

PodBites Episode 10: What If? Science Fiction and Educational Development

Adam Barger: [00:00:00] Need educational development advice fast? This is PODBytes, your snack-sized solution for success in educational development. Welcome to PODBytes, a project of the Centering Centers podcast from POD Network. I'm Adam Barger from the Studio for Teaching and Learning Innovation at William & Mary. If you have five minutes, I have five bite-sized pieces of advice.

Today's topic, what can we learn about educational development from science fiction? Today's guest is Deella Wiley, educational development specialist at the Biggio Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning at Auburn University. Deella, it's great to see you again. It's nice to have you on PODBytes.

Thanks for being here.

DeElla Wiley: Thank you so much for having me.

Adam Barger: The savvy listener will know that Deella is the voice from Centering Centers, our, uh, traditional long-form interviews, and she is here on PODBytes in the hot seat to give us some advice. Deella, are you ready to give us some bite-sized advice?

DeElla Wiley: [00:01:00] I am. I am ready, and it is so much harder being on this side.

Adam Barger: That's right. I have confidence in you, though. I think you can do this. Uh, so we are gonna start the timer now, and let's start off right with byte number one. Countdown initiated. One.

DeElla Wiley: Byte number one is starting with what if, or the idea of possibility, because that's what science fiction is really all about.

It's thinking about what is possible, it's pushing the limits, it's exploring, you know, beyond what we know and what's, um, common and, um, real in our world. So I think thinking about that is really useful in educational development, , putting the question back in of what if, you know? What if this assignment worked differently?

What if you gave students more choice or more decision-making power within this class? And thinking about what exactly is possible before trying to solve a problem or make that final decision. Yeah.

Adam Barger: That's a good [00:02:00] one. It, it just reminds me of how we infuse our imagination, um, or how do we infuse our teaching rather with imagination.

And same thing for educational development. Many of us work on routine calendars. We're doing the same seminars and programs each year. We have a nice rhythm to our year, but at the same time, that rhythm might prevent us from using our imagination. So starting with what if is a good one. Thanks so much.

All right, byte number two. Two.

DeElla Wiley: So byte number two, the future is unevenly distributed. So science fiction reminds us that the future does not arrive in the same way for everything, for everyone, and it doesn't mean the same thing for everyone. In educational development, that really means, you know, faculty are not always starting from the same place, especially when we think about educational technology.

Some faculty are more experimenters. Uh, they get excited about new technologies. Some get overwhelmed, some are skeptical, [00:03:00] some are just trying to get through their week or their semester. And so I think for us, it's, it's recognizing and acknowledging the factors, those contextual and situational factors that faculty face with new educational technologies like time, resources, level of access,

Their values

so both acknowledging all of those things and also trying to meet them where they are.

Adam Barger: Yeah, we have faculty that are at all parts of their career, right? So we have, uh, new folks, we have folks that have been, you know, here for 30 years and everything in between. We also have, um, adjunct faculty and, and, um, those who are, uh, tenure eligible or non-tenure eligible.

So because of the different contexts that we, uh, work in, I think it's okay to have kind of different, different outcomes. Uh, but you mentioned the technology piece, so I think that is going to come back here in byte number three. Give us byte number three. Three

DeElla Wiley: Byte number three is technology is never just [00:04:00] technology.

Yes. So in science fiction, you know, the, the robot or the spaceship or the time machine, is rarely the whole story. It's, it's, it's what happens because of the technology. It's the way that it changes relationships, it shifts power, it creates new risk, um, reveals what people value. And I think the same thing is true in educational development.

You know, when faculty ask about new technologies, when they're working with new technologies, it's about often not the tool itself, but everything that comes with it and everything around that. It's about access. It's about trust. It's about, learning and building human connection. So it's not just, it's looking beyond, right, what the tool is and looking at what's actually happening because of that.

Adam Barger: Yeah. Yeah. I, I love this one because it's never simple, and I think, um, that is the temptation with educational technology is, hey, we're gonna simplify, make you more efficient, and it's just easy. And it's not like [00:05:00] that, uh, because teaching and learning are human endeavors. Even the flux capacitor was not just a flux capacitor.

It, it needed the 1.21 gigawatts and bolt of lightning and whatever else. So, um, this idea that, um, we are the mediators of how technology helps us in a development is something to keep in mind. We don't wanna offload. Great one. Uh, all right. Bite number four Four

DeElla Wiley: Bite number four, small choices can alter the timeline.

So when we think about, time travel stories, especially the butterfly effect, you know, one small thing makes these massive changes in, in places where you would never expect it. And in thinking about that with educational development, we don't always have to make these massive changes. Not everything needs a complete overhaul, especially, when something's not working and you kind of feel that, that panic or that urge to completely change something or gut something.

And really, it's starting small. It's starting with manageable [00:06:00] pieces, starting in places where you can actually make change. So not getting overwhelmed by, you know, the situational contextual factors like we were talking about, where things seem impossible or too difficult to change, and instead it's focusing on what you, what you can do, and taking small steps to make positive changes in, what you're teaching in life.

Adam Barger: Yeah. I, I love this idea of many small things. It applies to a lot of areas of life, and, um, these small choices. So it's like I can't maybe fix the problems with course evaluations, but I can consult with this faculty member on their course evaluation and how to, uh, learn from it and, you know, try new things or, or whatever.

So, um, I like this idea of, uh, doing one thing, one small thing, or many small things that you know you can be effective at instead of trying to take on the big thing. Uh, so that's a good one. Um, you have made it to bite number five. See? It was so easy. Way easier than your [00:07:00] podcast, right? Uh, so give us bite number five

DeElla Wiley: Five Okay, so the last thing is the human story is the point.

And I think anybody who loves science fiction can agree, you know, there-- what separates the good from the bad is, is the story. It's the humans in the story, and how much do you care about them and how much you root for them. And I think we can think about that in educational development, too. At the end of the day, you know, we're all humans.

We're all people trying to do our best, and we should always try to remember that, and to treat each other with dignity and compassion. , When we're working with faculty, when faculty are working with each other, when we're working with students, you know, we are all human beings, and we matter.

Adam Barger: Yeah.

That's the whole point of this, right? Um, human learning is a unique thing, in my opinion. Uh, so that's what we're all about here in, in universities and in, uh, teaching and learning work and ed development work in general. So these are [00:08:00] great, uh, tips for us. I love the fact that you connected science fiction with ed development.

Sometimes I feel like ed development is science fiction, uh, but it's a fun one. So one more time, one to five for all the good people at POD Network. Give us your bites of advice.

DeElla Wiley: Start with what if and possibility. The future is already unevenly distributed. Technology is never just technology. Small choices can alter the timeline, and the human story is the point.

Adam Barger: Great tips from a great colleague and podcast host. Thank you, DeElla Wiley from Auburn University. And thank you, dear listener, for tuning in to this edition of POD Bites from Centering Centers.

This is our last episode of the season, but do not fret. We'll be back next season, uh, with a whole new set of ideas and bite-size advice. Special thanks to our colleagues at the Studio for Teaching and Learning Innovation, providing post-production support this [00:09:00] season, and to my colleague, Roy W. Peterson.

If you like all the sound effects, he's the one you can thank. So thank you, Roy. We'll talk to you soon. Need educational development advice fast? This is POD Bites, your snack-sized solution for success in educational development. Thanks for joining us. POD Bites is just a taste of what POD Network offers through our flagship podcast, Centering Centers.

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