

Ben Kahn: Welcome to the UP TechTalk podcast, coming to you from the Academic Multimedia Studio on the University of Portland campus. Produced by Academic Technology Services.

Welcome to another episode of the UP TechTalk podcast. This is Ben Kahn. Today I'm joined by Maria Erb, my co-host.

Maria Erb: Hey Ben.

Ben Kahn: Today we're very happy to have joining us via Skype, Bonni k, who is the Director of Teaching Excellence and Digital Pedagogy at Vanguard University. Bonni, thanks for joining us today.

Bonni: Thanks so much for having me. It's a pleasure to join both of you.

Ben Kahn: I have to say that I'm very happy to have Bonni on the show because she's a fellow podcaster and she hosts an excellent podcast called Teaching in Higher Ed that's just really fabulous and I, right off the bat, recommend that everyone, after you listen here, go immediately and check that out and download all those episodes and subscribe as well.

Maria Erb: Well I have to say that I'm really happy to have Bonni on the show too because I was just at the Lilly Conference in Anaheim and was fortunate enough to attend her session on assessments and it was wonderful. She's a wonderful presenter, so we are thrilled to have you today Bonni.

Bonni: Well thanks again for inviting me. I was laughing as you said download the shows because we're about to have episode 150, so maybe they don't want to download all of them but go to the episodes page and pick a few topics that look good or a few names that you recognize yes.

Ben Kahn: That's a great way to get started and just subscribe. Episode 150 is always a good time to jump in as well and keep up to date. Today we wanted to have you on to kind of follow up. Our listeners heard that you met Maria at the Lilly Conference, and she was intrigued by some of what you were speaking about in terms of assessment and kind of rethinking some of our traditional thoughts around assessment.

Maria Erb: Yes, Bonni I was wondering right off the bat is this a hard sell for you with your faculty? When you're talking about coming up with different types of assessments, I think in our sort of world that I think a lot of faculty are in where they're just really overworked and just stressed, to kind of make a pitch to them about maybe how to switch things up or kind of look at things from a different perspective or offer your students that agency that you were talking about,

might just seem like a lot of extra work to them. How do you come across to faculty with this topic?

Bonni: Well the first topic that we even bump into before we even get into the giving more agency in assessment is just assessment in general, and how measurable assessments should be, and how much should we as educators really just see what emerges in the learning, in a given time, and there's just really this tension that happens. It's actually attention that emerges in my own life too, in my personal life. I think I just like to plan everything out and have it all mapped out, and life doesn't quite work that way. That's the first tension we bump into when we start talking about assessment.

From there, of course, what our presentation was on was about building more agency or building more choice, building more of a opportunity for students to both explore in their learning more and in how they're going to be assessed, but also to bring in their own interests and passions and things that they're curious about. Yes you are right, definitely the first thing that comes up is I already feel so overwhelmed, that seems really hard.

Maria Erb: Yes, and what do you say to them?

Bonni: Well I try first to build the case that it's worth it. That things that can happen in a classroom are absolutely spectacular when you start to introduce things like this. One of the things that my colleague Naomi and I talked about in our presentation, that is really true for us, is you don't have to go full aboard. We talked about a whole spectrum of possibilities and it could start out really small. In fact, speaking of technology, our institution moved to a new learning management system but you could really accomplish this in any learning management system. Everyone I've ever used has pages in it, and then you can have a page that links to another page within your learning management system.

I decided to build a little agency into one of my courses in the form of movie trailers for your class, they're called Course Trailers. Ultimately I only had two Course Trailers that could possibly be viewed. One of them was a spinoff of more of a romantic comedy kind of thing, and the other one was more of an adventure movie kind of thing. What the students would see on a page was I think six different movie posters. Some of it was television too, I tried to have a mix of different ethnicities and a mix of different styles and stuff, so which of these would you most want to watch? Then they would click one of those six choices, which would then direct them unknowingly to the only two choices of the Course Trailers that I had built.

That's called branching, of course when you're building online learning that technically is called branching, and that's a very simplistic type of branching. It was really fun because it brings out a little bit of oh wow, I'm so used to when I go to an online class or to a blended learning type of a class, to things happening

in a very orderly way from start to finish. All of a sudden when you introduce a little bit of branching, some agency in exploration then it really brings people alive.

I had another recent example with some doctoral students where I used to talk about digital identity and because for many of them they'd never blogged before and it brings up a lot of, not just technical questions but personal questions. Who am I? Then who am I online? What does that look like? Instead of me trying to just tackle all of this really overwhelming anxiety for some of them, I came up with a list of eight different people who I thought had exceptionally good digital identities. Again, I went for a mix of different types of genders, I went for a mix of different types of ethnicities, and lots of different disciplines too, and people could go and really explore what really resonated with them of oh wow I would like to have this part of me expressed online in some way.

Ben Kahn: One thing Maria and I were talking about when we were bringing up the idea of how do you sell this idea to faculty, Maria brought up also how do you sell this to students? I was wondering they're just probably not even expecting it, it's not even really on their radar right? What is the reaction of students when they start interacting with the class and they find out oh, I actually have a decision point to make here?

Bonni: It's definitely a surprise to them, and sometimes it's met with delight, and then in other context we have to sort of unlearn that the professor or the teacher is the all knowing one and therefore we should be dependent. That's a dependent relationship as opposed to, I think of it more as an interdependent relationship. Given our access to technology and access to information today, I never could have from the beginning, but I certainly couldn't now, think of myself as the source of all knowledge on any subject. To me I just think well we're walking together. Yes, I've been down this path before, maybe not this exact path because as a class we might discover things together that has never come up before, but I've traveled similar terrain before.

You think of your backpack person who is the guide and going to help you through that process, so I think of myself like that but every journey is going to be different. I delight in that, but it does require some unlearning and sometimes, in fact all the time in my experience, it's harder to unlearn something than it is to learn it from the very beginning. It is not hard, for example, for me to get my three year old and my five year old curious about things because that's just inherent in them, they haven't had an educational experience where they're not encouraged to explore and be curious.

Maria Erb: Maria: Another thing I was wondering about, again from the faculty side, a lot of times we'll hear concern from our faculty about assessing assessments that stray from those tried and true. So if somebody wants to incorporate something a little bit different into their class that's not a multiple choice or sort of not

traditional essay format, they'll struggle with, "How do I evaluate this?" They want to make sure that they're being fair and that they really understand what is good and what isn't.

Do you have any tips for faculty who want to try something different, but how do they navigate that pathway to feeling confident about their ability to assess a new assessment?

Bonni: I absolutely do. One of the things I think is important for us all to remember, and I should be candid, I tend to be the one wants to measure things. You've just brought up a really big struggle for me in this whole process. How do you grade it, it seems really subjective? I don't know if this is gonna be fair and equitable and that's a value of mine.

First of all we can recognize that it doesn't have to be a binary choice. I can have, and I still do, in most of my classes, in fact almost all my classes have some very traditional looking tests that have multiple choice questions on them and have short essay questions and would look your very traditional test from maybe even 20, 30 years ago.

To me, those are the core fundamental ways I can measure against the learning outcomes for a class. But they're also not going to take it far enough, because generally a test doesn't make us curious. The opportunity to take a test doesn't make us want to do a little bit more because we got so interested in a topic that we kind of got lost in it. What is described as this concept of flow by a man whose last name I can never pronounce.

Maria: Oh, Csíkszentmihályi?

Bonni: Oh, very nice. [laughs] And then try and spell it to so good luck with that.

Maria: Oh, I know.

Bonni: That kind of experience of flow is never something that I've ever experienced coming out of a test so I do still use them. I think they're valid measures and they can be, at least the way that I do them, they can be very objective. But they're not gonna get that curiosity so can we blend a little bit more of assessments that, granted might be more subjective, but there also are tools that help us make them a little bit more measurable.

One of the sets of rubrics that I really like has the acronym VALUE, [V](#) [A](#) [L](#) [U](#) [E](#). And also I'm not gonna know what that stands for. I could Google it real quick, but it's fun to admit all things you don't know off the top of your head. So the value rubrics, one of them is around creativity. Because how do you say what's creative?

I had a poster session in my consumer behavior class that I did for the first time last year, and then this time I'm doing a second one. And it is hard for me to measure those. And I will say that the range of quality is very diverse among them, but that students who went and did a little bit more have such incredible stories of what came out of that including these two students who built a Barbie Dreamhouse.

I'm thinking poster session, like science projects, and they instead built a Barbie Dreamhouse with the siding and everything. And it was amazing and one of them has a tremendous internship now. And the other one has ... she's graduated and has an amazing job and this poster session experience and their Barbie Dreamhouse that looked at the history of the brand of Barbie and some of things around body image and ethnicity and those kinds of topics came up in their interview. And they had something different to talk about from their college experience than some of the other students might who are just coming with a degree.

It's really fun. I would say, every time I've done it, it's really worth the adventure of risking that I might not be as objective as I might like.

Ben: Yeah, it sounds to me that it's just applying a universal design in terms of diversifying the different types of assessment that you do to account for that there's all different types of learners.

Bonni: Absolutely, and that is one of those things that came up at the conference too and that definitely see the value in looking at universal design for learning.

Maria: So, I think we want to talk a little bit about digital pedagogy in general. How do you define that for faculty that really are not sure what that means at all. I think there could be such a range of definitions that would go through people's minds when they hear that, right? Does it mean regular class with PowerPoint in it? Does it mean something entirely new? So what's your definition, Bonni?

Bonni: When I was first introduced to the phrase digital pedagogy, it was from people like Audrey Watters and Jesse Stommel. And those are two individuals who come from more of a critical pedagogy type of model. And specifically Audrey Watters has a lot of critiques about the ed-tech industry, or the educational technology industry. That in that industry we can sometimes find companies who say they're about student learning, but there are some ethical implications to their profit motives that might mean they sell student data without even sometimes the students themselves knowing or the people who are teaching and using their services might know. So the idea of being over educational technology has the flavor of too much commercialization.

And I will say that it was quite possible that I was going to have a title at my institution that had something to do with educational technology. But what I like about digital pedagogy is that it centers around teaching versus education,

which is kind of more of the industry, versus pedagogy around the specific both art and science of what each of us are trying to do on a daily basis.

So just this idea that we can have our teaching be at the core and that teaching can be enhanced by technology. And as we all know, sometimes our teaching can be detracted by technology. Sometimes our teaching can become worse, whether or not that's the possible distractions that technology can bring into the class. Or even that we just can't get the darn thing to work with the PowerPoint and if it's tools we're not as familiar with.

Maria: And how do you support faculty at your institution in that exploration of digital pedagogy?

Bonni: The big thing for me is always that we start by talking about teaching and we start by talking about researched based teaching methods, and then we can talk about introducing technology. So one example of this would be all of the research being done around something called retrieval practice. And this would be the whole idea that instead of me, as a professor, pouring knowledge into my students 90 percent of the time and then expecting them to pour that knowledge back out to me for a midterm and then a final.

Instead of doing that I could regularly build into my classes every single session, and sometimes multiple times a session, where students are asked to retrieve. To bring back out that knowledge from their brains. And each time they do that they're building more connections with those neurons in the brains. And so we can strengthen those connections while we're in the class and one of the really powerful parts of the research is that if I get that question wrong while I'm in the class that connection actually becomes stronger.

So encouraging failure, encouraging guessing based on what they think and then having those really open conversations about well, "Oh, it's interesting. 40 percent of you though this. Tell me a little bit about where this came from. It's not the right answer, but let's talk about how maybe part of your wrong answer was actually right." And it brings out a lot of interesting discussion.

And then the last thing I would talk about with faculty is, "Oh wow, here's some great tools that you can use for retrieval practice. Here's an app that's really good with this. Here's an app that's really good with that." And then we can really explore the tools that would best serve the practice of retrieval.

Maria: And do you feel that faculty are pretty receptive when you start, you know like you said, with the researched based methods first?

Bonni: Yeah, I always work to not over simplify things. And so I will talk about, "Here's some studies, here's some of the research. In fact, here's some podcast episodes you can listen to if you want to talk to, listen to the cognitive

psychologist at UCLA who has an entire brain lab there." It's not like I'm the, this is not you know, I don't have a PHD in this stuff.

Maria: You don't have a brain lab there?

Bonni: No, I don't. I really don't. I feel like I need one for my own brain sometimes. But also not to oversimplify it like I've got some secret sauce, that if you could just access it teaching becomes easy. Because my philosophy is teaching is always hard and if it's not hard to you, you're probably not doing it right. So we should be thinking about admitting to our faculty that, "Yeah, when you start engaging in this stuff it's going to be difficult, but wow what a wild ride it is. And how much better we're serving our students when we're willing to take those risks."

Maria: Yeah.

Ben: Well said.

Maria: Very well said. Well Ben, I think we're at 20 some minutes or so. Should we move to the app reviews. I think ...

Ben: Absolutely, yeah.

Maria: I think Bonni's got an interesting one.

Ben: Yeah. So we had talked about the importance of leading with pedagogy and then finding the right tool for the job. But let's flip that for this podcast and we'll just talk about some apps that have been kind of touching our lives in the last couple of weeks. Bonni, would you like to start?

Bonni: I'd be happy to and I actually could lead with pedagogy. One of the things that's really important to me in my teaching is to be in touch with students and my classes meet twice a week and then once that Wednesday ends I might not see them again until Monday. And so I like to have some touch points that happen outside of class. And while I do send announcements which go through email, sometimes our students are not as keen on email.

So I love using an app which is a whole service that's also web-based, website based one called Remind. And Remind is a really easy tool to have all your students sign up and for you to be able to send them text messages. And they could just be plain text, or it could be a picture that you want to send, or even a handout that you want to send to them via their cellphone's text message. Or if they download the app they can get it on the app too. But all of this is possible without them having your personal cellphone number. Because it's all done with ... And in fact you don't have their personal cellphone number through this service either. Everybody signs up so you've got a class and you can send a group message to an entire class, or you could send a message just to a single

person, or a few people in a class and never have to have personal cellphone numbers exchanged in that way.

Maria: Well thank you for telling us about that Bonni.

Ben: Yeah, that's actually been a huge topic of discussion with our faculty here. It's just like, "How can we get in better touch with our students without them having our personal cellphone number?"

Bonni: It's phenomenal and it's used, they say on their website, four out of five K through 12 teachers use it in the United States. Which blows my mind that it could be that many. But it's not quite as popular in higher-ed but it works just as well. I mean, it's phenomenal and it's a wonderful wonderful tool. I'd hope that your institution would give it a try because it's really a great service.

Ben: Yeah, that sounds like a huge winner for us to try out.

Maria: Definitely. Well Ben, what's your app of the week here.

Ben: OK. Well for me, I've been interested in this concept of open annotation on top of the web. I'm currently doing graduate studies and most of my classes don't have a textbook assigned. But usually there's just a bunch of articles to read and things like that. And I've been thinking, how cool would it be if all the students could read the material for the week and then we could look at each other's annotations and notes that we made on top of it in addition to the discussions that we're having in our forums and things like that.

So the first one I tried was Genius, which is like a spin off of Rap Genius. Which was an app that initially was designed to help people kind of analyze and share rap lyrics. So I had some success with that one. But then just earlier this week I found Hypothesis. Which is, again, the same idea, but I find it works a little bit better for me. So you just go, I think it's Hypothesis but it's a dot i-s at the end. So, H-y-p-o-t-h-e-s dot i-s. And you just sign up for a free account and then you can add a Chrome extension that lets you add annotations over any website and then share those. And see any annotations that others have added as well. So I think it's really neat.

Maria: Well, let me just jump in with something that's not education related at all. And I just want to make a plug for the Lyft app. Now, even before Uber started imploding and just being, you know ... I don't need to say anything more about them. But even before any of that started, I would always defer to the Lyft app. And the reason is, first off, the design of their app was so much better than the Uber design and it was easy to use. I didn't have to set up a million different things to make it even ... to be able to even start using it. It was easy from the get go. It worked and all the drivers that showed up were friendly and was wonderful and it really, absolutely, just came to front and center when I was in Anaheim because I'd never been there before.

And here in Portland Bonni, I bike everywhere. I don't own a car. I could bike or walk to everything that I do. But down there in Anaheim, you know what it's like, right?

Bonni: Mm hmm

Maria: And I wasn't prepared for that. So there I was all the sudden, how do I even get two miles down to the Orange Square to go get something to eat. It was just ... it was perplexing. But Lyft saved the day and I was grateful for the service, but also the design. I'm just a big UI/UX person and just appreciating the simplicity. So I always feel, at the end of the day, you use what's easy to use. You use what works. I'm all about that. So, just want to plug them.

Bonni: I just have to say that Lyft saved the day on our date night the other night because our gal that watches the kids, her car had broken down, and she texts a half an hour. And we had this whole date that we'd planned with our friends for, I think it had been over two months. And we were, "No! No, please!" And my husband said, "I just got the Lyft we've never used it before, but it's gonna cost seven dollars to get her here." And that was the best seven dollars we've ever spent so ...

Maria: Well [inaudible 00:16:06] again, Bonni, so much for being our guest today.

Bonni: And thanks for inviting me. I really had a blast talking to you.

Ben: That's going to do it for this episode of UP Tech Talk. The podcast from the University of Portland, where we explore the use of technology in the classroom, one conversation at a time. I'd like to, once again, thank Bonni for taking the time to talk with us today. You can follow her work at teachinginhighered.com. As for UP Tech Talk you can always find our latest episodes, as well as our archive of past episodes featuring dozens of interviews from UP faculty, at our website at sites.up.edu/techtalk.

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