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| Ben Kahn: | Welcome to the UP TechTalk Ted Talk podcast. |
| Maria Erb: | Where we explore the use of technology in the classroom, one conversation at a time. |
| Ben Kahn: | This week, adjunct instructor, Peter Pappas from UP School of Education joins us to discuss project based learning. Welcome to the UP TechTalk podcast. This is Ben Kahn here at the University of Portland. Today I'm joined by my cohost, Maria Erb. Hello Maria. |
| Maria Erb: | Hey Ben. |
| Ben Kahn: | Today we also have with us, in the studio. Peter Pappas, who's an adjunct instructor in our school of education. Thanks for joining us Peter. |
| Peter Pappas: | Thanks, and thanks for the invite. |
| Ben Kahn: | We invited you here today, you're kind of our more Ted techy professors that we have on campus. We always love to have you on. This is actually, I think your second time, if I'm not mistaken. We invited you on today to talk a little bit about some of the methodologies that you're using in your courses, which include, is it Ed methods [crosstalk 00:01:10] |
| Peter Pappas: | There is a course in the spring, called ed tech methods that's for undergrads. Then, in the fall I teach a social studies methods class but our website's called edmethods.com. |
| Ben Kahn: | Yeah, yeah, that's right. Great. Some of the methodologies that you're using to actually teach those classes, and that includes a heavy emphasis on project based learning. |
| Peter Pappas: | Correct. |
| Maria Erb: | Peter, you've been doing project based learning for a long time. As far as I can remember anyway, that I've been here, you've been kind of in the forefront to just really run with that idea. Can you tell our listeners a little bit about, what is project based learning and how do you employ that in the classroom? |
| Peter Pappas: | Sure. First of all a little definition of terms. There is project based learning and some people also refer to problem based learning. I think they're kind of the same thing. Whether it's a project or a problem, what really happens is, you set a goal for your students, a problem to solve, a project to complete. That becomes the sort of rational for the learning. Typically, in the old days, when I first started teaching, I was a high school history teacher, we would ... I'd lecture, lecture, lecture. Then, maybe, if we had time, we'd do an activity. This really turns this on its head. |

In other words, we're going to set out to achieve a goal, to solve a problem, to design a project. That becomes the sort of guiding force that's going to compel students to learn content, to learn specific skills, to basically achieve that goal. It's not an add-on, it's the engine that's really driving the instruction.

Maria Erb:    So, your students take on the role from the get-go of being consultants, they're active content creators from the very beginning?

Peter Pappas:    Mm-hmm (affirmative). What I've done in the social studies methods class, for example. Back in 2013, we teamed up with the Oregon Nikkei Legacy Center. Which, is a small, Japanese American History Museum in Old Town. I live nearby and I'd gotten to know their ed director. I basically said, "What could you do with 12 curriculum consultants?" She said, "You got to be kidding me? That's great." They have a small budget, it's a very small operation. I said to my students "Guess what? In addition to the stuff we're doing, you're going to be a consultant to a museum designing curriculum for them."

Of course, the students said, "What are we supposed to do?" Of course, in a good PBL style I said, "I don't know, you're consultants you have to talk to the client. Find out what they need." Right from the very beginning, we approached it that way. I thought the best comment was one of the students, about a couple weeks on goes, "Man, I'm really learning a lot about Japaneses American internment and what happened during World War II." That really wasn't necessarily the assignment, but in order to achieve the goal, students had to be thinking about curriculum design. They're studying to be teachers. They had to be thinking about content and they had to be thinking about designing something for an external audience. In other words, they're not working for their professor, they're teacher. They're really working as professionals do, for the public.

Maria Erb:    What's the feedback that you get from your students on this style of learning?

Peter Pappas:    It depends. We have a lot of students who are very good at doing what you'd like them to do. They're very comfortable at it. They're very proficient at it. With, some amount if guidance, they will turn out great material. Some of those students are less comfortable when they're not exactly sure what you're looking for. There were some students, I think, who are a little edgy about it. "What's it supposed to look like? What are we supposed to do?" Etc. I'm usually able to work with them and say, "Look, in the rest of are life, you routinely get involved in endeavors and sports and whatnot, where you have to achieve a goal." I said "This is really no different." I said, "Education is really a social dynamic. We learn as social animals. This isn't about following instructions, there isn't a recipe here, this about you doing something that you're really proud of."

For that crew, I can usually bring them along. There's another whole group of students that just, totally glom onto this, "This is great." They would prefer not to have to follow a recipe. They would like to be able to inject some of their own thinking into the situation.

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| Ben Kahn: | I think that's interesting. One thing that we talk about on this podcast a lot is flip-learning. The idea of taking the lecture, or quizzes, or whatever, out of the classroom and doing that out of the classroom. Then that makes room, inside the classroom for more structured activities or even free formed discussions and things like that. It sounds like to me like project based learning kind of takes that even a step further. It's in class, out of class, whatever it is, you're actually working on a product that's actually, as you said, the engine of the learning that then happens. As a teacher then, would you say that your role in supporting the students learning is more, almost as like a mentor, to kind of guide them through their own process, rather than focus on the material? |
| Peter Pappas: | I think in the old days, when I first started teaching, I thought my job was to get up and lecture and to very clearly and slowly say things to people. They would then know them. Over many years of teaching I evolved into a whole nother methodology. For me, I see my job as a teacher, to design learning experiences to provoke reflection. I think that's what I do for a living. I do them in different situations with different groups of people. I've worked as a consultant and a trainer, I've been in lots of different environments. In this particular case, I'm in a class that's in a graduate, or undergraduate program with X number of students, one day a week for three hours, etc. |
| | My job is to try and design a learning experience and then to look at all the kinds of efficiencies that I can bring to that. For example, you mentioned flip-learning. There are a lot of things that I'd like my students to be able to do, that I don't necessarily want to explain to them, take up class time. I make these short little videos. I have YouTube playlists that are associated with different skills sets. I tell my students, "Okay, we have a WordPress blog. I'm not going to teach you WordPress, but here's a playlist and every little step of the way. Here's a 30 second, or 45 second video." I'm able to leverage a lot of class time that could be used for direct instruction for interaction, which to me is the key behind flipping a class. |
| | In this particular case, I'm able to provide a lot of one-on-one guidance with individual students or teams of students, as we move forward in these projects. Of course, for them, because they have an external audience for their work, it really ramps up the motivation because instead of working to turn in something to the teacher, who hopefully will turn it back to them, in a prompt fashion, they're really working as professionals do, in a more public environment. |
| Maria Erb: | I'm curious about, what's the biggest surprise that your students have for working with an external audience. They're so used to working just for the teacher, right? Or just working for classroom feedback. When they actually have this external audience that is looking at the end result, what's the biggest surprise for them? |
| Peter Pappas: | I think one of the biggest surprises is that anyone would even care to see their work. Every class I've taught here at UP, we've always designed a multi touch book using iBooks author and made it available on the iBooks store for free. I |

just looked and their books have been downloaded about 16,000 times from well over two dozen countries around the world. I'm about to see a new class for the first time today and I will share that with them. Our blog gets a lot of traffic. I'll show stats. People will comment on student blog posts and I'll a comment from a student saying, "Oh my god, someone's making a comment on my blog post what am I supposed to do?" I said, "I don't know, think about it and write back to them."

I think what they're startled by is the fact that somebody cares what they're doing. It's not just the teacher and it's not just for a grade.

Ben Kahn:        Do you think that changes the way that student's approach work when they know that the audience is public instead of just for one person?

Peter Pappas:        I do know that every time I've shown whatever my current class is, the work that prior classes have done, they always sort of look at it and they're a little taken back like, this is really good. Then, there's a pause and then they go, "Ours will be better, we can bet this." I mean, it's not really a competition but, I think it's really motivated. Students really want to make a difference. This coming fall, we're going to get back into a more intense PBL project. I've been working a bit in advance with the Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education. I think I have the title right.

They have a wonderful holocaust memorial in Washington Park. Which, it really is very evocative of feeling, but there's no, very little or no, guidance to what's going on there. There is no labels, there's no instructions as the what you're seeing or why you're seeing it. At the same time, they don't have any curriculum for it. My students are going to design curriculum for that. I think coming at a time when we are revisiting questions about history and people's perspective on history. I think it'll be somewhat cathartic for my students to feel that they could, they could make a statement and perhaps speak on behalf of people who can't speak for themselves. I think that's sort of an interesting element in that we will both be working with a museum, we'll be designing curriculum for middle school and high school students to use when they bring their students there. At the same time, my students might feel that they're maybe making the world a slightly better place.

Maria Erb:        That's a really powerful concept. Do you think that this idea of project based learning, all these real world topics that you're talking about, is that applicable to every discipline? Biology classes, chemistry classes, everything?

Peter Pappas:        I used to teach this way back as a high school teacher. I've got loads of examples of things we've done, which I'm not going to talk about. I think it really begins by looking at your curriculum, looking at your syllabus, looking at what you really think feels important for students to be able to do at the end of the course. Then say, "Is there a genuine project that really might meet these goals?" In other words, not doing a project for the sake of doing a project, and not doing a project just to have fun and we're not going to really study anything, but to say,

is there a task or a problem or something that we could do, especially based in the community which will require students to master the skills and knowledge that this course is really all about?

You look at things like, most any subject, you could certainly turn it into a kind of community based question. There are underserved groups throughout the community who might benefit from something, which, at the same time help a science student learn more about their subject. Or, it might be a kind of community based writing, or publishing project, which would certainly assist someone who's in the humanities. I mean, there's all kinds of things to be measured and quantified. So yeah, I do think it could be done anywhere, in any subject at most any grade level, K through higher ed. The key thing is not to force it. Not to make it the thing, but make it the engine that really drives the instruction that you really feel is needed in this course.

Ben Kahn:     Peter, you said that project based learning, it's important not to make it the thing, which I think I've heard a similar quote from you about education technology in the past, if I'm not mistaken, right?

Peter Pappas:     Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ben Kahn:     Could be this great support for learning. So teaching an ed tech class, I wonder if you could talk a little bit about your philosophy of how you integrate education technology into curriculum.

Peter Pappas:     We piloted a new course last spring for undergrads, which, I believe is going to become a required course. These were primarily seniors, from many different disciplines. These were students studying to be math teachers, english teachers, etc. What I really did is I, I tried to look at some essential teaching elements, things that are very important skills for teachers to be able to master. For example, having students collaborate in a positive way, let's say, or run an efficient discussion group in class. Or, organize information in a way that can be shared effectively or efficiently. Then we sort of experimented with different platforms and tools to try and make that possible.

For example, this was right after the election, fake news was all over the place. We're in an ed tech class so we're talking a lot about the media and social networks and so forth. Students wanted to do something about fake news. Fight fake news. What sort of bubbled out is, I said, "You know what, this will make a perfect showcase book." I like those multi touch books to showcase the best work of the students. I said, "Really at the heart of fighting fake news is being a critical thinker. Why don't you design a lesson in critical thinking in your discipline. And, I'm going to invite you find some ed tech tools that make that more effective. Then we'll document all those lessons as part of our multi touch book." That's exactly what we did. We called it Lessons In Critical Thinking.

I think the intro mentioned a little bit about fake news but it really wasn't a highly politicized book or anything like that, it was really about critical thinking in math and english and social studies, etc.

Maria Erb: Do you feel that your students coming into the ed tech class, do they ... is your class an elective for them? Is it part of-

Peter Pappas: It was an elective last year but it's going to be required.

Maria Erb: Oh it is? Okay.

Peter Pappas: Yeah.

Maria Erb: I'm wondering if you're going to see a change in-

Ben Kahn: Enthusiasm?

Maria Erb: I'm curious. You know, students have that sort of mixed, some trepidation.

Peter Pappas: Right.

Maria Erb: Right? When it's about using technology in the classroom, verus the ones that have self-selected in the past to come to class. I'm wondering how you're preparing for that.

Peter Pappas: The way I'm preparing for that is by saying, we're going to use the tool. Let's talk about how that changed the level interaction in the instruction. How did it work? Was is useful? Was the juice worth the squeeze sort of thing. We had to set this up, you had to learn how to use it. We used it and tell me about that lesson, how did that work? Typically, I only do things which really work well and which I think are good demonstrating the fact that they actually improve the quality of teaching and learning. I think for a group of people going out, into the educational field, having their toolkit enhanced with all these items, and I typically pick things which are somewhat platform agnostic, are usually free applications. I don't try and showcase something that they have to pluck down a lot of money to get. Or that they're schools might not have.

A lot of my students, in their final evaluations, last term, the big thing they said was "I wish we had this course earlier in our program." In fact, I passed that along because I had all second semester seniors and they were saying "We should be doing this as juniors." Now, whether that happens or not, I don't know.

Ben Kahn: All right Peter, thanks for a great discussion. While we have you here and before we let you go, we're going to have to get your tech pick of the week, as part of our recurring segment. Do you mind going first?

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| Peter Pappas: | No, I don't at all. I confess to being an Apple fanboy, my latest tech pick is called Clips. It's a free app for the iPhone or the iPad. It's a real stripped down version of iMovie and very much oriented towards social media. It allows you to very quickly and easily make a short film. You can either do just a headshot of yourself. One of the cool things I like is it has accessibility built right in. One of the features is, you can actually have it dictate all of the words and it automatically transcribes them. You can go in and edit the flaws. It's really great for making instructional things. Dropping in other footage, photos you have, there's lots of special effects, little emojis. Then it plays really nice with social media. You can shoot it up to Facebook or Twitter, or Instagram or just use it in the classroom. In fact, we're using it today. |
| Ben Kahn: | Very cool. I just shared that I as a graduate student, I used Clips for a couple of projects that I was working on. Found it super easy to use and intuitive. I know, as we're talking more about social media and accessibility and things like that, we're thinking, "This is the only way to actually get a captioned video onto Instagram." It's actually got myriad possible uses around the sphere. Maria, did you come up with a pick? |
| Maria Erb: | Ben I did not. Again, I purged all my apps trying to free up some space on my phone. When I reinstall somethings I'll let you know what I like again. |
| Ben Kahn: | I think doing a good cleaning, like an app inventor and just getting rid of all the cruft, that can almost be a pick of itself. |
| Maria Erb: | Is cruft a word. |
| Peter Pappas: | Yes. |
| Maria Erb: | Absolutely it's a word. [crosstalk 00:21:38] |
| Peter Pappas: | This is the key, good digital hygiene, that's what you need. |
| Ben Kahn: | That's right. All right. Maria's got her phone [inaudible 00:21:46]. For my pick, I'm going to go with Overcast. This is a pod catcher app, which, Maria I know that you're very fond of, podcast catchers. This particular one is iOS only, unfortunately. If you listen to a lot of podcasts, it's definitely worth picking this one out. One of the cooler features of it is it will automatically go in and eliminate pauses and stutters. Over the course of many months, or years, that could actually save you a crazy amount of time. Well, actually, it doesn't save you any time, it just lets you listen to more podcasts. I haven't looked in a while but the last time I looked it was like dozens of hours shaved off of my podcast listening regimen. Definitely want to check out. It is free, you can pay for a subscription If you want to get rid of the ads.

That's going to do it for this installment of the UP TechTalk podcast. Thank you for joining us and we'll see you next time. |

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| Peter Pappas: | Take care, thanks. |
| Ben Kahn: | Thanks Peter. |
| Maria Erb: | UP TechTalk is a bimonthly podcast. With cohost Ben Kahn and Maria Erb of academic technology services and innovation, that explores the use of technology in the classroom. |
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