

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

"Ayers All Access" Podcast

*Ayers Institute for Learning & Innovation
Lipscomb University College of Education*

Episode 4 – February 28, 2022

Title: *Finding 30 Extra Minutes in Every School Day*

File Length: 00:31:12

SPEAKERS:

Dr. Karen Marklein Director of Programs, Ayers Institute for Learning & Innovation
Assistant Professor, Lipscomb College of Education

Dr. Ronda Blevins Assistant Professor of Education
Carson-Newman University

FULL TRANSCRIPT:

Karen Marklein: Hello! Welcome to the Ayers All Access podcast brought to you by the Ayers Institute for Learning & Innovation. This podcast is a chance for us to help you access compelling people. Current topics. Practical tips and innovative solutions all related to the field of education. To find out more about this podcast and all the work of the Ayers Institute. Check out our web site at AyersInstitute.org. You can also find us on Twitter and Facebook at [@AyersInstitute](https://twitter.com/AyersInstitute).

I'm Dr. Karen Marklein, Director of Programs at the Ayers Institute for Learning & Innovation. Thank you for joining us this week for an "Always Learning" episode focused on using technology to make us more efficient and effective educators. There was a great session at our recent technology conference IGNITE!, and when I saw the title "*Finding 30 Extra Minutes in Every School Day*," I couldn't help but think, who wouldn't need this information?

So, I've asked Dr. Ronda Blevins to join us today and share her thoughts about how we can be more effective and efficient. Rhonda, thank you for joining us today.

Ronda Blevins: Thanks for having me.

Karen Marklein: Yeah, so we're really excited to hear about all the things that you're going to help us with today. But before we get started, tell us a little bit about yourself and your work.

Ronda Blevins: Okay. My name is Rhonda Blevins. I am an assistant professor of education and the coordinator of the Job Embedded Practitioner Program at Carson-Newman University. I have worked in education in multiple facets. I was a community college adjunct. I worked as an instructional technologist. I worked as a public school teacher. All of those teaching criminal justice. I've been a graduate advisor and then now an assistant professor in education.

So, I've kind of straddled multiple worlds, I guess, as I went through and I was currently am kind of the person responsible for our educational technology courses. (I actually just finished the textbook.) And then, teaching all our job embedded courses, of course.

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Karen Marklein: Wow. Yes, you've got quite a perspective to bring today from all different points of view about education. So, I'm excited to hear more.

So, as I said, this was an Ignite session, and we were really excited when you when you submitted that as your proposal. So how did this session come about? Like, how did these tools become, you know, obvious to you?

Ronda Blevins: Well, part of it was just simply when I was in a K-12 classroom and I was trying to figure out, I thought in a very unique situation. I was in a magnet school, and we were actually— I had to create the part the state's first dual credit, dual enrollment combined criminal justice program. So, trying to do that and take all the college standards and all the high school standards meant I had to figure out really quickly where I can save some time. Otherwise, I was going to spend 24 hours a day at school. And it happened to be at the same time. I was writing a dissertation so I could not spend 24 hours a day at school.

Karen Marklein: You probably couldn't spend 24 extra minutes at school.

Ronda Blevins: I couldn't! And I have kids and, you know, we were going back and forth. My husband was deployed. It was just kind of a crazy time. So that's where most of these tools kind of came from. It where this push kind of lit a fire in me, I guess. We have so many things to do as teachers all day, every day. Whether we're teaching preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school, undergrads— it doesn't matter. We're all so covered up.

So, this push to figure out how can I see myself some time? And then once I figured that out, how can I say my friends some time? Cause I don't know anybody that doesn't want like an extra 30 minutes in their day. I'd like to know somebody that doesn't need extra time?

Karen Marklein: Yes! Maybe we should find them and see what they're doing with themselves? So, you know, like I said, as soon as I read the title, I thought, "Yes, everybody needs this," you know? And what you what you say about— it doesn't matter what level you're at, it's just you're constantly pulled in so many directions and you have so many goals for the day in so many things that you want to accomplish for the day. And you know, these tools hopefully will help teachers get there.

Ronda Blevins: Right! And as I've watched— And I've watched, you know, I mean, I started in education in 2012, so we're on 10 years now. And like I said, multiple, varied, different settings. But I've watched and I've seen these demands that are made of teachers that are made of educators that are made of professors that are made of administrators. I mean, the demands keep going up. And nobody's added an hour! Like, we're not on a twenty-seven-hour day now.

So, when I started talking to— I mean, I work with job embedded and that is the number one thing that they would tell me was: "I'm just dying. I don't have time. I don't have time." And that got me back to thinking about when I kind of created some of these things. And I'm thinking, maybe this is something that people need to hear.

Karen Marklein: Right? I would totally agree that that people need to hear it. So, let's let them hear it. So, tell us how we can get 30 minutes in every day.

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Ronda Blevins: All right. So, my first thing that I love— I just call it automation. And it really kind of goes back to just, you have to take a second think about what are the things that we do on a daily basis that we complete that we ask our students to complete, that we are doing the same way we've always done them. Which is fine. It's not that it's bad, but is there a more efficient way to do it? What are the things that we really don't have to weigh in on every single time? So where really kind of dug down into automation was: What are the processes and procedures, you know, the things that that we're just doing all the time.

And it's funny. I started this particular process when I was teaching high school. And I realized that I was doing things the same way that the teachers had always done them, which worked. But things have changed since I was in kindergarten and we needed to do a lunch count. I didn't have to have everybody raise their hands and then try to figure out... I mean, when I was in kindergarten, maybe this was just my kindergarten class, but if the options were grilled cheese, hamburger or pizza, they would ask about grilled cheese. And you might have 20 kids in the class and 15 kids would raise their hand for grilled cheese. And then they say, OK, who wants a pizza? And then 17 kids raised their hands. And you know, I can distinctly remember my kindergarten teacher going "Ya'll. You can only have one. Pick one."

And I realized that was kind of what that meant in my high school classroom with some of the things. And I was— I don't want to say wasting time but— that I just wasn't using time efficiently.

So, the very first thing I automated was my bathroom pass system? We have an option of two things, either we could use our hand sanitizer bottle and hand that to the kid when they needed to go to the bathroom and that worked as our hall pass. Which I thought was gross, just to be totally honest.

Karen Marklein: Thank you. That's what I was thinking about, I didn't want to just say it out loud.

Ronda Blevins: No, I just. And we do that with all sorts of hall passes. But it's kind of like when you have to go to the gas station, they give you the gas station bathroom key. And you're like, I don't, I don't want to touch that. What's that?

But the other option was I had to write a handwritten note— every time— to show that I knew where they were. The other thing I realized was I taught high school and I had some serial bathroom users. That every day had to go to the bathroom. At the same time. Twice in the class period. So— and which affects their level of ratings.

So, I decided, okay, how can I do this and let it be something that they take ownership of, but I can also track it. Because that's what I really got thinking about was, okay, neither one of these things are showing me how many times Student A is going to the bathroom. And Student A's not doing well in my class and Student A's parents are upset. But Student A is spending 20 minutes a day in the bathroom. So, I figured that I needed to start kind of looking at that. Is see if— Where can I track something?

So, the very first thing I did was I created a QR code and this was back before we could do fancy like fun ones using the logos. This was just like legitimate free QR code generator. Kind a deal. And I setup a Google form because I was in a Google district. All of them had cell phones. And if they didn't have their phone or if they weren't allowed to take their phone out, I was at a school that was one to one, so they could all scan it on their laptop. So, if they needed to go to the bathroom, they would scan it. It took

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

them to the Google form. They would put their name, it timestamped it. Then they had another QR code that they scanned when they came back.

So, it stopped me having to stop teaching to write note to let somebody go to the bathroom. Which, you know, I say all the time, I'm a multitasker. I argue with my husband that I can multitask. But unfortunately, I cannot teach and write a note at the same time. I can do lots of things at the same time. Those two, I can't. I start writing what I'm saying. So, every time I was having to stop and write a note, I would have stopped teaching. So, this kind of stopped that. It also gave me, kind of, a log to go back and be— not using it as punishment, but like I had a couple of kids that all of a sudden there was lots of bathroom usage happening. It's when I would go back and, you know, because that Google form put it directly into a spreadsheet. So, I had all the timestamps. And when I started noticing, I just said, "Hey, are you OK?" So, I just don't feel good. And I'm like, "Have you talked to anybody about it?" You know, because they're high school kids and they don't really like to say, 'hey, I don't feel good. Especially not something to do with that. So, that helps a lot. That was one of my processes that I automated.

Another one that I automated was my bell ringer that I did every day. Right, we in higher ed, we teach our students about bell ringers, we do something to get the class started, get them involved, you know, some kind of hook. Something to engage them and to give yourself some data. And what I realized, was: I was doing that by hand. And any time I needed to use data. I needed to be able to sort it, so I was taking the bell ringers by hand and then putting them into the computer so that I could sort them. And which in my mind seems like a large waste of time. I felt like I was double dipping.

So, I actually put my bell ringers online. You know, that was that was an automated system, an automated process. Again, I would put my— So a lot of people would call them "morning meeting" because I taught high school, I feel that it was an 'all day meeting,' so that entire slide, that first slide of the of the slideshow of the presentation that we would use, it would always have what the bell ringer was. And sometimes it was a QR code that they could scan and get to. Sometimes it would tell them where to go when the LMS (learning management system) to do it. Kind of depended on what I was using.

Because I was teaching criminal justice. I got to use some fun. All right. Watch this 5 minutes of an autopsy and tell me what they're doing? When we did that a couple times, so they weren't all put in the learning management system, but things like that that I could just do. And I figured that also worked for my attendance.

Karen Marklein: So it sounds like, you know, this kind of a of a procedure like you start first with reflecting on your own efficiency, right? Like how efficiently am I really doing this? And if I'm spending time doing this and I can't be spending time focusing on my students, right? So, you figure out what you can do ahead of time, that makes perfect sense. So what about— what's the what's the next category of time savers?

Ronda Blevins: So, my next category of time saver is the things that you can create to help both you and your students. And this— it was actually my forensic science class that started this because they all would ask the same questions. But they didn't all ask the same questions at the same time. And I went to one of my colleagues that taught math and he goes, "Yeah, they're always— they asked the same question. And I'm answering the same question over and over and over." And I said, "But why are we not just making a video of the concept. Not a long one? Not a lesson.

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

But, you know, if you're seeking a concept that you know can be kind of difficult, especially in the past couple of years when we've had kids in and out due to sickness or quarantine or whatever else, was happening. With Higher Ed, they're in and out a lot for athletics. They've got these events they have to go to. That kind of thing. And so, pre-doing just like a short five-minute pre-recording, just you and your face so that they can see you. (I'm a big fan of having your face.)

Karen Marklein: Yes.

Ronda Blevins: I feel like that helps our students. But either sharing the screen on the recording, using a digital whiteboard or anything like that where you can actually show them how to work that math problem or where you can explain that concept again. It takes a little bit of time on the front end. But man, then you're not— I just created a YouTube playlist that with private, and so I would share that link with my kids.

Karen Marklein: You know, this sounds like an excellent support, like they can stop, they can rewind. They can listen to it again. You know, I'm thinking about targeted supports, you know, with our own candidates in our programs, you know within edTPA we have to have those targeted supports. That would be so perfect. You know, just to say, here's a support for you.

Ronda Blevins: And it really helps those kids that I didn't expect it to be as big a deal for, but it was the kids that don't want to ask the question. Because they don't necessarily have to. But it also helped with some of the absentee. "I don't understand. I'll never understand. I've missed." Okay. Well, here are some videos. Watch this and then come back to me and let me know what you're still confused about.

Karen Marklein: Right.

Ronda Blevins: And we did a lot of that. And with that, once I started that, then my next thing was, "Well, hey, if I give assignments— I give them assignments. I explain the assignment. I look at the students and I say, Hey, anybody got a question?" And you get that deer in the headlights kind of thing looking back at and they're like, "No, I understand." And then no less than 30 minutes later there's an email. "Wait, what'd you say for us to do?" So that if this works for concepts, then I'm going to do this with assignments, too.

I still explain the assignment in class. But then I give them just the audio and, you know, it was in our LMS. You can put an audio file on the assignment page. So, they have it written. They have it where they can listen to it. They'll go back and listen to that. And it's my voice which they're used to hearing there, you know? It's not that automated voice. So that has helped tremendously with answering some of those same questions.

Karen Marklein: OK.

Ronda Blevins: And my third piece was I started putting all of my rubrics into my LMS on my assignments. All three of those take a little bit of time at the front end. But then they have it. Once there in there, they're in there. You don't have to change it.

Karen Marklein: Right.

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Ronda Blevins: You know, some things I learned, like list— as you're doing the audio explaining the assignment, don't put the date in it.

Karen Marklein: Yes. Make it as general as possible. Then it's evergreen.

Ronda Blevins: Right. But things like that that just really kind of. And then it was getting my students to understand, Hey, when you have a question, go check and see if this answers your question.

Karen Marklein: Okay. So, it sounds like, there's some there's some time on the front end, but you get a return on that investment because then you're not constantly doing the same thing.

Ronda Blevins: Right? And the time on the front end was when I was trying to build the class anyway.

Karen Marklein: True.

Ronda Blevins: It wasn't when I was in the middle of, you know, it's homecoming week and we have 14 club meetings this week and we have, you know, two pep rallies. It wasn't in the middle of all of that. If I could create these things when I was creating my lesson.

Karen Marklein: All right. So definitely the category of creating something before and having it live there as a support is a really important category for you. What about the third category?

Ronda Blevins: All right. So, my third one is to use technology for communication. And I know a lot of us do that, but to actually think about how we're using technology for communication. You know, I have now a freshman in college and an eighth grader. And I can remember when my oldest, when my daughter, was in elementary school and we got all the notes home. Right? And I can remember. It was super intelligent because elementary school teachers do that thing where they take the note and they make it into a bracelet and stick it on their arm. And I thought, "Oh, wow. That's awesome," because it's getting home with my kindergartener. When it gets past elementary school, for some reason, those notes don't make it home as often. And then by high school, they don't ever make it home.

So, can we? And for me, it became a great thing to just shoot an email blast out. And what I did, I had my— always call them students' adults. I went away from calling them "parents" because we had lots of different types of students. And I didn't ever want to put somebody in that box that they weren't in. So, I'll send a note home. "Hey, if you want to get advice about plans about what we're doing, go here and put it in." Just like enough for any of mailing list. But just to be able to shoot one email out as a reminder "Thursday, we're going to have a test."

I know we've also done that a lot with some social messaging apps. Remind is a great one. Black is a great one. Band is a great one. The ways that we can send things to people's phones without them having our phone numbers. Those are awesome. I use Black a lot, especially during spring semester for— where I teach night classes, you know, sometimes the weather shifts a little bit. In East Tennessee, it changes on the minute sometimes. So, all of night class students are in a group on— I use Slack where I can send the message out that says, "Hey, it just started icing. Everybody stay home. We're not doing that."

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Like that newsletter just to create a newsletter. And I can remember. I don't know, back when I was in college, and Weebly. Everybody was using Weebly for creating class websites. There's others— More is one— just to have a newsletter for your parents to see what's going on.

Also gives us a great way to showcase student work. You know, we're good at showcasing stuff in elementary school. But in high school we don't have quite the parent traffic in the building, so we don't get to showcase as much. So, using a newsletter, a blog, even a blog doing the video blog kind of deal. Just, hey, this is our classroom and this is what we're doing.

And the other thing that I found that really saved time when I was talking about communicating with technology was to set 'rules' in my email. So, I have in my email inbox— You can set these rules the where if something comes from a certain sender, that it goes automatically into this folder. If it has this in the subject line, it automatically goes here. Right? The things that we need to keep. So, for instance, when I send in a graduation application and the registrar sends me, "This is approved," I need to keep that, but I don't really want to have to deal with it. So, if it's from the registrar's office and it has "graduation application approval" as a subject, it automatically goes into a file. I don't ever have to touch it, it goes there. Then if I need it, I can still get to it. I know where it's gone. But just— and that one,

I can be totally honest, because I'm married to a man who triages his email. And I was like, Man, honey, you can save so much time. And just put it— you know, those newsletters that we love and they're so helpful. But I don't need to see my newsletters first thing Monday morning when I opened my email. I don't need to take time to file them, you know, so those automatically in a file, but then I can go in and look at my leisure. I am a list person. So, when I see notifications, I feel like I have to do the thing. Right then I have to clear that notification. So not only did it save me— granted, it's a little bit of time for each one. But it also saved me a little bit of stress. Which then made me more open to being able to do some of these other things and being able to sit and have the conversations with my students.

Karen Marklein: Absolutely. You know, we've been talking a lot about just saving your time. But really, what are you saving your time for? You're saving your time so you can do what you want to do, which is spend more time with your kids.

Ronda Blevins: Right.

Karen Marklein: Like I'm having more academic conversations with my students about content and not just ticky-tacky details of assignments and things like that.

Ronda Blevins: Right. I mean, I can remember— I say, remember when I was teaching high school— but this is teaching college, too. You give an assignment and you go over it in class and the next class, you have to go over it again. I mean, they might spend 10 minutes across three or four different class periods if it's a larger assignment. Explaining the assignment over and over and over. I mean, that's like 30 minutes of class time. It didn't have to be.

I can spend the first ten minutes and spend ten minutes making an audio, and I'm not going lie. Those assignment audios: I'm not talking professional production quality. You know, it's a quick, "Hey, this is what you need to know." Because that's all I'm using it for— is just to get that information out. And it has given my students a level of confidence because they know, okay, I can go do this and I can listen to

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

what she said, and I can look at the rubric and then go to her with questions. And maybe, maybe I can find the answer.

Karen Marklein: So really, you're building their own capacity in answering their own questions too.

Ronda Blevins: Right!

Karen Marklein: As you were talking, I was thinking, too, about the Stephen Covey's quadrants. Like the "urgent but not important" and the "important but not urgent." And you know, very often we focus all of our time on the urgent and don't get us much time to spend on the important and we really need to remember, you know, what is important for my students to know today.

Ronda Blevins: Right. And what is, you know, I tell my students, I'm like, it always starts back with a standard. But then how I need to have time to take that standard and think about the kids I'm teaching right and make that fit. And to use my time typing out for the seventh time was the differences are between the different steps of body decay. I don't want to spend my time just doing all the thing. You know, there's a ton of things when you teach EdTech to cover. I don't want to I don't want a deal down in that one little bitty square and then forget all the other things.

Karen Marklein: Right?

Ronda Blevins: You know, my favorite thing is, "Is this Google-able?"

Karen Marklein: Hmm. Yes, that's a nice filter. "Is this Google-able?" And I guess 'Google-able' is a word? Are we making it a word?

Ronda Blevins: I think we've made it a word.

Karen Marklein: Ok. Thus, it is so.

Ronda Blevins: Maybe that'll be the next word of the year.

Karen Marklein: OK. All right. So, we talked about automation and we talked about doing things beforehand. You know, so that students can have this extra support. And now we've talked about the importance of communication.

I just want to say, you know, this all came about as a session in IGNITE. And, you know, IGNITE is an annual event at the Ayers Institute. It is a free event that everyone can come to. And so, we would encourage you to follow us on our socials for information about all of our coming events, but definitely about IGNITE.

And definitely, Ronda, before we end today, I want you to tell us about the podcast you and your husband produce.

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Ronda Blevins: All right. So, we have a podcast about education. It's called "Perfect Chaos," which came about because he is also in Higher Ed. He teaches emergency medicine in higher education. So we— when I was teaching criminal justice and he was in emergency medicine, our life kind of is chaos.

And I was thinking, you know, really good education happens when we find that perfect chaos. That's really when we see it. Not when the principal walks in and you have 30 kids and they're all sitting quietly at their desks with their heads down. That's not so that's kind of where the idea came from.

We cover pretty much everything we kind of bounce around. We cover things like: Have we Zoomed away snow days? We've talked about whether to do extra certification. Should we go to conferences? What do we gain from conferences? What does that look like? We talked about textbooks or open educational resources. We've talked about how to engage our students with critical thinking. We've talked about soft skills and what does that look like? Things that we've got to teach. We have to teach them. They're not a standard but, man, we are doing our kids a disservice if we're not working on soft skills. And how do we do that? And of course, we started this back in May of 2020. So, there's been a lot of looking at what does this look like pre-pandemic? What did it look like in the middle of the pandemic? What do we think we're headed with it?

Karen Marklein: Well, that's fascinating. So where can I find this podcast?

Ronda Blevins: So, you can— We have a website. It's <https://perfect-chaos.org>. And on that website, we both do a blog on there. You can get the link to the podcast to subscribe to it. It's available on Anchor and Apple and Spreaker. Since we've kind of got it out everywhere now, but that's the easiest way to find it.

Karen Marklein: All right, well, thank you for sharing that. And thank you so much for all the other information you've shared with us today. Especially, thank you for your work in education.

Ronda Blevins: Thanks for having me. This was great.

Karen Marklein: And to all our listeners, be sure to check out the show notes for this episode where you'll find links to helpful resources and anything we've mentioned today. I hope you've been encouraged and inspired to find a few extra minutes in your day. You can find more episodes of Ayers Institute Podcasts at <https://podcast.AyersInstitute.org>, on Apple Podcasts and anywhere podcasts are found.

Do you have a great "Ask Me Anything" question? Let us know using the 'ask a question' form on the Ayers Podcast website or send us an email at AyersInstitute@lipscomb.edu.

If you would like to receive a professional learning certificate for listening to this episode, fill out the online reflection form on the Airs podcast website and enter this 'Secret CE Code': [Code excluded from the transcript. Listen to the podcast audio.] The Ayers All Access podcast is brought to you by the Ayers Institute for Learning & Innovation at Lipscomb University's College of Education. Learn more about our work and how we can partner with you on our web site at <http://www.AyersInstitute.org>.

Until next time, remember educators change the world.