

# Dead Ideas in Teaching and Learning Podcast Series

## Season 7, Episode 3: From Devaluing to Valuing Teaching: Changes Institutions Can Make with Michelle Miller

### Center for Teaching and Learning, Columbia University

[00:00:00] **Catherine Ross:** Hello, and welcome to Dead Ideas in Teaching and Learning, a higher education podcast from the Center for Teaching and Learning at Columbia. I'm Catherine Ross, the center's executive director. As a quick reminder for our listeners, in this podcast series, we are exploring dead ideas in teaching and learning.

[00:00:25] **Catherine Ross:** In other words, ideas that are widely believed, though not true, and that drive many systems and behaviors in connection to teaching, exercising what Diane Pike called the "tyranny of dead ideas."

[00:00:39] **Catherine Ross:** Welcome everyone. I'm speaking today with Dr. Michelle Miller from Northern Arizona University. Dr. Miller is a Professor of Psychological Sciences and President's Distinguished Teaching Fellow at Northern Arizona University.

[00:00:55] **Catherine Ross:** She is the author of *Minds Online, Teaching Effectively with Technology*, and *Remembering and Forgetting in the Age of Technology, Teaching, Learning, and The Science of Memory in a Wired World*. Dr. Miller completed her PhD in Cognitive Psychology and Behavioral Neuroscience at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research interests include memory, attention, and the impacts of technology on learning and on the mind. Welcome to our Dead Ideas podcast, Michelle. I'm delighted to be talking with you today.

[00:01:32] **Michelle Miller:** Oh, so am I. I'm so happy to be here.

[00:01:35] **Catherine Ross:** So I'm just going to briefly set the stage here for this conversation. Long time listeners may recognize that we've

spoken with Michelle in the past, but there's a big reason why I brought her back here today to chat with me. Recently, in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, there was a question posed by journalist Beth McMurtrie about whether or not institutions of higher education truly value teaching.

[00:02:02] **Catherine Ross:** And she offered a list of signals or things that are routinely seen in universities that show an undervaluing of teaching. For example, the use of underpaid adjuncts who don't have offices even to meet with students or tenure and promotion policies that really don't count teaching, um poor teaching evaluation practices, for example, or, you know, the fact that many new faculty are warned not to spend too much time on teaching before they get tenure.

[00:02:37] **Catherine Ross:** And this is just a short list. But what interested me about Michelle's response to Beth's query was that Michelle offered her own list and addressed it to faculty on how to tell if you're institution is devaluing teaching, and this list of signals can be reverse engineered to serve, I think, as a really helpful starting point for people who want to change their institutional culture.

[00:03:07] **Catherine Ross:** And if you could get your institution to address even one of these issues that Michelle delineated, it could make a huge difference in how the valuing of teaching is being enacted in a very real and very concrete way. So I want to get Michelle talking um, so that we, those of us, you know, who work in a teaching center, or if you're in a provostial role, or you're a faculty member, registrar, any of us can put to rest this dead idea that systems change in higher education is not possible.

[00:03:46] **Catherine Ross:** So, just a quick note, Michelle had some really great ideas and what I've done to get as many of them in our conversation as possible is I've sort of bundled them into ones that I thought were related, so I would encourage you to read her R3 newsletter on Substack because it's just really excellent.

[00:04:10] **Catherine Ross:** So here's what Michelle says. Your institution may be a teaching devaluing institution of higher education if it tolerates classroom spaces that are in disrepair, are chronically too hot or cold, or just generally broken down. And, I would add, not even physically accessible to all students. And relatedly, when classes are routinely assigned to rooms that don't provide a pedagogical match for the instructor.

[00:04:46] **Catherine Ross:** And the thing I loved about the way Michelle framed this is she noted that classrooms in these states of disrepair may not even register with many people as being problematic because it's so common and it's gone on for so long that people just think that's normal and they expect that. So the idea that classroom spaces are neutral in their impact on teaching and learning is quite a pervasive dead idea.

[00:05:17] **Catherine Ross:** So I'm going to ask Michelle to expand on why these spaces matter so much and why having the right space is something that institutions should value and attend to.

[00:05:30] **Michelle Miller:** Oh, thank you. And thank you, by the way, for that introduction and for your very kind words about my Substack newsletter. It is a new project for this new year.

[00:05:39] **Michelle Miller:** And it's just been so rewarding to see how you can, we can really engage in this relatively new platform. And yes, I usually talk about research in the, in the R3 newsletter. But when I saw Beth McMurtry's piece for the Chronicle and saw the question she was posing, I just, I was inspired to jump in and frankly to editorialize a little bit.

[00:06:04] **Michelle Miller:** And if it does get us thinking about some issues that, as you point out, we may really take for granted in higher education and to look at those with fresh eyes in this fresh new year. Um, then I, I think that that can be a great outcome. So thank you for setting the stage in that way. It just has really started to strike me um, somewhat in my own experience, but I want to make it clear. I wasn't really trying to individuate my own institution of higher education. I mean, I've been at my institution, Northern Arizona University, for 23 years now. I've seen a lot of things come and go. So this isn't just like, Oh my gosh, this happened to me in this particular timeframe, but I visit a lot of institutions around the country and that's an amazing privilege and it does show it, it makes it very clear to me um just as a side benefit of like, okay, what seems to be some common themes that oh, this is a recognizable issue from, from my own experience and what, what's different. So this really is one the physical spaces and what we kind of tolerate as far as the quality of those physical spaces. And as you rightly point out, um, issues of accessibility as well.

[00:07:22] **Michelle Miller:** Um, so can, can all students even enter the classroom, even find a good place where they can set up and concentrate and can we all simply be comfortable and and I think it does make an impression on students as well. I think when you do come into the assigned classroom and you can say, wow, this classroom is freezing until noon, at which point it gets too hot or, you know, things like window shades don't work. I mean, it's little, little things in a way, but those accrue into an impression. And even if it doesn't consciously register on them or on us. I think it does say a lot. And I mean, there's practical points.

[00:08:07] **Michelle Miller:** I mean, I think I've had a few times again. I'm not going to say whether it was here on some of my travels, but where it's like, okay, you can design an amazing active classroom with all these, you know, wonderfully designed activities. And if it's 85 degrees and we're all falling asleep and it's after lunch, um, wow, that, that, uh, is not going to take you very far. So this is a real challenge to say, let's look at some things with some fresh eyes. And, you know, here too, I, as I tried to stress in the article and I wanted to say in the, in the newsletter, and I wanted to stress here too, it's not that I feel like we have to this, you know, very luxurious space, or it has to have a certain kind of bells and whistles and whatnot.

[00:08:52] **Michelle Miller:** But I think it's very important to compare really kind of on a spectrum of the physical spaces and facilities in. So if you're going to go into an institution, where do the teaching spaces stack up relative to the other one? So if you're going to go into, I mean, we all have the nice administrative boardrooms and those can be, you know, really well maintained and appointed.

[00:09:14] **Michelle Miller:** And that's fine. I think that's appropriate. But what is the disparity? If you were to walk, say, next door and walk into the classroom where, let's say, the foundational calculus class or pre calculus class is being held or psychology 101, the most popular college class out there.

[00:09:31] **Michelle Miller:** What does that look like? What are the facilities? So let's wake up to some of that. And you mentioned the matter, the matter of pedagogical match as well. I mean, I think that most universities and colleges also have kind of the special spaces that might have, you know, the active learning set up a really nice movable furniture, maybe special technology and that's wonderful too.

[00:09:54] **Michelle Miller:** However, where we can sometimes drop the ball is in the very kind of you know, nitty gritty issue of who's assigned to teach in that space. Is it being fully used? And is there some consideration of like, okay, how are classes actually designed? And at many institutions, that's a pretty big order because maybe nobody really knows. Maybe we have no way of saying, well, what are some of the style differences? Some of the different pedagogical demands? I mean, unless it's something very obvious, like, oh, hey, this is a biology lab and we need to dissect things. Um, there perhaps are some other requirements and some optimization that could go on and it just doesn't happen. Nobody sets out. Nobody wakes up in the morning and says, I'm going to devalue teaching by, but you know, letting all these balls drop, but they do drop. I think we do see that.

[00:10:47] **Catherine Ross:** Yes. And I think it speaks to a legacy of just assuming that the physical environment doesn't impact learning. So it doesn't matter where students are sitting. As long as there's students and an instructor in a space, the students will learn. And we know now there's enormous amounts of research that that's just not true. And that we need to address these kinds of physical structure issues and, you know, maybe improve like, I don't know, the systems by which classrooms get assigned or have a system where people could request, you know, those special active learning classrooms. Right? And some places do no doubt. But in general, I think these are overlooked systems changes that, that really do need attention.

[00:11:39] **Catherine Ross:** So the next sign that Michelle offered, that your institution might be devaluing teaching is a blend of some multiple points. So here we go. No one at your university has seriously grappled with the question of how to assess teaching. And even if they did, routine practices like assigning instructors to courses they don't want to teach or aren't prepared to teach would confound that assessment. And if we add to this that 100 level courses routinely receive less support than upper division courses and graduate courses. And by the way, these are always the largest enrollment courses. It means that the folks who teach the most students are most at risk with a faulty teaching evaluation system, especially as they are often the non tenure track instructors. Go, Michelle! These are all interrelated, aren't they? So what should departments, schools, or institutions think about?

[00:12:47] **Michelle Miller:** Yes, they sure are, aren't they? And these are some issues which are, have been with us for a long time. Again, as

a mid career person who's, who spent a long time in one institution and in academia in general, uh, I can look around and say, yeah, this wow. Are, are we still struggling with this, this issue? And it's a tough one, right? Um, you know, what is quality teaching, what is learning? What is evidence of learning? However, they are not unanswerable questions. And on the one hand, it's been so exciting and amazing in the last, I would say roughly even like 10 to. Maybe 12 years just to see how many great ideas and how many actual concrete tangible advances have been made and getting our arms around this issue of assessing, teaching, um, and doing so beyond, uh, as McMurtry again raised the classic student opinion survey. Um, and those, by the way, those started getting popular when I was in graduate school. I saw them come on the scene. Um, I, I don't know that they had quite the undermining effect that many critics at the time said they would have, but they're very much a part of the system now.

[00:14:06] **Michelle Miller:** And what do you know, they can only take us so far. We all know it. We all know at this point that there are real major issues, um, with individuals who are minoritized, um, and disempowered by institutional and social systems and structures. They take and a enormous hit through this. So it's perpetuating this in this enormous, uh, systemic issue at the same time as it's really, I think, not taking us to the next level in terms of saying, okay, beyond just kind of the basics of is this instructor responsive, you know, is, is, is class, uh, engaging?

[00:14:50] **Michelle Miller:** What is sort of the next level of, hey, what's difference between a really, really good, um, Psychology 101 class and one that is tremendously impactful and it sets students up for success and, um, gets a wider variety of students, a more diverse range of students reaching, um, attaining goals that we never could, could really see before for as many students.

[00:15:15] **Michelle Miller:** So, making it, so there is that, first of all. And so we do need to be looking at the systems for for making those distinctions. And one of the things that makes that difficult is not necessarily the, you know, just the nature of the issue. Okay. We can't directly see learning. So what is that? It also gets into making some real decisions in making some judgments that are not always going to be popular and especially if we are going to give them some consequence, consequential nature, you know, there's going to be some outcome that happens if the teaching or the design of a particular course is this way or



that way, if it's going to make a difference, then not every course is going to reach that a plus level, right?

[00:16:07] **Michelle Miller:** And so institutions and sometimes individual leaders in institutions need to say, here's the system we're going with. And it doesn't mean you have to invent the system. One of the great things is that we have so many institutions around the country in parallel who are saying, you know what, we are bringing a new system and they're reporting out on it.

[00:16:27] **Michelle Miller:** They're disseminating that. And they're looking at each other and saying, You know what? We're going to borrow this or we're going to take that. That's all wonderful. Um, but it does take leadership oftentimes to say, all right, here's what we chose to go with. And It's not going to be perfect. Um, but it is going to take us where we need to go, and it is going to benefit students in the end.

[00:16:51] **Michelle Miller:** So, so there is that. And, and yeah, the rubber really meets the road in these 100 level courses. And those 100 level courses, um, I would also kind of challenge faculty as they go into the fall semester, really listen with that great, you know, finely tuned academic ear we have for nuance to say, how do people talk about it?

[00:17:13] **Michelle Miller:** Do they talk about these courses as, ah, I got to get this over with, that it's, it's, uh, it's a load, it's a burden. And what evidence is there that we really do see them in this? Really fresh light of like, wow, this is, this is your chance to introduce a large group of students with this great group energy to this amazing discipline, right?

[00:17:34] **Michelle Miller:** So how do we talk about it? Who gets assigned to teach them? I mean our non-tenure track instructors, even in our relatively new instructors can be amazing and many are. However, that could be part of a pattern of, and I know many, many years ago when I came into teaching, they said, well, you know, here's here's sort of, I think they even use the term poison pill.

[00:17:56] **Michelle Miller:** You got to pay some dues. So do you want this one or that one?

[00:17:59] **Catherine Ross:** Whoa

[00:18:00] **Michelle Miller:** Twenty-three years ago. I think the statute of limitations is up on that. And we wouldn't see that today. However, that was very clear. And I think there's some vestiges of that and this whole exciting question of how do we take these arguably most important, most consequential course offerings that we have. And make them incredible.

[00:18:23] **Michelle Miller:** That's what even drew me in about 12 years ago to this whole idea of more progressive pedagogy. So this can be an amazing thing, but it's not going to be there. It's not going to happen by itself. What I have seen during my long time in course redesign and pedagogy and looking at that, I, it's just like a force of nature that that 100 level course is going to kind of fall down the list of priorities, unless it's actively pushed up. And so that's what we need to see as well.

[00:18:55] **Catherine Ross:** Well, that kind of leads into the next point that you made. The next signal of devaluing teaching was that professional development programming for instructors is limited in scope and lacks grounding in the learning sciences. And as I mentioned, um, noted on her script.

[00:19:16] **Catherine Ross:** I don't want to be too defensive, but CTLs do do that work and, and we of course do everything in the science of learning. We work on sort of, you know, what approaches are we recommending and why are we recommending this and how can you implement this in your course, in your discipline. But, you know, honestly, not every university has a CTL or maybe they are severely under resourced in some cases.

[00:19:43] **Catherine Ross:** So I'd like for you to share what you're seeing and what you think needs to happen around this to, to change that scenario. Because as you noted, you've had some professional development support. And even then, it's still a lot of work. And so that support is really key to helping instructors make these kinds of changes.

[00:20:06] **Catherine Ross:** You can't, especially for those large classes, you can't just do that by yourself.

[00:20:11] **Michelle Miller:** Right. And I'll say here is I've kind of been thinking back over this. Um, I would say that really, this is the area where I think we're the furthest along of all of these issues. Um, this is something that might not be sort of on the radar of many faculty or



maybe even some leadership, but the incredible progress that's been made, the incredible expansion and growth, not just in size, but but really in, uh, focus and grounding in learning sciences and other really important kind of, uh, intellectual frameworks. This has grown so much in the last 10 years. So I think let's all kind of give a virtual round of applause or thanks to the universe.

[00:21:02] **Michelle Miller:** That this has happened and it's largely happened behind the scenes and it's largely happened through the Um, and commitment and engagement of faculty, professional development, professionals, including those who may be in e-learning centers, online course, and degree programs, many times those individuals are contributing at a high level to faculty professional development too, even if that's not in their official job title.

[00:21:28] **Michelle Miller:** So this is something that we have really accomplished in, in the academy in a way. And I did bring it up, however, as sometimes even a source of misconceptions. I say this because actually, I'm kind of harken to a research program that has been going on for a number of years with my incredibly dynamic colleague, Kristen Betts, who's looked at well, neuromyths.

[00:21:53] **Michelle Miller:** If you're familiar with that term, your listeners are. But looking at them in higher education, which previously to her research had not been done as much as it had been in say K through 12. So, so these are kind of basic misconceptions about how people learn and sometimes even about how the brain works, um, that, that spread, especially in education.

[00:22:12] **Michelle Miller:** And we feel that they have a real undermining effect as, as well on the teaching that we do. So here's the thing is we have surveyed hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people in different professional roles in higher education. And when we ask them, like, where did you get this, this idea that we would argue is, is not really grounded in fact. Where did that come from? Sometimes they will say, I got it from professional development. Now we aren't there on the scene. We can't, you know, go in like detectives and say, okay, who done it? But this, this is something that faculty do continue to say. I think they will, they will see it less if we do and I hope we do run this research and keep sampling over years and years that trend line will go down and that is what I would predict based on that that I do visit so many CTLs and oh my goodness the leadership and the staff are 100% dialed into

the the latest research but you know here too especially if they're under resourced or leadership themselves or not.

[00:23:19] **Michelle Miller:** If they're subscribing to neuromyths or they're saying, well, you know, I don't really know what the context for this is, but here's a cool idea. Let's just randomly have an event on that. Then you're going to see that, that drift. And so, um, it having a healthy, resourced, high profile, respected CTL, as I said, fortunately, this is something you do see a lot.

[00:23:41] **Michelle Miller:** I think it's the rule rather than the exception, but that's another positive sign in the flip side is that's a red flag. If you're saying, well, I'm not really sure what our CTL is doing, or they probably have this, this wonderful set of things they could be doing, but they can't because of resource and time constraints. That's that's another factor.

[00:24:01] **Catherine Ross:** Yeah, I think a really good example of a neuromyth that was widely propagated was learning styles. That one did so much damage. Oh my gosh, people bought into that because it was so intuitively appealing. Of course, students loved it. Like, Hey, I, I'm a visual learner. So, or I'm an auditory learner, so I can't really read these, all this textbook stuff that was enormously damaging to teaching and still, I still come across it even today, people still mention it or hold on to that. Idea that there's such a thing of these predetermined learning styles.

[00:24:46] **Michelle Miller:** Oh, my goodness. What? Yeah, this is like a fantastic example. And you know what? Your impression also backed up by our our surveys. Um, so, Dr. Dr. Betts and I, this is one of the ones that we definitely zero in on it. And it is. It's like this almost this indicator. Um, so when we, when we gather the data, we kind of look at that one in particular to say, all right, this, this is the one and it should trend down over time, but it is still surprisingly high.

[00:25:15] **Michelle Miller:** And here's the thing that I think is also really great about that example that you brought up is that. The motivation to say, oh my gosh, I'm going to go to this great workshop on learning styles is going to tell me how to, you know, uh, adjust my teaching around this concept and nobody signs up for that because they're like, oh, here's a, here's a myth.

[00:25:36] **Michelle Miller:** Here's something that it's, that's kind of pseudoscience. They do it because they really genuinely want to help students and whoever brought the speaker in, they may have, you know, quite recently not been an expert in this area. They said, well, this looks good. Sounds good. And here's this great motivation and goal to, you know, open up these different disciplines and areas and levels of achievement to more students. And this is great. We can make things more personalized, and I'm sure it ties into brain science in some way. So let's tap into that. It comes from a good place, but that gives it a lot of momentum, right? And you're absolutely right. Once it's in there, it can be hard to have folks let it go. Especially once it starts to be intuitive, there goes all this very scarce, sometimes energy and resources that could be going to something else in course design. So, uh, yeah, absolutely.

[00:26:35] **Catherine Ross:** So you and I can agree right here and now on this podcast to say learning styles are a dead idea. So let's just put that to bed once and for all. No more learning styles.

[00:26:52] **Michelle Miller:** Hear, hear to that. Yes.

[00:26:54] **Catherine Ross:** Yes. If you have just a little bit of energy to think about teaching, look at universal design for learning. Let's go that route instead of learning styles.

[00:27:02] **Michelle Miller:** Yes. Amen to that.

[00:27:05] **Catherine Ross:** So on question four, I'm thinking that we do agree 100% that we need institutional support to value and reward instructors for working with teaching centers to signal expectations for effective teaching practices, which you just mentioned, you know, that that's been a struggle for many institutions to have those conversations on what constitutes Institutes effective student-centered equitable teaching practices. Um, and these institutional pushes and policies can encourage schools and departments to promote law, large scale change so that all students can expect the best instruction and equitable learning opportunities. I'm going to touch the third rail here, but what happens with academic freedom? In many institutions, it's defined as the right to teach what you want, how you want, and I've heard faculty say, uh, once in a while, like, it infringes on my academic freedom to have to think about inclusive teaching.

[00:28:21] **Michelle Miller:** Right.

[00:28:22] **Catherine Ross:** How do we walk this line to show that it really isn't about, we're not trying to attack academic freedom or, and we're not prescribing that you have to teach in this one way.

[00:28:36] **Michelle Miller:** Yeah. And on the one hand, I want to qualify that although I deeply respect and value the academic freedom, I have to have some humility here and say, I don't consider myself an expert on it.

[00:28:51] **Michelle Miller:** That said, I had to grapple with this as well as somebody who, uh, quite some years ago, but it was quite the experience. I helped put together and implement pretty large scale, actually quite large scale initiative on my own campus. The first year learning initiative, which did seek to completely leave alone the what of teaching because it was cross disciplinary.

[00:29:20] **Michelle Miller:** I mean, I'm not going to walk into somebody's course outside of my discipline and say, Oh, no, no, no. Don't say, you know, don't cover that unit first. How could I do that? Even if I wanted to, but to very strongly address the how, to say these courses that are part of this program will have. To some degree that we agree on these specific features and they will not have these other specific features.

[00:29:48] **Michelle Miller:** So it is a challenge. I think that we can, um, I think that reiterating just how you put it, that the what is up to you. It is the how, but also to have to respect as well that faculty like myself have been around for a while. We're also tend to be veterans of the latest buzzword at the latest. Like, it's this thing. It's a, you know, it's technique X or, you know.

[00:30:13] **Catherine Ross:** Right, right. Fair enough.

[00:30:14] **Michelle Miller:** Everybody just has to do it. We're all going to. I'm not picking here on purpose. I don't know. Flip classrooms. I think it's great. But to come in and say, okay, this is the thing that, of course, is going to lead to faculty saying, Well, how do I check?

[00:30:26] **Catherine Ross:** Right

[00:30:27] **Michelle Miller:** How can I push back and not do it and see if see if anything happens as a result. So you also have to say, well, Here are some parameters. Um, here's the end goal. Here's what we want and then create some flexibility about how we get there.

[00:30:43] **Catherine Ross:** Yeah

[00:30:44] **Michelle Miller:** So it is difficult. It is messy. So, you know, there, there is that, but I realize that there is the tension there. I will say to as a veteran of that. You know, practical experience. Another thing that if it's if we're looking at a program that encompasses, say, one discipline or one type, of course, as our initiative did, it may be reasonable, not easy, but I think quite reasonable to say, all right, well, if these features of, say, an inclusive classroom or a more supportive classroom, an active learning-oriented classroom.

[00:31:19] **Michelle Miller:** If that is simply not going to be a fit. I mean, it doesn't serve our students after all to have a faculty member in front of the class saying, well, I had to do this thing and I don't like it. That won't work either. So it may be reasonable to say, well, this type of class is not for you. Um, Thank you. And we can find a different kind of class where there is a better match between the style, your style, and the aims and particular parameters of this course.

[00:31:51] **Michelle Miller:** That is really, really hard. It's even hard for me to say it, but, but I think that's what we do need to say if we are going. To say, yeah, we're going to do this and not that in these types of classes.

[00:32:05] **Catherine Ross:** Yeah, that's, that makes total sense. And I really thank you for that very thoughtful answer. All right. Last one. You used a phrase that I just loved, institutional courage. Could you please share a little bit about that with our audience?

[00:32:25] **Michelle Miller:** Oh, yeah. I reached that kind of as I was grappling with like, why not? I mean, some of these are really basic things like thermostats, and, you know, meeting accessibility requirements, what can be so difficult and sometimes just delving into the why does reveal, um, the bigger, the bigger issues.

[00:32:48] **Michelle Miller:** And so this idea of institutional courage, as I said, nobody wakes up in the morning and says, I'm going to Kind of,

you know, push, push all the first year students to the bottom of the priority list. I'm going to exploit contingent faculty. Nobody does that. But over time, what accrues is this lack of courage.

[00:33:09] **Michelle Miller:** And as I kind of have been thinking about it, you know, institutional courage in some ways is even easier than individual courage. I think when we think in our own lives, doing something courageous, that means, you know, putting ourselves at risk and the handling the possibility or the reality of some really tough consequences.

[00:33:27] **Michelle Miller:** And not all of that is even true of institutional courage. I think it a lot of it just comes down to decisions. As I said, even just To take the one example of what are, what is your institution going to do to develop better ways of evaluating and hopefully supporting improvements in teaching? What are they going to do?

[00:33:51] **Michelle Miller:** Well, that means you got to pick something and go with it. I mean, there, there are, there are so many systems out there and it takes the leader to say, well, we've thought about it. Think about it for a little amount of time, a lot amount of time. You can get a lot of input, a little bit of input. Who cares?

[00:34:05] **Michelle Miller:** But once you're there to say, this is what we're going to do, and this is what the system will look like, and knowing perfectly well that there will be all kinds of pushback, of course, people will say, why did we do it this way? Or why are we doing this at all? And it takes institutional courage to say, we have done this and the decision is made.

[00:34:28] **Michelle Miller:** And, uh, that is what is absolutely required. And I think that's where we get into trouble is where we do kind of try to have it both ways. And that's, that's the dead idea here as well is like, well, I can just make a very strongly worded policy statement that we're going to have inclusive teaching or we're going to, we're going to have universal design for learning and I'm going to put that on the web.

[00:34:51] **Michelle Miller:** That'll do it. That's not going to do it. Very big dead idea. And, you know, I riffed a little bit in the piece and what I think a lot of people, many of you have found incredibly inspirational Maya Angelou's take on courage and which she kind of tied it to consistency that we can do great things, but we can't do them consistently unless



we're willing to, you know, face consequences, sometimes face pushback.

[00:35:15] **Michelle Miller:** And there's a little bit of a similarity here too. I mean, yeah. At the end of the day, yeah, I think it's great that we're at a point in history where we can look around and say, oh, really great classes and really great teaching exceptional teaching. We're going to applaud that that that wasn't always true.

[00:35:32] **Michelle Miller:** So that's super. But it's a dead idea to say that that's where we stop. It is another thing to say. And you know what? All the courses in this particular program, or maybe at the whole institution are going to look a particular way. They're going to have particular features. Yes, the standouts. Wonderful applaud them.

[00:35:51] **Michelle Miller:** But that doesn't take the courage. It takes the courage to sit with everybody else and say, well, you may not be at that at that, you know, super exemplary level. But what does really good teaching performance look like? And how are we going to keep advancing that year after year after year? That's where the courage part comes in.

[00:36:10] **Michelle Miller:** That's what I think.

[00:36:11] **Catherine Ross:** Yeah. So it's both courage and tenacity, I think.

[00:36:17] **Michelle Miller:** Absolutely.

[00:36:18] **Catherine Ross:** All right. Well, thank you so much, Michelle. We're so grateful for your participation in our seventh season of Dead Ideas.

[00:36:28] **Michelle Miller:** Ah, you as well. What an honor to be here.

[00:36:34] **Catherine Ross:** If you've enjoyed this podcast, please visit our website where you can find any resources mentioned in the episode, [ctl.columbia.edu/podcast](http://ctl.columbia.edu/podcast). Please like us, rate us and review us on Apple podcasts. Or wherever you get your podcasts. Dead Ideas is produced by Stephanie Ogden, Laura Nicholas, John Hanford, and Michael Brown.

[00:36:59] **Catherine Ross:** Our theme music is *In the Lab* by Immersive Music.