

3QTL: Three Questions about Teaching and Learning

Episode 3 - Can we think differently about time?

Guest: Alan Santinele Martino

Description:

What do Mariah Carey, arts-based student feedback, and the Disability Studies concept of “crip time” have in common? They all played integral roles in Dr. Alan Santinele Martino’s approach to teaching and learning during the most challenging moments of the COVID-19 pandemic. An assistant professor in the Department of Community Health Sciences at the University of Calgary, Dr. Martino is currently researching the intimate lives of LGBTQ2S+ disabled people in Alberta, and he brings this Disability Studies lens to our conversation. While we aimed to survive the pandemic, Dr. Martino points out, we also had a unique opportunity to consider how embracing “crip time” and interdependency might help us, as a community of teachers and learners, navigate difficult moments. Join us as Dr. Martino highlights the vital importance of disability justice, the value of vulnerability, and what it means to feel “Mariah Carey fabulous” in the classroom.

Bio:

Dr. Alan Martino (he/him) is a faculty member in the Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies program in the Department of Community Health Sciences at the University of Calgary. His main research interests are in critical disability studies, gender and sexualities; feminist and critical disability studies theories; qualitative and community-based research (particularly participatory and inclusive research methodologies). Dr. Martino is the former co-lead for the Sociology of Disability Research Cluster at the Canadian Sociological Association, and the current co-lead for the emerging Disability and Intimate Citizenship Research and Advocacy Hub.

References:

Kafer, Alison. 2013. *Feminist Queer Crip*. Bloomington, In: Indiana University Press

McRuer, Robert. 2006. *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. Cultural Front Series. New York: New York University Press.

Sandahl, Carrie. 2003. "Queering the Crip or Crippling the Queer? Intersections of Queer and Crip Identities in Solo Autobiographical Performance." *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly*. 9.1-2 (2003): 25-56.

Other resources:

Alan Santinele Martino's website: <https://www.alanmartino.com/>

Disability & Sexuality Lab: <https://www.disabilitysexualitylab.com/>

Sound clips:

Bell:

<https://splice.com/sounds/samples/dea11fa28711f00197e0bb6b1b8567dfe4065ceee1670dbee7e8e0670686afc/->

Clock:

<https://splice.com/sounds/samples/a95999e79850b18b8adcbb3fb4a49e21937a973b5afb15c4c3414602d0d431d4/->

Mariah Fantasy Stem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ECiMhe4E0pl>

Madonna Holiday Stem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcKLD6oJkoY>

Mariah Acapella: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ghOnE5fFzws>

Mario Kart Traffic Light: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87RMJc--8Sw>

Pencil:

<https://splice.com/sounds/samples/42ce210afbf8807ba76e4e65521a81c928e57c179ee630e10abbe23e8e87a23b/->

Camera Shutter:

<https://splice.com/sounds/samples/4f260ea1483c02cb0d6e46765675e977fc4a49d35eafd42ed23975f3a70b0a55/->

Gimme More Stem: <https://britney-online.net/media-bar/audios/>

Baby One More Time Stem: <https://britney-online.net/media-bar/audios/>

Oops I Did it Again Stem: <https://britney-online.net/media-bar/audios/>

Transcription:

[Theme music in]

ALAN SANTINELE MARTINO: [00:00:11] The notion of crip time is so important because it challenges notions of productivity, notions of doing everything so fast, without even critically thinking about why you're doing it... Disability Studies is about understanding that we're not independent, but we're interdependent: how much we need each other.

DERRITT MASON: [00:00:30] Hello, I'm Derritt Mason. Welcome to "3QTL: Three Questions about Teaching and Learning." This season, we're in conversation with post-secondary faculty from across disciplines, and our three questions focus on how the COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped values and transformed classrooms, challenging faculty and students in extraordinary ways while also sparking innovation. Our guest today is Dr. Alan Santinele Martino. Dr. Martino's research combines theories from the sociology of sexualities and the field of Critical Disability Studies. His current project focuses on the romantic and sexual lives of LGBTQ2S+ disabled people in Alberta. Dr. Martino is also the current co-lead for the emerging Disability and Intimate Citizenship Research and Advocacy Hub. My conversation with Dr. Martino ended up being a lot about time: in particular, how crip time, a concept that comes to us from Disability Studies, might clarify something about how time seemed to unfold during the pandemic and how we might move forward together with our students in our classrooms. He also has some pretty great suggestions for how to check in with and solicit feedback from students. Welcome, Dr. Martino.

ALAN SANTINELE MARTINO: [00:01:57] Thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate this opportunity to talk about teaching. It doesn't happen as often as I'd like, actually.

DERRITT MASON: [00:02:04] Well, thanks so much for being here. Would you mind taking a moment just to introduce yourself to our listeners?

ALAN SANTINELE MARTINO: [00:02:09] Yes, for sure. I'm an assistant professor in the Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies program here at the University of Calgary. My research is really community-based, which in my words means it's really based on needs identified by the community. So, I work with a lot of community partners and people with lived experiences. And my research really focuses on intersections of disability, gender, sexualities. This is kind of a taboo topic. So, I really enjoy, you know, being the one making more space for it.

DERRITT MASON: [00:02:38] That's very cool. And could you say a little bit more about what your classes look like in a typical term? How many classes do you teach? Are they undergraduate or graduate students? How many students are in your class?

ALAN SANTINELE MARTINO: [00:02:47] Yes, for sure. So, I typically teach about three courses per semester. It really ranges in terms of the size, like I have one course right now that is eighteen students and another one that is ninety. So, a lot of adapting my strategies, you know, and the assignments I create. Yeah, those are the typical ones, I'd say. Right now, I'm teaching courses about research methods, aging, disability, and I'm really enjoying it actually.

DERRITT MASON: [00:03:11] Alright, well, let's jump in. So, our first question is, what were the core values that guided your teaching and learning practice before COVID? And how, if at all, did these values shift during the pandemic?

ALAN SANTINELE MARTINO: [00:03:24] I think at least for me, it really reinforced the values that I already had before. So as a disability studies scholar, I'm really, really inspired by the work of folks in the community with lived experience, who talk about disability justice. And disability justice is an approach to activism and learning and scholarship that focuses on multiple principles. But the two that really ring a bell for me, one, I would say is intersectionality. And what I mean by that is the ways in which the multiple social identities that we experience in our everyday lives shape our opportunities, advantages and disadvantages. And I think the pandemic really demonstrated how it affects the general public, you know, in different ways. But even our students: I got to witness the ways that our students were trying to support other community members who are part of marginalized social groups, but also supporting themselves and their own families. So that was an important value that really stood out to me. The second one that I think the pandemic even highlighted more was this notion of interdependence, that we are in this together. I mean, you could not fight a pandemic on your own. I think that was the message that was so clear that it had to be a shared effort, and a shared commitment about caring about each other. And I tried to illustrate some of that to my students in my teaching by talking about this concept, but by also demonstrating through actions in my teaching. So those values were really important. The last one, I'll say that really, really stood out to me was this notion of "crip time". So first of all, this word "crip" is one word that you know has been used in derogatory ways before but has been reclaimed by disability activists and scholars recently, and in a very

empowering way and in a way that tries to challenge normative ways of going about in the world. I love this quote, and I'm totally cheating on here and reading from my script. [DERRITT MASON: That's okay, go ahead]. There is this quote from a colleague of mine, Alison Kafer, and she explains, and I'm quoting: "Rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds." And to me that just summarizes so beautifully what we had to do, you know, during the pandemic, but I think it's something that, you know, it forced us to be flexible with students; it forced us to work at a different pace, at a different timeline. We were reminded all the time that we should be kind to our students; that we should be flexible, we should allow for more time for thinking, for doing, and why can't we bring and take that lesson, even after a pandemic? You know, I think the notion of crip time is so important because it challenges notions of productivity, notions of doing everything so fast, without even critically thinking about why you're doing it. So, I think there's some interesting values that I hope to continue bringing to my teaching, even after the pandemic is kind of over?

DERRITT MASON: [00:06:19] Did you find that there were dimensions of online teaching and learning that lent themselves to a crip time approach? I'm just thinking about how the university operates on day to day. Productivity is a huge part of what we as faculty members do and what students do. As faculty members, productivity is how we're evaluated. Many institutions, including ours, the University of Calgary, operate a merit assessment system, where the quantity of our publications determines our salary increases. And during COVID, I think many of these systems, including ours, were paused, recognizing that many faculty members weren't able to produce in the same way. Just as I think, you know, we as faculty members recognize that we had to pause certain types of teaching and learning, certain assignments with students, simply because everyone was dealing with mental and physical health concerns. So, there were kinds of pauses. But there's a lot about the university that doesn't lend itself to, I'd say, "a crip time approach." But I'm wondering, were there dimensions of teaching online with crip time in mind that you found worked really well in your favor?

ALAN SANTINELE MARTINO: [00:07:23] Absolutely. It allowed for folks who learn in different ways to benefit in some ways. They could rewatch the video as many times as they wanted. They had subtitles in the conversations. The captioning was very important for some students. And just this notion that they could pause, they had time to think. I thought that a lot of students benefited from that, being able to just rewatch, even, and having more time. That's what I really noticed. And it's

interesting, right? On one hand, sometimes we don't see faces when we are teaching online; not everyone turns on their cameras. But in some ways, I still felt very connected to students. Because there are lots of strategies for demonstrating the connection or building that connection, even without the facial connection, and students even show that they can interact and show their contributions in so many other ways. For example, one of the things that we invite all the time in Zoom is how people can participate by raising their hands, they can speak on the mic, they can write their comments in the comment section. So, I mean, isn't it amazing that we're giving people more ways of engaging, participating, rather than simply relying on one way counting for participation? [D.M.: Yeah.] So I'm always telling my students like, all I care about is hearing from you in some way that works for you? Is it the chat box, an email afterwards? You tell me.

DERRITT MASON: [00:08:54] I'm curious: did you find that in your classes or in the discipline of disability studies more broadly, there were opportunities to reflect on what was happening in the pandemic as it was happening, and the toll that COVID was taking on certain bodies versus other bodies on, for example, students with chronic illnesses who might be vulnerable to COVID, or students who might not have access to or be able to use the kinds of technology for online learning? Was there space to reflect on this immediately in your classes as it was happening?

ALAN SANTINELE MARTINO: [00:09:25] Oh, absolutely. Disability Studies, my understanding, it's really about connecting lived experience in our everyday worlds, with those structural issues. And I think students, they were so generous in terms of being quite open about the struggles that they were experiencing. I mean, to hear stories of people losing people in their families or missing someone in their families, feeling isolated. It just highlighted so many of the structural issues we face, but it allowed them to make a totally different connection with theory. Now theory wasn't just something abstract, but it was something that they were really experiencing and could see in their everyday lives and the news. So, it just made Disability Studies even more concrete for people, I think.

DERRITT MASON: [00:10:09] Thank you so much for sharing that. I think that's a good transition into our second question, which is, I'm curious what best supported and what hindered your teaching and learning practice during COVID?

ALAN SANTINELE MARTINO: [00:10:20] I guess I was kind of lucky in the sense that I already had teaching experience, teaching online even before the pandemic. I had had some lessons learned in terms of what kinds of technology I can play with, how

can I keep students engaged, despite not, you know, seeing them all the time in person, building more spaces for more informal engagement. I had some of the lessons learned from that, which was really helpful, I think, but you know, I realized how much I didn't know either. You know, like, especially around concrete ways of getting students to talk, especially when you don't have the visual; sometimes it's kind of hard to gauge, are people understanding the content? Are they feeling it? Are they tired? It was kind of difficult to navigate that, but I really appreciated that there was such an explosion of resources about online teaching. Certainly, everyone is talking about online teaching and thinking about it, creating resources. I really appreciated the training that I received. But you know, most importantly, I think it was the feedback from students. So, one of the things that I really tried to do even more often than I used to was getting feedback from students and checking in. What is working, what is not working, what can we change, you know, and you need to be creative. I would always try to find, like, how can I gather feedback in a way that doesn't sound mechanic[al] and just annoying. Like every class, you're telling us like, "What do you..." but more creative ways in terms of like, okay, today, I'm going to create a Zoom poll that I'm gonna ask, "How are you feeling today? Are you feeling like Mariah Carey fabulous, like Madonna in the 80s level?" Like, what are you feeling? You know, it makes a difference. You see, immediately in some of the faces, I caught that moment of like, shoulders like relaxing. [D.M.: Yeah]. And students were just so incredibly honest in their polls, and we would get a very good sense of the temperature in the room, and just what was working. And, you know, some students even told me, like, I really appreciate that you actually listen, and you do something. And even if you don't follow, for example, what we are asking, you still justify or explain the rationale for why it might not make sense. Just giving students like, first of all, if you're, if you want to ask students for feedback, you need to be willing to actually take it seriously and show that you take it seriously. So, for me, that was very important.

DERRITT MASON: [00:12:40] Yeah, I was listening to another teaching and learning podcast the other day that was about the challenges of teaching and learning during COVID. And I heard one of the hosts describe, or the guest rather describe one of the biggest problems that faced us during the sudden rush to online teaching, as the kind of "absence of presence," where we are completely physically separate from our students. In many cases on Zoom, you know, it's a bunch of blank boxes in front of you, and you don't have that physical presence, or really, that visual presence which creates a kind of connection between instructor and students in a classroom community. And your comments are making me think about all of the different ways in addition to just physical or visual presence that we can be present

for our students, even if it means just showing up with a fun, popular culture reference moment in order to check in and see how students are doing. These aren't things that are limited to online teaching necessarily either, right?

ALAN SANTINELE MARTINO [00:13:35] No, absolutely. And creating spaces where students can contribute, right? I would create spaces where students could drop in a news article that is so interesting that everyone should read. And people actually did it; they would submit articles, and we would read it together and talk about it in class. I want to create more opportunities for students to feel involved and that they're contributing and thinking outside the box. I remember one session a couple of years ago, I asked the students to use any kind of arts-based approach to describe how you're doing, your relationship to this pandemic. And I was so surprised, actually, because I thought they would just write something short. No. I had one student who actually wrote a song about it. I had a student who came up with a sculpture that they created. I think if we motivate students to think outside the box and express themselves in other ways, rather than just writing and writing, it just creates opportunities for other ways of describing how they're doing to make connections with Theory and Practice. They were not simply talking about the sculpture, but what I thought was very empowering and satisfying was that they were making connections with the course content and the sculpture. They were talking about how inequality is exactly like how the sculpture is speaking to. I mean, how amazing is that? [DERRITT MASON: It's very cool]. I thought that was a great example of let's think outside the box and let students have a break from writing once in a while and do something that is more creative, applied in a way.

DERRITT MASON: [00:15:09] I love that: soliciting arts-based feedback. You've mentioned that you solicited feedback from students in a number of different ways. Was there one piece of really transformative feedback that you received from students that still lingers with you today?

ALAN SANTINELE MARTINO: [00:15:21] This might sound silly, but one of the things that always stood out to me was when a student said that I look human [Laughs]. It might sound simple but one of the things that they expanded on their feedback was like, "we really appreciate that, first of all, you're willing to be vulnerable once in a while, and share about how you are doing in the pandemic, because sometimes we have this image that, you know, only students are going through the struggles, but you told us about the day your dog is sick, and you're trying to deal with like masking and all those things." It was just, it is that being human, a human that is an academic, but is someone who's also a community partner, a community researcher,

is a human that actually, genuinely cares and has bad days. I appreciated that I was able to be vulnerable with my students, in a way that also, I think, demonstrated or illustrated the values of disability studies. Disability studies is about understanding that we're not independent, but we're interdependent. How much we need each other. And it's a bi-directional path of care. It's not like I provide care, or I provide teaching. It's much more bi-directional. I'm learning from students too. Some of my students, for example, they are working already in the field. They are working in organizations. Some of them even worked in long term care facilities during the pandemic. They bring such powerful narratives, stories and lessons that I don't have access to, because I'm on campus. So, it's just such a beautiful thing to see how much we learn from each other.

DERRITT MASON: [00:16:55] I love that too. And, you know, there were certainly many moments during the pandemic, where I at least personally felt less than human. [laughs] I imagine that was actually a really nice piece of feedback to get from your students on multiple levels, but especially coming back to this idea of presence, being able to find ways of connecting and seeing each other's humanity was such a big challenge. And I think it's just really wonderful how you found ways of doing that in your classroom for these different techniques.

ALAN SANTINELE MARTINO: [00:17:23] No, absolutely. And it's scary, though, that they follow me on social media too. I do have a Twitter account that I use for, you know, work, but also again, I purposely use even my Twitter, like an academic person, not just to talk about teaching or research. But I also want people to see me as a human being. So, sometimes I will post about Mariah Carey, and her new song and what I like about it, right? And again, I think that speaks to students, I hope, that you're not just content being delivered to us, but you're a human being also, who is trying to navigate lived experiences in the current times that we're experiencing.

DERRITT MASON: [00:18:12] You've already answered this question a number of times. So, if the answer is no, that's totally fine. I'm just curious if you know, in addition to arts-based methods and pop culture references, are there any other methods of soliciting feedback from students that you engage in that our listeners might find helpful?

ALAN SANTINELE MARTINO: [00:18:28] Yeah. Sometimes it's the very basic ones, like even red, green, yellow cards, and it's really about how you are feeling today. Right? Are you in a green zone? So, feeling good! Yellow? Maybe not, so. Red, it's like, really, I'm not doing well today, I might not deliver the best content to you. You

know, something as simple as that sometimes. I've certainly tried more creative ones, like, can you just draw like a comic strip? Just three boxes? Just tell me how you're doing. Or is the content getting your attention? Are you finding it interesting? What stood out to you? Even, for example, just asking people to draw whatever comes to mind about this content or this concept? Or even asking people to take photos. I've done that before. "Just go around your house. Take one single photo; you are only allowed one and tell me about like, how does that say how you're feeling about this course?" I usually try to lean towards the creative side of things rather than the kind of typical quick ones, just because I do see it as a good investment. I don't see it as keeping me from giving content. I see it as a part of that. And again, because of the values that I believe in coming from disability studies, feminist scholarship, you just cannot have one without the other. And that is a part of the learning experience. It is part of that care relations, and the, you know, interdependence piece. I usually go for the more creative ones, but of course, if time is short, I will go for "Just tell me, very quickly, folks, yellow, green, red, tell me how you're doing?"

DERRITT MASON: [00:19:59] Oh, well, I love this. And you've been incredibly generous and sharing so many of your strategies and resources with us today. So, thank you. I feel again, you've already answered this question tenfold. But our final question is, if there was one thing that you are planning to carry forward in your teaching that was new to your teaching practice during COVID? What would that one thing be?

ALAN SANTINELE MARTINO: [00:20:21] Hmm. Yeah, this is really a good question. So, there are two things, I'll totally break the rules. [D.M.: Great, I'll accept. (Laughs). Acceptable.] And just, I think one of the things that I certainly learned that I probably underestimated before, was the check-ins, the importance of checking more often with students, rather than just in the middle of the term or at the end of it. So, checking more often and more creatively, and normalizing check-ins, right? So students expect that and they know that it will be a part of our routine. I think students now in my class, for example, this semester, they kind of expect it, and they respond so quickly. They know like: "Oh, this is how I'm feeling today. It is like a Britney Spears moment, you know, like 90s generation, or 2000s, even better." So, I think, that is something that I will definitely take in with me and continue. The other thing, too, that I think needs to be said is how the pandemic, interestingly enough, really highlighted how some things that people with disabilities have been claiming and asking for, for so long, that were seen as luxury almost, or simply accommodations, now it was the norm. Right? Like, isn't it fascinating that now

we're being told that we should slow things down, we should be kind to our students, understanding, that we should give people, crip time, you know, to do the work. It's just kind of interesting. And I think talking to other scholars in the field, and people with lived experience, that's one of the things that I hear so often, is like, how come all the things that we've been fighting for so long, for this amount of time, became so normalized and expected from everyone? It just goes to show that I think we need to do better homework in terms of thinking about what kinds of changes can we do to our teaching? So, first of all, we're always expecting disability and disabled people in our classes in a way that we can make space, right for more thinking, make space for more reflection, transformative experiences. I mean, of course, it is not miracles. But I do appreciate the moments when a student comes to me and says, "This course changed how I see my life." And we need to have more room to appreciate those moments, but also allow students to get there.

DERRITT MASON: [00:22:42] Yeah, I'm wondering, because I think that practice really is shifting in the classroom. As you mentioned, things that used to be considered special demands for accessibility, or certain specific kinds of accommodation, those were perceived, I think, as being for unique circumstances only. But now, I think, Universal Design for Learning and the idea that classes should be accessible to as many students as possible from the baseline; I think this is becoming more widespread. But in many ways, I think, and I've found in my own experience, the system still hasn't entirely caught up with how practice is shifting in the classroom. Just a quick example: I was trying to integrate some alternative forms of assessment in my classes, and I found myself bumping up against university policies that said, I needed to have a certain percentage of a student's grade made clear by a certain point in the term when I was trying to avoid grades as much as possible and focus on feedback in order to take a gentler and more compassionate approach. So, in terms of university policy, or pushback, have you encountered anything like that given changes that you're making in the classroom?

ALAN SANTINELE MARTINO: [00:23:45] Yeah, absolutely. There are limitations sometimes to how much we can transform or challenge the way things are done, right? I think, for example, there's still more societal understandings of disability. And students with disabilities, for example, there are folks who don't even know much about what an accommodation is or why we need it. So it's interesting. I've done interviews with students with disabilities in a past project, and one of the things that became very transparent was this notion of inconsistency. Sometimes in one university, it would be a totally different access to resources and experience or even in classes, right? Some faculty members are thinking about issues of equity a

little bit more than others or universal design, right? Thinking about how do we design the classroom and the teaching in a way that accommodates more ways of learning? Right? So, I think it's such a variance in terms of classroom, discipline, space and university. And it just leaves students sometimes in that position where they never know what to expect, where they are going to get support or not, and it just creates more work sometimes for students. That's what is always on the back of my mind. It's like how can I, at least in the context of my classroom, try to change the way I do things, to serve as a role model, you know, in a way to try to show that there are other ways. It does not mean that I'm working seventeen hours extra. It's sometimes very simple things, you know, that already do make a difference, a shift, and send a message to students with disabilities that you're welcome here, you're expected here. I think that will be my message.

DERRITT MASON: [00:25:22] Thank you so much. Was there anything else you wanted to talk about or highlight before we wrap up?

ALAN SANTINELE MARTINO: [00:25:28] No, I think we cover quite a bit. Again, thanks for this opportunity to really reflect. I think, because of the way that the pandemic played out, it was so much quick change right at once, and so much happening that I don't think a lot of us even had the time to like, sit, take a breath, and reflect on what just happened. And, you know, I think the question for now... Well, apparently, I did have more to say! [DM: That's great!] I guess the question now is really thinking about: Is there anything that we can keep that we've done during this pandemic that we can adopt and keep going with? Like some of those things that I talked about. Maybe some of the things shouldn't go away as soon as things go back to normal. So, that is my hope.

DERRITT MASON: [00:26:18] Well, thank you so much for joining us today, Alan. I feel like we could sit and chat about this all day. It's been a pleasure listening to your answers and discussing your experience in the classroom and everything. So, thanks so much for being here.

ALAN SANTINELE MARTINO: [00:26:28] No, thanks for having me!

DERRITT MASON: [00:26:32] 3QTL is recorded at the University of Calgary, which is located on the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta. The City of Calgary is also home to the Métis nation of Alberta, Region 3. This episode was produced by Xenia Reloba de la Cruz and edited by Eric Xie, who also composed our music. Our consulting producer is Stacey Copeland. Support for

3QTL is provided by the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning at the University of Calgary and a generous financial gift from the Flanagan Foundation. I'm Derritt Mason, 3QTL's host and executive producer. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you again soon.

[Music out]

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai> and copyedited by Xenia Reloba de la Cruz and Derritt Mason.