

Ep. 043: Interrupted Case Studies with Bill Anderson

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Dr. [Bill Anderson](#), an associate professor in the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, is one of the 2017 Outstanding University Teaching Award winners. In this jam-packed episode, Bill and Jim explore the power of interrupted case studies-- a way to foster students' creative thinking by giving them structured opportunities to engage in inference and prediction. They also discuss the value of "stacking the deck" to shepherd learners towards "ah-ha" moments, examine ways to structure class discussion and learning about controversial issues in a safe way, and speculate about what should really be in your statement of teaching philosophy.

Transcript

JIM: Hi there. I'm Jim.

BILL: And I'm Bill.

JIM: Let's Talk Teaching.

JIM: Welcome to Let's Talk Teaching, a podcast from the Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology here at Illinois State University. I'm Jim Gee. Joining me today, Dr. Bill Anderson. He's faculty in the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences here on campus. Bill, welcome to the show.

BILL: Thank you very much. Thanks for the opportunity.

JIM: Well, we want to talk today, there's So, much we could talk about, and you've been very involved over here at CTLT. But let's start out with something that happened in the last couple of months. You were named the 2017, one of the 2017, Outstanding University Teaching Award Winners for tenured faculty on campus. So, first of all, congratulations.

BILL: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

JIM: So, as far as teaching goes, you're someone who I have come to respect, to-- someone who's really passionate about teaching.

BILL: Thank you.

JIM: But you're also, I think, in some ways, kind of pragmatic about teaching. So, what we want to talk about today might be some of the practical things that you do as a teacher, and how you help students understand the material that you want them to really critically think about, and not just not just remember, but to really critically think about. But let's let's begin with this concept that you brought to CTLT in a workshop before and you've talked about a lot, which is called an interrupted case study.

BILL: Interrupted case studies, yes. I tripped over that word—I'm not even sure where—by Robert Herod, and it was, he was using case studies, typical paper format, that's used a lot in a lot of our majors use case studies at one point in time, but he was using interrupted case studies where the students would get a portion have to come to an initial conclusion, project what might happen next, and they get the next piece of the interview. If the information it was like a detective movie, or Murder on the Orient Express, you know, where you put one thing together in the other. And I had been using an interview series called 56. Up there, actually, it's 40 to 49. Currently 56 for several years in one of my classes, and I had used 56 up as material to connect to developmental theory like Piaget or Erickson, but it, it was almost made to be an interrupted case study. So, instead of lecture, example, discussion, it became a lecture on a portion of a theory. And then we would meet the seven-year-olds, and we would follow, we would meet seven-year-old Neil and seven year old Susie and seven year old Bruce in 1963, when they were all asked a set of questions in 1963, London. And so, we would stop there, and the students would talk about Neil, who was sort of middle class, Tony, who was a WestEnder, he was a little lower, SES Susie, who was in a private boarding school, and another member of that group that came to be known as Evil John, he's not as bad as he sounds, but very wealthy family. And from there, I would say using the work of Piaget, the work of Erickson, tell me who 14-year-old Nick is going to be next week when we meet him. Tell me who 14-year-old Susie is going to be next week. And they were generally ready for that they could use the theory and say, well, for Erikson, they're going to be forming their own identity, they're going to be working on dreams of who they're going to be when they get older. For Piaget, they would say, well, at 14, you're supposed to be and that's a big thing. You're supposed to be entering formal operational thinking. So, they're going to be bigger thinkers, they're going to be thinking more abstractly. And sometimes the theories worked, and sometimes they crashed. So, with that, we meet them next week at 14. The first thing was, what did you predict? Did it work out? And generally, they typically saw that whether they were right or not, I sort of let that ferment over the next few weeks, but they were as often wrong. They were going with what the 101 version of the theory says this, So, when they saw this 14-year-old kid, they saw what they anticipated. But it becomes more apparent to them as we progress through that format, that sometimes life stuff happens. And the theory doesn't pan out for in this case, years. And so, they began to see theories more flexible, and more suggestive. And then even more So, predictive. So, we have used that series for quite a while successfully.

JIM: I'm familiar with the documentary series, okay, from from my studies as a as an amateur Film, film student way back way back in the day when it was well, I remember seven up I was not any more than that. Um, and I never really thought of this as sort of you could— You could isolate them as case studies, you know, snapshots in that time. I mean, that's kind of the premise behind it. But right, but but then you could you could encourage students to extrapolate forward. So, that sounds like what you're doing.

BILL: That's it. That's it. Exactly. And if we think in terms of Bloom's Taxonomy, yeah, that top level, the creating level has some of the descriptors there are inference, imagination. So, pushing toward that top of the taxonomy away from them, or remembering stuff that you mentioned earlier to that inference? Imagination has worked really well for us in this class.

JIM: So, tell us a little bit. Let's take a step back. Tell us a little bit about your discipline, because the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences seems to encompass quite a lot. So, what do you what do you concentrate on?

BILL: I'm in human development and family sciences. That's one of the several we have interior design, we have food nutrition and dietetics, apparel, merchandising and teacher education, FCS teacher education. So, basically, we are bundled together in the life stuff, family relationships, clothing, food, housing. And I like being that big picture by degree. I'm an educational psychologist, I don't have a degree in FCS, but it's a good place to apply this stuff.

JIM: When I had read up a little bit on interrupted case studies, I was always a lot of the literature that I read, talked about how it was founded in, in law schools, right. Harvard Law School—

BILL: Is... always come up.

JIM: Yeah, it always comes up the idea that that you would give students just enough of a case to get them started, but you wouldn't tell them how it ended. Or you would expect them to go out and find other evidence. So, is this something that you you tend to do in the course of one class period? Or is the lesson extended over a long time? How would you structure that?

BILL: Using the 56 Up? It's eight weeks in one of my grad classes, okay, I'm constantly looking for a way to use it in other other classes. For instance, I can use the snippets when they're seven in 14 and 21. In my adolescence class, I haven't done that yet. But it's, it's on the back burner, right? So, I could use that part in the adolescence class, just that age. If I taught the aging class I may, time might allow me to use seven and 56. And I'm hoping there's a 62, because we're all really antsy to see if Neil is still around 62. So, there's, there's things that can be done there. I have a new one new for me, 21 up South Africa. Okay. When these kids were seven, Nelson Mandela was in prison when they were 14, he was about to be released. And when they were 21, he was president. And so, they've lived in three different worlds. I use that with a different set of theories this semester, for the very first time. But yeah, it could be chopped up it could be used. And you're right that a lot of the roots for case studies in this format. Go back to law school. Nursing has used a number like this. But to my knowledge, there's only been one or two using videos, right case studies, right? This is something of a new format.

JIM: Yeah, typically what I remember and actually there were there are videos out there because I remember there was a great series that was on it might have been on PBS in the in Journalism and Communication, talking about ethical case studies, and whatnot and there was a great and I'd have to look it up, I will, I will try to link it to our show page for this podcast, this episode. And some of the other resources that you've been talking about, too, will link to the documentary series and find some some information on that. But they were ethical case studies, and you would present it and then So, So, it sounds like that the key to teaching with this is to not only provide the description of

the incident or the description of the, you know, the documentary itself, but you have to give the students some sort of a framework with which to analyze and synthesizing information out of this.

BILL: And with us, that's developmental theory again, JJ Erickson. as they age up, we sort of leave Piaget behind because most of his research was done in his own children assumed at some point they said, you know, Dad, please yeah. But we continue with Erickson's work, psychosocial development, we began to use the work of Perry intellectual development who sees things beyond Piaget 's formal operational thinking. So, that serves us well into the 30s in the age 40s. I also, use a couple of motivational theories that come from my ad site background. Where the one that's most applicable in this series in this class is expectancy value theory to determine why why did Neil make this decision? Do I really believe Neil is going to follow through with this, this task for the next seven years? Do I see evidence of motivation there? So, we apply a number of those things to predict. And again, the predicting part puts us up in that rarefied air of bloom with inference and imagination.

JIM: Let's expand on that a bit. How do you know that it worked or that it's working? Okay, what do you see from students?

BILL: What do I see from students, they have to give me a two page write up. Every week they finished seven up, they describe their seven, they predict 1414, I get one that they haven't met 14-year-old yet. So, they go over their predictions, they anticipate using theoretical terms and theoretical structures, and then respond as to whether they were right or wrong. But how do I know it works? About four years ago, when I started doing this, I'd had a just a pre-test post-test for the theoretical forms that I've mentioned several times already the theoretical structures that we measure by. And since then, we've done a pattern match coding with three years' worth of students where we look at their first and last essays, coding line by line to show cognitive growth and generally shows a move from the application, the simple application of the theory, up until the evaluation of the theory where they're actually taking pieces apart. So, we get the pretest, posttest, and the coding. And there's we also, use an IDA to assess our own teaching in caste and the College of Applied Science and Technology. And a couple of those points on there are relevant to this one of them being found ways for students to answer their own questions. So, I'm looking for a couple of things on the IDA and triangulating those three things. For four years, it's indicated the move from application at the beginning more to evaluation and creating ideas at the end, as well as the pretest posttest showing about a two-letter grade swing.

JIM: So, yeah, that's, that's No, but that's, I mean, that's the kind of rigorous assessment that we wish we could all unearth in our, in our teaching. That's great. It's awesome. Talking about all of that detailed assessment, that that you do, to see if it works or not, there also, has to be some sort of, I mean, there's a reason why you enjoy teaching. I am presuming at this point; I'm making an assumption that—

BILL: It's a good assumption.

- JIM: What is it about— Because I know you've done a lot of work mentoring graduate assistants or graduate students, I should say. So, I know you've done a lot of work mentoring graduate students. What is it about that process that you like?
- BILL: Same thing, it's its discovery. I'm something of a constructivist, I guess, when it comes to my own philosophy. And if I'm doing stuff, right, it should lead them to a place where they just trip over the next big thing that aha moment. Yeah, William James said that real learning has to come with the force of Revelation. And he's sort of a I don't know, if you have heroes in EDSAC, that'd be pretty nerdy. But I would just like his pragmatism. Sure. And so, if we're setting these things up, and I don't muddy the waters too much, and let stuff be discovered, then they will find over the first four or five weeks where theory stalled. Then maybe two weeks later into the study, they see why it stalled a piece of information that they did not originally have. And even as grad students in this class, they come from education, psychology, sociology, some human development, but most of them enter this class with a 101-level understanding still of developmental theory. And they see it become far more flexible. They let them see something that Erickson says should start around age 45, and 35. They let them see early pieces of that in the 14-year-old as they look back, So, they see these not as stage ends and one begins, but lots of overlap. And it gets a lot more, a lot more human that way.
- JIM: We had before we started recording, and I'm not I'm not going to give any way— Give away any of your teaching secrets, per se. But before we started, tell me, before we started recording, I said, how are you doing? I you know, what? How's it going today, and you had said you had a very good day that that something worked in the classroom, it sounds like we're in a lesson. And the again, without giving away any details for future classes of yours. You have a situation where you to make a point or to help students to learn you kind of stack the deck. Talk about that a little bit because I'm fascinated with this idea that as teachers, we don't always have to tell them everything or tell them the whole truth. Teachers trick people into learning,
- BILL: We just have to make the stuff discoverable. Right. You know, well, this is class multicultural family studies. It was it's a new class for us. We started in the fall of 2016. I taught it then. And it was very much a service provider-oriented class. A lot of our students, we child life specialist or adoption specialist, and they will be working with a variety of ethnicities and a variety of religions. So, as a result, we would talk about Latino culture for a couple of weeks Native American culture for a couple of weeks, but the following semester, we had Charlottesville and it could no longer that class couldn't stay a service provider class that would be it would feel to me like I was phoning it in. So, we have moved, keeping that part intact. But I've added 10 different student presentations in there. And I'm not sure if you're familiar with the taking sides books from McGraw Hill, there's like taking sides on human development. And basically, it would be a topic is racism a permanent part of American culture, for instance? And then this book would give you a two-page blurb on that. And the most extreme 'Yes', Article I could find, and the most extreme 'No' article they could find. And most of us don't make make our decisions at those two extremes, right. So, when we do a taking sides presentation in class, that's all there there it allowed to use. And So, they hit their assignment is to sort of blow up the topic, find the gaps, find not

what's being addressed. And some of the topics that we've used in multicultural family studies this time have been, well, is racism, a permanent part of American society? Is mass incarceration of blacks and Latinos, the new Jim Crow laws, is gentrification, a new form of segregation. So, these are hot button topics, and I want them to explore this. But yes, we are using Confederates right in the class who are in the class, a teaching assistant, and they have to meet with her to fine-tune their presentation before they give the presentation in class. And they do they work through their what the material that they're showing that they're talking about, they work through their PowerPoint slides. But the one area that's not discussed as openly is the teaching assistant, realizes that she's to keep them from taking the easy way out when it gets to the questions, as opposed to is racism permanent America? What do you all think? And you know, then we have chatter. But I just don't— forcing them to form questions, then order those questions, So, that they're actually going somewhere. And I think that has been very successful. We have I think we dove deep. A few times, we have disagreed several times, no casualties, no raised voices. Right. There has been disagreement. Yeah. But the each time we've done that, So, far this semester, we've run out of time. Yeah. But we're still chatting because it's, it's safe to ask the tough questions. I don't know if I can replicate this exactly next semester or not. But I'm certainly going to try.

JIM: Sure. It may be a product of its times to some extent. I mean, maybe they're very open to this right now, because of what's going on in the world. But I also, I mean, first of all, it's a great problem to have that you're running out of time, because the discussion is guys along. I do you know. So, and just to clarify, the teaching assistant is not giving them the question. No, she's encouraging them to find those questions. So, she's kind of an extra. She's sort of an extra guide. An extra?

BILL: Yeah. I think I know where you're going. Yeah. Her own only instructions from me. Yeah. Was don't let them get away with the surface level question. Sure. And, and that has not happened. Just that little bit of permission. I think the first two or three of those that we did were a little tough. The class also, had to discover that things were not going to blow up. We weren't going to lose tempers; we weren't going to have to choose sides. It wasn't a debate.

JIM: And did you did you explicitly say that to students? Did you explicitly lay down some instructions? Or did it? Did it naturally just come out of the community that you've already built? So, far?

BILL: I think it's a it's an it's a natural event. The only instructions for the presentation itself is you are to use these materials this yes, this no article, you're to make sure that the class is on the same page with you with whatever terminology there is. Let them know what your first ideas were your first take on this question to maybe two people were 'Yes.' And two people were 'No' What was your first impression before you looked at anything else? And then they deliver the yes and no sides. And they talk a little bit about the process of consensus, whether they were able to agree or not. And usually Well, So, far this semester, they haven't been able to come to agreement. And those have been good. If we have three yeses and one no at the end. The next question is what's keeping you apart? What piece of information are you waiting for? That keeps

you from going to this side, right? And then from there, it just goes into the questions and then they're required to tie it up. And the way I require them to tie it up is in five years or 10 years, this question will look like So, again, I'm back to the interrupted case study thing of jumping toward the future, a bit and inferring based on what I know now, I think this is going to happen, but the conversations have been really good.

JIM: That's great. And one final question about that. How do you? How do you evaluate students on that? What sort of evaluations do you do? How do they get graded on it?

BILL: Right? We have a rubric and this there are several items on there. One is their introduction to the question. And the top grade for that is, the topic is our Native American mascots and sports racist. And if you just leave it there, you're not doing very well give some examples. Give your first reactions to that as a group, then we're graded on the yes or no side, they find specific things between those two articles that they could put head-to-head in conversation, or was there one area that they thought was really important that was addressed in one article and omitted in the other? Okay. And then from there, it's their process of consensus, what conversation? Did they have? General ideas, I want everybody to know what both sides of the argument are? And then the usual stuff, how did you present? Did you read off the slides, that sort of stuff? But that process of consensus, and the student involvement, the results from the questions they brought with them? That's the bulk of the grade. Okay. And generally, well, this semester, they've been all A's. But you know, they have been too easy there. But they've been great discussions.

BILL: Well, and you can you can say that with confidence, because you built out the rubric ahead of time. So, you have that structure to, to kind of do that gut check as a teacher, am I being too easy? Or Or am I being too hard? and whatnot. We've talked several times about rubrics on our pokey little podcast here. So...

BILL: With those rubrics, generally if, as I write from lower to higher, I generally start out with something that would be comprehension or remembering level over here. So, I'm genetically connected to the taxonomy. Sure How and by the time I get up here, what will be the top points, that's going to be the inference, the imagination, the what ifs and maybes, and then why not? So, there's that that depth that I hope is built in across there.

JIM: Another topic, quickly, too, would be talking about teaching philosophies. And as part of the teaching portfolio process, which was part of the outstanding university teaching award process, you had to do a teaching portfolio within that as it is a statement of teaching philosophy. Tell me about what led you to create your what's in your teaching philosophy and what led you to create it, shape it that way?

BILL: I think I started with someone else's philosophy way back when when I was applying for jobs right out of grad school or something, but it was like a brief introduction. Learning is teaching is and in a sort of wrap up, and I've kept those things in there, although it's probably in version 11. By this point, sure. But who am I is a teacher is where I started, and I'm a product of my own teachers for good or bad. I hope that I'm as good a teacher is my 11th grade English teacher, Miss Bernice Martin, just a fine

teacher. I'm hoping that I'm not like a conducting professor that I had later as a music, music major, who sort of on that day would just grade sort of on the fly. So, that that general idea, but for me, then what is learning and again, I mentioned a little earlier that I'm more on the constructivist side of that, you got to add something that touches this piece and adds something new from that. I think the core of a good philosophy as I would see it, is describing what you really actually honest to goodness do in the classroom, as opposed to a philosophy that has all the right buzzwords. You know, constructive learning, critical thinking, critical reflection, several any other buzzwords that you want to drop—.

JIM: Student engagement.

BILL: Yeah. Oh, that's a good one. Yeah. I may use that one.

JIM: Yeah, there you go.

BILL: But yeah. If it's going to be of any good if you're going to be able to gauge yourself by it. And if it's going to tell your D FSC, or your faculty status committee on the college level, it's going to tell them what you really do. It's got to be what you really do in the classroom. And I think mine shows that I am a little more of a constructivist, that I am not very, I don't have a positive view of corporate education. I am a very much liberal arts grounded I want the discovery to be the students. But yeah, I'm probably not getting to your question. But I think the general idea is right, what you really do in the classroom, as opposed to right, writing a winning document, and I probably just had 99% of anybody listening going well, yes.

JIM: Well, I mean, it sounds simple on the surface to some extent, but there is a sort of bravery in writing for yourself as an audience as much as for a committee or for someone else. I mean, obviously you have to keep the Ultimate audience in mind, but you do that later, don't you? First you have to. Don't you have to first kind of build? Like you said, be honest to what you're doing in the classroom? What about what you wish to do in the classroom? In other words, is there an aspirational aspect to teaching philosophy? Or is it just descriptive of where you're at?

BILL: I mine is mostly where I'm at. But the aspirational part of that the aspirational part would be how am I going to improve? How am I going to get better between now in the next couple of years, and that's CTLT, to a large degree, the books that you read SoTL work. The idea of the 56 up as an interrupted case study was a really cool idea. And I inherently knew that it worked, but not until I had done the pretest posttest and other things, did it. Whether its way into the into the philosophy, this idea of interrupted case studies as student discovery. And now that has a place in there now because it's been tested. Right? But yeah, it is. The aspirational part is what will I be doing? Will I be able to take some classes? How many hours can I get at CTLT? What books am I reading? Those usually find their way in there also, and what am I learning from my students? I guess there's aspirations for teaching and student learning, right? But I've been happy in my own little realm of improvement trying to improve myself a little more than those, I guess.

JIM: Well, instead of maybe aspirational, per se, it sounds to me like it is an excellent tool for reflection for reflecting on your teaching. How often do you visit your teaching philosophy?

BILL: Once a year?

JIM: Do you really? Yeah, really? Okay.

BILL: It's a part of our package that we are that our departmental faculty status committee look at every year. It doesn't necessarily change every year. I think it would be a typical to change every year, but mine, mine does not because I'm special or anything, but I just discovered something along the way last year, you know, that says this better. Recently read *The Slow Professor*. And finally, well, now I've got a term for what I want to be.

JIM: There you go.

BILL: I got a term. Yes. So, that aspiration has been self-improvement for me for very largely.

JIM: When we're talking about teaching philosophies, yes. You're writing for your committee. So, your committee is going to see this or your or, you know, colleagues are going to see this. But where are you at, as far as a statement of your teaching philosophy in say, a syllabus or on a on a website that your students are using or something like that? Is it important to be explicit about that? Or do you prefer that they discover that it through the course of working with you for a semester?

BILL: I haven't thought about that very much I had connected my philosophy, but on a website to a couple of grads syllabi that they use it So, they know a little bit more about me? I don't know if that provided anything for them or not. I don't really know who access that. But that's intriguing. Since you say that I might, what would that class look like if I were a little better known? If they did understand where I was going with that?

JIM: I don't know. And someday the question I've asked myself, how much of me do I need to explain up front as I'm trying to get a group of and I'm teaching mainly undergraduate students and communication, as I try to get this group to discuss, and we discuss some somewhat uncomfortable things, because we're talking about performance. And we're talking about exposing yourselves. And we're also, talking about the very superficial nature of some of the media industries and, and, and horrible phrases like generalized American English, and, and all of that stuff. So, maybe there is no answer there. But it might be something to think about. So.

BILL: I do tell them at the beginning of the semester that I tried to teach So, that they can discover things along the way. And I do tell them that if your idea is you need to complete these things, get a degree, fine, if that works for you knock yourself out. But I would prefer that you would engage and discover and challenge me can offer to rewrite a question. So, I say these things on day one, and a few people take me up on

it. I haven't thought about that. I have to think about that a little more fully. Maybe I need to be a little more revealed.

JIM: And once again the mystery, but there may be value in just as there's value in students discovering things about the discipline. There may be. I don't know, there may be well, that there. Yeah, we'll have to—

BILL: that goes back to expectancy value theory, right. Yeah. They value this a little more if they understood a little bit where I was coming from, would that up the motivation? I don't know. But now I've got another idea to work on.

JIM: Well, well, there you go. They you go. Well, you've given us a lot of ideas to work on today. So, Bill, thank you So, much.

BILL: My pleasure.

JIM: And that's all the time we have for this week's episode of Let's Talk Teaching. You can find out more about our podcast and about some of the topics we talked about today. We'll link them on our website CTLT.IllinoisState.edu. Go to the podcast link in the upper right of the page. For Dr. Bill Anderson, for all my colleagues here at the Center for Teaching Learning and Technology, until we talk again, Happy Teaching!