

TOPcast Episode #198: “An Instructional Design Institute in a Book!”

Narrator: When you know what you want for the future, you need the present to line up with your goals. UCF Online offers more than 100 fully online programs in healthcare, engineering, criminal justice, and more, so you can get to your future and beyond.

(Musical Intro)

Tom Cavanagh: From the University of Central Florida's Center for Distributed Learning...

Kelvin Thompson: And the University of Louisville's Delphi Center for Teaching and Learning...

Tom: I am Tom Cavanagh.

Kelvin: And I am Kelvin Thompson.

Tom: And you are listening to the final 15 episodes of TOPcast, the Teaching Online Podcast.

Kelvin: That would be, Dr. Cavanagh, the final 15 *scheduled* episodes.

Tom: Of course. Of course. Everyone knows that's what I meant, I'm sure. But we are in the home stretch now, Kelvin.

Kelvin: Oh, my goodness. Yeah, that's true.

Tom: I can see the sunset on the horizon. I'm ambivalent. I have mixed feelings about this.

Kelvin: Yeah. I mean, I wonder if this is... This is probably in poor taste, so you can just skip past this little part with that little...

Tom: Oh boy.

Kelvin: ...that little skip button in your app. But this is probably the ambivalence that people feel when they've decided to enter hospice. You're like, if there's a level of acceptance and so forth, you're like, "This is good and I've chosen a way out," but I mean, I don't know, but we've chosen to be done.

Tom: We have chosen to be done. Yeah. My wife and I are thinking about downsizing and moving, and so, it's a similar sort of emotional gumbo of like, yeah, it's time for us to move on to something else, but we've got an awful lot of memories in that house, 24 years of memories in that house.

Kelvin: You're singing my song. I know a little something about that. As long as people are skipping this part, I'm going to tell you something I've only told one other person.

Tom: So, why not tell all the world? [Laughs]

Kelvin: Or at least the three people who are still listening to Episode #198. When we finished up in Orlando before moving to Kentucky, the night before we left with the moving truck, I walked around that place that we had been in for what, 24 years at that point, and I walked around the Florida room, where we originated a lot of remote recordings during the lockdown era, and I thought about all the time that we had there, and I thanked the house for being a good house. And you can call that crazy if you want to, but it felt appropriate emotionally to let that go, and to be appreciative, and then move on.

Tom: Yeah, yeah. I get it. I get it. So, we've gotten very sentimental here very quickly. [Chuckles]

Kelvin: This has been This Old House, the podcast.

Tom: [Chuckles] To kind of bring it back to maybe more of our regular fare, I see you sipping your mug there, Kelvin. What is in the thermos today?

Kelvin: Well, in my coffee cup today, Tom, is my go-to coffee blend. We've shared this coffee blend before multiple times, and I've brought it in multiple times. This is Storyville Coffee, a very good high-end coffee blend available online should you find yourself in the market. And this is my very first use of my Stan's Donuts & Coffee mug from the windy city of Chicago, where I went to recently. And I made this just a moment ago with my AeroPress, this space age intensity, innovative brewing method that's maybe quicker to brew, but with a much more intense flavor profile.

So, I thought the coffee blend and the brewing method... Oh, which I should add, I always have to look up, because I don't do this brewing method enough. I have to go to where I've bookmarked these instructions from Bluebottle Coffee. They use a special technique for the AeroPress that's not the standard technique, and I like that technique. So, I always have to kind of review the instructions before I get to this. So, the blend, the brewing method, and my deviation, as I mentioned, I thought were all

appropriate for today's topic. Can you find a connection to today's topic in my cup of coffee?

Tom: You thought they were appropriate, did you?

Kelvin: I did. I did. But I always do. [Laughs]

Tom: Yeah. I don't know, Kelvin. I've got some, I think, tenuous incorrect assumptions here.

Kelvin: Let's go for it.

Tom: All right. So, Storyville is back, and it's an old friend of the podcast.

Kelvin: Sure, sure.

Tom: We have some guests in here that are old friends.

Kelvin: I like it.

Tom: Stories are often collected in books. [Chuckles] We're talking about a book. [Chuckles]

Kelvin: [Hearty laugh] This may be my favorite attempt on your part to make the connection. I like it.

Tom: [Chuckles] Yeah. I don't know. Help me out here.

Kelvin: I like what you said. Those are good things. I was thinking of blending together guests and lots of contributing writers. The innovative brewing method, I was thinking about the innovation that is in a book that we're going to talk a little bit about in the episode today with some degree of intensity, and my go-to instructions for this particular deviation in the brewing method, I thought, "Yes, we need a designed instructional resource to get to my cup of coffee today."

So, Tom, why don't you tell people what we're talking about?

Tom: Yeah, it would be my pleasure. Kelvin, you recently interviewed two co-editors of the new book, *The SAGE Handbook of Higher Education Instructional Design*. Both of these guests are friends of TOPcast. One is a returning guest. Dr. Safary Wa-Mbaleka previously guested on Episode #150 is currently an associate faculty at University of Arizona Global Campus and is the Research and Evaluation Manager for the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research at the General Conference of Seventh Day Adventists. And Dr. Baiyun Chen is a Senior Instructional Designer

and Program Director of Personalized Adaptive Learning at the University of Central Florida, Center for Distributed Learning. You may have heard of it.

Kelvin: I think I have.

Tom: We should note that Dr. Wa-Mbaleka and Dr. Chen's co-editors are Dr. Gianina-Estera Petre and Dr. Aimee deNoyelles. So, Kelvin, is there anything you want to say about the interview before we cut to it?

Kelvin: I'll say one thing. We jumped right in to talking about the book and didn't necessarily say something broad and framing. Handbooks like this from SAGE and other publishers are pull-off-the-shelf ready references. The book we discuss in this episode is *huge*, 800 plus pages across 50 chapters and seven sections on a wide array of topics. You might not get that from the conversation. We talked a little bit about some specific topics and specific chapters, but oh my gosh, it intends to be, I think, Instructional Design Institute in a book. [Chuckles]

Tom: Wow. Yeah, that is comprehensive. That's awesome. All right, so we'll let you listen to the interview through the magic of podcast time travel. Here is your interview with Dr. Wa-Mbaleka and Dr. Chen.

(Musical Transition)

Kelvin: Hi, Safary and Baiyun. So good to see you and have you on TOPcast today.

Safary Wa-Mbaleka: Good to see you, too, Kelvin.

Baiyun Chen: Good to see you, Kelvin. Thank you for the invitation.

Kelvin: Well, of course. Hey, when esteemed colleagues come out with a new scholarly publication, we have to have you on and learn more about it and promote your good work. So, maybe we'll jump right into it. I'm curious, what's the origin story? Why do we need a handbook on higher ed instructional design? You want to start, Safary, and then let Baiyun add in?

Safary: I think this story starts with you, Kelvin. [Chuckles] Way, way back, way back 15 years ago when we worked together, and I was an instructional designer, and you were our leader, and Baiyun was my colleague. We were both instructional designers. And I just love instructional design. I just love instructional design. And fast-forward last year, you were my co-editor of the *SAGE Handbook of Online Higher Education*, and in that book, we had a section on instructional design, but we quickly realized

that no, we need something bigger for just instructional design itself. And so, as a result of the book last year, we just went ahead and started talking to other people who have the passion for instructional design. And before we knew it, that was a new project starting, and Baiyun was invited to join the team.

Kelvin: Anything you would add, Baiyun?

Baiyun: I just want to add that one of the biggest strengths of this handbook is really the global perspective, just with all the editorial board members, and also the contributing authors. I think we represent over 20 different countries from diverse different continents. So, it's really a global perspective of instructional design applied in different local contexts.

Kelvin: And if I'm not mistaken, I think this is correct, you are not limited to only online instructional design, right? You address instructional design much more holistically. Is that right?

Safary: That's correct. Actually, when the project started, when we presented this project to SAGE, it was initially for online education because when we talk about instructional design, it's generally primarily the online education that deals with that a lot more than face-to-face. When it's face-to-face, we hear people talking about curriculum design, curriculum development, much more, so those are the concepts you hear more used.

And so, when we presented the original plan, it was really for the online education because Baiyun, and myself, and the other co-editors, when we were introduced the instructional design, it was from the online perspective, but then SAGE said, "Well, we are sorry. We cannot accept your project because it's focusing only on one modality, and we want people in all modalities to benefit from the project."

So, we went back to the drawing board and added the face-to-face, the hybrid, and the virtual, because all there's instructional design that is involved, although the face-to-face, they usually don't use that word that much. And so that's why it ended up being instructional design in higher education and in general, whether it's face-to-face, online, or mixed modalities.

Baiyun: Yeah. I remember we have a section, a whole section on different modalities. We have a chapter on fully online, blended, and face-to-face, and we have a chapter on micro-credential. We have a chapter on MOOC, the massive online learning. So, I think we have touched different modalities in this book.

Kelvin: Well, maybe that's a good point of transition. I'm curious, as editors of a large treatment of instructional design, I wonder how you each see the field of instructional design and the role of instructional designer evolving over the coming years. In your opinion, what will change? What will remain the same? Baiyun, would you like to start, and then maybe Safary can chime in?

Baiyun: Sure. So, I think in the past when we talk about instructional designers, people always think of us as tech support, but actually, instructional designers, we wear different hats. So, we are not just tech support, we also are course builders. We also are faculty trainers. We also are course reviewers. We're also sometimes maybe web developers [Chuckles], or more editors of videos, and graphics as well. So, I think it's a very varied, complex role that we have. And so, I don't think this is going to change. I think it's going to stay.

And the biggest changing part, I would think it's the technology. So, I think the technology is always changing, and we are always rushing to learn what is the latest thing ahead of faculty members, so we can educate them on how to meaningfully incorporate the technologies. So, nowadays the biggest game-changer is the artificial intelligence, AI, especially the generative AI. So again, coming back to this handbook, we have two chapters focused on this AI, the use of AI.

So, one is "The Use of AI in Teaching and Learning." Another one is "The Use of AI in Course Design." So, I think those are very valuable chapters for instructional designers and faculty members, just to talk about how AI can be used ethically and meaningfully, and we can use AI to help us reduce a lot of routine tasks, but at the same time, designers, we are still needed. We are still very important, essential to the whole process so that we can align the AI tools, the technology with the right pedagogy, with the ethical practices.

Kelvin: What about you, Safary? Anything to add on the evolving role and field?

Safary: Yeah, I agree with Baiyun, what she just shared with us, and especially with the arrival of AI on the field, it's really going to transform how we do things as instructional designers. I don't know the full potential of that. We have, I believe, one chapter on artificial intelligence as well, but there's just so much potential that AI is bringing that we make our work more efficient, and more effective, more precise in designing instruction.

One thing that I see evolving is the crystallization of instructional design. I think that's how I want to call it. Before, an instructional designer was... Actually, not even just before, even right now, some universities that are not yet strong with the online education, for example, you'll find that the

person they want to run the online education is somebody who has an IT degree, has nothing to do with the instructional design, and yet as important as the IT is, we definitely need a strong instructional design team.

And so, I see that as more and more people replace online education, they will discover that, hey, instructional designers are just experts with instructional design. We need to match them, pair them with IT, and they need a leader, an instructional design leader, and we need an online leader if it is an online department. And so, we'll see these roles crystallizing rather than what we had maybe 10, 15 years ago in some universities where if you were an instructional designer, you had to be the webmaster, you had to be the IT provider, and all these other roles.

And that will also influence the research in instructional design, I believe, in a way, because when we do research in instructional design, it'll be much more geared into instructional design and the instructional designers rather than dealing with things that are around it because we'll find, again, research that was in the early 15, 20 years ago was more of, "Okay, what do instructional designers do?" There was a lot of articles and chapters or books written with that title, and you'd always see so many things happening. But at this point as we evolve, I think we will see instructional designers do exactly what is expected of instructional designers.

Kelvin:

Thank you. Having worked so extensively across so many sub-topics around instructional design, I'm sure you have insights on this topic. I wonder if I can put you on the spot and ask each of you to identify, say one really practical insight about instructional design that you think is not widely enough understood across higher education. I mean, you've touched on this a little bit perhaps in your elaboration around the evolving nature of the role, but maybe just one practical thing, if you could help people understand one thing about instructional design or instructional designers, what would it be? Maybe Baiyun, we'll start with you and then go back to Safary again.

Baiyun:

Sounds good. I think one of the most difficult topics in instructional design, I would say maybe it's the copyright and fair use because when we did faculty training, faculty development, this area, faculty members always, they have a lot of questions. So, we have to invite a lawyer who has expertise in this aspect to answer questions for our faculty and participants.

That's why, and I read... I think we have a chapter in this handbook, Chapter 15, it's on this particular topic, "Copyright, Intellectual Property, and Fair Use..." I think this is probably one of the most insightful and chapters that I have read in this handbook, because the authors, they try to

explain the copyright law in very simple languages that instructional designers and instructors can understand, and they also try to clarify the fair use best practices, and provide actionable advice on how to source, license, and attribute materials.

And one of the most important things is that in this particular chapter, the authors also included the AI-generated content and also the relevant emerging illegal gray areas related with the AI-generated content. So, I think they definitely recommend educators to model the ethical content use. So, of all the different chapters, I think this is definitely a very practical and relevant chapter and really relevant in the age of the AI enhanced course design time.

Kelvin: Thanks, Baiyun. Safary, one practical insight about instructional design?

Safary: I would speak from universities that are new to instructional design because I know what Baiyun has just shared is from the perspective of a well-established university like UCF where she is. I've worked with a few universities that were starting with online education, and what I have come to realize is the training of the faculty in some basic concepts, guidelines, and standards, the best practices of designing instruction, because if the faculty do not have that understanding, you'll find the instructional designers doing a lot more work than they should be doing because they are trying to implement things that the faculty do not understand. But if the faculty understand some of these basic things that, hey, we need structure, and everything needs to be connected to the previous module, needs connected to each other, and all the assessments have to be connected to the learning objectives. If they understand that clearly, then it is easier for them to prepare the content and be guided in getting everything ready. The help of the instructional designers will be a lot more effective and efficient if the faculty have some fundamental understanding of instructional design.

Kelvin: Those are two good important topics and I'm glad you brought them up. We are getting close on time, but I would be remiss if I didn't invite you to give a little bit of a commercial for the *SAGE Handbook of Higher Education Instructional Design*. So, I'm going to put you on the spot and on the clock. Why should our audience of online faculty, instructional designers, and administrative leaders reach out to their institutional library, right now as soon as they're done with this podcast to request that this new handbook be added to their collection? Why should our listeners do that? Why should they stop right now and go submit that request? Safary, what would you say, and then Baiyun, what would you say?

Safary: I would say, I have read, I've seen and read a lot of books on instructional design written by very well-known experts, but there's none out there that

is as comprehensive as this one. There's none out there that has as much global perspective as this one having almost all the continents represented, so it's not just the perspective of one continent or one country, with a lot of our main leaders in the field. I mean, when you go to the table of contents, you see names that are very familiar. And so, we have some of the best of the world, not just one country, some of the best of the world who contributed to this handbook.

It is very comprehensive from the instructional designers, to instructional design leaders, to faculty, to tech support, to the library support. I mean, research for instructional design, the assessment, and the quality assurance, and the history of instructional design and how to do analytics to support design is really, I can call it so far, the 360-degree look at instructional design. So, everybody should definitely get a copy of that in their library, and those who can afford it, actually get a personal copy. If you're an instructional designer, or you deal with instructional designers on a regular basis, you should definitely consider getting a copy for yourself.

Kelvin: That was a pretty good commercial. Baiyun, can you top that? What would you say?

Baiyun: [Chuckles] So, I definitely agree that this is a really comprehensive handbook, and then I want to talk a little bit about the content of this handbook. So, I think the content of this handbook definitely serve both for introductory instructional designers and also for the more experienced professionals as well. So, even for students who are just in the field trying to learn about instructional designers, instructors who are trying to learn about effective teaching course design, I think the early chapters and sections, they offer great foundational knowledge about the definitions, what is instructional design, also practical steps, the real-world examples. So, I think this is great for the introduction.

But at the same time, the later sections and later chapters, it offers a lot of knowledge about leadership in instructional design, the program design, and the program level design integration of advanced technologies like AI, and even strategic research framework. So, I think this is definitely very comprehensive, and whether you are a newcomer in this field or experienced professional, I think this textbook, this handbook can grow with you.

Kelvin: Well, that is a robust commercial indeed. I so appreciate both of you being willing to come on the podcast today and talk about this important new work. On behalf of Tom, who will join us in the wraparound and myself, thank you for your contributions to the field, and thanks for being on TOPcast today.

(Musical Transition)

- Tom: So, Kelvin, that was your interview with Safary and Baiyun. That was really interesting. Yeah, it's always great to hear them.
- Kelvin: Yeah, agreed. I was curious though, Tom, for some zoomed out color commentary we might call it based on the interview, here's an edgy question that I can't wait to hear what you might say. And don't throw, listening audience, don't throw things at your speakers, and especially don't throw your smartphone. But here's my question for you, Tom. Do we still need instructional designers in a field of instructional design?
- Tom: That is a spicy question, Dr. Thompson. It's actually funny that it is... Obviously that's an intentionally provocative sort of way of framing it, but I've thought about this, and I think the short answer is, "Yes, of course."
- Kelvin: Good, good. Everybody's like, "I can breathe now."
- Tom: Yes. However, having said that, I think like a lot of professions, AI is changing, in many ways, sort of the nature of the work, and I think going forward, will continue to evolve it. So, we've been doing some efforts here on how can we use AI to enhance the ID's role, make them more efficient, be able to support more faculty. And there's kind of two schools of thought. One is this sort of dystopian fear of, "All right, the AI is going to just take it over and we're not going to need IDs anymore." I think that's extreme. But the other is it becomes this complement to the ID's arsenal of tools that they can use, either to help offload some of the work that they do that the AI can do at scale, or it becomes a behind the scenes support for the ID.
- So, I've actually seen some tools from some commercial vendors that do this sort of thing where the instructional designer is still the face, and they consult with a faculty member, like, "All right, so what are your objectives? What's your teaching style?" And they take some notes and then they go back and they put that into the program, and the program spits out, "Well, you may want to consider problem-based learning strategy given this," or, "You may want to do a case study." And then the ID goes, "Well, that's not a bad idea. This one works but that one doesn't," and then they go back to the faculty member more informed. That's a much more nuanced, I think, use of the tool.
- Kelvin: Yeah, I think that's well said. I think I'll add two things just by extension. One, I'm reminded of Dr. Chris Dede and his comment about intelligence augmentation in the partnership between artificial intelligence and humans and his metaphorical analogy of the partnership from Star Trek: The Next Generation between Captain Picard and Commander Data, right? You

bring Picard's wisdom, judgment, and experience, and Data's calculative speed, intensity, and prediction, and so forth, and together they're a good partnership. That's one thing.

Second thing, I walked into this recording having just left an event organized and led by our faculty subcommittee on teaching and learning with artificial intelligence here just a few yards away from my office. We called it a "Prompt-a-thon." It was really this target audience was faculty who hadn't done a whole lot with artificial intelligence, weren't super comfortable, or maybe even have resisted and have done nothing, and it was a safe supportive space thing. And our emcee of the event, faculty member, Dale McIntosh, did a bit that I've called AI stand-up. He introduced the subcommittee members, and he said, "Well, this is this person and their role, and you might think AI could replace them, but AI might be able to do this, but it couldn't do that." And he went through. It was humorous. He said that routine was AI-assisted itself.

Tom: [Chuckles]

Kelvin: But I appreciated AI can do this thing, but it can't do that thing. And so, while this person might be an expert in pedagogy, and AI might be able to give you some ideas, they're not going to be reading the facial expressions around the table as we do these tabletop exercises. And I just thought to your point, the partnership is the way forward, and we need to lean into the uniquely human, and let the AI be AI and the human judgment is going to keep us going I think in instructional design, as in so many other fields,

Tom: Yeah, agreed. It's a reality, and so we're going to have to learn how to best use it as a tool. And I think just being threatened by it is probably going to be a non-productive sort of response to its arrival. And I look forward to checking out the *SAGE Handbook* and just seeing how a lot of experts grapple with all of the latest trends in instructional design. I imagine at 800 or so pages, it's pretty comprehensive. [Chuckles]

Kelvin: It would be hard not to be with 800 pages and 50 chapters.

Tom: Yeah, and knowing three of the four editors well, these folks are great, and they know what they're doing.

Kelvin: Yes, that's right. And just skimming through, we'll put a link to the publisher's website for the book, which you can skim all of the contributing authors. As I think Safari said in our conversation, you'll recognize names. [Chuckles] If you're in instructional design in higher education, you're going to recognize some names.

Tom: Yeah, absolutely. All right, Kelvin, I assume your mug is winding down, and do you want to try and put a bow on it?

Kelvin: Yes, because AI has not mastered bow tying.

Tom: [Chuckles] Not yet.

(Musical Outro)

Kelvin: Yet. That's right. By way of wrap-up, perhaps I will put out there that instructional design remains an important sub-field of digital learning and will add a key capacity for higher education institutions. In many ways, the instructional designer serves as the central hub for ensuring quality online and digital learning. How about that?

Tom: Amen. It's true. I agree with all that. Awesome. Well, as we wind down, Kelvin, until next time, for TOPcast, I'm Tom.

Kelvin: I'm Kelvin.

Tom: See ya.