In the Classroom 117
Bullet Journaling for Educators

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Stan Skrabut: Well, thanks ever so much for taking time to listen to this podcast. It certainly means a lot. You could be doing other things, perhaps you are, but you're still hanging out with me and I really do appreciate it. Throughout my life, I have been looking for ways to become more efficient. I've tried lots of different strategies. Probably in trying all those strategies, I soaked up a lot of time, but I have found some strategies that have stayed with me.

One strategy has been with me since around April 2016 and it's called bullet journaling. I use a bullet journal to track what I'm doing, regardless if it's my work, side hustle, or even my personal life. I want to share this with you. I think it's a tool that can help you become more productive in whatever you're doing, specifically the classroom because that's really what we're talking about.

Since my days in the Air Force, I've always carried a small notebook with me. It was a little Moleskine notebook. I would write notes as they occurred to me. These notes would be from meetings, podcasts, books, random ideas that I wanted to capture. My notebook was a mess. There was no rhyme or reason to it, and that wasn't the only place that I was capturing notes. I was also putting them on Post-it Note. I would have multiple notebooks, any scrap or piece of paper, I would write on until I found bullet journaling. I tripped upon this method and this has helped me stay on track, primarily because I'm taking better notes, and I've used this method ever since.

Bullet journaling is a system that was created by Ryder Carroll. I first heard about it while reading a blog post dealing with Evernote, and it happened to deal with bullets and they were talking about bullet journaling. I decided to take another look and eventually, it got me to write to Carroll's website and what he was talking about in terms of bullet journaling. Bullet journaling is just a strategy, it's a way of taking notes, but it's probably the most thought-out strategy that I've found, and so far it's been tremendously effective for me.

As I said before I learned about bullet journaling, I was taking notes and organizing my calendars, my tasks, it was basically a mess. There was no organization. There was no sense of direction. With this new method of taking notes, I have pages dedicated to collections, such as books that I want to read or applications I want to try. I have a written calendar of upcoming events and a list of tasks that needed to be completed or tasks that I have been completed throughout the month.

The cool thing about bullet journaling is each individual can personalize their method and basically make their notebook their own. Even though I am now using the bullet journaling method, I have made adaptations to the method so it works well with the way I work. One of the, I guess, most important things about bullet journaling is I am

more relaxed because I have offloaded content from my brain to a more reliable memory source.

That's probably the prime thing about it is the fact that when I have an idea, I automatically just jot it down in my bullet journal. Then I don't have to carry it around in my brain and soak up all that energy. Let me talk about how this all works. Bullet journaling is made up of a number of different types of basic elements. There are different elements to this. The first part is the bullets. The bullets will go on different pages that you're using, and bullet journaling uses a method called rapid logging. Rather than taking very detailed notes, you're just creating bullets, short bullets, and you capture your notes as bullets. These bullets can be for tasks, they can be for notes, or for events.

In terms of tasks, these are your things to do, these are the things that you want to get done. Right before the bullet or the signifier as they call it for that particular bullet is a dot. You put a dot there. When you're done with the task, you put an X through the dot. The dot is the center of the X. That means you're done, so either have a dot or you have an X. Now, there's other signifiers for that that you can say that you migrating it to the next time period, or they have a lot of different strategies. Those are strategies I don't necessarily use. I definitely use the dot and I put an X to it.

Another signifier are related to events. Events are noted basically in front of the bullet statement. These events are your experiences. Now, this is not something that I do frequently, but after doing a little more research in support of this podcast episode, I'm rethinking that. I need to do more in terms of those types of bullets than what I'm doing. I primarily focus on tasks and notes, but I don't do a lot of events and I need to rethink that because I really need to do a better job of capturing what's transpiring throughout my day or throughout the major things that are happening.

Then finally, we have notes. I use a lot of notes. These are typically a dash in front of them, a hyphen in front of that bullet. I record notes for meetings, training events, any other learning opportunities. If I'm listening to a podcast or reading a book, and there's something that jumps out at me, I'll make a note. Those are different types of bullets that I have. Bullets, that's the essence of it. Throughout your different pages that you're creating, you can use bullets a lot. Now, one of the areas where I've found bullet journaling really different than other note-taking systems that I had is the index system or the index page.

In your journal, in the actual book that you have, the very first set of pages, you mark as an index. At the top of each other page, you will indicate what that page is. I'll talk about monthly pages so you would put, for example, April, and that's when I'm recording this at the top of the page. On the index page, you would have April and you would indicate the page number.

That is really powerful in trying to find notes, related notes because you can go back and you just keep the index up to date and you can find notes on all kinds of topics. That was one of the pieces that I was missing in previous note-taking systems. The index page lists all your collections, your calendars, your special note pages, daily logs, everything that you've created throughout your journal. The index really allows

you to rapidly find all these different pages so you can continue to add entries or quickly find information later. I use the index all the time.

I will have a meeting page related to our staff meetings, for example, or one-on-one meetings for the folks that work for me. I have those noted in the index page. When we're having another staff meeting, I looked through the index page, where did I leave off? I can flip that to that page. If there's still room, I just continue taking notes on that particular page. If not, I go and start a new page, but I will put the new page number in the index. Absolutely wonderful.

In addition to the index page, you have a future log. A future log lists the various upcoming months along with specific tasks that need to be completed in those months. You basically create a page, divided into thirds, that's what I do. Indicate a month for each of those sections or each of those thirds, so I have basically two pages to capture all 12 months. Then I will have notes of important things that are going to happen in those different months. That just reminds me when that month comes up, then I can go to that.

Another section that I have are my collections. Typically right after my future log, I create a couple collection pages. One page is my book wishlist. When I'm listening to a podcast or I read something on the blog that references a book that catches my eye, I will note it in my bullet journal that that's a book that I want to read and I captured the title of that. It could be, I have another page for applications when I was listening to podcasts, they would mention an application that would grab my attention, I would put it on my application page.

I've also created collections to capture podcasts, blog posts, and video ideas of future episodes or future pages that I want to create or future videos that I want to create, so I capture that information. The nice thing about a collection page is if you didn't set those up right away, no big deal, you come to the first blank page, you indicate that that's going to be a collection page. It's going to be my book wishlist, and then I can start tracking it. The thing that I want to do is make sure I get that noted on the index page. I looked through my index page and said, "Oh, that's a future podcast episode." I click on that, go to that particular page.

The next major section that you would have is a month log. Basically, you're going to indicate the month at the top of the page, and then you will number one through how many days of the month and write next to the number, you'll indicate whether what day of the week it is a Monday, or Tuesday, or Wednesday and you'll make an annotation. I just use the first couple letters of the day and put that in there. That way, I can look through it rapidly and say, "Oh, the 15th, that was a Thursday." I can look at that in my bullet journal.

Next to these days, that's where you put different event entries. It could be birthdays, or special parts, special tasks that need to be accomplished. Maybe it's important for me, I need to know when the start of a term is, when the end of a term is so I can send out some messaging. I annotate those in there and that way, I know what's happening on that particular day. I can look on that page very rapidly and see that. When you're setting up your monthly page, it's always good to go back to your future

logs and see what's happening in the month and make sure that you can get that annotated on that particular monthly page.

Now, you don't set these monthly pages up in advance, you will set those up typically on the first day of the month, or the last day of the previous month, and you will then create a page because you don't know how many notes are going to be in between. You just set things up as they come along. That's one of the things that I like about this note-taking system is I don't have to set up everything way in advance. I can take care of it as it's happening.

Now we come to what I consider the really important pages and these are the daily logs. On the daily log on the very top, you'll enter the month and that'll that's where you're going to keep basically notes for the month. Every page that you set up, that's part of that daily log will have that month at the very top, then this is where you're going to add your different tasks, your ideas, your notes, your research, your contacts, and just all of that. It's part to-do list and just part daily log, and you can use it as you see fit.

Normally, like this episode comes out on the 19th, I would write 04/19 and M for Monday. Then each line would have a separate bullet and it may be a task, a note, or an event. I would write those things down as they happen or maybe I'm planning ahead and I would note that information. You're really trying to add information as it occurs to you. This is a log of your journey. This means it's a record of where you have been as well as where you want to go. You log it as it's happening.

I like the analogy of captain's log. The sea captains, they would keep a log of what was happening through the day when the weather changed. When they changed force, they would specifically indicate when these events happened. You can also think of *Star Trek*, they're always talking, Captain's Log: Stardate da, da, da. They would put that information of things that were transpiring. I really liked that idea and that's why I talked about those events. I'm not capturing events like I should, and perhaps I need to in order to better reflect on what I'm doing and what's happening. I'm going to be working on that.

As I noted, you have signifiers. Before each entry, you indicate the entry type with a symbol. In the front of my bullet journal, I have a list of the symbols that I use, and I use those consistently throughout my bullet journal. If it's a task, when you complete a task, you put an X through the symbol to indicate the task is complete. At the end of the month, you need to carry over tasks, then you'll make the appropriate annotation and ensure the tasks get listed on the monthly page so that you know you're going to continue to work on them. This will help you to stay on track.

Other pages that you may see perhaps a weekly log. This is really tied to goal setting that some people use a weekly log to track tasks they want to accomplish throughout the week. They'll set it up and then for the rest of time, they'll use daily pages to work on those tasks to keep track of where they're going. Another aspect that I like of bullet journaling is the review sessions. You should regularly review your journal to see what you've completed and what still needs to be done on a pretty regular basis.

You can do these reviews every day or once a week. I typically do it once a week and certainly monthly. Then one of my primary times is when my journal is full and I need to move to a new journal. I will go through my journal and see what kind of things weren't finished that I still want to finish and I make a decision. Do I want to finish it or complete that task or is it no longer relevant and I can just line it out? This is a good thing to do is just have these regular review sessions through your journal.

Other pages that you may want to consider a habit tracker. Maybe there's a list of habits that you want to keep tracking. You can create across two pages a grid, where you have the days numbered across the top and the habits you want to track, running down the left side of the page. With this grid, you just mark things off as you've completed it. This is really tied to this idea of don't break the chain that Jerry Seinfeld I think, made popular. He would write a joke a day. It was important that he wrote a joke a day, and he just on a calendar marked off every day, he did this. He just didn't break the chain. You can do that, with a habits page, and just keep track of different things that you want to accomplish.

Couple additional tips that I want to share. As you create a new page, make sure that you add the page number at the bottom of the page and use this page number for your index page so you can find information later. If a topic spreads across many pages that are not connected, you can link the pages by referencing the future page number or for previous page numbers.

For example, say that April and I have entries for April all the way up to page 20. Then I have a couple pages where I've got meeting notes and other things. Then I pick up maybe on page 28 with April again. On the page 20, I can just put a little arrow and say 28. Then on page 28, I can put a back arrow, saying page 20. I could very quickly go from one page to another. On your index page, you're going to indicate, page 20 and 28 also. I think some of this is more visual. If you say you're like, "Oh, I immediately know what the heck I'm talking about here."

I shared a number of articles, feel free to go check those out. In those articles, you will see that there's just countless ways of tracking information. If you want to, you can color code things. You can put stickers next to things. You can save it digitally into tools like Evernote. It's about making this system your own. There's no right or wrong way to do it. There's practices that people think that work better than others but really, it's up to you. You can make this as fancy or simple as you want.

You can use things like stamps, colored pens, pictures, stickers, all kinds of things to just enhance it. You have that. As far as the power, the power of a bullet journal is one, there's no specific way to do it. During the day, I may be adding to a daily page and then flipping back to a meeting notes page and adding new notes or creating a new page for a project and capturing my ideas for a project. The nice thing is, is everything is in that one book.

Another powerful aspect of the bullet journal is that you review the journal and reflect on it. Right now, I have five years of journals sitting on my shelf, and it has been rewarding to review past journals to see what I accomplished and also what I wanted

to do in the future. That there's some things that I've written I want to do, I haven't got to them yet but I have a note indicating that I'm doing those kinds of things.

Marcela Sapone shared an interesting reflection exercise in her article, a practice that successful leaders have kept for over 300 years. I've put that article down in the show notes, go check it out. She advocates for weekly reviews. She uses questions. Basically what lessons did she learn and she makes annotations around those kinds of things. That's the essence of the bullet journaling. What I want to do is also provide you with some suggestions in terms of how to use it in the classroom or how to use it for educators. These are just a few suggestions. Those who have gone before us have collected a number of great ideas for using bullet journals to support educators and using the classroom.

Here are some of those suggestions. First of all, is key dates. I don't know about you, but I'm constantly trying to hunt down a key date sheet for my particular college. What I started doing is I'd get the key date sheet and make those annotations right into my bullet journal either in the future logs or on the monthly pages, the monthly logs of just key information that I need to know. For example, when does the term start? When does it stop? When is finals week? When is new orientation weeks? Those are all things that I have to plan around, and so I put that information right into my bullet journal.

With a bullet journal, you can eliminate this idea of posted notes. Do you have posted notes everywhere? If you're like me, I jot things down on the first scrap of paper I can find, and then I later lose that paper. This is where a bullet journal can help. My bullet journal goes with me everywhere, it is where I collect notes on pretty much everything. When you are having a planning session with yourself, a bullet journal is a great place to collect those ideas. When I'm reading or listening to podcasts, when I come across a great idea, I jot it down into my bullet journal, and I don't forget these things, they're always available. Now, I may not use them right away, but they're available.

Having a brain dump of a new-- You did all this reading, maybe you were on break, you did all these reading, new strategies you want to use in your classroom, and this is just a great place to collect those ideas and be ready to use them when class starts again. Also, with a bullet journal, you can have the best of all worlds. Have you ever been at work and you suddenly think about something that you need to do once you get off of work? What do you do with that information? Well, for me, I put it in my bullet journal, and that way, when I get off work, it's like, "Oh, I still need to do this," and I take care of it.

I've come to realize that my personal life and my work life overlap, that I will think about while I'm sitting at home wonderful ideas I want to implement at work, and then when I'm at work, I think about things that I need to do in my personal life. It's not practical to maintain multiple record systems, note-taking system, so I just have one book and I keep all that information because tasks still need to get done regardless of what role I'm in at that moment in time. I'm not alone, when I think about this, other educators also think that one journal is very useful. Matter of fact, in a survey, 62%

indicated that they use the same journal for both their work and personal life, so I happen to be in the majority for once.

Another way that you can use bullet journaling in supporting you as a professional educator is in terms of tenure and promotion. You can use a bullet journal to track all your professional development, or any key events, or artifacts for tenure and promotion, have separate pages just to log that information, those type of collections so that you can build out your package easier and not forget things. Because we're always doing things that can help our careers but are we good at capturing that in the moment, so it'll make it easy to develop our packages later? Something to think about.

Student notes, there are times where you make observations about a student or you have an interaction with a student and you need to follow up. You can have a dedicated page just for those student interactions, who are you talking to, when did you talk to them, what do you need to follow up on? Keep a log of those type of transactions. Same goes with goals, that we all have goals, things that we're trying to accomplish. A bullet journal is great for keeping track of those long-term and short-term goals as well as track the progress in meeting those particular goals.

Those are some ideas that you can take with you in terms of supporting you as a professional and supporting your class, you can certainly put your lesson plans, the to-do list that you want to work on for that particular day. I know a lot of instructors have a list of things that they need to do, things that they need to get copied, videos that they want to show in their classroom, and just having a list, ready to go, a bullet journal, certainly can serve those needs.

I have found a bullet journal is a very flexible and forgiving tool for staying on track. I would have to say it's probably my number one productivity hack because I can find notes really quickly on different subjects, and it just keeps track. It's like my physical brain that I can keep track of things and offload them from my memory, which is distracting me from other things that I need to do, so rather than worry about it, I just have it there.

When I'm working on things, working on projects, I have my bullet journals sitting right next to me, and when something comes up, I jot it in the journal, and move on, and continue working on my project. Because when you're in the flow, sometimes, you just have those thoughts that pop up and it's like, "I got to capture this," and so having that log will help you do that. It's also a way to track your journey, and as I noted, there's one area that I'm deficient and I need to do a better job, and so I'm going to start doing a better job of tracking my events and keeping my captain's log.

That is it on bullet journaling. I've linked to Ryder Carroll's book down below, it's an affiliate link, understand that I'm promoting his book through Amazon. If you buy through my link, I'll make a couple pennies, but it won't cost you any more than it would normally cost you. It's just a way of promoting his book, and I tried to promote things that I like. Speaking of books, here's also a plug for my book.