

Sam: Welcome to the UP Tech Talk Podcast coming to you from the new Academic Multimedia Studio on the University of Portland campus, produced by Academic Technology Services, with your hosts Maria Erg and Sam Williams.

Welcome to the UP Tech Talk Podcast. Today we have with us, Dr. John Watske, who is a professor and the Dean of the School of Education at the University of Portland. Thank you Dr. Watske for joining us.

Dr. Watske: Thank you for having me.

Maria: Dean Watske we're so glad to have you here with us today. And we've just been having a lively discussion, a little bit ahead of the podcast here, about technical preparedness from an administrative point of view. Please share with us some of things that are coming on board this year for the state of Oregon.

Dr. Watske: Great. Well, it's interesting. From my perspective, you see technology in the schools, we work with teacher candidates who are preparing to teach or lead schools, and certainly we have faculty who, one of our charges is to remain up to date, and know what's happening, and part of our charge is to work in schools, you know as a part of our load, and professional development as well. So, we see technology across the board, and they interact across these levels, but in a, to kind of create a frame for this, there's really 3 ways we see it across those 3 groups. The one is sort of the here and now, I would always call the here and now, and it's really about the technology at hand, and the gaps that exist in schools, or the gaps across what we're doing in the teacher ed program versus what a school says we need to be doing, in terms of technology preparation. Looking at those gaps, how can we improve those, and a good example of that, is you know looking at a classroom teacher, most systems now use an online grading and attendance system. Right, I remember filling in these ovals as a student, and then I'd have a student run those to the office first hour, and every hour in fact. But that's an example where, there's no option, there's no opt-out for any teacher. And that may be really, at the end of the day that may be one of the only kinds of technologies that a teacher's engaging with. And I will tell you if you go out to classrooms, you'll see the range, and I know, I know we've been out to these classrooms and seen the range, and seen probably optimal use of technology as well. The here and now can include all sorts of things, like you know obviously overheads and video graph machines, if you remember those. I remember filling the tanks

Sam: Right.

Dr. Watske: as a first year teacher anyways.

Maria: I remember the smell of those.

Dr. Watske: Oh yeah, yeah that's right. What do you do with that can when you're done with it too? So there's all that here and now, and there's a whole gambit, and the reality is, teacher's typically are given the option to opt-out, as well as faculty often as well, it's not always the case, and rarely the case where technology is pushed down and a mandate's given. Another example of the here and now, we were talking earlier about the new statewide testing, that's starting this year, smarter balance testing that's replacing oaks. And that will be a computer-based test that all children will take, elementary through high school. And it's requiring far more than, it's more than multiple choice. In fact, I believe the minority of items will be multiple-choice. It's going to involve manipulating items online, underlining you know, topic sentences, short answer. There'll be a performance test that's performed over 4 hours in the classroom.

Sam: Oh wow.

Dr. Watske: It's going to involve listening sections, one section will be called research, where even the little ones, the elementary school students will be listening and then having 2 other sources of either, some kind of media or reading exercise and then answering questions and trying to develop an argument. And that will go all the way through high school as well. So you can imagine, this is mandated, and every school will deliver this in house, it will be pushed across a common platform, but the technology in place at every school is so different.

Sam: Yes.

Dr. Watske: And there are amazing gaps, and we hosted 350 teachers yesterday on campus, and one of the themes was around common core and smarter balance testing, one of the strands that ran all day was technology. And it was really around the questions, what do we have, what are skills that our students have to have in order now to take this test, and, you know it overlaps between, I think just pragmatic skills of test taking, whether it be on a computer and how to do this and what to look for. But also, you know just general skills and general computing skills and technology skills that we would want any student to have. But as you listen to teachers and building principals who we hosted, I mean there are just amazing gaps, and this is hitting this year. It'll happen this year, and there will be, you know, implications of the results. So it's been pushed down by the state, but pushed on and there's no opt-out.

Sam: Yeah, immediately what pops into my head is just some equity issues.

Dr. Watske: Absolutely.

Sam: Issues in the schools that can't afford, you know, good technology. So is anybody, I mean I'm sure people are talking about that.

Dr. Watske: There are. There are, and I think that, I mean the primitive approach is we all know it's happening, you know we budgeted for about 200 teachers and school leaders, we had 350 that could have gone to 500 but we are really looking for all the knowledge they can have now, and people know it's a learning year, it's a real year for this to happen. But you know, you will see changes in budgets shortly, around how to increase the technology and how to try to address those gaps.

Maria: And what's likely to be the source of that money moving into that area, where's it going to be coming from?

Dr. Watske: It will be definitely a reallocation, it's going to be reallocation at the district level, and probably decisions made at the, you know even at the building level where the principal's might say, I would, I need to use this budget this year to ramp up a lab. You know, most are looking at workstations to deliver, rather than iPads, whatever. There's a listening component, and I think most schools are looking for a hardwired connection, you know because it's a test pushed out, and it's going to be an adaptive test, that changes over time. So, and in fact, the performance task, I saw some of the examples yesterday, the performance task will be such that you'll cover a general topic as a teacher, we'll say 11th grade, and the topic may be budgeting, like personal budgeting, and then the students will sit in front of their workstation, and this isn't in theory, this will happen this year, and they'll be pushed out 6 or 7 different topics around budgeting to write to, and respond to. So it's, you know, so it's a scenario generally discussed and applied, and then specific topics individually given to the students at the same time in the same testing period, so it's really interesting, but lots of questions.

Sam: Well the adaptive testing, I mean as somebody that, as a technologist I've participated in adaptive tests, like Microsoft testing. So you never get the same

Dr. Watske: Nope.

Sam: no two people are going the same thing, so that, I think one of the questions we get all the time with online learning from faculty is you know, how do I get around cheating, and so the adaptive testing is awesome.

Dr. Watske: Absolutely.

Sam: I'd say it, you know, again it's going to be about problem solving that students do, but immediately when you're talking about it, my mind starts going to infrastructure. And we talk about the computers, but I think people often forget, and one of the things that we experience here at the University of Portland, is we had to triple our bandwidth just to be able to keep up, on campus and I've heard that from the one to one schools, that they've had to really increase their bandwidth in order to do this, so I'll be curious to see what happens in that part of the community as well.

Maria: Yeah and from your description, it sounds like these tests are going to resemble something like the GRE's where there is a dedicated testing center, and I'm just wondering why that model wasn't put on the table. Why not develop, you know, testing centers that are set up for that, and move the students there, and just kind of do it that way.

Dr. Watske: Well I've heard discussion on efficiencies, and just as of yesterday the official data and smarter balance is in contortion with state, so we're all, the other interesting thing is our results will be looked at across multiple states. I think about 20 have adopted this test so far, but we're told it's going to be about a 4-hour process. To take the entire test, and that so for efficiency's sake, you know the idea is we want to do this in school, and not send people out to centers to take these, if that's what your implying. So there'll be a center, but it may be in the school, and it may be in computer lab, let's put it that way.

Maria: Yeah, it just kind of sounds like, you know Sylvan testing, or whatever is set up for that why not just build it out a little more.

Dr. Watske: Exactly.

Sam: And how often are they going to be tested though, I guess I didn't catch that earlier, but how often?

Dr. Watske: It's yearly and in the spring,

Sam: It's yearly, ok.

Dr. Watske: And the idea is you'll take those results and that will help set up a more effective fall learning experience.

Sam: Ok, so maybe the impact, you know on my side I was thinking more like a regular kind of testing environment.

Dr. Watske: Right.

Sam: But if it's kind of a yearly thing, then, you know, there might be not as much impact, because I'm thinking in terms of bandwidth, but...

Dr. Watske: The conversation that teachers have been having as well as that, as this couple with the common cores, is really demanding a different kind of teaching, different kinds of tasks, a lot of really rich context as well, and not that that didn't exist, but I think this really, again there's no opt-out ultimately, and I think that we're talking about gaps, I think one of the reasons that really having that technology in the building is because we want to engage students throughout the year using the technology in different ways. So, although I sometimes cringe watching my elementary school daughter touch type, you know she's kind of

learning some touch typing, but you'll get the single fingers in there, you know it's not just for testing, but for a lot of reasons it's good to see that she's become more efficient at getting her words onto paper, and then being able to edit those, and that sort of thing. But that's sort of the notion of the here and now, where there's not really an opt-out, the gap I see sometimes between the school of education and our schools, and I believe I just spoke to this earlier, but it's just you know, there's a here and now at the schools, and there's a here and now here at the university. Where as 6 or 7 grade and attendance, you know platforms may be used across the Portland metro area, and we could possibly teach one of those. And our approach typically has been, you know, we want tech savvy students, and we want them to go in and learn. And the feedback I will get, is no we want your student teachers to come in, and I don't want to spend 2 or 3 days training them on a grading, you know we have to use this every day, so we don't want to spend time training them. So we've gone on back and said well, if there are 5 or 6 of these platforms out there, how can we select one? Well maybe we can do a boot camp. Well again, we don't want to spend time training, so a simple example, but there are many of these kinds of examples where you have to make decisions in higher ed, and you know one of the ways to affect that is to make sure you have real rich field experiences in before your student teaching year, where you know there's lots of exposure to technologies, and you can sit in on professional development where students can as well. But that's kind of a here and now, and we all feel it, I certainly feel it as a parent, and I feel it as a professor, but also with our teacher's and teacher candidates as well. There's also that notion of if you're a Vagotskian fan, this notion of proximal development, and it's kind of technology that's just out of reach, and I know that that's a lot of your work as well, is you have the opportunity, and you might have a little bit of knowledge, and how do you create a strategic plan or programming that really leads to integration of technology, and we deal with that, how do we deal with that with our students, where there's a limited time that we have with them, our faculty, and also we feel a real obligation to our teachers that any knowledge that we have we want to pass that on, and likewise we want to learn from what they're doing as well. So, I'll just speak really shortly about this, I'm a dean so I feel really strong, lots of hot air, but you know we've worked on this, we've worked on the OATS conference, which we've really created a consortium of experience, you know all that expertise out there, how do you bring that together so we can learn from one another consistently. We've worked on an education technology certificate, which really could be open to faculty through practicing teachers, and it's affordable, I think it's accessible, but the work is, how do we now get that in the hands.

Sam: Yes.

Dr. Watske: And just likewise, again we hosted, we have a educational leadership network that's a board run professional development network that we, we ran this common course smarter balance yesterday, and hundreds of teachers came, and the teachers and instructional coaches, and some of the principal's taught those sessions, so we're sitting along side with them as faculty learning. It's great PD for us, but so you know how do you bring that expertise together or strategically, and

that's one where you kind of close that gap. I don't know what your experiences have been here on campus or with teachers, but it's challenging work.

Sam: Well it's definitely challenging and of course, their focus, most of them, you know at the university especially, a lot of people that are teaching didn't go to school to become teachers. So they're learning that at the same time as they're really focused on their content area. And so, when we're talking about you know integrating technology into the classroom, we try to find the low hanging fruit often, and find those one or two tasks that we can help someday create efficiencies with. But that's a lot of one on one time that we have with faculty. We get in there and we examine these with the faculty and help them move forward with them. When I hear this going across districts and states, I really don't see the ability for people to get that one-on-one training with a technologist, to sit and kind of work on these things. So within the K-12 school, we always see, you know there's pioneers, the ones that will grab anything and throw it against the wall and try it, and then everybody else that, not everybody else, but you know this part of it that's saying you know I'm just going to grab one or two things. But they really don't necessarily have those people to sit with. And so I think that's a component that's kind of missing in the K-12.

Dr. Watske: The certificate idea, this notion that at least initially it would be quite local, and you become, you learn along with classmates who are teaching in neighboring districts or in your own building, and in some ways that provides opportunities for more one on one,

Sam: Yes

Dr. Watske: where people can share that expertise, and certainly yesterday, we've tried to create 3 professional developments a year that are theme based, and of course this is our testing and standards year, but, you know, we left a lot time for networking, because the idea is we want people to come back saying, you know I want to touch base with this colleague, I want to follow up with you, can we come visit your school to see how you're actually doing this.

Maria: Yeah, right.

Dr. Watske: And that's, you know the network that you create, that those colleagues, that is so important.

Sam: Well I'm in a masters program right now in education, not here at the University of Portland but somewhere else, I won't say where, probably get in trouble for that one, I'm just kidding. The, and I've been finding that what's been very, very helpful throughout the curriculum has been the project-based you know, learning that's been happening.

Dr. Watske: Right.

Sam: I know that that's changed a lot in higher ed, but the fact that we have to work on these projects, and the projects are using the tools, and really testing out tools, and I was really surprised. And this term I'm taking a class on open source tools, and geo-spacing technologies. And I was really surprised by the offering of these 2 courses and that fact that I'm taking them in the school of education, and again I think there is a lot of that curriculum that is changing out there

Dr. Watske: Right.

Sam: But, it's, you know, 5 years ago, or those classes were being offered 10 years ago, or this class being offered, but the teachers that are currently in the classroom, and so at least with our future teachers, I think they're going to have a lot more opportunity

Dr. Watske: I think so.

Sam: for hands on.

Dr. Watske: I think there is exponential opportunity, and so, you know, but you have that continuum from, I have to do this tomorrow or I have to do this every day, to I have some choices out there, and you know what do I specialize in, and so definitely working with colleagues, I think the project based piece, you know a sense of accomplishment is, a sense of this is something that I can use or can you bring to my instruction. I know a lot of the work has been course based that we've done here, right at UP, and we're talking about the full sections of the grade book option right in Moodle, and that's, it's something that I think we'll all use, and maybe goes from an option to a here and now

Maria: Yes.

Dr. Watske: after a while, but that's you know, those are kind of 2 levels. And that final level, I know Eric Anctil speaks so eloquently about this, but it's a gap between what the learners are bringing into the classroom, and what's really happening. The difference between real life, you know I call it the life of a classroom, you know we want our classrooms to be alive, but sometimes they seem you know semi-thawed, you know and not sort of necessarily frozen at times. So, you know and I can give, just an example, just recently I was volunteering at my ninth grader's high school, last week, and she brings a phone to school, and we've talked about you know, and when how not to lose it, and that sort of thing, and I've seen this dramatic difference from junior high to high school where, I didn't know this, I didn't realize this, the teachers are fine with the students having their phones out on top of their desks. I guess I'm a traditionalist, I thought it had to be away.

Maria: When did that happen?

Dr. Watske: That was my question, when did that happen. So, we talked about it, and what's happening is, basically the teachers are opting not to go to labs, and they know that a majority, a least in this high school, the majority of the students are bringing smart phones with them. And if you don't have one to work on, then you pair up with someone, you know, and that's very typical, so they'll say 5 minutes, look up different definitions or different images around this particular word, or whatever. And they are on a daily basis integrating that into their teaching, depending on the teacher. And so, there seems to be, one there's probably some sort of rule about having your phone out and visible that has been, you know, lifted. I'm guessing, and you know, as the dean of education I'm a little bit more hands off at the school, and other parents might jump on that, but I guess I'm honestly though, the teachers are utilizing these tools in a way that, so I found that really interesting, because I think that's at least a recognition how technology and the skills are there. But we're challenged so much, because we are of different generations, and certainly maybe multiple generations, and it's sad to think that the, you know in one sense it's sad that the classroom isn't reflective of reality, or our everyday life, but, the other side is you want the classroom to be a special place where you can take risks, and you can try out different identities and you can do that through literature or whatever, writing. So maybe it is a suspension of reality, and I don't know where technology almost finds it's way into that. But what I do know is that, you know, as Eric has pointed out, Eric Anctil has pointed out multiple times, and we all know, there's just such a technological divide between the every day of many children and what they experience. And I think even as adults, we see that as well. And there maybe are ways that we can use technology that we just, hasn't filtered into our classroom. And it ought to be. So that would be kind of a third level where I see those gaps. It seems as though we often talk more about teacher development and the K-12 level, and it's not always integrative of how does that take advantage of what the students know and do already. So that's the three kind of levels, and the challenge is how do you try to address those gaps, whether it's programmatically, development of, kind of professional development of our faculty, whether it's our students trying to get them in the field, how do we serve the teachers out there, many of whom are alumni, but we want to learn from them as well. That's kind of the rounded view I have, and not a lot of good answers sometimes.

Maria: Yeah it's a dilemma. Well we're going to have to have you back on the podcast, after the big changes, happen and roll in, and it'll be a nice time.

Dr. Watske: Yeah I'm looking forward to it.

Sam: And thank you for your thoughts on these subjects and just for your attention to this as the dean of the school of education.

Maria: Yeah thank you.

Sam: Yeah thank you so much for being here today.

Thank you for joining us for another episode of the UP Tech Talk Podcast. Just a reminder that we post a new podcast every Friday morning, and you can find us at techtalk.up.edu.