

# Transcript

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**Derek Bruff:** [00:06] Welcome to “Leading Lines,” a podcast from Vanderbilt University. I’m your host, Derek Bruff, the director of the Vanderbilt Center for Teaching.

[00:13] In this podcast, we explore creative, intentional and effective uses of technology to enhance student learning — uses that point that way to the future of educational technology in college and university settings.

[00:22] In this episode, we talk with Elizabeth Self, a teacher educator here at the Vanderbilt University in the Peabody College of Education and Human Development.

[00:31] My Center for Teaching colleague, Stacey Johnson, talked with Liz about her clinical simulation project in which pre-service teachers role play with actors in the kinds of interactions they might one day have as teachers with students, parents, and colleagues.

[00:43] Liz shares why these simulations are such powerful learning experiences for her students, and the specific ways that technology, particularly video technology, enhances those learning experiences.

[00:54] [background music]

**Stacey Johnson:** [00:58] I am so excited to be here today for this episode of Leading Lines with Liz Self from Peabody College here at Vanderbilt. Liz, tell us a little bit about your position here and what population you work with and what you teach.

**Elizabeth Self:** [01:10] Sure. Thank you for having me.

**Stacey:** [01:11] My pleasure.

**Elizabeth:** [01:12] I am a lecturer in the Department of Teaching and Learning. I've spent a long time in that department. I started at Peabody as a masters student in 2009 in the Learning, Diversity and Urban Studies program.

[01:25] I got to study with Rich Milner, who was the faculty member in charge of that program to start with. I kind of asked Rich while I was a master student if he thought I could hang around as a doctoral student and he seemed to be keen on that idea as well.

[01:42] So I finished my master's and then started my PhD in 2010. Unfortunately, while I was a doctoral student, Rich left and I started working with Ilana Horn, who was my adviser when I finished.

[01:56] The project itself started out of my being the wife of a doctor. I met my husband in college. We started dating. We dated through medical school. While he was in medical school, I would be his patient every once in a while, while he got ready for a standardized patient encounter.

[02:15] I would have to pretend to have an illness and he would have to practice going through the motions of diagnosing something. I remember him trying to learn the steps to a neurological exam.

[02:27] I kept thinking, because I was teaching school at the time, "I wonder what this looks like in teacher education." I went through my teacher preparation classes prior to some of the newer restrictions. I started teaching and I took a couple classes and I took the praxis. I didn't have a traditional process of going through.

**Stacey:** [02:49] Just to clarify, you actually, right out of college, started teaching and were teaching for several years and being your husband's standardized patient, and then you decided to go back and do your master's and doctoral work.

**Elizabeth:** [03:00] Yeah.

[03:01] I taught high school in Virginia, and then I taught high school in Chicago. We moved here for him to start working at Vanderbilt and I was going to keep teaching school and I couldn't get a job.

[03:12] And so I said, "Well this master's program looks really interesting," and applied and started. Because my interest was less in the content. I was an English teacher. I love English, and books, and writing and communicating, but that's not what I wanted to spend a lot of time studying in graduate school. The diversity in urban studies piece was really what drew me and it became the heart of the work that I do.

**Stacey:** [03:36] Excellent. Did your project have a name?

**Elizabeth:** [03:39] We call it clinical simulations. We're working on a better...

**Stacey:** [03:43] Which is just the same thing they call it in medical school, right?

**Elizabeth:** [03:45] Yeah. That's the terminology they use. They mostly call them standardized patient encounters, SPEs.

[03:52] It's a challenge to talk about them as far as the term or we probably need a better name for the project only because simulations in education conjures a lot of things for people. Everything from computerized games to help people learn physics, to testing out scenarios via simulations, to what we're doing in terms of live actor video recorded group debriefed clinical simulations.

**Stacey:** [04:19] There's a lot to unpack there. Why don't we start at the beginning?

**Elizabeth:** [04:21] Sure.

**Stacey:** [04:22] Your clinical simulations, there were a lot of keywords in your description, live actor, videotaped, group, debrief. [laughs] Let's start at the beginning and work through all of it.

**Elizabeth:** [04:32] So the basic scenario is this: we take usually pre-service teachers and we put them in a moment of teaching. The moments of teaching are chosen based on a lot of things. They come out of the literature based on moments that we know teachers struggle with. They come out of previous teachers' critical incidents or moments that they experienced that became really important to their professional development.

[04:58] Also, from my own experience, or whoever is writing the simulation, things that we

experienced as teachers and felt like, "I wish I'd had a chance to think through that before I actually had to do it as a teacher."

[05:11] We create a story. We have two parts to the story. One part is what the pre-service teacher gets and it just sets up the story. You're a teacher at this school, this grade. It's this far into the school year. Here's the student or group of students. Here's what's going on with them. Here's why you're meeting with whoever you are today, whether it's supposed to be the student, the parent, or co-worker.

[05:33] The other half of the story goes to the actor who's playing the part of the student, the parent, or the co-worker. As it happens in teaching, that person has a lot more information available about what's going on than the pre-service teacher has.

[05:49] We put them in this moment. They basically read their part of the story beforehand. We have them answer some questions ahead of time. What do you think is going to happen? What is informing what you think is going to happen? What do you think you'll do?

[06:03] They basically walk into a room that we setup to film in. They are thrust into this moment of teaching. There's a student sitting there who's waiting to talk with them, or a parent who's come and is angry about something, or a coworker who's going to chat with them about some previous students, or any of those things.

**Stacey:** [06:22] The people that are waiting in the room are actors who understand all the tangents the situation needs to take?

**Elizabeth:** [06:30] Right. When we create the narrative for the actor, there's a couple parts to it. One is, "Here's what you need to know about the story that's happening and all of the information you have that our pre-service teachers don't and might want to find out from you." Part of it is, "Here's all the things about who you are in the world."

[06:48] Probably the most important thing that we do is try to give them a sense of, "How is this person feeling in this moment and what are the things that are shaping that?" so that as the scenario unfolds, if the teacher does something we don't expect, they can try to respond as that person, from the spirit of who they are.

**Stacey:** [07:07] Awesome. I guess there's a lot more detail that we could unpack about what

happens next. I know the teachers are actually going into the room and interacting with the actor and having that videotaped is only the first third of the process, maybe.

**Elizabeth:** [07:21] It is. In one sense, it's not the most important part because it's not really where the learning happens. On the other hand, it's really important because it's what we leverage in order to support that learning and the fact that it's video recorded is really important in my mind and from what we understand so far.

[07:40] When teachers are experiencing these moments out in classrooms and in schools, there's no recording of that. There's no way to go back and explore what happened. The only record we have to rely on is the memory of the teacher, which includes their lenses and their interpretations and the memory of the other people who are involved who, because of the way schools were setup, may not feel comfortable communicating what their perceptions were at that time.

[08:08] We have this recording and we're able to have the teachers and then us as the instructors look back and see what actually happened. Did you say what you thought you said or did you say a version of it that came out differently and possibly was heard differently by this person?

[08:26] Did you really listen to what the student told you? Did you, so focused on what you had to communicate, that you totally missed the fact that they just shared something really important or something really deep and troublesome that you need to stop and honor and respond to in that moment?

**Stacey:** [08:42] I wish I had that as a parent, where someone would follow me around for the crisis moments and be like, "Do you notice how you got really tense and did not honor what your child just said?" [laughs]

**Elizabeth:** [08:52] I have an eight, a six and a four-year-old. As my kids get older, I just more and more talk about the overlap between parenting and teaching. I very often tell teachers, "I'm giving you a sense of what we know is good practice and I'm giving you a sense of all the tools you have available to you in these moments and know that 95 percent of the time, I don't use them as a parent."

[09:14] You will fail, still, and you will not make the decision you wish you did a lot, but the

goal is to be able to see that and to get better at it.

**Stacey:** [09:24] It's about the journey of improvement, not necessarily getting it right.

**Elizabeth:** [09:27] Yes. I'm not so much preparing them for the moment when something actually going wrong in the classroom or when a parent does come in angry. I'm hoping that these encounters more than anything prepare them to be open to continuing to learn from and with students, parents and coworkers.

[09:46] Many of the scenarios are also to prepare them how to respond to those moments, but also just to develop this sense that, "Even when I feel like I'm an expert teacher, I won't know everything I need to know."

[09:58] So when a parent comes in and says, "I want to share these things with you because it's really important to who my child is," that they will say, "Thank you. It means so much to me that you brought this in. I'm going to take a look at this. Can I come back to you if I have questions?"

[10:11] I would feel like we've [laughs] been at least partially successful if our teachers did that every time.

**Stacey:** [10:17] I think that's amazing. Also it's a really human approach to teaching teaching. We're not teaching you to enact a set of skills perfectly every time or teaching you to interact with complex people who have their own stuff.

**Elizabeth:** [10:32] I think that's a big part of what confuses people or concerns people when they first hear about the scenarios.

[10:40] I think that scholars in the diversity and equity world, in my field in particular, when they first hear about it, think that either we're trying to prepare them for almost a script, "Here's how you would deal with this moment of teaching," or that we are doing it in a way that dehumanizes and really removes that complex human element from it.

[11:02] The way that we've set it up is to say, "We can't prepare you for every situation you're going to encounter. By the way, if you experience this situation again, other things may be called for depending on details of the context," and wanting them to start to see things more

complexly, to be able to think about things more complexly and to understand who they are in that moment.

[11:26] I think that's where the video recording in particular becomes important, is that they are -- especially for our pre-service teachers who are sophomores in college -- they are truly coming to see themselves as teachers for the first time. They are getting to hear what they sound like when they're talking to students and parents.

[11:43] They are getting to look at what they look like sitting as the person in authority after having been out of the high school situation for only a year or two. For a lot of them, it's a moment of transition to sit around the other side of the desk, so to speak, and to really figure out who I am in that role.

[12:01] I think some portion of what we do is to say to them, "Follow your human instincts more and worry a little less about what you think a teacher, whoever that looks like in your head, would do or say in that moment." Part of our work is disrupting hegemonic forms of teaching that have not served students well, particularly students who have been marginalized in society and continue to be.

**Stacey:** [12:27] Awesome. I love that. I'm just going to recap. We talked about the preparation stage, which is where you all, the instructors and the administrators who are running this project, write scenarios, prep the actors and make sure everyone knows what they're getting into.

[12:46] Stage one is the actual encounter that's videotaped. Stage two is a debriefing with the instructor of that video tape. How does that work?

**Elizabeth:** [12:54] Not necessarily. So the next thing that happens after they leave the room one-on-one with the actor is that they go to another room where the group of people who just finished doing the scenario sits together in a room.

[13:08] We call it a raw debrief, and this is coming from Ben Doscher's work up in Syracuse, who did a lot of work and has published a lot on clinical simulations of a slightly different sort.

[13:19] If we only are running one room at a time, we have them sit with an iPad and just

unload what's going on in their head onto the iPad on video. If we're running multiple rooms at a time, then we bring them together in a small room. There's no facilitator present. We do have a video camera still running.

[13:40] We simply say to them, "What just happened and how are you feeling about it?" Those are our only questions.

**Stacey:** [13:47] Those are good questions.

**Elizabeth:** [13:48] Just talk until you feel like you've talked it out or someone tells you have to go. That's not something we usually have them watch back. It's definitely something that informs what the instructor does when we get back to the large group setting because it gives us a glimpse of how they're making sense of the interaction right after.

[14:06] We have some questions that help us get a sense of how are they thinking about the situation before they walked into the room. This helps us right after they've walked out. Then the next thing they do is between that time and when we do the group debrief — and we try to make that at least three days, usually as much as a week — they have to watch their video back by themselves and answer some new questions and those questions are starting to probe now.

[14:29] What assumptions did you have that weren't met? Why do you think they weren't met? How many questions did you ask? What kind of information did you get? -- Those kinds of questions that start them taking a deeper look.

[14:41] They submit those before the group debrief as well so that we can look at those prior to that whole group debrief and again get a sense of now that they've watched that video back, how are they thinking about this so that when we come in and bring anywhere from 5 to 25 students together to talk about this, and each one of them has had in one sense the same situation to respond to...

[15:04] Where is everybody? How do I provide some instruction? How do I start conversation with the group that meets them where they are and not with where they were prior to going to into the room or right after they've walked out?

**Stacey:** [15:19] I'm going to revise my recap. You have the preparation and then the actual



filming of the interaction. The raw — you call it raw debrief — right afterwards that catches just those two important questions.

[15:33] About a week later, more probing questions after they've processed a little more. Do you normally see a difference between the raw debrief and the more probing reflective questions, or are they pretty much still on the same track?

**Elizabeth:** [15:45] Usually, we start to see teachers dig a little bit deeper in the questions. And it really just depends. Part of my dissertation work was looking at, when does a critical moment happen? What makes it critical? When is the point at which a teacher suddenly starts to see things very differently than they did before?

[16:04] The first time I did this, the very first scenario I ever ran, I really expected the teachers to go in and be so taken aback by the interaction that they had that they would walk out and be like, "Woah, I have to really rethink this." I was a little flabbergasted that they weren't — and alarmed.

[16:21] On the one hand, I was like, "How are you not pushed by this?" On the other hand, I was like, "This is my dissertation and what on earth am I going to say about this?"

**Stacey:** [16:32] These findings can't be written up!

**Elizabeth:** [16:34] On the other hand, what I realized is people have different trajectories through this. Some teachers go into the interaction, they walk out and they say, "That did not go like I thought it was going to. I felt very uncomfortable. I felt like I wasn't saying what I was trying to say." There are other teachers who don't get to that until three months after we do the group debrief.

[16:55] I have evidence of that in this trove of data I now have of people who said it wasn't actually until the last day and our last conversation at the end of the semester when somebody said this and mentioned the simulation that I thought "Oh," and this is the challenge of teaching.

[17:13] We know this happens in K12 schooling. A second grade teacher will read a book or have a conversation and somewhere around the beginning of fourth, that student remembers back. It helps them in some way or serves as a touching stone for new information. We don't

get to see those trajectories unfold.

[17:31] At least within the scope of our teacher ed program, we do get to see that more often. For undergrads, they have my class sophomore year. They continue to do simulations in their later coursework, but in fewer numbers.

[17:44] We're able to sometimes hear them say, "This is just like this scenario I had," or they'll bring up a character from one of the scenarios because it's a common reference for everyone in that classroom, and they all remember Ms. Sahil.

[18:01] Or they can all talk about Mr. Duncan and how frustrating Mr. Duncan was, and how this thing that my instructor's teaching me now would have helped me there. We're able to see this build. We know it's how in-service teachers learn to the extent that we have information on that.

[18:15] We know that they have scenarios and then, often, they're troubled, they go out looking for how to handle those scenarios better. In pre-service teacher education, we don't have those scenarios because they're not out in schools enough to be witnessing them.

[18:28] Even if they are witnessing them, they're not the ones necessarily in charge of responding to them.

**Stacey:** [18:32] They're not insiders in those scenarios even when they do see them.

**Elizabeth:** [18:35] This gives them a somewhat authentic, but still safe place to get a sense of what that looks like. A big part of my goal was to create a way for teachers to learn these things or to begin to learn about these things in a way that minimized harm on some of our most vulnerable students.

[18:56] Very often, programs will say, "Oh, in your first year or two you should go tutor in this after school program down the street, or you should be part of this program that does mentoring."

[19:06] What we're doing is sticking students that are complete novices to thinking about these issues with children who have already experienced the inequities of society or who are not having a positive experience in schooling, and we're asking our teachers to learn *on*

them.

[19:22] While there's still a level of learning *on* happening here, we at least have actors who are fully consented, who understand what's about to happen and who can choose to opt out at any point if they feel like it's no longer something they want to participate in.

**Stacey:** [19:35] That's great. I love that. So we're not sending our most vulnerable students our least prepared teachers right off the bat.

**Elizabeth:** [19:42] Yeah.

**Stacey:** [19:44] After talking through all the different stages of the project, I can see how several of them are really facilitated, made possible through different technologies that you've used.

[19:55] I'm wondering, how did you come to those technologies and did you have any challenges when you were setting up the project, figuring out if someone is trying to do a raw debrief alone, how do we record that? How did you approach deciding which technologies would fit this project?

**Elizabeth:** [20:12] Some of choosing the technologies was just what was practical in the moment, what we had access to, but some of it was this idea of what do I need to see, especially coming from a critical discourse analysis perspective. I wanted to see them talk about what they just experienced, not just listen to it.

[20:30] Doing Photo Booth on iPad gave me more information as an instructor about how to support that student than the audio alone. I mean, we bought the iPad specifically for that purpose to begin with.

[20:42] Now we use them in other ways as well in terms of videoing. We started initially running these at the simulation lab at the medical center where they have hidden cameras and hidden audio in a way that allows them to really forget, to a certain extent, that this is happening.

[21:00] Unfortunately, over there, it looks like a doctor's office, which is awkward and it's not affordable to continue doing that. Really just thinking about what all do we need to capture

here. There are places that are using more advanced technologies in terms of also trying to track heart rate and blood pressure to get a sense of the stress level and all that kind of thing.

[21:23] With the video, we're just trying to figure out, because it's a mostly stationary thing, we can just point a camera and capture what we need to. We want to make sure we get good audio because we want to make sure we can hear everybody.

[21:35] But this idea of really needing to see what's happening, the way that this is embodied for the teacher and the way that they are communicating their not just intellectual and emotional, but truly affective state is important to me as an instructor and as a researcher.

**Stacey:** [21:49] Just another logistical question. How do you get the video then to the instructor who is that student's instructors?

**Elizabeth:** [21:56] For the purposes of Vanderbilt, we've been using Box, since it's a FERPA compliant space. The only person who has access to it then is the instructor and the student. We, basically, leave it there long enough for them to watch it and then we pull it down and it gets stored on a Vanderbilt server, since this is all done under IRB.

**Stacey:** [22:12] The students themselves would upload it to...

**Elizabeth:** [22:14] No. We record it. We upload it, make sure they can see it, the instructor can see it, and when they've finished what we call their simulation cycle, then we pull it all down and save it for data purposes.

**Stacey:** [22:27] That was excellent. Thank you so much for walking us through that. I think this is such a cool project. I'm really excited it's happening in Peabody College and I look forward to keeping up with you.

[22:37] I know you've been in the news. I look forward to keeping up with how the project progresses and maybe expands to other places. Our last question that we ask all of our guests is, what is your favorite non-digital, analog educational technology?

**Elizabeth:** [22:52] Because I'm a teacher, and I feel like I have to go with a chalkboard here.

[22:55] [laughter]

**Elizabeth:** [22:56] I think that it serves a function on multiple levels. One is that, not that long ago, that was also what kids wrote on in schools. Everybody had their own slate and chalk. It became the space that kids were practicing.

[23:10] Because it wasn't on paper, it also wasn't permanent and I think that's one of the things that was beautiful about the use of chalkboards. That is still interesting and how we're starting to use or have begun using little white boards with kids. It's the idea that you don't have to do it and turn it in for it to be marked and is it correct or incorrect.

[23:29] Rather, this is a practice space. This is a place to learn. It's transient. What you write down, you can erase and do over. When you feel like you've got that down, we're going to erase that and move on to the next thing.

[23:42] It has both that sort of...all of us who grew up wanting to be teachers loved the idea the chalk and the chalkboard and the histories of kids having to clean erasers out in the grass next to the classroom.

[23:54] Also just the fact that it was a space that kids could learn on and not feel like it was some permanent reflection of who they were as a learner, but really a space to be a learner.

**Stacey:** [24:04] That's awesome. I really like that answer. Liz, thank you so much for being here today.

**Elizabeth:** [24:09] Thank you.

**Stacey:** [24:10] I know you have to run to your next meeting, but this was a great interview.

[24:13] [background music]

**Elizabeth:** [24:13] Thank you.

**Derek:** [24:14] That was Elizabeth Self, lecturer in teaching and learning at Vanderbilt University. Liz works with pre-service K12 teachers, helping to prepare them for the classroom.

[24:24] At the Center for Teaching, we work with novice teachers too, although in our case,

that means grad students and junior faculty teaching at the university level.

[24:31] We've always had practice teaching with feedback as part of our training programs but we haven't built out the simulation structure that Liz described in her interview.

[24:39] I can imagine, however, that the simulations she runs would have a useful place in our work, particularly as we work with instructors around issues of power and difference in the classroom.

[24:48] If you'd like to learn more about Liz's work, see our show notes for links to her website and an education week story about her work. You can find those show notes on our website, [leadinglinespod.com](https://leadinglinespod.com).

[24:58] We welcome your comments and questions there and on Twitter, where our handle is @leadinglinespod.

[25:04] Also, you can find us on iTunes. If you wouldn't mind leaving us a review or rating there, that would be really helpful. iTunes uses those to decide which podcasts to share. It will help more people find our work.

[25:17] Leading Lines is produced by the Center for Teaching, the Vanderbilt Institute for Digital Learning, the Office of Scholarly Communications, and the Associate Provost for Digital Learning.

[25:24] This episode was edited by Rhett McDaniel. Look for new episodes the first and third Monday of each month. I'm your host, Derek Bruff. Thanks for listening.

[25:31] [music]