

Dead Ideas in Teaching and Learning Podcast

Season 8, Episode 4: Notes from the Field: Dead Ideas from Columbia CTL Educational Developers

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] 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.” Welcome everybody. I'm speaking today with my teammates who work on the faculty programs and service system here in the Columbia University Center for Teaching and Learning. As part of that work, they develop and facilitate programming. They provide services and they create a lot of online resources for all the instructors who teach at Columbia. We're going to try out a new format in this episode, offering some mini conversations around a variety of dead ideas that my staff are encountering in their work, in their reading and research as educational developers.

[00:01:17] So who are we talking with today? John Foo is a senior assistant director for science and engineering. He is committed to enhancing STEM education and making it more equitable for and accessible to Columbia's diverse student population. Jamie Kim is an assistant director and she has a background in conversation analysis and classroom discourse and is committed to supporting instructors in creating inclusive learning environments where all students are actively and equitably engaged.

[00:01:51] Rebecca Petitti is an assistant director. Through program facilitation and resource design, and drawing on the principles of universal design for

learning, Rebecca is committed to helping instructors make their classes more accessible and inclusive.

[00:02:07] And Corey Ptak. Corey is an assistant director who is part of our team at Columbia University Irving Medical Center. Corey's focus is on applying education theory to classroom practice to create accessible, equitable, and student-centered learning environments across all of the schools in the health sciences.

[00:02:29] All right. Now let me set the stage a little bit more for our listeners, because this is a different kind of episode. We're still continuing our examination of systemic changes that are needed in higher ed teaching and learning, but just for something I hope fun and different, I thought it would be really nice to hear from the people who work every day in educational development to see what kinds of dead ideas they're encountering.

[00:02:59] And thinking about each guest will do their own brief interview and this will be a compendium of their responses. So a little different than our usual 30 minute long conversations. I will ask each guest the same three questions so that the structure of these mini conversations will serve as an organizing thread.

[00:03:19] I'm really excited to see what we uncover. Hi John, welcome to Dead Ideas Podcast.

[00:03:26] **John Foo:** Hi, Catherine. Thank you so much for having me.

[00:03:29] **Catherine Ross:** So, we're going to go right into the first question. What is a dead idea that you encounter somewhat frequently in your work with faculty, or maybe just in your engagement with educational development more broadly?

[00:03:44] **John Foo:** I think one dead idea that I encounter relatively frequently is that social issues that students are interested in don't belong in STEM courses. And this is something that I'm interested in because there has been more work done over the past decade or two to create modules that include these things in STEM courses at the introductory level that I think are pretty interesting and serve as a model for what other faculty can do.

[00:04:15] **Catherine Ross:** Wow, that's really interesting. So, how are the systems sort of working to perpetuate the dead idea that if you teach math, that's all you teach, right? You don't have to think about climate change or whatever

other pressing issues we're facing of the day. Why is this dead idea so prevalent, do you think?

[00:04:39] **John Foo:** That's a really good question. Some of the things that I've been hearing have been a lot of introductory courses are part of a sequence and because they're part of a sequence, a lot of content has to be covered so that the next class can build upon that topic and so if you bring in additional content about social issues, it takes time away from covering all the math or physics content that you want to cover as part of that sequence.

[00:05:04] **Catherine Ross:** Oh, boy, you just uncovered a whole hornet's nest of bad ideas there. The idea that covering content will set students up for success in a subsequent course is one, right?

[00:05:17] **John Foo:** Mm hmm.

[00:05:18] **Catherine Ross:** Yeah, okay. So the pressure from, you know, this sort of systemic idea or supporting notion that the content must be covered, whether students learn it or not, is a separate question.

[00:05:33] **John Foo:** Yes, and another thing that comes up is that some of these topics they don't see as being part of their discipline. So they think it belongs to a humanities course or a social science course and not so much in some of these STEM courses, which is interesting because some of the examples I've come across have shown how it can be really nicely integrated into these more traditional courses in a way that shows students how these principles that they're learning in this, in these math courses or engineering courses apply in all these different ways that intrigue students and inspire them to continue in this field.

[00:06:17] **Catherine Ross:** Right. Right. I think solving authentic real-world problems is highly motivating to students, right? It gives them a sense of purpose.

[00:06:29] **John Foo:** It definitely does. Yeah. Yes, and including for math, one thing that I have come across pretty frequently is students having math anxiety. And so, that brings up a whole lot of challenges that other students don't have to face.

[00:06:45] And the idea for me that's pretty intriguing is, if students can enter the course thinking about how all these topics that they might be interested in and exploring further, and then seeing how math can help them explore it in a

deeper way. You know, that can make them overcome some of that anxiety or give them more motivation to explore math further in a way that they wouldn't have if it was just a traditional math course.

[00:07:10] **Catherine Ross:** Wow, that's, that's really powerful. And so that's part of how you've addressed the challenge in your work, but we often aren't necessarily working with the students, we're working with the instructors. So how do you convince instructors to take this kind of a step, especially given the concerns about content coverage?

[00:07:32] **John Foo:** Yes, it is definitely a challenge because of all the things that I've just mentioned. And, you know, faculty are working with, within systems that make it hard to enact these kinds of changes. It requires a lot of, you know, curriculum review, a lot of discussions about what the direction might be for them to take in a department.

[00:07:53] But some of the things that I think have been pretty helpful is bringing back examples from other courses. Firstly, other disciplines, you know, that have tried this more than other disciplines, and then bringing it back from other institutions as well who have tried this in, you know, different settings, as examples, again, not to say that they are going to be adopting the same modules.

[00:08:13] **Catherine Ross:** Right.

[00:08:13] **John Foo:** But just as a way to say like, oh, you know, this can be done this way, how would you like to do it in your own class?

[00:08:16] **Catherine Ross:** Right. Right

[00:08:19] **John Foo:** Yeah, and highlighting some examples from within the institution as well has been helpful. I've been very inspired by some examples from Barnard College, for example, Rachel Austin, a professor in chemistry, did a course on racism and chemistry that as part of a small add-on to their introductory course and it, you know, had the most students enrolled among all the mini one-credit course sections that they had.

[00:08:49] And it led to a publication, you know, where the graduate student who co-taught that class, you know, wrote up that paper with Rachel. And so seeing all these examples happening around campus, I think, inspires other faculty to also take that leap.

[00:09:01] **Catherine Ross:** Right, right. Yes, and I'm recalling also an example at a previous institution I was at where a math instructor coordinated with facilities and as they were implementing sustainability initiatives, students help assess whether those green initiatives were actually doing what we hoped they would do. And that course was wildly popular with the students.

[00:09:36] **John Foo:** That's so wonderful to hear. I know that there's some work in the chemical engineering department as well where they now have a green chemical engineering course that I think is really exciting for me to learn more about. I'm going to be meeting with the instructor shortly, Chris Chen. And I think one other thing that it's interesting to think about is, it's not to say that these disciplines don't necessarily engage with these topics in their courses, but they tend to happen at a more senior level.

[00:10:06] **Catherine Ross:** Right. Right. So how do we get them from the start so that the students see a reason to persist in the discipline? Right?

[00:10:16] **John Foo:** Exactly.

[00:10:17] **Catherine Ross:** Okay.

[00:10:17] **John Foo:** Yes.

[00:10:18] **Catherine Ross:** Right.

[00:10:19] **John Foo:** And so instead of waiting for senior design and engineering before you tackle these, you know, real world challenges that are authentic, can we bring it into, you know, like the first course in engineering that they're taking, in a way that really engages them?

[00:10:30] **Catherine Ross:** Right, right, right. And that's kind of like project-based learning, except the projects are very, um, issue-oriented, right? Solving a real-world problem.

[00:10:43] **John Foo:** Yes, yes. And so, I, I see lots of opportunities that faculty, you know, our faculty are so creative, so innovative, and I'm really excited to see, you know, where this might go.

[00:10:53] **Catherine Ross:** Where this might go. Yeah, yeah, that's wonderful. Well, thank you for sharing this.

[00:11:00] **John Foo:** Thank you so much for having me, Catherine. I'm really glad that we were able to talk about this. Really important issue.

[00:11:05] **Catherine Ross:** Yeah. Yeah. This is a great contribution to this spring season of dead ideas So, thank you.

[00:11:13] **John Foo:** Glad to be here. Thank you.

[00:11:16] **Catherine Ross:** Welcome to dead ideas podcast, Jamie I am really excited to be talking with you.

[00:11:23] **Jamie Kim:** Thank you. Happy to be here.

[00:11:25] **Catherine Ross:** All right, our first question: What is a dead idea that you encounter somewhat frequently in your work with faculty or in educational development more broadly?

[00:11:35] **Jamie Kim:** So, something that I often notice in my day-to-day work with faculty is the sense that faculty just don't have a lot of time or the incentives to devote themselves to maybe reflecting on their teaching or make improvements in their teaching. Because after all, all of us are kind of pulled in so many different Directions, right?

[00:11:57] Every day because of all these responsibilities and commitments that we have. So faculty are probably no different. So I think sometimes there's this perception that the educational development work that we do is, is challenging because faculty just don't have that time or the incentives to engage with us.

[00:12:14] And I think that's only partially true because you're, you're only looking at it from the individual level. And when you're looking at the individual level, you only see those individuals who seem so busy and, and disengaged when in fact those very individuals are also operating in an existing system that they're part of.

[00:12:34] So, perhaps what we should also be doing is paying attention to, you know, what the system is doing, what are the incentives, what sorts of rewards and opportunities are out there for faculty so that they can continue, um, investing their time and effort into, into their teaching.

[00:12:51] **Catherine Ross:** Right, systemic change is what we're all about and yes, like, looking at that bigger picture, what's the environment saying to people

about the work that they're doing and the ways in which they're prioritizing certain kinds of work.

[00:13:09] Yes. So, what do you think is the, the underlying issue that's created this dead idea or made it so prevalent?

[00:13:19] **Jamie Kim:** Well, I think one issue that might have created this perception or idea that faculty are so busy, so disengaged, therefore our, our educational development work is, is struggling. I think, I think one issue might be that there's this lack of platforms or spaces where faculty are encouraged to really explore different ways to improve their teaching.

[00:13:41] You know, I think there's also this lack of space where faculty are, are also recognized and rewarded for their teaching efforts. Teaching, I think, is often seen as something very individual and idiosyncratic and, and often the, the burden to teach well seems to fall on that one individual teacher. And if you don't have a lot of resources or, or recognition or opportunities to, to keep improving your teaching, I think it's very easy to kind of get stuck in your own routine of, of doing the same thing every day without really having that opportunity to reflect and, and, and figure out ways to continuously improve your teaching.

[00:14:23] **Catherine Ross:** But also, like our students, I think there's no community there, right? There's no one that they can, that they're talking with regularly about their teaching. And I think that's probably, you know, teaching's always been that thing you do, like you said, as an individual in your classroom with the door closed, right?

[00:14:44] **Jamie Kim:** Yeah.

[00:14:45] **Catherine Ross:** Um, and you know, we know from students that that learning community is important for their learning and development, and it's probably true for faculty too.

[00:14:55] **Jamie Kim:** Absolutely. We say all the time that students need that community. Students need, um, that sense of belonging in their classroom environment. And I, I think, as you pointed out, the same thing goes to, to faculty.

[00:15:08] They need a network of supporters and allies and, and resources that would enable them to, to continue improving their teaching and, and so teaching is done by individual teachers, but I think it can also be enhanced when there,

there is that support and acknowledgement from the community that, that these individual teachers belong to.

[00:15:30] **Catherine Ross:** And the validation, or, or the sense maybe that other people care about this too.

[00:15:36] **Jamie Kim:** Yes.

[00:15:36] **Catherine Ross:** Right?

[00:15:37] **Jamie Kim:** Absolutely. Absolutely. I think when you. When you know that there's also other faculty who are trying to do their best job in teaching, when you know that you're not the only one trying to improve your teaching, I think that really gives that sense of validation.

[00:15:53] And when you know that the institution supports you in, in, in your teaching endeavors, that really empowers them to continue doing their work.

[00:16:02] **Catherine Ross:** So how do you then sort of deal with these challenges when you are working with instructors?

[00:16:10] **Jamie Kim:** That's, that's I think is such a hard question to answer because I don't think I alone am able to solve all these challenges that we just discussed, but I guess one thing that comes to mind is, um, the work that I've been doing with, um, the Teaching and Learning Grant that's awarded by the Provost's Office at Columbia, and it's something that we at the Center support.

[00:16:33] It's very Columbia-specific, and we're very lucky to have these kinds of resources, but I do think it's one of the few examples that I've seen that takes place in this very much of a concerted effort at the institutional level that offers real tangible resources for instructors. And it's just super inspiring and encouraging to be part of this work because I get to see the instructor's vision for good teaching materialize over time.

[00:17:01] And, and when you receive a grant like this, it's not just a reward in monetary terms, but it's also an official kind of recognition that what you're doing is, is validated, as you said, right? And the institution supports your, your good teaching and, and your endeavor, your, your, your drive to do innovative teaching, because we, we all know how much time and effort it takes to design and deliver a well-structured course.

[00:17:28] **Catherine Ross:** Right. Right. And I think also maybe in this case, like you and people in the CTL are providing some of that community that may not exist in any, you know, in a department or in a school, right? It creates a little bit of community around getting that project done.

[00:17:49] **Jamie Kim:** Absolutely. And I think, I keep coming back to that theme of community, because I think that's in general what I try to do every time when I work with faculty to build and foster that sense of community, not just in this work with teaching and learning grant, but when I'm facilitating a workshop for faculty, when I'm writing a spotlight article where I'm trying to feature a particular faculty's teaching, I think it's that sense of community and belongingness that's, that's really empowering for a lot of faculty, just telling them that they're not alone in this work.

[00:18:22] And, you know, this work is sometimes very, very tiring and exhausting and, and to know that you're not alone in this work, I think that's, that's very powerful and that's what really inspires me to continue the work that I do.

[00:18:35] **Catherine Ross:** Oh, that's, that's lovely. Well, thank you so much, Jamie. We really appreciate you being part of this season of Dead Ideas in Teaching and Learning.

[00:18:45] **Jamie Kim:** Thank you for having me.

[00:18:47] Welcome to the Dead Ideas podcast, Rebecca. I'm so excited to be here with you.

[00:18:54] **Rebecca Petitti:** I'm delighted to be here. Thanks for having me.

[00:18:56] **Catherine Ross:** All right, here we go. What's a dead idea that you encounter, you know, somewhat frequently in your work with faculty or in educational development more broadly?

[00:19:08] **Rebecca Petitti:** Yeah, so one that I've seen coming up, I feel like it's kind of picking up pace, is this idea of losing yourself in an effort to be inclusive and equitable, right? So we know that inclusive teaching is so important, right? It's, you know, we want to do the best to accommodate our students, meet them where they are, but what I'm hearing more and more about is that faculty are actually finding that becoming more and more of a task, and how do they do it, and they're losing themselves.

[00:19:32] You know, I had a faculty member say they made eight versions. to try and accommodate students' makeups and things, right? And so, this idea of, you know, how do we find the balance between meeting our students where they are and giving them what they need, but also realizing that faculty need to make time and space for themselves.

[00:19:50] Um, and we see this affecting different levels of faculty in different ways, right? So, our adjunct instructors or our non-tenured faculty that are teaching perhaps several courses, sometimes at different institutions are finding they're trying to do all of this and keep track of everything. And so, you know, during the pandemic, we saw this move from perhaps rigid structures and this rigid way of thinking to be more flexible to provide more accommodations.

[00:20:17] And we don't want to go back to rigidity. That is not where we want to go. But then how do we find this balance, and how do we make sure that, you know, we're focusing on wellness and well-being for our students, but also ourselves?

[00:20:29] **Catherine Ross:** Right, right. And I think the non-tenure track faculty, it's really hard for them to say no to anything students ask for.

[00:20:40] Which kind of leads into the second question, the systemic or underlying issues that have created this or made it so prevalent. So how they're evaluated, the use of student evaluations. But it is really an interesting kind of emergent dead idea, like how far do you go to be inclusive? And what about your, we're also concerned about student well-being, but what about instructor well-being?

[00:21:08] **Rebecca Petitti:** Absolutely. And we see this, you know, both in terms of our non-tenured faculty, but also women.

[00:21:15] **Catherine Ross:** Yes. I wonder.

[00:21:16] **Rebecca Petitti:** Faculty of color, they are asked for things beyond, um, what, you know, other demographics of instructors are. And so, you know, we can think about this dead idea around student evaluations of teaching, right?

[00:21:27] And I know that you've talked about that. Um. And so there is this idea of I can't say no or if I say no, am I being exclusive or am I not meeting my students where they need? There's also that personal element of what you believe as an instructor and these things get compounded and you know, you can look at the headlines.

[00:21:45] It's all about burnout. It's all about well-being. And we're seeing that from our students to our instructors, and I would argue you're starting to see that trickle into the educational developers and the folks that are trying to support all of this and wondering how do I do that in the system that I'm working in?

[00:22:01] **Catherine Ross:** Right, right.

[00:22:02] **Rebecca Petitti:** Um, you know, and we can think about, too, like, another underlying issue is that this is coming from years of inequitable practices, and we're seeing people that want to fix that, which is incredible. But you've got to fix it within a sustainable model, or you're not going to be able to do the change you want to without burning out from that.

[00:22:21] **Catherine Ross:** Yeah, it can't be left to the individual instructor to figure out how to do this, right? There needs to be conversations in departments or in schools.

[00:22:34] **Rebecca Petitti:** We need to support teaching.

[00:22:36] **Catherine Ross:** Yeah, yeah. Exactly, exactly.

[00:22:38] **Rebecca Petitti:** Yeah, yeah. They need models of how to do it. What does it look like to be an inclusive instructor in a way that's sustainable across a department, across an institution, and not just you as that lone instructor, sometimes without even the protections of tenure, trying to do that.

[00:22:53] **Catherine Ross:** Right, right.

[00:22:55] **Rebecca Petitti:** Yeah.

[00:22:56] **Catherine Ross:** Right. And to not leave your students feeling like nobody cares.

[00:23:01] **Rebecca Petitti:** Exactly. And that's the other piece of it, right? We don't want to swing to the point where nobody is being accommodated or met. But what does this balance look like?

[00:23:10] **Catherine Ross:** Yeah. So, that leads into the third question about how you've addressed these challenges in your work with instructors.

[00:23:18] So, how do you find that or help them figure out what that looks like?

[00:23:24] **Rebecca Petitti:** Yeah. I mean, for me, a lot of it, you know, just telling someone setting boundaries is actually a form of support, right? And it all comes down to transparency. So sometimes, you know, it's, oh, I don't, I don't need to provide a rationale, right?

[00:23:37] For why I'm doing something. They, this is just what needs to be done. Yeah. But if you provide that transparency of here is when the exam is, I can maybe, you know, provide makeups within this window of time, but after this date, I can't, because we're on to the next thing and I have grade, like, really modeling that.

[00:23:55] It can also help students learn how to set boundaries in their own lives, right? Because they're also going to be, you know, when they enter a profession, have people that are kind of push on those boundaries. I need you to do more. I need you to do this. And so how do we model that? And it's really about being transparent and open.

[00:24:13] Um, and then I also encourage people to go back to the basics, right? If you're having issues with having to create multiple forms of a quiz or a test, is that the best assessment for your course? Really thinking about some of those. And so I feel like this, you know, what we're seeing with burnout and perhaps losing themselves really gets us back into all these other underlying dead ideas around assessment, around evaluations of teaching, around teaching support. Is it valued? And we're kind of seeing some of the consequences maybe of some of those dead ideas with this.

[00:24:46] **Catherine Ross:** Wow. Those are really some very interesting insights into how it's not just a system or a systemic problem. It's like the whole system, all the systems are sort of coming together in a most unfortunate way with the best of intentions on everyone's part, right?

[00:25:07] Because the instructors really are trying to, to care about their students and be mindful of where students are at right now and the stressors that they face. But yeah, we can't, we just can't do it all. Right.

[00:25:21] **Rebecca Petitti:** Yeah. And I like to remind, you know, we talk about, you know, our students are bringing their whole selves into the course. I start every session with reminding instructors, you're doing the same thing.

[00:25:32] **Catherine Ross:** Yeah.

[00:25:33] **Rebecca Petitti:** You know, we talk about all of these societal and contextual factors that think about for your students when they enter your course. Maybe it doesn't seem relevant to your content, but it's coming in. The same is true. You're living in that space.

[00:25:44] **Catherine Ross:** Right, right.

[00:25:45] **Rebecca Petitti:** Um, and I think we saw, you know, it was easy to see that when it was the pandemic and we were all quarantined in our homes, but no, it's everything, right? And you maybe don't have to disclose every personal thing that you're entering the course with, but recognizing that, you know what, I can't extend my grading beyond this date.

[00:26:04] **Catherine Ross:** Right.

[00:26:05] **Rebecca Petitti:** And just telling students that and working with them to the best you can.

[00:26:07] **Catherine Ross:** Right. Wow.

[00:26:09] **Rebecca Petitti:** Yeah.

[00:26:10] **Catherine Ross:** Well, thank you so much, Rebecca, for being part of our podcast this season.

[00:26:14] **Rebecca Petitti:** Thank you so much for having me.

[00:26:17] **Catherine Ross:** Welcome to Dead Ideas, Corey.

[00:26:20] **Corey Ptak:** I'm very happy to be here. Thank you, Catherine.

[00:26:22] **Catherine Ross:** So tell me about a dead idea that you have encountered or are encountering in your work with faculty or in educational development more broadly.

[00:26:33] **Corey Ptak:** Yeah, thank you for that question. I think one of the biggest dead ideas that I continually encounter is that faculty are set in their ways and don't want to change their pedagogy. And nothing really could be further from the truth. Because faculty do want to advance in their teaching

practices, but they exist within an ecosystem at an institution, and change is difficult when you think about their place within an institution. So even if they want to change, it doesn't mean that they're able to make those changes within the ecosystem they exist.

[00:27:07] **Catherine Ross:** That's really interesting. So then what, that leads us right into our second question. Like, what are the systemic or underlying issues that have sort of created the dead idea that they don't want to change when in fact we know that many faculty do?

[00:27:24] **Corey Ptak:** Yeah, I think that we're thinking about institutions and there's a question of structure and agency. The way that structures give or take away agency to people within it. And there are certain structures within the academic institution that empower faculty to make changes to their courses. And there are others that really take away. So there's lots of barriers that faculty face when they're trying to make changes to their course.

[00:27:51] And that includes things like reward structures. If, if their promotion is dependent on things other than teaching, then they're not incentivized to make changes. It also includes things like institutional and departmental cultures. If the department says investing in your teaching is not valuable, then they're de-incentivized, or even it can become, investing in teaching can become a professional liability depending on the culture of the department they're existing in and who is going to be recognizing their work, etc.

[00:28:20] So I think that there are, there are many barriers that faculty face on an institutional level that really disempower and remove their agency within the course.

[00:28:30] **Catherine Ross:** Right.

[00:28:31] **Corey Ptak:** And it's going to depend a little bit also on like what kind of faculty you are.

[00:28:34] **Catherine Ross:** Yeah, yeah, exactly.

[00:28:34] **Corey Ptak:** Non-tenure track faculty, tenure track faculty.

[00:28:36] So, those structures within the institution are really going to determine who has agency and power to make the modifications to their course that they might want to.

[00:28:46] **Catherine Ross:** Yeah. And I think, you know, it's not even if a department explicitly says teaching is not important, because that would be very rare. I don't think departments do that.

[00:28:57] I think most departments feel like they value teaching for good reason, right? That's what they're there for. But I think there is this unintended consequence of a reward system that prioritizes one thing over another, right? So it's often a very implicit message.

[00:29:16] **Corey Ptak:** Oh, most definitely, most definitely implicit. And it's also in many ways who is placed well within the department to, you know, to make those kinds of decisions. So, you know, for instance, a lot of the non-tenure track faculty, they're usually not on committees for promotion, et cetera.

[00:29:37] **Catherine Ross:** Right, right.

[00:29:39] **Corey Ptak:** And so that means that the voice of the people who are doing the predominant amount of teaching are not actually placed in positions to actually change culture to value teaching the same way.

[00:29:50] **Catherine Ross:** Yeah, and that's, that goes directly back to a conversation I had last fall with some authors of a paper around how to improve STEM education, STEM undergraduate education. And one of their recommendations was that all faculty, including visiting faculty and lecturers and adjuncts should be at the table when decisions are made about teaching.

[00:30:14] So that to your point directly, right? So how do you address these challenges in your work or in your thinking about how we approach this?

[00:30:26] **Corey Ptak:** So one of the things that I've drawn inspiration from personally is Henderson published a paper and what, what he did is he looked at change strategies around teaching and he then categorized them based on whether they were individual strategies meant to help individuals or whether they were institutional strategies.

[00:30:47] And he came up with sort of four general kinds of categories of change strategies. And lots of different programming falls into these sorts of four categories. And at the individual level, there's this category of Individual instructors disseminating their pedagogy and talking about their pedagogy with other instructors so that an individual is empowered to share their pedagogy and share their teaching strategies and that in turn can spread from individual to individual.

[00:31:17] And then also promoting these reflective teachers, right? Getting them to think more actively about how their teaching is going. And that's kind of at the individual level. But then at the institutional level, there's the idea of developing policy, like thinking about the institutional structures that empower changes to educational practice.

[00:31:41] And that includes things like, are we having non-tenure track faculty on committees that, we're, we're making decisions about, about education and about teaching. And then more culturally at the institution is developing a shared vision of what the institution values around teaching and who gets to contribute to that shared vision. That's another sort of institutional category.

[00:32:02] **Catherine Ross:** Right, right. And I think an example that I saw in the paper that you've been working on was if one single thing that could be done is like changing or broadening, perhaps is a better word, the definition of scholarship.

[00:32:20] **Corey Ptak:** Yes, because, sort of, scholarship is the language of academia in many ways at the current moment, broadening what that scholarship actually, what the definition of that is, gives more people access to speaking the language of promotion and advancement and the language of academia.

[00:32:37] So if we broaden scholarship to include discipline-based education research or scholarship of teaching and learning, then even people who are in a more educator role can still access more of the institutional structures rather than being excluded from them because they're then sort of speaking the language of the institution.

[00:32:57] **Catherine Ross:** It also, I think, would incentivize even tenured faculty, if they do make a big change in a course, to perhaps do a little research on those changes to see how it worked out, right? In terms of improvements in student learning.

[00:33:13] **Corey Ptak:** And I think we see that a lot. In the, the provost grants projects.

[00:33:18] **Catherine Ross:** Yes.

[00:33:18] **Corey Ptak:** Right? We, we see someone who has got a little bit of money to make some changes in their course and suddenly they're starting to see those changes. They get very passionate, like, how do I document these

things? How do I, and so this is very, you know, this is the labor that goes into these changes is something that should count for professional development. It should count for their tenure and promotion. And how do we make that happen?

[00:33:42] **Catherine Ross:** Right.

[00:33:43] **Corey Ptak:** SoTL and DEBR is one of the ways that we can translate that labor into a usable format for tenure and promotion within an institution.

[00:33:52] **Catherine Ross:** If they allow.

[00:33:53] **Corey Ptak:** If we allow it.

[00:33:53] **Catherine Ross:** If they count that as scholarship. But it also, I think, helps the faculty, like, they have all these research skills and it allows them to use those same skills with their teaching, and I think that's a win-win.

[00:34:07] **Corey Ptak:** I absolutely agree. I think that the more that we can shift faculty's thinking, because they have these wonderful research skills, they're very analytical, and data-driven, etc., in their scholarship, but they're not always applying those same things to their teaching. And the more that we can get them to transfer those research skills to their teaching, and come at it with the same critical eye, and data-driven eye, the more we can make these changes. But we have to lay foundations that values that transfer.

[00:34:35] **Catherine Ross:** Right, right, yes. And Columbia actually has a great example with our SOLER initiative, which people can find on our website, right? Where faculty can apply to do research on a course that they're teaching. So I think that's a really good example of how an institution can promote value around teaching.

[00:34:57] **Corey Ptak:** I agree. Thinking about Henderson's categories, it hits multiple categories, right? For professor is able to get a lot of professional advancement from doing some of this SoTL or deeper work. That's great. That's shared vision. That's also sort of developed good policy, but also when they disseminate it, other faculty are reading it, they're empowered.

[00:35:14] **Catherine Ross:** Yes, right.

[00:35:17] **Corey Ptak:** So that's hitting the individual level as well.

[00:35:17] **Catherine Ross:** Right.

[00:35:19] **Corey Ptak:** So it's hitting at the institutional and the individual levels and Henderson's categories.

[00:35:22] **Catherine Ross:** Yes, right.

[00:35:24] **Corey Ptak:** I think it's a great idea having this two for one kind of, uh, strategy.

[00:35:26] **Catherine Ross:** Yes

[00:35:28] **Catherine Ross:** Yeah, it is a two for one, isn't it? Yeah. All right. Well, thank you for this, Corey. And before, um, we sign off, I'll just say I referenced SOLER, that's the Science of Learning Educational Research Initiative here at Columbia. And we'll put a link in the description for our listeners if they want to learn more about it. So thank you so much for being on Dead Ideas, Corey.

[00:35:52] **Corey Ptak:** Thank you for having me, Catherine. It was a pleasure.

[00:35:58] **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. 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.

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