

Transcript

Derek Bruff: This is “Leading Lines.” I’m Derek Bruff.

I met Kylie Korsnack back in 2016. She was a fairly new graduate student in the English department here at Vanderbilt. I had heard that she was doing some interesting things with course blogs. Since I was organizing a panel on that topic, I reached out to her to see what she was doing with course blogs in her teaching.

Since that initial conversation, I’ve been impressed again and again with the creative and effective ways she uses technology in her teaching. In fact, that semester when I reached out to her, she was running a collaborative blog with another instructor in the English Department.

Her students and his students were, essentially, writing for each other, this course blog structure. It was really great.

I was really happy to have Kylie work here at the Center for Teaching. First, as a teaching affiliate running sessions at our orientation for new TAs. Then, later as a graduate teaching fellow engaging in all kinds of programs and projects in consultations here at the CFT.

It’s one of those projects that is the focus of her interview with Leading Lines producer, Stacey Johnson. Stacey, who is the CFT’s assistant director for educational technology, recently talked with Kylie about a new practicum at the CFT that was launched to prepare grad students to teach online.

Stacey and Kylie discussed the origin and structure of this new practicum, as well as a really useful framework for teaching online that Kylie learned about while designing the practicum. Before we go to the interview, I should note that this episode of Leading Lines is another special crossover with Stacey’s podcast, “We Teach Languages.”

Her podcast is focused on language of teaching from the diverse perspective of teachers and if you'd like to hear more of Stacey's conversation with Kylie check out episode 90 of We Teach Languages, released just last week. I've put a link on the show notes. OK, here is our interview with Kylie Korsnack on teaching online.

[music]

Stacey Johnson: Kylie, can you just tell us a little bit about what your role is here Vanderbilt?

Kylie Korsnack: Sure. I am currently a PHD candidate here in the English Department. I'm working on a dissertation on Anglophone Literature and Science Fiction, actually, but I also have, the past few years, worked at the Center for Teaching in a variety of different roles. Last year I was a grad fellow here, and this year I'm teaching one of the practicums of our certificate program.

Stacey: Can you tell me a little bit more about what a grad fellow is for people who might not know that terminology?

Kylie: At Vanderbilt you can apply for a graduate fellowship at the Center for Teaching. Basically what that means is you work at the center in a consultation role. We work on a peer-to-peer model. So as a grad fellow, I would meet with other graduate students to talk about basically professional development related to teaching.

Other tasks besides individual consulting would be that the grad fellow is also responsible for teaching all of the seminars and practicum in college teaching that the center offers to grad students from across disciplines. We'd also put on various workshops on evidence-based teaching practices.

Stacey: And you and I have worked a little bit specifically on a workshop about developing interaction and presence in hybrid online teaching. That's been a really fun experience. I think I have a really specific perspective as a language teacher that I bring into everything. I also in my role consult with faculty in a range of disciplines.

Both of us working in languages and then trying to translate those concepts, we've had stem folks. We've had professional folks, you know, just from like all the different disciplines on campus in that workshop in one form or another. It's been an interesting experience.

I was hoping that you would be willing to talk to us about the framework that you really brought to the workshop we did together because I learned a lot from listening to you do it over the several times...

[laughter]

Stacey: ...we gave the workshop. And I think people would be interested in it.

Kylie: Yeah so one of the things that I was tasked with as a grad fellow last year was researching online teaching and working with an instructional designer to Aidan Hoyal, who's part of the Vanderbilt Institute of Digital Learning. She and I worked together to design a pilot version of a practicum in online teaching.

It was through that project and through the research I did that I came across this framework called "The Community of Inquiry Framework." It was developed in 2000. D. Randy Garrison, Terry Anderson, and Walter Archer first developed it. It was actually developed as an assessment tool.

If you're doing research on threaded discussion boards online, like how you assess what's actually happening in those discussion boards. What I found useful about it as someone who was designing online experiences, I actually found it to be useful as a tool for course design.

Basically, what the framework does is it gives you a systematic way to break down the activities and the thinking that is happening in an online discussion.

It does this by breaking into three categories, teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence.

Stacey: First of all, just the word presence is meaningful because I think one of the things that maybe people who haven't taught online before or people who have just started and haven't found their way with the online course yet...It can feel like you're teaching at text on a screen.

It really doesn't feel like you're present maybe in the class or your students are present in the class, so an emphasis on teaching presence, cognitive presence...What was the other one?

Kylie: Social presence.

Stacey: Social presence, already has piqued my interest. It's, "Wow, that's a real problem solver [laughs] in course design."

Kylie: Yeah, I think for me splitting up what I'm actually doing within the space online helped me to think differently about what it means to be a teacher in an online course. Rather than just think about, "OK, here's what I do in the face-to-face classroom, and how am I going to replicate that or just revise it for the online space?" It actually makes you...

Stacey: Or digitize it? Turn it into a PDF. [laughs]

Kylie: Right, exactly. It actually makes you think about it more as an act of -- I think I talked to you about this -- almost like an act of translation.

Stacey: Which our language teachers will really connect with.

Kylie: [laughs] It's not like a one-to-one direct correlation between face-to-face and online. There's some other things that have to happen. By breaking up what I do as an instructor in these three ways, I can start to see what those changes need to be.

To back up, I think to define these three...Cognitive presence is simply that students are engaging with the course material and understanding and meeting the learning objectives that you have. Is there evidence within the online space that that is happening? As an instructor, how am I building mechanisms into the course to ensure that that cognitive presence is taking place?

Stacey: That is great. I think this applies to all online instruction, but particularly I want to bring this up for language teachers who might be teaching online. In our face-to-face classroom as language teachers, the traditional model that we all imagine, like an old-fashioned language classroom.

It's really easy to imagine a student's cognitive presence because they're churning out verb conjugations and vocab lists. That's not what a modern language classroom looks like. Modern language classroom is a lot of spoken language and a lot of negotiation and meeting and interaction.

I think there's some real opportunities...Actually, opportunity is a strong word. I think there's a potential for a pitfall here with language teachers who say, "OK, I need to make sure that students have a cognitive presence in the course, that I can measure that the learning objectives are being met."

That we don't accidentally fall back into maybe that older model of easy-to-measure verb conjugations and easy-to-measure vocab lists. We don't have to dial down the learning just because we're online. We can still look for real communication. We can still do that higher-level cognitive work online.

Kylie: That's really important too because within the framework all three are interconnected. Cognitive teaching and social...The argument is that by increasing one you are actually also making a more meaningful learning experience as a whole. So that it's having this balance of these three that makes the learning experience successful.

So, if we've switched from cognitive presence to social presence -- this is what your comment just made me think of -- social presence is the interactions that are happening between students. And also, importantly, that there are opportunities within the course for students to demonstrate and, kind of, be themselves as people, [laughs] because often in an online space, there's a risk that you're just words on a screen.

Providing opportunities within the course for students both to interact with others about the content, but also allowing them to bring in their own personal experiences, maybe even allowing or making it possible for them to upload videos or audio, maybe as the instructor modeling those things.

It's a sense that it's a community of people learning and not just student reading content, regurgitating information. Those two support each other, the social and the cognitive. The last one is teaching presence.

This again is probably one that we think a lot about as instructors, but don't realize how much we think about it, because teaching presence includes everything from how the course shell is set up, to how the assignments are scheduled throughout the semester, all the planning that goes into how the course actually will unfold, the content selection...

Stacey: Even the way you phrase your prompts, right?

Kylie: Exactly. All that information can help to both support the cognitive and the social interactions that are happening in the course. Also, teaching presence is when the instructor is actually present within the course.

This is one that really impacted the way I thought about online teaching, because often these three things social presence, cognitive presence, teaching presence, when you're in a face-to-face class, they're all happening at the same time. You're not always thinking about them separately.

When you think about an online course, especially if it's an asynchronous course, when are you going to be teaching? A lot of the content creation, things like that, that's all going to have already happened. It's set up before the course even starts often.

As an instructor, your teaching looks a little bit differently when you're in an online course. It might be, "When are you going to be in the discussion boards and what are you going to be doing in those discussion boards?", "Are you going to be commenting on each student?", "Are you more connecting students to the content in different ways?"

Also thinking about time, is it better for me as an instructor to always log in to the course for two hours every Monday like I would in a regular class, or am I going to actually see that, "Oh, most of my students are posting at 8:00 PM. Maybe I'll jump in for only 15 minutes every day," or something like that, or to think about where is the labor of teaching and what would be the most useful or this particular class of when I'm actually like physically present in that space?

Stacey: I have a question. So, in my teaching practice, creating videos, or PowerPoints that I talk over, or something like that, and then posting them online, that's not actually a big part of what I do. I know for other kinds of courses, that's actually the core of the content, like recording a lecture and posting it and having students interact with that in some way.

I'm wondering, where does that sort of practice fall in the community of inquiry framework? How would you parse out what that is?

Kylie: It would depend on what they're doing with it. So for me, the lecture itself is the content that the students need to engage with in some way. You might think about, "Are they going to be discussing this with someone else? Are they going to be taking this content and

applying it to previous content?"

There could be ways in which they use that that are social. There could be ways in which they're applying that content to something, and they're first showing evidence that they're making meaning of that content, which would be the cognitive presence aspect. The teaching presence, you recording that, you putting that out there, that's evidence of your interaction with the students.

Stacey: As the instructor, I'm still going to have to design. OK now, if they have this chunk of lecture of recorded content. What are they going to do with it to make sure that we have those three elements interplaying in the course?

Kylie: Every single piece of content may not actually engage all three of those things, but the idea being that if you can have all those three things throughout the course, that is going to make for a more meaningful online experience. It might be that the nature of the content is that they just have to read it, or watch it, and take a test on it, that's fine.

If that's what the whole course is, that may not be the most exciting course that that student has ever taken [laughs] .

Stacey: The teacher's never taught, sounds hard for everybody. I want to circle back to what you were saying about the work you did on the online teaching practicum, can you tell me a little bit of more about how that started, how you got involved with that?

Kylie: The Department of Religion came to the CFT and they were interested in some program for their graduate students about online teaching within the diaspora of religion. A lot of seminaries are starting to go online.

Graduate students that are getting a PhD in religious studies, many of them go on to teach at seminaries, but because Vanderbilt is a residential program, and their Masters in Divinity is also a residential program, there is not any experience that those students can get to be able to apply for those online teaching jobs.

Our task was, "Could we develop something for that department specifically?" In my own pedagogical research, I do a lot with digital technology in my classrooms. I have taught an online class, it was a high school class many moons ago.

That's why they really, "Hey, would you be interested in this?" I was like, "Sure. This sounds something that would be fun to learn about and get my feet wet," and do an online class today with the technology that we have that we didn't have 10 years ago, the last time I did it.

I started reading up and doing research on what do online classes look like today? What some of the research that has been done about teaching practices within those spaces? Then we sat down and I worked with Aiden to just imagine what this program might look like.

Because we were designing this specifically for the religion department, the first version of it was really geared toward that discipline. A lot of our readings I pulled were explicitly about teaching religion online. However, we had in the back of our mind that this might actually be useful to people from many different disciplines. So we're kind of building...

Stacey: From the very first time I heard that you're working on this my thought was this we need to do one of these for the whole campus. It's going to be really valuable.

Kylie: So we're kind of building both general readings and disciplinary-specific readings. So, the way that the course ended up, the pilot version, we designed it, so that there was a center and practicum together, because it was an entire semester-long course.

Stacey: I'm not sure if we went into any detail about this before, but we do actually offer through the Center for Teaching, what we call a certificate programs in college teaching. That are a seminar, which is really about theory and research, and building a knowledge base.

Then a practicum, which is more hands-on opportunities to, actually, teach and get feedback on your teaching. And that's a two-semester program. You were convincing this online practicum into one semester that did everything.

Kylie: Yeah, right. So the regular certificate programs don't last the whole semester. They are only about eight weeks in each. This was...Just because of the nature of the course, it was going to be an entire 14 weeks. And so, we decided to do everything and see how it went. [laughs]

We also designed it as a hybrid course. It was a course in online teaching, so we felt like we needed, at least, half the course to be online. Because we, also, were having students that

had, perhaps, never had any experience online, we started it face-to-face. And, so...

Stacey: I actually, I love hybrid teaching. It's probably my favorite mode of teaching. I think that was probably smart not to throw people into the deep end with a fully online course. I know that one time I actually got to be a guest speaker during one of the face-to-face sessions and use some really practical tutorials, about heres, hows, done with the technology tools work.

Here's something you might have never seen before. I felt like, that was a really useful way to spend that face-to-face time is really imagining what might be possible in an online space before they went out to the [inaudible 20:50] .

Kylie: Yeah. The first half of the course, the class met for two hours a week. The first hour was used on discussion of some research article or a discussion based around a set of readings, a kind of theories about online teaching.

Then, the second hour was usually a workshop. And so this is where we'd often invite guests in. When you came in, you talked about the Course Management System but really getting into some of the more robust features of it, I guess.

Stacey: Yes. I spent a lot of time talking about what's possible on the Course Management System. But every once in a while, I have opportunities to say, "You've never seen a Course Management System do this before. Let me show you what's possible." and this is one of those times.

Kylie: I should say that, the other thing, all the students in the course have access to, uh, their own Sandbox course. I remember after you came in, everyone with mind was blown, about how they could organize the landing page for their online course show completely different from the standard thing that everyone has.

Stacey: We have to give...this is from that drives me crazy from. As Course Management System Administrator, I don't know if I ever mentioned that in Leading Lines before. Part of my role...a significant part of my role at Vanderbilt is to be the administrator for the Course Management System and help faculty get the support they need to use it well in their teaching.

We have to create sort of a default template for folks, but as much as possible we try and tell people, "Whatever you can imagine, we can help you bend Brightspace to your will. Just tell us what you want it to do and we'll show you how to twist it and turn it, to make it something useful for you."

One of the backbones of our sort of way of administering Brightspace on campus is that...we think that faculty creativity and innovation, and academic freedom extend even to the Course Management System. There's some checks and balances in place to make sure enrollments are consistent and things like that.

But if you want your course shell to look different, we want to help you get there. We want to give you the freedom to twist it and turn it which I think might be different from some other management styles.

Anyway, I don't know, maybe someone's listening to this [laughs] and we'll get a consult now about how we can change everything. Some things we can't change but when we know how we're happy to.

Kylie: The great thing was after you came then the students could actually go into their shells and play around with the look of it and things like that. The interface. Um, we also had Melissa Mallon from the library come and talk about ways to incorporate resources into the course.

Stacey: She's also a contributor to the podcast?

Kylie: She talked a little bit about OER and things like that. We also took a trip to the video recording studio at Vanderbilt at the Vanderbilt Institute for Digital Learning. The students got to get some training in how to create videos if that's something that they wanted to do.

This is all leading up to the second half of the semester which I was calling the practicum part. Essentially, we met together with these seminars/workshops for I think it was five weeks. Then we went online for four weeks. We wanted it to be a significant amount online so they could kind of get a sense of being away from people [laughs] a little bit.

At least getting a sense of being in that online community. We did two weeks of asynchronous online lessons and two weeks of synchronous online lessons. Then we came

back together face to face and debriefed on that and what that experience was like, picked apart the lessons that they participated in.

Then we made the shift to the practicum where now they started designing their own online experiences. So the main...in our regular certificate in college teaching program, students in the practicum have to do a microteaching lesson.

They have to have a classroom observation so what they have defined a guest lecture. If they are teaching, have someone come into their class, watch them teach, and then debrief about it. In the online version they actually had to create an online module.

They did this practice teaching, but they did it online and they were students for each other. Then as an instructor, I was able to kind of do a short little observation of that micro-teaching moment. That's how we translated those experiences from the...the regular face-to-face practicum to the online version.

Stacey: You are not working with the practicum anymore, right?

Kylie: I'm not doing the online practicum this year. So... so the way in which we are continuing to develop this program is that, starting this year, all of the students who have completed the certificate in college teaching program seminar, now they have a choice of whether they want to do a face-to-face practicum or if they want to do a practicum that has an emphasis in online teaching.

And so, I passed off that to someone else. I'm teaching the regular practicum but someone else, Alex Oxner, is teaching the online focus practicum.

Stacey: It's been rearranged to take out more of the seminar focus and now it's just an eight-week online practicum.

Kylie: It was a lot to do. It was doable since I had the whole semester, but we like the idea of knowing the students that come into that practicum are already grounded in basic educational theory. In the online practicum when I taught it, I was trying to do both.

We had a week on universal design, a week on backwards design. That was a lot of ground to cover. This way they now have all that seminar experience behind them. Now they can just

really focus on what does it mean to teach online, which I think—and we'll find out— but I think that will be a good alteration.

Stacey: One of the things I'm the most excited about, that your experimental practicum that was really designed to meet the needs of one department, it's been brought into the general center for teaching programs and been made an equal option with face-to-face teaching. And I like that for a couple reasons.

One, it definitely is helping to give more emphasis to the foundation that it takes to teach online, The face-to-face teaching just looks and acts different. And so actually having that real practical experience to prepare you.

And second, I think it's just going to make our graduate students more competitive in the real world, where most colleges are using a combination of just sort of what other mode and instruction is most attractive to students, whether that's face-to-face, hybrid, online.

And so having graduates who have gone through this practicum have a little bit of foundation in general teaching, have the online practicum, have real practical skills. It just seems like best for all and I'm excited about seeing the results from this semester.

Kylie: Yeah. I think online teaching sometimes carries a stigma with it. Or people, especially those who just love teaching, think that sometimes that they wouldn't love online teaching. And, so I think just having a little bit of exposure to it could help graduate students see like, "Oh, this is actually like...this is a really, really important mode of instruction and maybe I actually would really enjoy doing this."

That there's a lot of things you can do online that you can't do, and there's a lot of ways in which online teaching is more equitable to more people [laughs]. I think it's just good to be having those conversations with as many people as we can.

Stacey: Yeah. That's fantastic. Kylie, this has been really great, and maybe we will be able to catch up with Alex at the end of this semester and find out how the second version of the practicum went.

Kylie: Yeah. Well, thank you for talking with me.

[background music]

Derek: It was Kylie Korsnack, PhD student in English here at Vanderbilt University, interviewed by Center for Teaching Assistant Director and Leading Lines producer Stacey Johnson. As I mentioned in the intro, you can hear more of Stacey's conversation with Kylie in the newest episode of Stacey's podcast We teach Languages. See the show notes for a link.

Stacey has developed a really robust community of language teachers through podcast. We teach languages as quality work and I'm not at all jealous that she has more Twitter followers and probably more downloads than we do.

Back to Kylie. I mentioned that Kylie takes a creative and intentional approach to using technology in her own teaching, including the face-to-face classes she teaches here at Vanderbilt. I was particularly struck by an assignment she blogged about a couple of years ago, a digital revision assignment.

She asked the students in her writing class to take an essay that they had turned in earlier in the semester and revise it in another medium altogether. Students reimagined their arguments as Prezis, and "Choose Your Own Adventure" books, and Pinterest boards, and more.

Not only were these projects fun to see, but for many of our students remediating their arguments like this helped them see their own writing more clearly and make changes to their writing going forward. It was a really great assignment. Again, see the show notes for a link to her blog post with details about that assignment.

You'll find those show notes, as well as past episodes and transcripts, on our website leadinglinespod.com. If you have thoughts about this episode please share them either on the website or on Twitter, where we can be found @leadinglinespod, or via email, leadinglinespod@vanderbilt.edu.

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This episode was edited by Stacey Johnson and Rhett McDaniel. Look for new episodes the

first and third Monday of each month. I'm your host Derek Bruff. Thank you for listening.