheerleader. So what can I do to articulate and convey my enthusiasm to students? That starts with awareness of who I am.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Right. Yeah, there's so many things there.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: I know. The image of me in a cheerleader dress is probably distracting.

[LAUGHTER]

STEVEN ROBINOW: Well, that's not where I was headed, actually, with this. No. I was actually looking at this—I'm still hung up on this identity issue. Because I think that's such a big issue, right? Because we make so many assumptions about our students when we walk in. And one of the first ones you said is you've got a lot of first-gen students.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yes.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Well, outwardly, you don't know.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: That's right.

STEVEN ROBINOW: They look like anything. And you can't tell them—there's no way to tell. So that's a simple one to pick out for people. Because throughout your book, one of the things you—and I think it's in this first chapter—in particular, you give examples of faculty that are frustrated and make some statement about students, how these students, blah, blah, blah—whatever disparaging statement is made about the students.

And then you provide an alternative way to think about your students and an alternative way to look at your students. Which is, hey, these are hardworking kids— young people, young adults—maybe not even so young—and their lives are complicated and complex.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah.

STEVEN ROBINOW: So I think in the awareness, that's something that you point out and bring forward, that you need to constantly be aware of. It's easy to blame the students. But it's hard to understand what their lived experience is.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah.

STEVEN ROBINOW: And their living experience is right?

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah.

STEVEN ROBINOW: I mean, what percentage of your students are food insecure?

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Who's even thought—during my teaching career, I never thought about that.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah. I think the pandemic era has upped awareness of students' unique life contexts, including diversity as an educational asset—but that a wide range of life experiences helps every student in class learn. I think the pandemic crisis has increased many people's attention to an awareness of those issues and increased understanding of the need to be aware of those issues. I'm thinking about those examples of the inner dialogue versus what might be more helpful to reframe it.

So instead of, oh, my god, I hate talking to all those blank screens. Why, why, why won't they turn on their cameras? Why won't they listen to me? And why are they so disrespectful when I'm trying so hard and I'm so burned out? And instead, just, well, the cameras aren't on in class. That's just the reality. Let's try to dial down our ego, defensiveness, taking into account that we are also very burned out and exhausted.

So certainly, the awareness of our own stress levels—even traumatic stress that might be shaping how we respond to teaching and learning issues—but all those black windows in your Zoom class and your incredible frustration with it isn't just about that class and that Zoom session. It's also about trying to find childcare during the pandemic, and concern about, is this person you're talking to wearing their mask

correctly? And oh, the multimodalities. Are you going to be in person? Are you going to be in Zoom? Are you going to be online?

STEVEN ROBINOW: Right.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Who knows? So all those stressors on you might—it's the awareness of it. Again, I'm not saying it's right or wonderful. But it is what it is, yeah.

STEVEN ROBINOW: And those pressures are on you as well as on your students.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: That's right.

STEVEN ROBINOW: And these students, their living situations, you don't know. It's interesting.

So do you think that awareness—so if there is a heightened awareness of faculty of students' lives and situations, do you think that will persist when we come back to class? So I have the hope that this pandemic, as horrible as it's been, is going to improve teaching nationally. Because faculty, instructors, many of them, for the first time, have had to think about what they're doing and why they're doing it.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yes. I hope so too. This is what I say when I'm doing workshops with faculty right now—is that there is no silver lining to a devastating global pandemic. And at the same time, you are learning how to do new things as an educator that will benefit your students and that you'll use for the rest of your careers.

You are smart people, with big, huge, powerful brains, and you can hold two contradictory ideas in your head at the same time. And the one idea is that this absolutely sucks. There is nothing redeeming about a pandemic—deadly, horrible pandemic. At the same time, you are adding tools to your teaching toolkit.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Absolutely.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: And that's the pedagogical learning part.

But I think faculty need to be supported to be able to continue to have enough resilience in their own brains and bodies and souls to keep learning during such stressful, traumatic times. Because like it says in chapter one, learning is hard is the reality for your students, and it's the reality for us as teachers. So I really hope that some of the things sort of we as individual instructors have gained can continue. But it needs institutional and cultural support as well.

STEVEN ROBINOW: So as you said, it's not an instruction manual. These are five ideas. And so we can jump around. We don't have to go in order.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: That's right.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Because they're integrated, right? They're all integrated.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Exactly, yes.

STEVEN ROBINOW: So since we're talking about support, we're going to jump there in a second. But before we do, I want to ask about—you were talking about things you do to make your students feel welcome. You don't talk about this until the last chapter in the book: support. And I want to ask about your welcome mat.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Oh, yeah. [LAUGHS]

STEVEN ROBINOW: I want you to talk about your welcome mat. You were talking earlier about how you let students know that you are there for them, and in different ways.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yes.

STEVEN ROBINOW: And one of them, for example, is you're at the classroom before class starts and you just casually engage with students.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yes.

STEVEN ROBINOW: That's one thing you do.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah.

STEVEN ROBINOW: And you have a welcome mat. Talk about that.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah. Well, this comes up actually in the chapter on preparation as well. Because as a very introverted and fairly awkward person, the easy small talk never has come easily to me at all. I have to prepare myself for social interactions.

Like I saw on Twitter the other day, someone's calendar: from 8 AM to 11 AM, prepare to give a talk; 12:00 to 1:00, talk; 1:00 to 9:00 recover from talk. That's kind of how it is. Even though I actually, after these past two years, I am pining for more in-person classes personally, but to effectively communicate to students that I want to be there with them, that I want them to approach me with their questions and concerns, I have to plan for ways to do that.

I'm not going to just convey it naturally. It's not natural to me. You know what's natural? Sitting quietly in a room, reading and writing by myself. Even now, even after these two years of isolation, I'm ready for more socializing. But even so, my natural inclination is to be quietly by myself.

So when I started to work more concertedly on the social interaction aspects of teaching, when I accepted the reality that teaching and learning always is about emotions and social interactions as much as it is the intellectual part—I got my PhD and became a teacher thinking we're going to talk about ideas. I'm going to just sit around a seminar table for the rest of my life and talk about complicated ideas. And that's all teaching's going to be. No. There's always emotions. There's interactions.

So the welcome mat is actually a reminder to me. I have one in my office to remind me that when it's time to interact with students, I need to interact with students. I need to effectively convey to them that I want to talk to them and I want to be there in the classroom.

The thing that's really helped the most is just saying clearly, I want you to succeed. I care about your success.

In my experience, students are quite perceptive, and they know when a faculty member, when an instructor really wants them to succeed. But it really helps to be as clear as possible, especially if, like me, you're verbose and you can rattle on and on and maybe dull people's senses, instead of just saying, I care about your success, I want you to succeed.

I had a huge professor win last semester, when I was—I was giving students—they were coming up on a big assignment, the first complete draft of their senior projects. And I was giving them a little pep talk: I know everybody is going to successfully finish. It's a really hard time to be a student, but I know you can do it. We're going to successfully finish this.

And after class, a student stayed to ask me a question about something. And she said, it really helps to know that you like us.

Now, I didn't say I like you. That's what she heard when I said, I know you can be successful. I want you to be successful. That's authentic to my teaching persona. It is about the ideas. It is about the work. But it's conveyed in a way that emphasizes their success, completing the assignment.

When I say, I'm incredibly fascinated with your ideas, I want to hear what you think, that is very authentic to who I am. I love to talk about their ideas. I love to hear their ideas.

I am not warm and fuzzy. I'm not making, necessarily, those kinds of connections, where students are going to be flocking into my office just to shoot the breeze with me or talk to me or chit-chat. That's not necessarily going to be where I shine. But they know that I want them to succeed.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Right. And that comment that the student—that they like you, and that the liking is important—or that you like them—

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: I like them

STEVEN ROBINOW: —isn't a comment necessarily from that moment, right? You've been with them the entire semester. And through that semester, you've shown caring for your students in many ways. So that, at that moment, that student then shared the accumulation of those feelings, which is really something special.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah.

STEVEN ROBINOW: In fact, there's an episode with Bryan Dewsbury, where he talks about this agency that you give students when you validate their ideas, right?

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Right.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Or when you show interest in their ideas, not just telling them your ideas. That that really changes the interaction and really provides students with some skin in the game—I mean, that you value their thoughts, what's going on in their big brain.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah. That's right. And it's such great news for those of us who are not really extroverted, who don't just easily convey a lot of emotions. You can demonstrate caring for students in a way that's authentic to you. There's really a wide diversity of ways for nerds and for introverts, for people who really geek out about their subjects but aren't necessarily super socially skilled.

The great news is there's so many ways to convey caring for student success, in ways that, yes, you have to prepare for and plan for, but that can be authentic to you. You don't have to be someone you're not.

One of the stereotypes about professors that I found particularly difficult to overcome and damaging was the super professor stereotype. And we see him on TV and we see him in movies, where he's giving a dramatic lecture to a packed hall of students who are laughing and clapping, and they learn just because he's so brilliant.

That was never going to be me ever. And that's actually very few real people in real life anyway. But we have this stereotype in our head about what excellent teaching looks like, what effective teaching looks like. And it's unrealistic for most of us. It reinforces gendered and racialized expectations about professors. And it really leaves introverts and nerdy, socially awkward geeks out in the cold.

STEVEN ROBINOW: And it also reinforces a bad model—I mean, the notion that a good lecture—that students learn from a good lecture.

[LAUGHTER]

In addition to all the important aspects you just raised, I actually have a friend who once said to me, oh, I'm a great lecturer. And I know this person—if I sat down, it would be a great lecture. It would be fun for you and me to listen to. And for an expert to listen to, an expert would learn a lot, right? Because you've already got the pigeonholes all set up and you know the vocabulary. But for a novice—

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah. Yeah. I'm not antilecture. I think there's places for it. But I am of the mind that anybody listening to information needs a chance to do things with that information.

I guess I'd also add to that—it's not just extroverted performers who talk too much in the classroom. I mentioned it actually at the beginning when I said—before we were recording, I said you have to cut me off if I go on and on and on too long. Because introverts do it too—introvert academics. And they get into the classroom or they get in a meeting and they start going on and on and on and on and on. It's our training as scholars.

And for introverts, it can be a way of coping with social interaction—talking too much. So we all, as a rule, could stand to talk a little less and listen a little more I think. But again, individual teaching contexts really matter there.

STEVEN ROBINOW: But when you're talking about what's happening in the classroom and what we're doing and what you just said a moment ago—and I actually wrote down a quote from your book—

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Oh, gosh.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Yeah. No, no. I wrote down quotes I really like. We're not actually teaching a subject. We're teaching other people how to do things with and through knowledge about that subject.

So I really like that idea that you're not just—the knowledge is not just to occupy space, but it's to do something with.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: That's right.

STEVEN ROBINOW: I mean, this notion is really interesting—that you're not just imparting knowledge. You're helping them learn to do something with that knowledge.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah.

STEVEN ROBINOW: How do you analyze and be critical, and put that knowledge to use? I think that's a really interesting—that's on page 65.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah, thank you. Well, what should students be able to do, or do better, at the end of the class than they could at the beginning? That's the goal.

STEVEN ROBINOW: And then doesn't that help you set up your assessments for—

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: That's right.

STEVEN ROBINOW: —how to work with students—what is it that you want them to do?

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah. Yeah. And to learn how to do things, we have to do things.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Right.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: And lecture has a place in that, but there's ways to do it effectively. And it's not like we see on TV.

STEVEN ROBINOW: No, it is not. All right. Now, let's come to where we were headed here and talk about some supports.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Oh, yes, that's right.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Because we were talking about all this awareness, and then you were talking about support. You talk, for example, in the support section about—well, basically, you say—and here's a quote from page 132—You just can't do this on your own. In terms of teaching and becoming a high-quality—becoming an effective teacher, you can't just do this on your own.

So do you want to talk about some tools you think are useful for people?

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah, sure. Well, your friendly neighborhood teaching center is always the first stop. It really depends on where you are and what kind of access you have. More and more, it seems like universities and colleges are paying attention to that possibility—providing college instructors with teaching support.

But even that—now that I'm saying it—it makes me think, again, about people's individual contexts. And I know employment status can really shape how and where you can get support for teaching or even ask for assistance. Some department cultures are so toxic and unsupportive that even seeking a consultation at the teaching center might be perceived as a weakness. So your individual context really matters.

I think that the scholarship of teaching and learning is so multidisciplinary and quite accessible in many, many ways. But even just starting to read a few books or reading an article or reading a blog post helped me start to reframe what I was doing and what might work or not work. The research is pretty clear, that there's one thing and only one thing that, across the board, improves teaching from K through college. Do you know what that one thing is, Steve?

STEVEN ROBINOW: No. I'm going to embarrass myself. I think it's—

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: It's talking to other people who care about teaching.

STEVEN ROBINOW: OK.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Having time and support to be able to do that. Time and space to be able to just talk to other people who care about teaching. If they're teaching your same discipline, even better. If they're teaching at your institution—like you share a student population—that's even better.

Understanding and talking to other people about just what are you trying, what are you doing, is one of the best ways that people get support. And it's not expensive, except that people need to feel like they have the time and support to be able to do that.

STEVEN ROBINOW: So if you're at an institution and you are looking for that sort of support, and you don't have a center of teaching and learning, or you do, but they don't provide those sorts of things, how do you move forward, do you think?

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Well, in the book I talk about teaching conferences. Which I found such a refreshing change from many academic conferences. But one thing in my own teaching life and my personal learning—my personal pedagogical learning network—has changed dramatically since I wrote that book. And some of your listeners might know, but I'm on Twitter now. It truly is my go-to now for pedagogical learning.

To contextualize that—as you said at the beginning of the podcast—I'm in a very small rural university. Going to just even one conference a year—even if this was prepandemic times—and postpandemic times, it's still going to be hugely challenging. Because it takes hours and hours and hours to get anywhere.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Right.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: And you might have picked up on this from what I've been saying, but I'm not fantastic at in-person networking. So it's not like I was able to do a lot of that. But on Twitter there really is a very positive and really highly productive network there of educators. And it is a way to share some big ideas.

And it's a way of sharing just simple ideas too—this is something I did that's been working really well. I see it on my phone in the morning, and I go try it that afternoon in class.

And it's less about me saying, everybody should be on Twitter, and more about me saying that there's a variety of ways that you might find support.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Right. So I'll throw out an example that I was involved in last summer. The National Institute on Scientific Teaching, which is the new offshoot of the Summer Institutes on Scientific Teaching, started by Jo Handelsman—this last

summer, we ran a collaborative workshop for faculty to assemble and work on issues of teaching that they were interested in.

So we brought together about 70 faculty that self-assembled into specific topics on teaching that they wanted to work on. Some were discipline-based, so it might be a particular type of course that they got together to talk about. Others might have been, hey, how do we do on grading, and how do we do that?

And so they worked for four weeks together.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Awesome.

STEVEN ROBINOW: And these groups got together across the country. I think we had some international participation as well.

As a quick note, the National Institute on Scientific Teaching ran this Solve My Problem Collaborative in the summer of 2021 and is running this program in the summer of 2022 as well.

So there are a number of opportunities out there for that sort of interaction. I think one of the things that I like about—as we did talk about before we started—the web is that, suddenly, you can talk to people across the country who teach the same course as you that at your own institution you might not be able to do. And then you can really talk about specific problems, specific issues that you're dealing with, and get interesting help. Yeah, it's interesting.

OK. Support—what else can your institution do to support? Maybe geeks, introverts, and nerds don't go to the department chair or their dean and ask for things.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah.

STEVEN ROBINOW: But do they? Can you? Is that possible? Is that too hard? Do people think about that?

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: I will say, when I think of support and teaching, if there's a way to cultivate what I think of as a community of practice, and supports for, at the very minimum, people being able to talk about teaching—so like, for example, something as simple as a roundtable event—

STEVEN ROBINOW: In terms of supporting faculty learning communities of some sort, as an ex-associate dean, I think it's not unreasonable for faculty to say, hey, we've got this learning community we're interested in putting together. Would you guys buy us lunch once in a while or something?

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah.

STEVEN ROBINOW: And a dean's office, they might really go for that. It's not a big deal. But like you said, if you can convince your dean that one of the most important things you can do to improve teaching and improve student learning is pay for lunch once in a while for six or 10 faculty to get together —

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: Yeah.

STEVEN ROBINOW: We did that for a while in one of my prior institutions, and we got it across the college. So we'd get faculty from various disciplines—well, similar disciplines—this was in the sciences—would all come together to talk. And if that's one of the most important things, that's a cheap professional development moment there for a dean. I would encourage people not to be afraid to approach your dean and talk about those things.

JESSAMYN NEUHAUS: It's a good idea. Yeah.

STEVEN ROBINOW: Our discussion with Jessamyn Neuhaus on her book, *Geeky Pedagogy*, continues in the next episode. For more information about Jessamyn Neuhaus, her research and her favorite books and papers, please go to our website, teachingforstudentsuccess.org. Or go directly to her website, geekypedagogy.com. We'll provide a link to her website on ours.

Let me give a shout out to Ben Roberts and his team at Codon Learning. If you are going to the SABER Conference in July of 2022, please stop by his table and say hello. Tell them Teaching for Student Success sent you.

Thank you for spending time with us today. I hope you found this discussion interesting and helpful. If you have, please share our podcast and website with your friends. Those of us at Teaching for Student Success would love your feedback. Please contact us through our website, at teachingforstudentsuccess.org.

Teaching for Student Success is a production of Teaching for Student Success Media. Let's end this podcast as we always do, with some music by JuliusH. Some of Julius's music can be found on Pixabay.

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