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00:08 Nathan: Welcome to Popular Podagogy. In today's episode, what we're going to do is find out how the education world is dealing with this pandemic. We're going to talk to a student, a faculty member, and a current teacher in the Ontario school system to get a better sense of how they're handling it, what are some things that we can do to stay occupied and encourage the education system, and maybe have a little fun.

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00:40 Nathan: We're fortunate to be joined here by our first guest, Nelligan Letourneau. Nelligan, how are you doing today?

00:47 Nelligan Letourneau: I'm good, thank you. How are you?

00:48 Nathan: I'm good, thank you. So we're curious a little bit to see how all of this has been affecting students. So you're currently a teacher candidate at Queen's University. Queen's has moved all of their programming online. How did that affect you? What's the transition been like? How have you handled that?

01:15 NL: Well, the transition into self-isolation happened while I was on my alternative practicum. So the transition into classes just started last week. So for the first three weeks that we were in self-isolation I transitioned from my alt practicum that I was doing at an art studio in Kingston to moving back to Ottawa and having to find an alternate solution to that alternative practicum. Now that I'm doing classes, we have started doing some Zoom classes. So several of my classes are in a video format, and they happen at the same time they would have normally, and then I have some classes that I'm able to do asynchronously. And I've just been trying to, I guess, keep afloat. It's been a bit of a struggle to re-adjust to this format. I'm used to being in a program where I'm constantly collaborating with my teachers and my school mates and students, so it's been interesting to figure out how to do that through an online platform.

02:33 Nathan: That's a good point that you bring up there, because teaching in itself, in its nature, is such a social profession. You're always interacting with students, you're interacting with your

peers, you're interacting with parents. So as someone who is used to being in a social atmosphere pretty consistently, how are you trying to stay socially connected?

02:58 NL: Great question. Is funny I... Just before this call I looked at my recent call history and all of my calls were basically from three or four of my friends who are also in the program with me right now, so we have been in almost constant communication through the phone. And it's funny 'cause it's almost more communication than we would be in person when we happen to see each other in the hallways or something. So, we're kind of supplementing this lack of face-to-face connection through hearing each other's voices and doing that more regularly than we would have.

03:41 Nathan: Yeah. It's nice that it finally has brought back the phone to a new generation of people. We've finally been able to do it. We're bringing the texting generation back to the phone generation. It's perfect.

03:57 NL: It's so much easier. I don't have to use my thumb muscles as much.

04:01 Nathan: Carpal tunnel has never been so relieved. So you mentioned earlier that you were doing your alternative practicum as this was going on. And I know at the Faculty of Education we've had to try and come up with some creative alternatives to practicum because of physical distancing. So you had a really cool idea. Can you explain a little bit about what you've done?

04:24 NL: Sure, yeah. So my alternative practicum, as I said, was in an art studio in Kingston, and it was an inclusive arts hub for people who are artists, who have exceptionalities or face barriers. And I was there for one week, and once I left, our coordinators... I'm in the ACE program, the Artist and Community Education program. Our coordinator said that we could take this opportunity to figure out basically our own alternatives, whatever that may be. And so what kind of rooted my idea of creating art education resources online through YouTube videos was that I could share these with some of the people that I had been doing my alternative practicum with originally. So I started a YouTube channel, which I really had no idea I would ever be doing, and I have made four videos so far. Each one is 15 minutes or shorter, and in the videos I show myself doing an art project with materials that are around my house that most people would probably have at there's. And I give instructions as to how to do them, and then show my final product. And I've been sharing these through Facebook and email, and it's been really cool to see how many people they've reached. So yeah, that's kind of what ended up happening with my alternative practicum.

06:00 Nathan: So first of all, the art studio sounds like a pretty amazing alternative practicum idea. So it's unfortunate that you weren't able to continue with that, but I hope that you get involved in that when it comes back, or at least can support it in some way. But I was fortunate enough to be able to go on and check out some of your videos prior to this. And you do a really good job. So I am an art amateur. I once made a deal with my art teacher that they would give me a 67 in the class as long as I handed in all of the work and did not disrupt the class. But you make it seem like it's pretty easy and it's pretty doable, and the end product is still pretty amazing. So kudos to you on that. But I have to say that my favorite one that you did was the pet portraits, because I got to meet Romeo. So that was very nice.

07:03 NL: And Romeo... Oh, sorry to cut you off.

07:07 Nathan: Nope, that's okay.

07:08 NL: I just wanted to say Romeo is my dog, but he's 15 and a half years old, so I'm impressed that he was in the video too. [chuckle]

07:17 Nathan: Yeah. So if you're interested in going to see and meet Romeo, where would they be able to find these? And what are they called?

07:28 NL: They are on YouTube, and my channel is my name, which is Nelligan Letourneau. And every video starts with art at home, and then it follows with whatever project I'm doing. So that video with Romeo would be art at home, pet portraits.

07:44 Nathan: And Nelligan, I have to say that for someone who says that they've never used YouTube before, never made a video, it seems very well done and very creative. So thank you for putting those together and for sharing those, and hopefully it's a good resource for not only parents at home, teachers at home, anyone who wants to be able to put together just some arts for anyone. It seems like it's a very inclusive activity. So thank you for coming on and sharing that today.

08:13 NL: Thank you.

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08:15 Nathan: And for our next guest, we're joined here by Chris Carlton, who's an instructor at the Faculty. Chris, how are you doing today?

08:23 Chris Carlton: Great, thank you, Nathan. How are you doing?

08:26 Nathan: I'm doing well, thanks. So how are things going during this crazy time? There's been a lot of changes that have been going on at the Faculty, how have you been adjusting to them?

08:37 CC: Crazy is a good definition for it, Nathan. I'm actually enjoying it, because... And let me put a qualifier on that. I'm enjoying the aspect of being able to try a new technology. I'm really missing the face-to-face with my students, that's what got me up in the morning and kept me going throughout the day, is seeing their faces and being able to have that connection. But with the Zoom platform that we're using, I really feel that I do have the ability to have that video chat with them and still be able to connect them in that way. I really feel that this is... For me, at least, because I'm sort of a bit of a technology dinosaur, this is a new digital frontier for me and it allows my creativity to flow a little bit more, or in a different way, I guess, 'cause I think my classes are creative. But it's given me a new avenue to try. I think I might become a newscaster, I'm not sure.

09:42 Nathan: Well, I hope if you become a newscaster you get to keep the outfit that you're wearing right now. For those that are listening at home, Chris has a nice beach background in the background, he has a lei around his neck. And if I'm not mistaken, he's got a nice, lovely pina colada cup that he keeps sipping on throughout this conversation. So we are all sufficiently jealous of Chris from his work from home situation from the background that he's got there. And tumor has it you're doing something like this in your class as well, some sort of Zoom background competition?

10:16 CC: Yeah. So Nathan, we're trying to... I try to keep as much familiarity as possible so that

we have that continuum. So in our face-to-face classes... What do we call those? Pre-pandemic classes. I always opened up with a music video, so when my students came in, when the TCs came in, they'd have music to listen to or a video going. And I can still do that with the Zoom classes. So every time when they start Zooming in... It's amazing how our vocabulary changes too, eh? When they start Zooming in I still have that video, that music video playing, and we all sit there and do the head bob and we can see each other. So today we had 38 students in there, or TCs in there, and it's great just to still have that musical connection and be able to relate to them in that way.

11:05 CC: And we all do the thumbs up, round up, thumbs up, just to make sure everybody is okay and they can hear me, and then we get right into just a quick activity. And the great thing about Zoom is we can do a quick poll, just a fun poll to see how everybody's feeling. Today, we did one where they had to rate themselves, rate their mood based on weather conditions, so whether they were sunny, cloudy, foggy, rainy, or a double rainbow. And I got a few double rainbows, which I was very, very pleased with. And then we also do breakout rooms where we can just have a quick chat with each other. And as an instructor, as the Zoom host, I can jump from classroom or breakout room to breakout room, so it's amazing to be able to do that.

11:48 Nathan: Yeah. And the thing that really strikes me from what you're talking about is that we're so focused on all the things that are different and all the challenges that come along with being in a situation like this, and I know that I've seen and commended a number of people who have been able to switch and adjust and try and find ways to make this the new normal, but the fact of the matter is, is that a lot of the ways that we were doing effective instruction and being good teachers and good humans and caring about each other can be transferred over to these types of technologies. And we're really in quite a remarkable time, but we still need to remember that a lot of the things that work, such as setting a routine like the music videos, work over this as well. And making those routines and making those connections with people, and getting those double rainbows, they still mean everything to the people that are in your class, I'm sure.

12:47 CC: Oh, yeah. And we're trying to stretch it a little bit further and trying some new things, so challenges that we have... Or, sorry, presenting challenges that are available because of the digital world. So this week we had virtual background challenge where everybody had to, or anybody that wanted to, had to change their background. And Zoom has a great program for that. And not only did they have to change their background, but they had to actually fit into their background, so that's why my tropical background is complemented by my lei and a godawful tropical shirt as well, and my piña colada. Next week, though, we have a new challenge, and that's bring your pet to Zoom. So everybody gets to bring their pet. Because we've seen over the past little while there's been a cat run across the keyboard, or a dog being lifted up, so we thought we'd celebrate that. And so for the first part of our Zoom everybody gets to put their cat, or dog, or pet, we're trying to see who can bring the most exotic pet, but bring them right into the Zoom class and be able to celebrate that as well, the fact that we do have these companions and they're part of our life, so why not make them part of the classroom as well? So we're gonna do that for next week, so that should be a lot of fun as well.

14:07 Nathan: Yeah, I bet you that the students can't wait for that. I know that that was a big theme when I was doing some of my master's classes as well, was everyone brought their pets up and was showing them off. And you never see someone so proud as when they get to show someone else their dog or cat, so it's an important part of being in a class there. I would be remiss if before we let you go I didn't ask. Alex is our podcast aficionado, she's the one that helps get all the guests and organizes us and keeps us on track, and she's in this sitting quietly. But she insisted that I ask you

about bringing back The Brady Bunch and Jetsons TV in your classes. So would you be able to explain on how you're doing that?

14:57 CC: I sure can. And thanks, Alex, for that promo there. One thing about about teaching, and Nathan you'd realize this too, that especially in education, what was old becomes new again. A lot of things are recycled and we start looking at new educational material and you can see the remnants of something that was successful in the past and brought forward. So Zoom, I explained to my students that Zoom is not a new concept. Zoom was in a different form in the 1960s. So what I did is I showed them a video clip of the intro from The Brady Bunch. And for people who are of the age that can remember The Brady Bunch, it had six kids on... Or three kids on either side, mom and dad in the middle, and then the... Oh, I forget her name. It had the nanny in the middle. And they would all look down at each other, and they'd do the Brady Bunch theme. So I showed them the clip, and then we took the time to actually look down to see who was below us, look to the left, look to the right, give them a little wave, and it was really cool even though it wasn't really happening to be able to see people thinking, "Okay, there is somebody below me, beside me, and up above."

16:14 CC: And then the next feature was in 1968 there was an episode of The Jetsons, which was a cartoon, and George Jetson answers their video phone, and his wife doesn't wanna come to the phone because she hasn't got her morning face on. So she runs to the closet and she puts on this mask, and she comes back and she talks to the person on the video chat. And I was explaining that even in Zoom, you can go down and change the settings, and I can make myself high definition, which, guarantee you don't want that, or you can soften your features. So these aspects of Zoom have been forecasted, I guess, back in the 1960s. So it was really a lot of fun to show the TCs that what old becomes new again at some point in time.

17:05 Nathan: Yeah. Well, thank you, Chris, for taking the time today to come on, and hopefully we'll be able to chat again soon so we can hear about what new shenanigans you can cook up on Zoom.

17:16 CC: Thank you so much, Nathan. And I think the one thing I'd like to leave us with was that we really need to... As you actually alluded to at the beginning, we really need to focus on the positives, the things that we can do with the technology in the situation that we're in. And I know everybody is trying to do that, 'cause the more we focus on the positive, those little challenges that come up, as a group, we can overcome them and they don't seem as big. And that is one thing, when you're doing a Zoom class and you're doing this new digital frontier, there are lots of challenges. I've turned off people, I've kicked them out of the class by accident, but we all have that growth mindset that teachers are famous for, and a lot of people are famous for. And we just go with the flow, and it's a no-stress situation, and we'll make it all work, and it'll be a fun experience, a new experience.

18:09 Nathan: Yeah.

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18:10 Nathan: Thank you, Chris.

18:11 CC: Alright, thank you so much. Great to see you.

18:14 Nathan: Our last guest today is a teacher in the Limestone District School Board, Diane Pennell. Diane, how you doing?

18:22 Diane Pennell: I'm good, thanks.

18:24 Nathan: So Diane, you are a grade one teacher?

18:28 DP: I am.

18:29 Nathan: And so, how has the transition to online learning for grade one students been? 'Cause that must have been pretty difficult.

18:36 DP: Well, as you can imagine, a grade one classroom is very hands-on and interactive, so all of a sudden having to speak through a screen or through emails has been difficult. That said, it's been interesting and challenging, learning new ways to be able to do that.

18:57 Nathan: And so what are some of the ways, because especially at that age... I remember when I was teaching and you would go into the grade one classroom and they just idolized their teacher and they loved their teacher. And so, what are the ways that you're still staying connected with the students while you've moved to this online format?

19:16 DP: All year I have been emailing with families, so that was an easy transition. In the first two weeks when we first found out that we weren't returning to school after March break I sent an email to each of the families just to connect and see how they were doing and say hello to the child who was in my class. And so, I've continued to do that and now send daily emails during the school days of course, not weekends, with work that the children have the option of doing on their own or with their family. So that has been very positive. I receive photos and videos back from families and it's so exciting to see the children, not obviously in person, but at least close enough that we can right now.

20:04 Nathan: Yeah.

20:04 DP: So that's one of the things that we've done, as well, they've continued with some of the activities that we've done in the classroom. Like we had Epic, which is an online reading program, and so we've continued that from home as well. And my first week was very basic, it was a lot of just straight emails to the parents, and I have now started to learn some new ways. And so just today, actually, I had a few families send me some journal entries that their children had done, and I figured out how to Screencastify, and I had their journal up on the screen and then my face talking to them and giving them some feedback on their work. So, it's been certainly a challenge, but also as fun as we can make it in the times that we are in.

20:58 Nathan: And so, you mentioned how you've learned how to do a couple of new resources, and you're using a few new resources. So if there are some teachers out there that are listening, what might be some things that you would recommend that they go and check out?

21:14 DP: Well, the Screencastify has been life changing for me. I just learned about that on Friday during an online staff meeting. And so just being able to share the screen that I am looking at with the child has allowed some more opportunities for learning and for teaching. So that has been really

fun. And this is not mind-blowing, but I learned how to do my first Survey Monkey. And so, at the end of last week I sent a quick survey to all the families just looking for some feedback on how they found my instructions, if the amount of work was enough or if it was too much, and what were some of the favorite activities the students completed and what were some activities they really didn't like. So it was nice to hear back and then be able to guide my teaching this week based on the results of the survey last week.

22:11 Nathan: And I think that's actually a really important message, you had two kind of in there that were really something that I'd like to highlight. The first is that it doesn't necessarily have to be the flashiest tech resource or the flashiest new tool or anything like that. Sometimes the simple practices are what are most effective and it comes down to, yes, it's important to continue to learn and grow and find these new tools, but it's also important to remember that the ones that you're most comfortable with and the ones that will be most practical for the students are the ones that are most essential to be used. And so, really focusing on those things that you can use in your classroom or in your virtual classroom will be the important thing. And then the second thing that I'd like to touch on, and I think it's really incredible that you did this is, you searched for feedback amongst your students and you're allowing for reflective practice even in this time that's completely different. We're taught as teachers from the very beginning that being reflective in our practice and learning and growing is so important, and you're doing that. So I wanna give you some kudos for thinking about that and taking the initiative and really trying to find ways to make it so that your classroom is more effective for your students.

23:26 DP: Thank you.

23:27 Nathan: Would you talk about a win or something really cool that you've done with your students so far, maybe an activity or something really fun?

23:36 DP: Well, so far all I've talked about is tech-based activities that we have done, and not all of the students in our class or in our school have necessarily access to the technology. Or some of the students may be able to access the technology, but it's not the best way for them to learn. Some of our students have special learning needs and they often can't access their learning through a device. So one of the things that we did, and this was spearheaded by two of the EAs who work in my class, Shannon Veal and Tammy Cobb, and they put together an Easter craft or a spring craft. And so they bagged up all of the materials, and then for students who lived in apartment blocks, they mailed them out to them, and those who had a front porch, they dropped them off. And I heard a lot of feedback, the children are really excited to get these deliveries, and lots of photos came through of their completed work with smiling faces. So that was by far one of the best things that has happened so far. So we are planning another one, maybe in a couple of weeks, and that will have to be a surprise.

24:51 Nathan: And I think that's such an important thing because I know I am pretty active on Twitter looking at different teachers and thought leaders in the education field, and a big part of that is that we have to remember that not everybody does have the same equal access to technology, and that there are differences among students no matter where you are teaching. And so, it's things like that where you can find ways to make it so that you're still interacting and engaging with students who maybe don't have all the latest technology, is so important. So that's an amazing story. Thank you, Diane.

24:55 DP: Yeah, thank you.

[music]

24:55 Nathan: That does it for another episode of Popular Podagogy. If you like what you hear, be sure to subscribe to your podcast provider, whether it's Apple Podcasts, Google Play, Stitcher, or just on the Faculty of Education or CFRC websites. A big thank you again to all of our guests today, and stay safe everyone.