

Pedagogy A-Go-Go_ s04e02_SoniaMassie

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SPEAKERS

Gina Turner, Tom O'Connor, Sonia Massie

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Gina Turner 00:00

1234 and a guide you go, go, go, go, go, go. Hello and welcome to Pedagogy-a-go-go, a podcast about college faculty sharing what happens in their classrooms and why this is season four, episode two teaching with grace and leeway. And we are your hosts, Gina Turner, and Tom O'Connor. Happy May Tom,
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Tom O'Connor 00:36

happy Monday, Gina, how are you doing?
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Gina Turner 00:38

I'm very excited to be in the middle of finishing up the the finals finals week and waiting for my final assignments to come in so that I can calculate those final grades. And then summer.
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Tom O'Connor 00:54

Jeff was asking me if I was tired, and I was like, Oh, yes, I am. And then I realized why I'm so tired, because it's the end of the semester. Ready to crash?
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Gina Turner 01:03

We made it. We survived in the midst of continuing, you know, transition and uncertainty and who knows what the fall will bring as well? Or are you teaching the summer? No, I'm not teaching the summer, which again, is a little unusual, because I usually teach at my alma mater. I've been teaching for them one class a year since I graduated. And usually it's in the

summer. But of course, with everything going on now. They've postponed that class. So I'll be teaching that in the fall. So is that the new school or? Yes, so that's the new school? Yeah. Yeah. So I gotta find something to do with myself to keep myself out of trouble this summer.

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Tom O'Connor 01:42

Yeah, I'm in a new norm. I didn't get to mention this last episode, but I took on a new position at Northampton Community College. So whereas you know, in the past, that was a, you know, Assistant academic dean at our Monroe campus, I'm in a new role as director of prior learning assessment, which is a mouthful, but it's worth remarking on briefly, just because it's, it's a really cool new gig. Basically, I'm working with students, from veterans to non traditional students to dual enrolled students, helping them, you know, earn credit for, you know, for the work they've doing. So, you know, top of mind for me recently has been allying and partnering with faculty who are willing to kind of help me assess student work, you know, in different ways, and expand like pathways, you know, to NCC. For students, it's really, it's rewarding work, it's very cool to get to work with a, you know, current or or veteran member of any of our armed forces and simply say, you know, the, the service you provided to our country has, has amazing value. And we as a college value it, let me let me help you. And let's look over everything you've done, and get you started on on your college career. So it's been it's been a crazy transition, and it'll be interesting to see what the summer looks like, I know it's gonna be different than last summer, though.

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Gina Turner 02:56

Yeah. Well, it that is really important work that you're doing, Tom, because it speaks to, I think many of the things we're learning having gone through this pandemic, which is a lot more openness around what constitutes academic achievement, and what what constitutes I guess, demonstrating your knowledge, your competence around different academic areas and translating that into academic credits. And I think that's, you know, I think those are, those are positive moves that we're making, right? It goes to the idea that it's not just sitting down and memorizing a textbook and then regurgitating it on a test at the end of the semester.

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Tom O'Connor 03:44

That's exactly right. So that's, it's a brave new world, but I'm excited to be a part of that here at NCC. Yeah. But more important than my role, though, is is our guest today. Professor of Biology here at Northampton Community Colleges, Sonia Massey. I'm so excited to get the chance to talk to her. She came in actually, maybe a year and a half after I did the college. I think she's in her fifth year here at Northampton Community College she teaches at our Monroe campus. She's also been a real leader teaching online for us, and especially as we pivoted into the pandemic. She brings experience teaching at community colleges and colleges in New Orleans in Florida, in southern New Jersey before her time here, she's an Atlantic City native. And I'm sure as we'll find out during our conversation, just a truly remarkable professor and human being. So I'm really looking forward

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Gina Turner 04:37

to it. Yes, Sonia is a great colleague, and I've had the opportunity to work with her on several committees and caucuses and projects and so I know we're going to have a great conversation. If you had just one or two, describe yourself as a teacher, what would it be?

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Tom O'Connor 05:00

As much as giant crabs and allergies are exciting, Sonia, it is so wonderful to have you here on the Pedagogy-a-go-go podcast that with us. You may not know this, but I've wanted to have you on for a long time. But I'm I'm secretly glad that we waited. Because you've been here at NCC, you're in your fifth year. And I realized that over half that time you've been teaching here during a pandemic, and what that experience must be like to kind of just have your feet under you. And then the world pulls the rug out from it. And so like, I'm going to be picking your brain later about what that experience has been. But it made me just want to have you on the podcast more because I hope I make you embarrassed in a good way right now, just because in a moment where there was so much uncertainty and so much uncertainty lived in the sciences in which you teach about how are we going to do this remote, you position yourself as as such a leader and mentor to other faculty during that change in the move to remote and online. So and I was working closely with you because in that at that time, I was working as an assistant dean at the Monroe campus. And I just want to say right now how grateful I am for everything that you did during that time and how many people you helped so so thank you from the bottom of my heart.

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Sonia Massie 06:18

I'm touched, I didn't even know I did that.

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Tom O'Connor 06:20

So but but for our audience, no, I will I will get into ways exactly how you did that later. But but for our audience, can can you tell us what classes do you teach here at NCC? And what is it about your classes that make you excited every day to come in and teach them.

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Sonia Massie 06:36

So I primarily teach microbiology for Allied Health. The students in that class usually are nursing intent. They're hoping to get into our nursing program. And there's usually a few each semester that are going into other allied health programs. And I'll get back to that because that that is the main class that I teach. And it's my beloved class because my degree is Master's in microbiology, immunology. But I also have taught the majors version of for like science majors microbiology, I've taught here at NCC genetics, four majors in genetics for non majors. And then, you know, essentials of biology, class, and anatomy and physiology, all that good stuff. But my favorite is microbiology for Allied Health, and I think so it's twofold why I love it. One is that microbiology fascinates me. And I'm assuming that now coming out of a pandemic, it fascinates everyone. But the other part is that my students are going into allied health fields.

And I think that they view microbiology the way I do or at least there is the potential for me to get them to be as fascinated by it as I am. Because they're going into fields where they actually need to know the content of the course because they are going to be working with patients.

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Gina Turner 08:07

Do you feel like you have had any pushback on the science of the pandemic? And I mean, not to kind of go there already. But do you feel like there has been any? I mean, I guess I'll use the word political, you know, politicizing of your discipline in these last few years,

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Sonia Massie 08:31

of course. So microbiologist and immunologist go to school for a long time, right? They get master's degrees, they get PhDs. And then everyone believes, you know, buddy, who made a YouTube channel to talk trash against the CDC. I don't know. There's a real buddy. I'm not referring to a real person. Just a name. So absolutely. I mean, it takes a while to really grasp viruses. Microbiology in general, but especially viruses, viruses are bizarre. They're alive when they're in us, but they're not alive. When they're not in us. They make no sense. I tell my students, they're like aliens from outer space. They don't they don't fit with life on Earth, and yet they wreak havoc with life on Earth. And so for the scientists to have been so I don't know denigrated, and, you know, people didn't believe them and said horrible things about the motives. It was definitely politicized. And I will say just personally because people know that this is my field and like on social media, I would I would, you know, post trying to be a voice of reason explaining things like even from the beginning of the pandemic, and so I've had people contact me privately to ask, you know, like, my husband and I are debating whether we should get the vaccine and we wanted to hear your input on a different things like a former student of mine who was a an elementary school teacher wanting some input about masks because she teaches in Florida where they refuse to let the students wear masks like little things like that. But definitely you get the pushback, like you're saying, I, just the other day, somebody was saying, like, don't get any vaccines don't ever get vaccines. God is there like God is your vaccine. I'm like, God gave us medical advancements. So I'm getting my vaccines. I was like, We can talk later on microbiologist.

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Tom O'Connor 10:47

God, maybe a lot of people's copilot, but I don't see them taking their hands off the wheel in the car. So Right.

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Sonia Massie 10:52

It's funny, because I mean, I have a very strong faith. This is I have a very strong faith in God. And my faith tells me that God provided me with the vaccine, you understand God made humans that are intelligent, that can test things out. And this works, that doesn't work. And so I feel like yeah, that's definitely not a good excuse that we're going to pray our way out of the pandemic. That doesn't make sense.

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Tom O'Connor 11:17

Can I ask a quick question about so like, Gina, kind of lead the way here, I think we've been talking about politicisation in this moment of time. And the added stress that that brings into the classroom. But I'm thinking for the last two plus years, you know, you said teaching and allied health, you mentioned nursing intent students, and the intent is the key word there. Because I know what a pressure cooker that classroom can be for the stress that those students are under, both because they're in an incredibly competitive, they're trying to get into an incredibly competitive program with very limited seats. But importantly, many of these people are already working in the healthcare industry in some way during the pandemic. And then, you know, I'm gonna throw this out there. Microbiology is not an easy class. You know, students were stressed about that class, pre pandemic. And now they're, they're learning in that class, and in many cases, a fully remote environment. When you add all those stresses on top of one another, how do you manage that in your classroom?

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Sonia Massie 12:19

So I could probably fill the rest of the podcast just talking. So can we go back to when, when everything shut down? Yeah. So during that semester, I was teaching microbiology and genetics. And I let my students decide whether we were going to keep meeting to have lectures live, only one class opted to do that. And there are about 21 students in that class, and about seven or eight of them would consistently come to the lectures, and we were doing on Blackboard Collaborate. And so much like many of my colleagues experienced, I was teaching to like one person and a bunch of square squares with a name and that kind of thing, which was fine. But my teaching style is is very interactive. I'm asking questions people are telling stories. Like you mentioned, Tom, many of my students are already working in healthcare, whether that's a receptionist at a doctor's office, an LPN at a hospital, medical assistants CNAs like they are in healthcare. So one of the reasons why many of my students could not come for the live lecture was that their hours changed. When the pandemic hit, they were now at the hospital for much longer stretches of time. So I had been teaching, I've been teaching online courses since maybe 2002. So I have experience with you know, arranging Blackboard, very methodically, making sure they could find everything they need, putting in a variety of assessments, quizzes, exams, different kinds of assignments, discussion board, and I had never, I hope I don't get in trouble with anybody for this. But never, never have I ever in my whole entire teaching career. Made a lecture recording for my students. No, I never. I never provided them with lecture recordings I and I never and I was not doing during the pandemic. I was not doing any zoom or Blackboard Collaborate because of what I experienced. That semester that we shut down. My students, especially because they're in health care. My students to me they were no longer candidates for being at a place at a certain time. If that makes sense, right? Yeah. There are plenty of other professors Those who have made recordings of their lectures and so I link those in on Blackboard, so that the students who do need to hear a lecture had it. But I just tried to build in so many different things like, I'll put fun videos, if you ever on YouTube look up amoeba sisters, they have these cooler, they're animated, it's so fun, they're short, they usually like five to 10 minutes. Because I know some students might need that. There's PowerPoints to click through with no voiceover, you know, I just tried to put different formats of of, you know, ways that the students could, could learn it. But um, so one other thing I want to say on this subject is that because my students work in health care, when the time came for us to start moving back on campus, I actually opted to continue teaching online as long as possible. Because twofold. Number one, I never know when

my students, you know, they might sign up for a class at a certain time. But if their schedules had to shift again, because their ward was overrun with COVID patients, that's not going to be beneficial to them. And then number two, I have some health risks that put me in like the high risk category for COVID complications. And teaching any class of students gives you risk. But teaching a class where half or more of them work in hospitals, was you understand like that was a little bit higher of an exposure than I wanted to, to take. So this semester was my first time with a couple of classes that were hybrid with the lab in person.

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Gina Turner 16:31

It's great to hear you say that, Sonia, because one thing like you, I've been teaching it, at least somewhat online since 2004. So I was very comfortable teaching classes fully online, and fully asynchronous. And, you know, one thing I am pleased about is the validation of that as a teaching methodology. Because of the pandemic, I think people are being forced to find ways to use these learning management systems like Blackboard, and to use these video conferencing systems, even for things like office hours, right? Adding that in to give your students an opportunity to, to meet with you in real time. But still, that there's a ton of value in providing multiple ways of exploring the material, like you just describe different videos and activities and PowerPoints, that isn't just recording a person standing in front of a room, and then plopping that recording into into Blackboard, which is not to devalue lectures, but I'm just really glad to hear you say that.

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Sonia Massie 17:40

Right? Well, something that I appreciate about Northampton Community College is that we did shift to start offering so many modalities and I know it can be overwhelming for students even figure out even in my classes, where when you look on the schedule, it says online, it says like, from zero o'clock to zero o'clock, there's no meeting time. And they, they look at my syllabus, and they see my office hours, and they're like, Okay, is this the time that I have to log in for class? And like, no, that's my optional office hours, you never have to log in for class. But if it's a student who does need that live lecture, they can take someone else's offering a section like that, where it's online, but you have a lecture, and then someone else is offering a hybrid class, right? So I love that we are giving our students so many options because some students do need to hear the live lecture. Some students read their textbook and they get it they never need to go in the classroom. Yeah. All the in between.

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Tom O'Connor 18:38

I began by discussing my gratitude to you personally, Sonia, like it with the pivot to to the teaching in the pandemic landscape. And you were like, What are you thanking me for? Well, I think he just explained what I'm thanking you for, in terms of because I mean, just to be clear, what you are describing is meeting our students where they are understanding their specific needs, and also understanding that students come to knowledge in different ways, and are different types of learners. So you're kind of in in a nutshell, you pretty much laid out the basic principles of universal design, for learning, and how you've been bringing that into your classroom. And in a moment of panic, when people hadn't been teaching online for over a decade, right. You know, you were, I think, at the front saying, We can do this, let me show you

how I'm doing this. Like, let me show you how my students are being successful in this moment. And so like, like I said, I think you were a real thought leader, but even just in hearing you talk about the stress of that time and how you met it head on. You were this, this calming presence at a moment of great, you know, of great unease. And so anyway, that's where my gratitude came from, because you were always open, you know, if an adjunct needed help, you know, or if another full time professor was like, I don't know how I'm going to be doing this in this in this way. You Were like, let me show you what I'm doing. And so like, that's, that's where my gratitude came from. But

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Sonia Massie 20:07

I think the pivot Oh yeah, sorry, I was just saying, pandemic or otherwise, I'm always willing to help others. And there have been others that have been always willing to help me here at Northampton Community College. So I just feel like that's why I wasn't sure what you were talking about, regarding the pandemic, because I feel like that is just that is just our way here

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Tom O'Connor 20:25

was in specifically yours. And I knew that as soon as you began to talk, it would become incredibly obvious why I admire your teaching style, and, and just your, your collegiality in this academic environment. So let me let me put you on the spot and ask a challenging question. If you had just one word, describe yourself as a teacher, what would it be?

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Sonia Massie 20:48

So hard to it's hard to pick one word, there's two words that

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Tom O'Connor 20:50

you can hyphenate we've let people hyphenate

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Sonia Massie 20:54

hilarious hyphen passionate is that? How about effervescent, that

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Tom O'Connor 21:00

effervescent? There's no, I'm



21:02

okay. With that you like it? I'm going with it.

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Tom O'Connor 21:05

We began with the sound of the fists of myself, Sir, we've we've arrived fully effervescent.

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Sonia Massie 21:12

Yeah. Because I just, I want my students to love learning and not just microbiology or whatever the subject is I'm teaching. I just want them to be as excited as I am about, you know, diseases and oozing sores and stuff is fascinating.

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Gina Turner 21:35

I'm reading a book. That's a setting the plague in England right now. And it is fascinating. It is, Do you can you think of a, an, an experience that you've had with a student, or multiple students where you've felt like, oh, gosh, I really effervescent. And I really to, to to get passionate about these yucky diseases, or even a time where you have felt challenged by a student's experience or multiple students experiences?

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Sonia Massie 22:10

So? Well, the first part, I'll just answer briefly. It always pleases me in the comment section of student evaluations, when they say that I made microbiology fun. And they'll say like, she made a hard topic seem easy, you know, I learned but I had fun doing it like that is like Whoo, that just like icing on my cake, free cake, if you will. But I have to say, and forgive me, I might get a little choked up. But during the pandemic, I, I made an assignment that was just worth a small amount of points. To give my students a chance to talk about what they were going through with the pandemic. And I don't even remember exactly what questions I asked, but it was, it was just a reflection on, you know, like how things were going. And, again, because a lot of my students work in health care, I could only read a few at a time, because it was so devastating. Yeah, the students were working in hospitals, and not seeing their families, sometimes they had to, like isolate away from their families for long stretches of time. And God bless them, they were still taking microbiology and whatever else they were taking, and they were making it happen. And I just want to say like, I mean, everyone has been affected by the pandemic, but our health care workers are heroes. And the fact that they you know, just were able to continue on, adapt, make a way, I am just an all of them. But definitely my students have had a, you know, like a unique set of challenges during the pandemic. And one huge thing that I take away that I am really like challenging myself to continue doing is my my model during the pandemic was Grace and leeway. I wanted to give my students all the grace and leeway and give myself grace and leeway. We all needed grace and leeway. And the majority of the assignments in my class in my classes have, you know, weekly deadlines. But their ultimate deadline was literally the last day of classes. The only thing I don't accept late is peer feedback on the discussion board because no one's gonna see it if you post it, you know, the week after or beyond. And I've had students who really needed that right, because they're great students. I know you're already a great student, if you've already if you've made it to AMT. If you made it to a&p one and you're now in micro like usually they take AP one first. That class is like the boot camp of trying to get into allied health fields. So I I already know you're you're studious,

and you're, you know, motivated and all this stuff. But I mean life really blindsided a lot of them. So not only are they in hospitals, right, but their aunt might be dying of COVID. And their next door neighbors, like every, you know, all the same stuff we all went through in the pandemic, except they were also working in hospitals and doctors offices. And so anytime something was late, or they're asking for more time, I would just remind them, like, as stated in the syllabus, the last day of class is the ultimate deadline. And I'll accept it, and I had students really fall behind and still get A's and B's other classes, because they were able to go back and make it up. And I know that will be more challenging when we're in person, for me to accept something way after the fact or let them take an exam, the last day of class that they missed the first month of class, but I want to challenge myself to find a way to make that happen. Because, I mean, in the real world, we can move deadlines, you know, we can readjust and we can adapt, and I want to be able to do that, for my students. And I don't think there'll be as much of a need for it, you know, like, as much as a widespread need for it. But if I had that one student who whatever their grandmother died, they had to travel to another state, they were going for two weeks, the family was traumatized, whatever the case may be, I want to try to continue given that grace and leeway because we have phenomenal students, but sometimes life gets in the way.

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Gina Turner 26:28

Absolutely. And it gets in the way, not just for the students, but for us as faculty, for all of the other people who are working at the college as well. And, you know, hearing you say that I love that grace and leeway, you know that that flexibility that you're bringing to to your classroom into your community of students? Do you ever feel like you were you know, you were kind of singing the praises of the collegiality here at NCC? And do you ever feel like maybe that butted against other people's perspectives on rigor and you know it because I love what you said in the real world. deadlines can change. You know, oftentimes you hear people say, well, in the real world, you'd get fired if you didn't meet that deadline. But, but it is true that there is a certain level of grace and and leeway in the world as well. Maybe even, you know, hopefully more so after the pandemic, but did you feel like Grace and leeway was being granted between colleagues and how that contributed to the feeling of collegiality?

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Sonia Massie 27:35

I think so, I mean, I haven't experienced anything to the contrary. And I think I'm not the only one who was allowing for, you know, some flexibility. I am sure that not everyone was only because I had students that would, you know, or advisees that would let me know that they were having this problem. And the teacher said they couldn't take the test late, even though it was be like a really big problem, like they were hospitalized, or, you know, they death or something like that. So I understand that not everyone is going to give that grace anyway. Just I'm just gonna say for me, personally, I don't think rigor has to rigorous not diminish by simply giving students that flexibility.

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Gina Turner 28:24

Amen. And I didn't mean for it to be like, well, so and so did it. I wasn't trying to get you to call anyone out, but I would never anyway, right. I know, you are a much kind, you're very kind person. The, you know, the other thing that this leads me to think about too is, you know, you

you mentioned getting choked up even reading, you know, a few of your, your students assignments and, and also, it takes a lot of bandwidth to provide that flexibility and that grace, how are you giving yourself that grace? Can you can you talk a little bit more about, you know, how you're avoiding burnout by maybe giving yourself some of that grace and

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Sonia Massie 29:05

leeway stopped cleaning my house.

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Gina Turner 29:08

I am giving you a standing ovation for that answer.

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Sonia Massie 29:13

Door during the winter when we went into lockdown I had I think I was in my second quarter of my Doctorate of Education Program, just fully online. And my daughter was still a preschooler. So now she was so now I was home with a preschooler. So now instead of her room being her playroom, the whole two bedroom apartment is her playroom. And I'm home with her with a two full time teaching load. And I was taking two classes per quarter at Drexel. And so something had to give it was my floors but I think so that is one way that I really have had to give myself grace in the way so I now I'm joking that I'm One day Dr. Massey will clean that apartment.

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Tom O'Connor 30:06

Sonia, I cannot give you a magic wand for cleaning your floors. And I don't have a magic wand, maybe for the answer to this next question. But so much of what you're speaking about, I think gestures towards it in the sense that when we talk, I want to be clear. I'm so glad that that Gina doubly underlying this notion of grace and leeway only because I think that's not just a COVID issue in the COVID classroom. I think that that's importantly in all classrooms pre and post God willing pandemic. For me personally, the last few years have really shaken my the way I see higher education, have expanded it in many ways is we've had to explore new avenues. So I'm going to put a magic wand in your hand and ask you if you could change any one thing about the state of higher education right now. In light of everything you're talking about, what would it be?

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Sonia Massie 31:00

Alright, so this is huge. And the pandemic happening while I was in Drexels, EdD program, those two things like came together to really impact me in that I don't want to ever lecture my students again. And I'm going to have to figure out what that looks like. Because in the fall, I do have some on ground lecture, this will be my first time with an on ground lecture. So number one, my teachers at Drexel didn't lecture me, they didn't lecture us, we had a zoom class couple times a semester, not even every class, every professor did that. And very little of it was

lectures, more like conversation, group work, stuff like that. And during the pandemic, I have not been lecturing my students, and they're still doing fine. So I know for years I've been hearing this, we should be the, we shouldn't be the sage on the stage, we should be the guide on the side. And I have to say that what I had to end up doing for my students during the pandemic, and what my Drechsel professors did, for me, really, those two things came together to highlight that, that I am there to facilitate my students in their learning journey, and not just blah, blah, blah, stand at the front of the room and talk at them. And I know, I think especially in the sciences. I hear this like for years decades, maybe even people will bring up things like a group project, like different things that you do in a class and science teachers are usually have the mindset of why have too much content to cover. And of course, we do have labs where you get to have hands on and you get to have group work and things like that, and that's fine. But um, it can be boring for students to have to sit and hear someone talk about science for an hour and 15 minutes, twice a week. And so So I want to, you know, maybe experiment with flipped classroom, you know, basically have everything online for my on ground students that, that my online students had, the videos and all that. And then let's just talk and I have to say that on a small scale, I have done this in the past where my students had to find a primary research article on anything related to microbiology, read it type up a summary, and then we sit in class, and we talk about they share their summary. And then we always have discussion. And my favorite time, this was before the pandemic we were in person. I think it took two and a half class periods. To get through everyone's all the discussion about these journal articles. And I know that as a science educator, there will be the temptation to feel like, I'm going to cut out two chapters now. Right, like we just wasted, quote, unquote, all that time. But it wasn't because the articles they were reading were about microbiology. And when they were something relevant relating to, you know, what, what we were going to discuss, I would, you know, chime in. And I would even say like when we get to that we can just skim through it now because we just talked about it. Right? And so I really, and I know this is not it's not necessarily a one size fits all. Like, I don't know, math, for example, at some point, you're going to have to talk at the students so you know certain things, but I just would love for us to really move away from lecturing in person because it's boring. And I'm sorry, it's boring. And I mean, I've done it and I'm admitting it's boring. And then like I try and make it as interactive as possible. But the other thing too, is like art. Our students like modern humans are becoming less likely to want to hear and lecture and more likely to want to talk and interact and construct and collaborate and you know, All that good stuff. So I would like for me and other educators to, to take heed to that and actually be that guide on the side rather than sage on the stage, we're still important, we still have all the knowledge, you know, we still can feel great about leading the class, but in a different way,

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Gina Turner 35:18

I am so happy to hear someone from the STEM area to talk about a move from both being the sage on the stage. And also the fact that let me frame it this way. There is factual information that a nurse is going to need to know 100% You want her to know, the difference between, you know, I don't know, I'm not a nurse. So I can't think of a good example. But there's factual information that we want our physicians to know what there's factual information. But the way in which factual information becomes sticky, I think is, you know, more and more we're really recognizing is by connecting it to the things that we already know and understand. So group discussions and group projects makes that information sticky. And for me, in psychology, I feel like their ability to make those connections between the concepts is more important than me drilling the terminology. Understanding the concepts is more important. And in my cognitive psychology class, I have my students read a little section from a book by Yuval Harari, who's a

historian who's talking about the tools we need for the 21st century and beyond. And all the information is at our fingertips. If you can't, you know, we can we have, we don't need to have memorized everything, like you did in the 18th century for education, because we can Google it on our phone. So it's the ability to connect the information and to think creatively, and to communicate with each other, I think is so important. And that's really what I'm hearing you saying about? You know, I feel like that is a move that higher education is making?

T

Tom O'Connor 37:07

Can I ask about the flip side of that coin? Because Sony, I can't tell you how many times like you said it, the most common thing you hear is my classes crammed with all this knowledge that I have to cram into my students heads, right? I don't have time for any of that. And I think you outlot are very quickly outlining a few paths, that knowledge. And I would ask you actually, to share I mean, so you talked about the primary source article that summarize and then the student becomes the teacher. And then the discussion happens around each of those articles is one great example of an assignment that leads people to the learning to the desired learning outcomes. How are you what are just off the top of your head, if you have like other assignments that you're doing in your own classrooms, I think would be other faculty members would love to hear what they are? And also like, how are you assessing that your students have reached those learning outcomes? How do you know? And when do you know how to assess that?

S

Sonia Massie 38:00

Right? So I mean, I still use traditional quizzes and exams for, you know, for assessing their learning outcome. And online, I use discussion boards and look at their if they're, you know, actually providing the content that I'm asking them for, and then also the the peer feedback. But as far as an assignment, there's an assignment that I'm really proud of that I started using a few semesters ago, it was just a, it started off as something more basic, that was just an extra credit assignment. And it evolved into something more detailed. So I was at a conference online during the pandemic, and somebody from another community college, was talking about a diverse stem influencers, Google spreadsheet that she had made. And she was sharing it with with people. And it's amazing. It's a spreadsheet that has, again, like diverse stem influencers. So it has the person's name and has what field they contributed to. And then there's even some links to websites to get more information about the people. And I was like, I need my students to see this. Like, I want my students to use this. So the assignment that I use now in my microbiology for allied health classes, the students have they, they they don't have to pick from that list, but they can at least you know, look at that list for ideas. If they know someone that's not on the list, that's fine. But they have to research to individuals that are from different STEM fields, right? So I don't want to microbiologists right, so it might be a computer scientist and a mathematician or aerospace engineer and a biologist, that sort of thing. And they need to basically report on the person's life and also their contributions to their field. And I very specifically did not want to make this is an essay or research paper? So I made it a multimedia presentation. Because I think that, not that I think I am certain that as much as our students are tech savvy, they, for the most part, don't know how to make things with technology, if that makes sense. I mean, I've been shocked to even find out that some students have never made a basic PowerPoint presentation. So yeah, so they have they can I give them suggestions of possible using YouTube, like make a video, they can make a PowerPoint presentation and

present it and record themselves? I have. I have a Padlet is another example that I give them where they're, you know, Padlet, you're kind of making like a poster presentation. And, and so this is I mean, it's worth part of their grade. And they post it in the discussion board area, so that the other you know, others can look at it and give them feedback. And I mean, honestly, for me, the assessment is, I mean, they, they're assessed on like, whether they did what I said the two different people, different fields and all like that. But as far as the the, the learning outcomes like they are. How can I say the feedback, I've asked for feedback, because it was a new assignment. And I've actually put it in my supplemental questions for my student evaluations to ask them specifically about, about that assignment. And I'm just so pleased at the fact that they were struck by these diverse stem influencers that they didn't know existed. So like, for me, I don't know, I don't know, did I leave it to a specific learning outcome? No, but I'm on top of the world because my students now know that there's some Chinese man that did this. And there's some black woman that did that. And that science is not just a, you know, monogamous field, right. So and then the fact that I'm having them do things like Padlet, or make YouTube videos, or even PowerPoint, and they never have done that before. And it's, it should be fun. I mean, it's, it may be challenging, but I would hope that they had fun, a lot of some of them, the feedback was that they really enjoyed it, they had fun doing it. And so yeah, that's, that's something that I, I love. And I would love if all of our STEM classes did this, because like I said, this spreadsheet, it literally has people from all fields of, of STEM, and the the teacher, that professor who made this is open to input, because one of my students, I think, told me about someone and I emailed her and she added that person to this to the spreadsheet. So it's a it's a growing spreadsheet,

G

Gina Turner 42:51

Oh, that's great that the student was able to contribute to the information too. And what a fantastic way to address I mean, honestly, to address the fact that our traditional learning materials don't make a point of finding people who have contributed to these fields, from different backgrounds from underrepresented backgrounds. Do you feel like you've ever had any pushback on the assignment from or either from this assignment, but it does also make me think about the ways in which you know, if we're talking about COVID, and we're talking about disparities and who gets COVID and, and disparities across ethnicity and differences in access to health care and things like that? I'm not sure how much you get into that necessarily, in your classes, but are you getting any pushback from people who are, you know, again, I have to be the one who keeps bringing up elephants in the room. But in terms of this idea of, oh, critical race theory, oh, you're, you know, you're forcing us, you know, forcing this down our our throats and and we don't, you know, we want to push back against that.

S

Sonia Massie 44:06

No, I've never had any student you know, like, voiced concern about why I was doing it. So I will say that I started using this before critical race theory became like, a buzz, you know, problematic. I never heard of critical race theory until I took a social justice class at Drexel in a doctoral education program. So it's funny to me that I mean, I am not teaching critical race theory to my students, I am just giving them a diverse stem influencers assignment. But But one thing that I want to point out is that the majority of my students are women. And I would say I mean, a third to half of my students are from minoritized racial groups. So I think this spreadsheet that's full of it Women of every color, there's white women to white, white women

in STEM is still considered diverse, you understand? Right? So for the most part, I think they're just seeing people that are like them, right? And then I do selves. Right. And that's important. That is so important. Yeah. And, and so, you know, I have had male students also, and I've never had anyone say anything about there are males on there, too. There's Hispanic males and Asian males on the spreadsheet. So but No, I've never gotten any pushback about that.

G

Gina Turner 45:31

Yeah, I mean, I got a little bit of pushback in my health psychology class, when we talked explicitly about COVID. And, and those health disparities and kind of back to the beginning of our conversation, I had students who just kind of wouldn't accept the data that I was providing to them from the CDC. And, and from, you know, well source news articles, you know, they were they were sort of at, you know, kind of stubbornly rejecting the idea that, that there would be differences in in an in an illness, for reasons that we were discussing in the class, right, that there are social inequities. So I just wanted to ask that question. Well, you've mentioned your your program, your EdD program, and how that's kind of informed or thinking about lecturing, do you have other experiences, either in your program now or at being a student prior to this, that you feel like really turned you into the teacher that you are today, or maybe even a moment when you thought, you know, what I really want to do is teach?

S

Sonia Massie 46:43

Why? Well, both of those questions are gonna lead me back to my beloved alma mater, I got my bachelor's degree from Xavier, University of Louisiana, which is a historically black university in New Orleans. And I have to say that it's I've heard people say about Northampton Community College, that it's a community college with like a university feel or something like that. Yeah. And I have to say that Xavier University of Louisiana is a university that has a community college feel. My Yeah, it's funny, because I'll just leave it as one example. So there was a, I had some health problems my first year there. And much like, I tried to give grace and leeway to my students, my professors there gave me grace and leeway. So this is my foundation, right? Xavier had a policy called F E, you could fail due to absences, you could have an A, and still fail due to absences, and they waive this for me, and my teachers were all very understanding and they helped me during that year. And one of the things that really like, impressed that, you know, like I know, that loving, nurturing, caring environment, there was a, there was a teacher who I was familiar with who I had never had. And she saw me in the hall one day might have been my sophomore year by then. And she stopped to talk with me, like, how was my health doing? And she was so you know, like she was, I don't know how she knew anything about me, you understand what I'm saying? But because other people knew, I mean, her colleagues were my teachers. And I just remember that that impacted me. Because people cared about me, right. And I had an advisor that I remember saying, Whatever you do, don't, don't take time off. Don't move back home. Like even if you just go part time, like don't stop because the I remember she quoted some statistic about the likelihood of coming back is, you know, not high, right. So those things really impacted me. When I went to college, I had the intent to go to medical school. My degree is my Bachelor's is biology pre med. But because of some health issues, I realized I didn't I thought I could survive medical school, but not the residency where they have you working 16 hours straight. And people's lives depend on you. I didn't think I could do that. So for a while, I wasn't sure what I would do. And I was in my, I was in my I was in my microbiology class at Xavier University. And my professor had a master's

degree and she was working on her her doctorate and she was she was there with us teaching and she was talking about how she was doing research and I was like, oh, that sounds so interesting to teach and do research. So that was what sparked you know, hey, I could become a teacher. But I will say real, very briefly, the teaching experiences I had as a graduate student, love them. The research experience is nice. I did it I don't want to ever do it again is boring. You're basically by yourself doing like repetitive motions. over and over again. And then it takes over your life. And so, yeah, and I actually started teaching at Delgado Community College in New Orleans, while I was still getting my master's degree. And I absolutely just loved it just the whole community college setting. And I think a part of that is because like I said, Xavier, had that vibe, right, that that we are a community, we're going to help you get through this vibe. And I, I came to understand later that most universities are not like that when, when I was in graduate school at LSU Health Science Center in New Orleans. One of my friends and I were running late for a class it was the only class we had that was not on on site there was it was over at the dental school. And I wanted to call the professor and leave him a message to let him know we were running late and my classmate, this seems so bizarre to him. Because he was saying he went to a large university where essentially the professor wouldn't even know that you weren't there. Everybody was like a number. And to me that was foreign because it was there were like nine of us of course, the professor is going to see we're not there. I want to let them know why we're not going to be on time.

T

Tom O'Connor 51:04

God bless you, Sonia, because you just gave me the peace to something I've been trying to put together in my head. And so I'll just say what it is I'll get myself in trouble here because the the old saying that NCC has been saying for probably over a decade now that we describe ourselves as a two year school that feels like a four year school. And I I can't tell you how much I oppose that philosophy in a lot of ways because no one is more bounded in a nutshell, if you will, than the idea of the four year school and I would much rather NCC supposition be the endless possibilities of being a true community college and in the Excelsior. Xavier I'm sorry example that you gave to describe Xavier Stanley it's what our Sherman or Kelly was shouting in the background where you were talking about public facing student assignments as he was celebrating your assignment. No but with Xavier the idea that for your school should be trying to be more like us. Like we need to we we have the potential for a flexibility a different way of being and a truly being a part of a community and just you framing it that way as exalting this really lovely historically black four year college in New Orleans. It wasn't New Orleans, right? Yes. And Louisiana. Okay. Right in New Orleans. And, you know, and simply saying what made them great is that they embodied the best aspects of what a community college Yes. And I think that's, that's our future. I know, we're running short on time. So I'm going to lob one more difficult question at you. And then we've got a real easy one for you to to end on. And it's yes. And actually, I think you've been so open and honest this probably isn't that difficult question what do you see yourself as being your own biggest struggle as a teacher? And you know, how are you working on growing and changing in that area?

S

Sonia Massie 53:06

This is gonna get me in trouble because I hate I hate grading and so the way the way I am the way I'm facing that challenge is by giving myself less things to grade

G Gina Turner 53:20
another standing ovation from me so

T Tom O'Connor 53:23
huge article on this in the Chronicle of Higher Education about getting away from you know the about getting away from different means of assessment and getting away from the all the grading

S Sonia Massie 53:33
you know, in science in sciences there there are like Gina was saying there are facts that the students need to know and so my students just take exams online or in person the exams are you know, it's going to be somewhat stringent you you're going to have to memorize a bunch of stuff and and so I still am required to give them exams to make sure that they can remember those terms and definitions and which disease causes which are which diseases caused by with which pathogen that sort of thing. But I can do all those I usually do that as multiple choice and matching. I will give some essay questions to grade but yeah, I really don't like so so like for discussion boards, the students have assignments to do but it's it's really like what I had to do to grade Israel basic because for me, the point is them doing the work and discussing it with each other. Right. So yeah, so yeah, I don't know should I be challenging myself to do better with grading or am I good with just keep doing things that don't need to be? permission? Yeah, it

G Gina Turner 54:48
comes back to that idea of whether it's what's going to stick with them. The the 72 points they got on this assignment or the interaction they had in a small group discussion of the assignment. Right and and, you know, so I'm I'm with you, Sonia and maybe I'm getting myself in trouble too. I get points for doing it and not how it was done. And and then feedback and discussion in class about what we're doing together. And then obviously there are major, you know, structured with rubric, final projects, presentations, papers. Absolutely. But yeah, the small stuff teaching

T Tom O'Connor 55:32
you're you're, you're teaching your students to become learners. That's what I worry about the act of learning and acquiring knowledge. And there is no more valuable tool than that.

S Sonia Massie 55:42
That's one of the things I tell them when it comes to like deadline because my students do for the most part, they try to keep up with the weekly deadlines. And I've had students say like, I don't think I'm ready, it's okay to take a late and I'm like, as a reminder, it stayed in the

syllabus, you can take it up to the last day class, but But I tell them like do not take it if you don't feel like you're ready. I'm, I'm more concerned with you learning the material than I am with the grade that you're you're going to get.

G Gina Turner 56:07

Exactly, exactly. Well, Sonia, this has been so great. And we could continue talking to you forever. But we I'm going to ask you our last question which we ask every guest and and that is to tell you, for you to tell us a non guilty pleasure that maybe your fellow faculty and colleagues don't know about you.

S Sonia Massie 56:35

I love watching sci fi shows. I mean anything my all time favorite is Stargate SG one with different ones over the years fringe dark matter. I mean, there's so many travelers it can be about Time Travel Alien, whatever, if it's sci fi, I watched sci fi so much. Yeah, that almost I mean, at least once a week I have an epic dream. That's about alien invasion. I can probably remember like amazing stories or Twilight Zone kind of thing. I could probably if I would like dream journal in the morning, I could probably make a series on Yeah, like different scenarios of alien. alien invasions. I love watching.

T Tom O'Connor 57:21

Let's do it together, Sonia. This can be our side hustle. I'm totally on board.

G Gina Turner 57:27

I just a friend just turned me on to a resident alien. Have you watched that? No. Oh, Colin

T Tom O'Connor 57:33

Alan Tudyk. From fireflies in it. He's Oh, I

S Sonia Massie 57:36

love I was gonna mention Firefly. He's awesome.

G Gina Turner 57:38

It's a really fun show. So I Oh, good. I gave you something to check out.



S Sonia Massie 57:43
I'm gonna check it out. Thank

G Gina Turner 57:44
you. Well, thank you so much, Sonia. This has been great. I always enjoy talking to you. And you are an esteemed colleague. at NCC

T Tom O'Connor 57:55
they simply the best is Tina Turner would say simply the best.

S Sonia Massie 57:59
Thank you all. What's Love Got to do with

G Gina Turner 58:04
everything, everything,

S Sonia Massie 58:06
everything. I agree everything. Thank you all for having me.

G Gina Turner 58:10
Pedagogy-a-go-go Go Pedagogy-a-go-go Go.

T Tom O'Connor 58:19
But I am a sucker for time travel. Somewhere in the back of my mind. I've been plotting this time travel novel, you know?

G Gina Turner 58:25
Yeah. You know, I didn't mention the show. But a show that I got really hooked on was timeless. So I need to ask her. This was great. I loved that. I actually watched that show through twice. I got such a kick out of it.

T Tom O'Connor 58:42

And you saw the final Christmas Special for that thing up? Oh, good. Yeah, I had. Actually I was just thinking of timeless the other day because Becca and I were watching. Oh, it was it was a really, really lousy. Like, I should say mediocre MC G movie with Reese Witherspoon, Chris Pine. And I forget the other actors name called this means war. And there was like a kind of a small character part. And I'm like, Who is that? She looks so familiar. And she had been the lead and timeless and it took me a few Oh, okay. So, okay, we have to we have to make that recommendation to Sonia then. Yeah, it was every bit as wonderful talking to as I knew she would be.

G

Gina Turner 59:23

Yeah, yeah. And her warmth emanates through talking to her today. But I just get that sense that her students might just gravitate to her so much, especially given basically her mission statement of grace and leeway.

T

Tom O'Connor 59:39

So there's there's a deep well of genuineness, and and just, like almost a humane impulse to, to be kind of to to honor our students as adults in the classroom to understand the lives that they're coming from, and be present for them where they are and how they're learning. Yeah, and just she, you know, even if she became emotional, you know, you can't listen to Sonia talk about her experiences with students talk about her experiences in the classroom, whether it's in person or online and not come away going, Oh, my gosh, she cares so much. And you just know how tremendous she is in the classroom.

G

Gina Turner 1:00:18

Yeah, like, especially and and I should say, in conjunction with her passion and love of her subject matter, and her attention to, you know, to detail into wanting to make sure her students are getting the material. With rigor, you know, we used to that word and in the conversation and, and so I just, I really appreciate hearing someone who feels that priority to have both at the same time to have that grace, but to also have that rigor and that they're not diametrically opposed from each other.

T

Tom O'Connor 1:00:56

No, I, I found it remarkable that I kind of asked for an assignment demonstrating kind of universal design for learners, a kind of lecture free classroom. And not only did she give me this amazing assignment, but essentially, it was a masterclass on how to draw issues related to diversity, equity inclusion into the STEM classroom. And so like I did not, I didn't anticipate that. And once it was there, I'm like, What a gift. And I know that, you know, we're going to put some of the information that you share with us up on the podcast website, and I encourage our listeners to check it out. And to, as I say, you know, what, like, a steal freely from the great ideas of others in that case, and draw that into your own classrooms?

G Gina Turner 1:01:40

Yeah, it's true that that assignment was such a Venn diagram of teaching, diversity, student engagement, giving the students Simone eight, their own agency about what they choose to focus on for an assignment, and also what she touched on, in terms of assessment, right, that she's not necessarily grading them on what they've done, but to simply the fact that she's giving them this opportunity to explore and to become learners and to learn how to love learning,

T Tom O'Connor 1:02:11

when it's so you know, I began this podcast talking about my new role here at NCC and that's, that's top of mind. That's exactly what I'm thinking about is how do we assess learning, especially if, if that knowledge has been acquired in a non traditional environment, not your kind of straightforward, top down teacher, you know, pouring the knowledge into the students classroom, and not just memorizing a number of terms. And it's led to really philosophical conversations, and I mentioned about faculty who are thought leaders and real allies and partners in that work and, and Sonia says top of the list,

G Gina Turner 1:02:45

yeah, it's great. Well, I'm sad that that is our last conversation of the semester, but at least we got to have two really fun engaging conversations with Dr. Karen McClintock, Walsh, and of course with Professor Sonia Massey this time,

T Tom O'Connor 1:03:04

so, without question, and as this episode lands at the beginning of all of our listeners, summers, let me just take a second to say enjoy it. Take time for yourself where you can, and we look forward to talking again really soon.

G Gina Turner 1:03:18

Yep, have a restorative and fun summer and see you in the fall.

T Tom O'Connor 1:03:33

Hey, thanks for listening to Pedagogy-a-go-go recorded in the Center for Teaching Learning and Technology at Northampton Community College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Our podcast daydreamer slash show runner is Kelly Allen and Pedagogy-a-go-go is produced by Jeff Armstrong. If you've got any questions, please send them to Pedagogy-a-go-go at gmail.com. Our social media handle is at Pedagogy-a-go-go and you can stop by our website at www.Pedagogy-a-go-go.com for copies of podcast transcripts, guest assignments and other useful tidbits. Keep in mind there are no hyphens or dots in any of the above web addresses. Until next time, this is Gina and Tom saying Take care and teach well

