

Transcript

[0:01] (music)

Derek Bruff: [0:09] This is Leading Lines. I'm Derek Bruff. I am very excited to kick off the fall season of Leading Lines with an interview with Randall Bass. I like to say that Randy is the Vice Provost of "awesomeness" at Georgetown University, but his actual title is Vice Provost for Education.

[0:24] Randy has a pretty amazing story. He earned tenure in the English Department at Georgetown on the basis of his Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. He was the founding director of Georgetown's teaching center, The Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship or "CNDLS."

[0:40] He was one of the first educators to explore the digital humanities through the multi-campus Visible Knowledge Project he directed. And more recently, he moved into administration at Georgetown, where he leads the Designing the Futures Initiative and The Red House Incubator for curricular transformation.

[0:58] Beyond his impressive CV, however, Randy is one of the most insightful and creative thinkers I know in higher education. He's helped me understand teaching and learning more deeply and inspired me to think more broadly about the purpose and future of the university. Randy and I had a really fantastic conversation this summer, and I'm honored to share it here on the podcast.

[1:21] (music)

Derek: [1:24] Thanks, Randy, for being on Leading Lines today. I'm looking forward to talking with you. As you know, I've followed your work for quite some time and I'm happy to call you a colleague and a mentor. And when we started this podcast on ostensibly the future of educational technology, there were a few people I had in my mind who, who like to look at

the future a lot that I wanted to have on the podcast, and you're definitely on that list. And so I'm looking forward to picking your brain a little bit about what you've been up to at Georgetown and where you see the future of educational technology.

Randall Bass: [1:58] Great. Thank you so much for having me.

Derek: [2:01] Let me ask, let's look in the past first, though. Can you tell me about a time when you realized you wanted to be an educator?

Randy: [2:09] I think it was in my first year of college and I was taking a nine-credit course called, "The Ascent of Man."

Derek: [2:17] Wow.

Randy: [2:19] That was based, it was three quarters of my first semester load, based entirely on a PBS series that was based on a book by Jacob Bronowski called, *The Ascent of Man*. And it was taught by three professors from chemistry, biology, and history. But it had a total of 14 faculty involved over the course of the whole semester. And it was at that moment that I changed my major from Political Science and Pre-law to English and History. And walked around telling people that when I graduated, I wanted to get a masters in the humanities and make multimedia documentaries for PBS.

Derek: [3:01] (laughs) Well, there you go. That was quite an inspirational experience.

Randy: [3:04] Yes, and so in some ways that really marked a lot of my career, even though I didn't quite get a masters in humanities or make documentaries. That sense of what was possible to think across disciplinary boundaries, to put together multiple media. To think about how people learn in these really rich, kind of multi-sensory, layered environments. It completely changed my whole direction.

Derek: [3:29] Wow, wow. Did you, did you find moments after that in college where you got to kind of lean into some of those spaces?

Randy: [3:38] So not specifically on the multimedia piece, because this was in the eighties, and there wasn't a lot of that distributed around, I mean. But I actually had two really single experiences, I'll say really quickly. One was that, then for seven of the next for the next seven semesters, beginning in February of my first year in college, I served as the student representative on a committee to reform the general education program at my

school.

Derek: [4:09] (laughs)

Randy: [4:10] So in essence, that was like my third major. I mean, I really literally...

Derek: [4:13] Sure

Randy: ...spent the next.

Derek: [4:15] Seven semesters, yeah. That's intense.

Randy: [4:17] And witnessed kind of an arc of excited development and then very depressing roll out into faculty governance. And the destruction of what had been a beautiful design into a very vanilla distribution requirement. So, it was also a very powerful lesson in design and, and reality.

[4:39] And then actually because of that experience, I got very interested in just the history of liberal education. And in my entire junior year, did a year-long independent study with the provost on the history of the liberal arts from the Sophists to John Dewey. And every two weeks he and I met and I basically read my way through about 2500 years of the history and...

Derek: [5:00] Wow.

Randy: ...theory of liberal education.

Derek: [5:01] Wow, I didn't know any of those things about you. And I think that's really fascinating, that young Randy was drawn into and exploring these spaces that are so much a part of your work now. That's really amazing.

[5:14] Well, you went on to be a faculty member, right? And I, I met you because you were really involved in the scholarship of teaching and learning. And so, when I was starting out as an assistant director here at the Center for Teaching. I remember, I think I met you at a conference at some point, and started following your work and your, your essay, "What's the problem?" really helped me think a lot about my own teaching and learning.

[5:37] You were involved in that world and that, I think, led you to be the founding director of

CNDLS, The Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship, Georgetown's teaching center. (laughs)

[5:50] And I'm curious, you're now Vice Provost for Education, right? You're in administration. You have a really interesting portfolio that I want to get to in a minute. But what are some ways that your background in teaching and learning, in the scholarship of teaching and learning and the teaching center world. What are some ways that that background informs your work now as Vice Provost?

Randy: [6:12] So I think it has been huge to have come out of. I think it's kind of a combination or convergence of things to have come out, both of having been grounded in the scholarship of teaching, and learning, and that movement from sort of the mid 90's on.

[6:27] And then the experience of being the founding director of a center for teaching. Even that in itself, is a relatively unusual path to end up as the Vice Provost for Education. Many people come straight out of being faculty members or department chairs or maybe deans and that kind of thing.

[6:45] So I believe that I have brought both to the broad kind of core work of being a Vice Provost, as well as the innovation work, which we'll talk about in a moment, in a different way from having run a center for teaching and learning. In the sense that I think what I understand, about what it takes to make change, has to happen at least three different levels that are all aligned.

[7:12] It has to be a change in pedagogy, but within certain bounds, pedagogical change is completely delimited by the structures in which faculty can think about their pedagogy. And so, you really have to change structures to have, to open up the ceiling on what's possible with pedagogical change. And then ultimately changing structures often then runs into policies, at least institutional practices, but sometimes out now policies.

[7:45] So to me, real institutional transformation depends on this alignment and dynamic interaction between pedagogies and structures and policies. And I think, having come through a center for teaching and learning and having focus so carefully on the scholarship of teaching and learning and the belief of the role that faculty can play in studying learning, I think gives me kind of a multi-layered perspective on what it means to think about institutional change.

Derek: [8:11] Wow. Can you give an example of the structural layer and how that might or might not facilitate change?

Randy: [8:24] So I think that one of the things I came to see at the end of my time leading the Center for Teaching and Learning, as I transitioned into this new role, which in part involved helping to spur campus wide innovation around curricular structures, was that when you're running a center for teaching and learning, I think you're especially focused on changing individuals or motivating individuals, faculty, so that they're motivated to change their teaching and then you give them support to change their teaching. But really most of the change is on them.

[9:01] You're supporting them, you're instigating them, you're creating communities. But really, if their course is going to change, it's the faculty member who has to change it, even if it's in a team setting. The work that I've been doing, that's more of the innovation level, which we'll cycle back to, I've realized that some of what one needs to do, is just to create new structures, to let faculty step into and let in some ways the structures change them.

[9:25] So I think a version of this could be building new classrooms. So, a lot of campuses have done that. You build a new classroom with no central podium, distributed stations, technologies that are, you know, so then faculty are now teaching in that new classroom or that new classroom building. That to me is an example of a space or a physical structure that is already a context that when a faculty member steps into it, they start to change to adapt to that.

[9:25] I think there's an analog to that, at other curricular structures. So, for example, one of the innovations that we have started the last few years, is a novel way for students to move through their core curriculum requirements, their general education requirements. It's called "core pathways." And we basically have built a way for students to study a variety of different disciplines all focused on a single large issue.

[10:18] So we started with climate change, but what we did, was we completely restructured the semester. So we, we, we created seven week 1.5 credit modules that continue throughout the year. Students move from seven-week module to seven-week module. They're not allowed to take the same discipline two modules in a row. So they start with theology, then they move to science, and they can move to history and back to theology. They can stay in the pathway up to two years. And then there's a set of integrative moments in which all the

students and all the sections come together in one large room, four times a semester, to engage in large-scale policy simulations or ethical, moral imagination exercises. Big common final exercise, whatever.

[11:05] That, to me, is an example of a curricular structure that's analogous to the classroom with no central podium, where we then recruited faculty in to say, would you like to be part of this, et cetera? In essence, it lets them, to a large extent, just be themselves, because they're still teaching now, a seven, a two seven week, or 7.5-week theology courses. Let's the theologian be a theologian. But there's buy-in to this larger integrative structure. And it's been really fascinating to watch the faculty community, we're now up to almost 20 faculty, start kind of step-by-step, think about, well, so, "what does it mean that we have these integrative moments?" And increasingly, the faculty have taken as the, as the teaching community have taken control and said, we'd like to do more to change our modules to hook into the integrative moments and make sure that the integrative moments are feeding the next module and making sure that the final is bringing everything together.

[12:10] So in essence, it's a curricular structure that gave them the freedom to think in new ways. So it seems to me that, that is a way to elevate the kind of person by person conversion, or you know, inspiration that you do it at a center for teaching, into another level. But that would have been very difficult to have done as the head of a center for teacher and learning. I mean, you can imagine all the things, took us 18 months, working with the Registrar, changing the calendar, working with the student information system, working with recruitment, working with registration, working with first-year registration, New Student Orientation.

Derek: [12:47] (laughs) Right.

Randy: [12:48] All of that had to be lined up, like that was not a center for teaching and learning thing. That was really where somebody had to be operating with the authority to work across all those boundaries, to convene the advising deans, to convene the registrar, but around what was also an act of kind of creative pedagogical design. So that's a good example of where, to make that kind of change happen, required really being able to operate in both those levels.

Derek: [13:14] And I'm imagining, if Georgetown is anything like Vanderbilt, there might have been a policy level too. I mean, we recently rolled out an undergraduate business minor that

cuts across colleges. It's offered across multiple schools here. And because it, it, it kind of lives in our school of management, they teach on the module schedule. And so this new undergraduate minor involves these 1.5 credit hour courses. And that was, that was a new thing here, right? Like to get that approved, took some policy work too.

Randy: [13:52] Yeah. No, absolutely. I mean, being able to, you know, this is probably policy, but the "small p."

Derek: [13:57] Right.

Randy: [13:58] But yes, being able to say that, that even two halves of two different theology courses could be bundled to count as a theology requirement.

Derek: [14:06] Right.

Randy: [14:07] That's a policy change. What order people take things in, you know, et cetera, et cetera. So yes, some of those things are policy. I think there's other policies that aren't really involved with that, that speak to other innovations that are similarly implied around how you count faculty load, for example, or how money gets moved around between schools around interdisciplinary teaching.

Derek: [14:28] Yeah.

Randy: [14:29] So those are those are getting closer to policies with a capital "P," I think.

Derek: [14:33] Yeah, yeah.

Randy: [14:34] But yes, I think, you know, policies, rules, practices, all of these things are, you know, if you're really going to take institutional change around learning seriously. If you don't have structures that allow for that to be part of the experimentation, then there's going to be a very low ceiling to what can be accomplished simply by asking people to change their teaching. Not that there can't be a lot that's accomplished, based on best-practices, a pedagogy, not really diminishing that. But if we're really looking for higher education evolving to meet new populations, new demands, new kinds of learning, flexibility of time and space. That is not just about applying good practices to pedagogy that has to be working at all three of those levels.

Derek: [15:19] Yeah, yeah. Well, tell me about the Designing the Futures initiative. What are

its goals and how do you go about doing that work?

Randy: [15:27] So it was founded in 2013 in the midst of, you know, sort of MOOC Madness. And, you know, all institutions were going to close. And there was lots of noise in the, in the environment. And there was just a real sense by the leadership that, you know, we didn't know where this was going, but we wanted to be in control of how things were changing. So it was meant to be a kind of visioning exercise, but very emergent, very adaptive.

[15:53] So it was created as an initiative that I lead, in behalf of the provost and president, as part of my portfolio as Vice Provost for Education, that was meant to just encourage and support pilot projects from faculty that would deliberately break some of our own rules of the educational model. And in fact, we came to adopt as kind of our motto, that our number one rule for supporting a project was that it had to break at least one rule. So by break rule, I mean the kinds of things we're talking about, it had to, how we count credits, how we break the sort of one size fits all standard 15-week semester three credit. How, what a minor is, what a major is, the relationship between the nine-month calendar and summer, having count faculty load.

[16:48] Any of those things were sort of fair game. And so we have gone through several different phases, which I can talk about. But it really was trying to create at least what I came to call, "small game changing pilots." So I think what has been effective, when I look back over the last five or six years, and I think we made a lot of progress. Not that we've revolutionized higher education yet, but that I think that we have actually, in just five-years, significantly changed the landscape on campus around what people think is imaginable for building new structures and new degrees.

[17:28] And I think the way that we did it, looking back on what was most successful, was saying, you don't have to revolutionize everything with every pilot. But actually, what you want, is that each one of your experiments is helping to test one building block of what eventually could be a much more flexible, adaptable, powerful, equitable environment. And, and each time you put another building block out there, you give the campus a chance to sort of socialize itself to that idea. And I think that's really important.

[18:03] And what we've seen, is that each couple of years, as we've introduced different building blocks to campus, it's then given us this new tool set to build something new. So in

the first two years, we just had several small one credit bundle-able, small little pilots. But then core pathways, that I was describing, was really built out of that.

[18:27] Now, one of the projects I've been working on this year, is building a whole new immersive program downtown, downtown Washington DC. That would be a semester-long residential program where students would move off, the Hilltop. We call the Hilltop campus downtown, take an internship at the core. And we're building 12 to 15 credits around this supplied learning. It's called the "Capital Applied Learning Lab" or "The CALL," has very bespoke curriculum where students can build and customize their program. Project-based, inquiry-based, skills-based, as well as other kinds of courses.

[19:06] Nearly every element that we created in the previous four years, is now being brought into play to build the curriculum of the CALL. And I think that really what has been effective, looking back, not that I didn't make many missteps. I'll just pretend it was on purpose.

[19:21] What has been effective, is seeing that, if every project is, is adding something to the toolbox, then when you're ready to make the next significant strategic move, then you just have expanded people's imagination in how to make that happen. And I can see us now building momentum toward where we imagine we'd be five or six years ago, where we can now think really creatively about new ways to make education more effective, more equitable, and potentially more affordable.

Derek: [19:58] I love that big picture look, right? And the idea that the current pilot, the current project is helping us figure out something, right? And then once we've learned that, we can now use that something in other ways.

[20:17] Can we, can you give another example of some small game-changing pilot, as you say, one that had a technology piece to it? We are ostensibly a technology podcast. So, I'm curious how, how technology plays a role in these kind of innovation experiments that you're, you're conducting.

Randy: [20:36] Yeah, I'll give you two examples that I think have kind of similar kind of sub text. So one, is one of our very earliest projects was in partnership and originated out of our Center for Social Justice, which is our Community-Based Learning Center. In which they, their problem they were trying to solve was that they, there was, there were Georgetown students who were traveling all over the world in the summer, doing justice, immersion

experiences very un-mentored, often alone, in terms of they weren't with anybody else from Georgetown. They were not necessarily alone where they were, Kazakstan or Bangkok or whatever.

[21:17] And so they created something they called, "social justice intersections," which was an online course, that was built in an online reflective environment in which for eight weeks students would join a reflective community and they would be working with mentors to process what was going on in the ground and how it was feeding their own sense of self and justice, et cetera. And then gradually over the years, they added digital skills-based modules that were relevant to the kind of work that students were doing on the ground.

[21:51] And so every 2.5 weeks, in addition to the community of reflection, they could take, you know, a one credit course in community asset mapping or peace education or intercultural communication, survey design, things like that. And it was variable credit so that they could, they could take it for one credit, two credit, three credits, et cetera. So, so that was a way in which we sort of dubbed it "experience wrapping," the W, that where we, where we were seeing that, you know, trying to ask what was a powerful combination of a virtual community, of virtual learning and all the things that one could do there. But that it was really helping to intensify and make the most of an on-the-ground learning experience. So that's one example.

[22:41] Second example, is we have one of our signature programs, is something we call the "Region Science Scholars Program," that was a way of supporting first gen low income students in STEM, especially the biomedical sciences. And it has two components, a five-week summer bridge program, which is residential, but then for every summer after that, and now over winter breaks, there is an increasingly growing library of non-credit modules that had been developed for students, that are essentially geared to the threshold concepts of the courses that they're going to take in the next semester. So it's entirely personalized and customized.

[23:26] So when a student is going to take Genetics in the upcoming semester. They're advised to take the Genetics module, right, to remember everything they forgot from the genetics part of the first-year Biology course and on, on, and this includes all the sciences, math, as well as writing. There's now a module on Writing in the Sciences.

[23:38] And the idea is that, students coming from under-resourced backgrounds have

generally a weaker kind of base of knowledge. And if you don't have a strong foundation, moving into your next thing, you'll basically just keep getting structurally more and more behind. So these are meant to be sort of booster shots around that. And there's a whole sense of community in the digital. We're increasingly looking at how to make the digital modules better, perhaps more analytics driven, increasingly personalized and customized. But that to me is like the first one, in the sense, that it's also acknowledging that there's a very specific role for the digital piece, in what is really much more largely, a community- building, a way of building up and maintaining people's sense of belonging and identity and their own sense of agency as they move through the science curriculum. So I think that's- There are many different examples throughout higher education. But I think thinking of the technology piece, not as an end in itself, but is actually a critical tool in a larger story of building community and agency.

Derek: [25:00] So I'm going to ask you to expand on that a little bit. I mean, you mentioned that the Designing the Futures Initiative started back during MOOC mania, where I think a lot of higher education realized technology was there and it might change things. And there were a lot of crazy op-eds. I remember reading at the time, you know, having lived through that and now having experimented in some really intentional ways. What, what role do you see for technology as we move higher education forward? What, what is it good for and what does it, what does it maybe not helpful with, or not good for?

Randy: [25:41] I think the most, at the macro level, the most important thing that we can look to technology for, is to enable us that, a term that I often use in distinction to some of the voices out in this noisy environment, meaning that they talk about unbundling the university. I like to talk about re-bundling the university.

[26:04] I think that technology is a critical piece of re-bundling, in that, to say there are certain things that can be scaled or intensified or personalized or customized using technology. And that those capacities, which we could talk about examples, but I'm sure you've talked about them in every episode you've ever had. But those, those capacities of scaling, intensification, personalization, customization should be in the service then of creating the space and the human resources and the curricular emphasis around the things that we know make the biggest difference in learning, which are relationships, sustained work, being able to learn how to work with uncertainty and a mentored environment, the power of community, the power of developing your own sense of agency, et cetera.

[27:04] So I think those things, not that digital environments can't support them, but in general, when we talk about how to create an environment that's relationship rich, inquiry, rich, sustained work, a real sense of educational agency. That's the most important thing we can be doing with education. And it'll become only more important, as we move into an AI shaped future for what work will be left to humans.

[27:33] That's the most expensive thing we do. Supporting that kind of learning is the most expensive thing we do. The least expensive thing we do is stand up in front of hundreds of people and talk. The most expensive part of education is supporting that kind of inquiry based, relationship-based. Now that doesn't mean it can't scale to some extent, but it can't be massified It can't be massified.

[27:58] And so I think the role of technology, whether it's in a, you know, a STEM gateway course, where one's using intelligent tutors to help strengthen the math component or it's many other kinds of tools that would enable certain kinds of customization, that the eye on the prize here is, how do we make sure that everyone has a right to an education that has relationship-based, inquiry based, mentored learning at the heart of it?

[28:29] And the only way I can imagine a 40 net in a democratized way is to figure out where technology can help us re-bundle to who imagine that broadly. If we can't figure out the role that technology plays, then that kind of education will remain the province of the privileged and a few lucky, less privileged people who make it into those privileged environments. So, so I think we have a vision now of what matters in education. And I don't see how we achieve that vision without technology playing a critical role.

Derek: [29:06] So what, what could that look like? What could re-bundling look like with technology? Have you, do you have any experiments at Georgetown that have started to explore that space a little bit?

Randy: [29:18] I don't think we have as many here as I observe in other places, but I think that, you know, I think you can look, for example, at, you know, take the statway and quant courses at a place like LaGuardia Community College, right? Where massive amounts of their students, very high percentages, need to take non-credit bearing math before they can take credit bearing math.

Derek: [29:44] Sure.

Randy: [29:45] At LaGuardia, they have figured out how to do what I think everyone thought was impossible a few years ago, which is in one semester, get students up to a place where they move through a couple levels of non-credit developmental math and college credit, say statistics course in one semester. And the way they've done it is by re-imagining classroom time, by re-imagining the proportions of the way people are in labs and collaborative work and other kinds of classroom time. Using an intelligent tutor, like Alex, to help students on the personalized work around the math. And to work with teachers who have fundamentally re-imagined those courses around important topics like food justice and climate change, which are themselves keyed to their overall learning goals, right? And in the midst of all this, they're addressing students' anxieties and their hatred of math, and their failure of math, et cetera.

[30:46] So to me, that's the perfect example of re-bundling, in which, they could not possibly do it without Alex, the intelligent tutor program. Alex, by itself, could not possibly do what they achieve by aligning it with their larger goals, by re-imagining this is a human space, by really thinking intentionally about every level of pedagogy, and by re-imagining the actual content so that students can find relevance and engagement in it. So to me, that's the perfect example of, of a re-bundled course, that in which technology has played an absolutely critical, but not determinative role of what it is that's achieved in a course like that.

Derek: [31:29] Do you? I love that. And being a mathematician and having taught a lot of math, I love all the threads coming together to make that possible, right? There's a curricular piece. There's a structural piece. There's time and space. There's faculty development, right? There's, it sounds like breaking some rules, as well.

[31:51] What, so I'm curious. So I find sometimes I'm torn when I'm talking with faculty about teaching with technology, sometimes I just want to treat it like we just have these tools that we use to teach. And some of them are digital and some of them are not, right? And so technology, I mean, I think in a lot of our daily life, we just use technology because it works and it helps us. We don't think of it as kind of "strange and other."

[32:20] But other times when I'm talking with faculty, technology feels "strange and other," and I feel like we have to call it out as a separate thing, as a different thing. Do you think, 5, 10, 15, 20 years from now, we'll think of technology that way, as something kind of "other" or "inserted" or do you think we'll, it'll be just kind of part of our toolbox, either at the class level, or at the curricular level, or at the institutional level?

Randy: [32:47] I believe it's going to be more the latter, that we'll increasingly think of it as our toolbox, that ceases to be its own category as technology. So I guess maybe, the sort of parsed answer I'd give is that, I think educational technology, or technology as a category, will cease to matter.

[33:11] I think at any given moment, there will always be an emerging wave of technologies that feel new, just like all innovations. I think there's, there's always that, that wave of assimilation and us recalibrating, what does this mean for our sense of ourselves in time and space, and capacity, et cetera? So I think, there'll always be new technologies that are visible inconspicuous. And we need to be intentional about asking about.

[33:37] But I feel like in some ways, we've already, even though I know it's still very present, I think we're already kind of past, or getting past, a point at which there's a whole separate ontology called, "educational technology." I co-chair, as in my role, the Council of Associate Deans. As a sub-topic, we spent a year trying to develop a definition of online learning, which we had to do for- it grew from a paragraph, to a page, to a sentence.

Derek: [34:08] (laughs) Ok.

Randy: [34:09] Because, because, you know, every time we came up with what is not online? At first we tried to define, "online hybrid " and whatever the thing was that didn't include either of those two...

Derek: [34:23] (laughs)

Randy: [34:23] ...which was highly contested, place-based or whatever. And just almost every single definition could be deconstructed. Almost every single percentage could be deconstructed. It's, it's hard to imagine that for the most part, there's anything that's not hybrid learning now. You know, it's just a matter of percentages, but I'm not even sure that ultimately, in 10-15 years, it'll even be a difference in kind. It'll just be, be a qualitative difference. I think it'll just be how much people are emphasizing certain kinds of activities. Plus as you know, even, you know, this is an audio podcast, but we're looking at each other on Zoom, right? I mean, even I have stopped using the term, " face-to-face " to mean that we're both in the same room. Because if we're having a Zoom conversation, how are we not face-to-face?

Derek: [35:07] (laughs) Right.

Randy: [35:10] And in fact, all we are is face-to-face. So I also think that the better the technologies get, the more transparent they get, and the less they are about technologies and they're about affordances.

Derek: [35:17] Mm. Well, because one of the things I'll say in workshops often is that, I mean, we all teach with technology, right? There's chairs and tables in the room, and there's a whiteboard or a chalkboard at the front of the room. Those are just technologies that we're really used to and we kind of know what they do, right? And so they become just part of the infrastructure, just the environment. And yes, they have affordances, but we know what they are and so they don't scare us. They don't worry us. We just get to kind of use them. And I like that idea that yes, there will always be new technologies, that we have to figure out, but that eventually we, we won't have this separate category.

Randy: [36:02] Well, and I also think that, you know, the deeper into our culture that certain kinds of practices where it's just clearly better one way than another and it becomes very natural. Like, I don't know about you. I don't get into my car and think, "Would I like to navigate to the train station using digital tools or analog tools? Like what feels like the best way to get to the train station?"

Derek: [36:24] (laughs) Right.

Randy: [36:25] No, it's like it's just it's clearly you just bring it up on Google Maps and that's, that's a simple choice. Other things, we may be making choices, but I think it's really about figuring out what we want to do. I think that to me, what has been 50 years from now or a 100 years from now, rewriting the history of kind of approximately the late eighties to whenever this period ends that it becomes so visible. I think what we'll realize is that the technological revolution in education coincided with the learning sciences revolution. And with what was this turn of the century's version that we've seen at many other moments in US history and others of, of an enormous democratization and, and shifting of the ecosystem.

[37:15] I actually don't think that what's been happening the last 20-30 years has just been about a technology revolution. It just happens to be that all three of those things have happened at the same time. And that maybe, maybe it's been a learning revolution, or a learner revolution as some people call it, or some other clever moniker. But I, I think that looking back, we'll realize the technology was really just a piece of some other revolution that

was taking place.

Derek: [37:44] Yeah, yeah. Well, Randy, I've got a couple more questions for you. I want to circle back to the the kind of fostering change that you do at Georgetown. If I'm a faculty member or say a teaching center director and I would like to try to foster some pedagogical innovation on my campus, and I'm maybe not a Vice Provost. What advice would you give for someone who wants to push the envelope a little bit or make some change happen in a, in a productive way?

Randy: [38:15] So obviously, first of all, that, you know, it's very context-dependent. But I think one of the most important things that a campus can do, and I think to the extent that a center for teaching person can find allies to try to do this, is to try to create an environment in which people are launching pilots that are as ambitious as possible and connected to sort of larger goals. I think one of the things that is surprising, how many campuses still are not doing this, is thinking in terms of pilots. And that can include governance structures that approve pilots rather than new programs. So obviously, a center for teaching director doesn't have sole ability to do that.

[39:06] But I think that that that's one of the most important things, so that maybe there's, maybe there's room for a center director to, I often think of it as leading from the middle, to try to galvanize who are the right players, to try to create a protected space for some kind of experimentation or piloting that allows pushing on the rules, that allows this pedagogical space diverge into the structural space.

[39:32] I recognize that there's power dynamics that limit center directors there. But I feel as if we're on the cusp of an evolution of what we think of as in, I think pod calls it "educational development," this broader sense of professional learning and its connection to the larger institutional transformation. I think campuses, broadly, need to think that we're moving to this next level. And it's incumbent on people in my position to see that. But I think to the extent that center directors are trying to see it as an evolution of their mission, to not just merely, or not just in a kind of circumscribed way, be just focused on pedagogy and classroom practices, but realize that it has diverge into this structural space.

[40:24] On most campuses, there are strategic goals that can be connected to, to do this. They're equity goals, innovation goals, online. I think the online learning space is probably one of those spaces where centers for teaching, or other kinds of instructional

design centers, have the license to work with faculty on rethinking kind of time and space. Because the financial and otherwise pressures to move into the online space creates more room to do that kind of thing. But I, but I think that the fundamental thing is just realizing that centers for teaching need to try to rethink their practices in also a structural space. Or I think that they'll be forever sort of circumscribe.

Derek: [41:09] Yeah. Yeah. I appreciate that. I think I've seen that in my work with faculty who, who run into those structural barriers in their own classrooms and they want to move forward. But it's, it's, it's, they've kind of moved outside of the place where they have full autonomy, right? And so I like looking for those areas, and seeing if I can lead from the middle a little bit. And often it is, it's, it's, we're good at connecting at teaching centers. And so sometimes it's about getting the right people in the room to have a good conversation and realize that there's some space to move forward.

Randy: [41:48] Yeah, and it may be that so part of it's connecting, and it may be that there's a way of starting to think about how to connect up, right? It's not just connecting, that's critical in, in the way that you meant it. But you know, the way people talk about managing up or leading up, like there's a kind of connecting up. Like not just connecting the faculty, but who's the associate dean, who can speak in behalf of the dean's goals that, that by connecting the associate dean to the work of connecting a group of faculty across boundaries who want to achieve something, that's running afoul of certain structures or, or even policies. They're in a position, to then pivot up to a higher level to see if you can create a more capacious place to execute experimentation. So maybe recognizing that there's limits to what centers for teaching and those kinds of folks can do. This notion of who is the next level up that you can engage in the work, that'll- gives you access to the people who can make those kinds of decisions?

Derek: [42:48] Yeah. Yeah. Thanks. My last question, we ask this of all of our guests. We're an educational technology podcast. And we spend most of our time talking about digital educational technologies. What is one of your favorite analog educational technologies?

Randy: [43:07] Well, it's probably cliché. The Post-It note.

Derek: [43:12] (laughs) That's a good answer. Can you say why?

Randy: [43:17] Because I think the combination of the Post-It Note and possibly the writable table or writable whiteboard, we have writeable tables in the Red House, we're quite

fond of. I think because post-it notes give you the malleability of your ideas that you have in digital environments. Like I can just move this from here to here. Everything is- Post-it Notes is analog provisionality.

Derek: [43:46] (laughs) I like that. I don't know if, if the Post-It company will use that as their new slogan, but I like it. I like it. I have a feeling that if, you could solve a lot of problems by getting creative people in the room with a bunch of Post-It notes and markers?

Randy: [44:00] Well, in what it implies, I think what it implies, I think what people appreciate about the digital environments that are truly creative and flexible, which of course many have shutdown that, is that we do realize that the reason people like drawing on paper or taking notes, or the reason that you take these fabulous visual notes at conferences and then share them with lucky people like me, is because people like the freedom for their ideas to have space to play and change. And that we've, we really have come to realize from all different sectors, that's how thinking and creativity happen. So I think Post-it Notes, whiteboards, et cetera, a big part of that kind of design thinking and whatnot, is part, just tapping into people's desire to have their ideas play, have space to play with their ideas. And I think in many ways, we've learned that that's what learning is.

Derek: [44:58] Yeah. Well, thank you so much, Randy. This has been just a really great conversation. As usual, when I hear you give a talk or have a conversation with you, my brain is very full, so thank you for that and thanks for speaking with our listeners here today.

Randy: [45:13] Great. Thank you so much for having me. (music)

Derek: [45:17] That was Randall Bass, Vice Provost for Education and Professor of English at Georgetown University. Thanks to Randy, for taking time from his very busy schedule to speak with me. If you'd like to follow Randy and his work, see the show notes for links. And I would love to hear your thoughts on this interview. Please reach out via email, leadinglinespod@vanderbilt.edu or via Twitter, where our handle is @leadinglinespod

[45:44] We have a fantastic set of interviews coming up this season, here on Leading Lines, look for new episodes the first, and third Monday of each month. You can find us wherever you get your podcasts. But if you want every episode of Leading Lines with show notes and transcripts, you'll need to head over to our website, leadinglinespod.com

[46:03] Leading Lines is produced by the Vanderbilt Center for Teaching, the Jean and

Alexander Heard Libraries, and the Associate Provost for Education Development and Technologies. This episode was edited by Rhett McDaniel. (music) I'm your host, Derek Bruff. Thanks for listening.