

Annotation:

The CIRTL Wowza! Discussion series is meant for a general audience who have interests in pedagogical literature and STEM education. We use the Dead Ideas podcast to provide a digestible, short-form secondary source as a foundation for our literature review. This workshop was held remotely on Zoom (video optional; some participants contributed via chat). Thirteen participants attended, in addition to Columbia CIRTL Fellows and Columbia CTL co-facilitators.

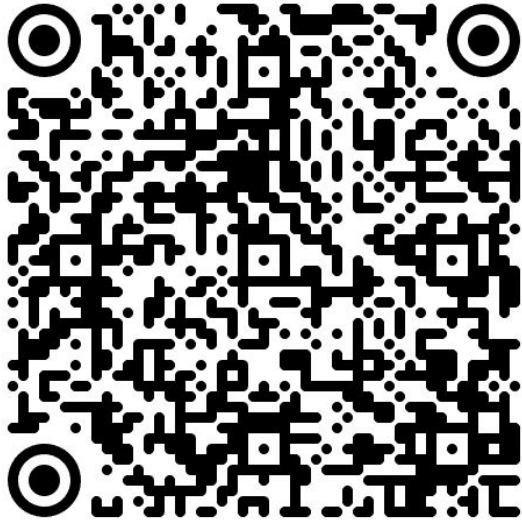
When we opened registration to the CIRTL network, individuals who signed up for this particular workshop came from a full range of backgrounds – some participants had never been in a formal instructor / TA role, some participants were staff members of teaching departments, and others were non-university educators. When preparing for this session, my primary goal was for any participant to be able to contribute to meaningful discussion using their personal experience, **but without assuming any previous teaching experience**. To achieve this, I tried to frame all questions such that they could be discussed from the perspective of students as well as instructors.

I requested a formal Columbia CTL teaching observation for this workshop for my pedagogical development. [Here is a link to the resulting observation report.](#)

Welcome to the **Wowza!** Discussion Series

Please **sign in** with QR code or go to
<https://forms.gle/5BqudUqe7osvvZZZ7>

Expected Start Time:
10:05am EDT



Today we're discussing:
"The Damaging Myth of the
Natural Teacher: The Story Behind
The Story with Beth McMurtrie"

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Center for Teaching and Learning

Supporting Teaching as Scholarship

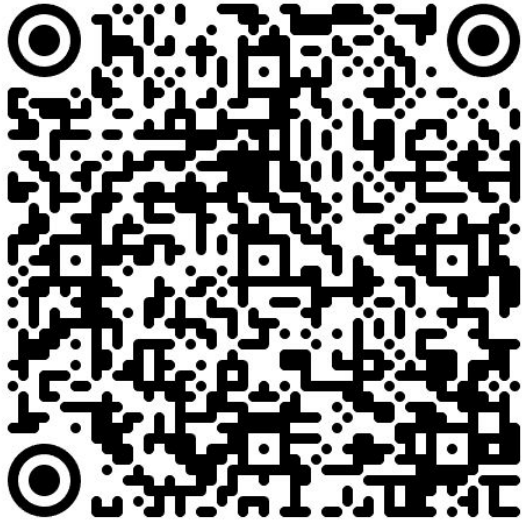
Wowza! Discussion
Series

Ava Chen

Columbia University CIRTL Fellow

Welcome!

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Discussion Guidelines

In this session, we aim to...

- **Share space:** Step up, step back. Avoid interrupting each other.
- **Listen actively** with an ear to understanding others' views.
- Constructively **critique ideas**, not individuals.
- **Avoid assumptions** about any member of the community and generalizations about social groups.
- **Anything else?**

Agenda

- Session Objectives + Podcast Summary
- What Makes a Good Teacher?
- Systemic Inertia Sustains the Myth of the Natural Teacher
- Supporting Teaching as Scholarship

Session Objectives

By the end of today's session, you will have:

- Reflected from self-experience on refining teaching skills
- Identified structural and institutional barriers that currently limit instructors from prioritizing teaching development
- Discussed possible ways to spotlight teaching in your professional development

Podcast Summary

“The Damaging Myth of the Natural Teacher”, the article:

- Narratives about instructors who realized that teaching was a skill to be honed, not an art
- Call to action for spotlighting teaching development programs

“The Story Behind the Story”, the podcast:

- Discusses systemic barriers behind the myth
- Considers internal and external forces pushing for change in how teaching is handled at the university level

Podcast Summary

“When people don't think of teaching as a skill to be learned, there's often no consensus on what good teaching is, which means how teaching is evaluated can be very flawed, at best, and often just relies on the student ratings, which is a disincentive for faculty to do anything innovative in their teaching. So it becomes this kind of vicious circle.”

- *Catherine Ross*

Breakout Rooms Discussion (8 Minutes)

Please spend some time introducing yourselves, then discuss one or both:

- If you've received teaching evaluations before, have they changed your subsequent teaching methods? Did the evaluations align with how you thought your teaching went?
- From your experiences as a student, do you remember any classes in which the instructor tried an unusual or innovative approach? How did it go?

What Makes a Good Teacher?

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What Makes a Good Teacher?

“This myth holds that a great teacher is somebody who is brilliant, or charismatic, or empathetic, or passionate. And, you know, these are all very personal traits, right? So the implication is that either you have it or you don't, but the truth is becoming a good teacher is hard work.”

- *Beth McMurtrie*

What Makes a Good Teacher?

The Mythic “Good Teacher” can be many personas:

- The brilliant inspirational professor
- The engaging storyteller
- The compassionate cheerleader/mentor

But no innate character traits are necessary for good teaching.

What Makes a Good Teacher?

Many longstanding evidence-based approaches for improving student learning and engagement:

- Crafting a syllabus with clear objectives and roadmaps
- Including active learning activities, not just listening to lectures
- Allowing room for low-stakes assessment and feedback

Unlike K-12 pedagogy, teacher training in graduate schools is scattershot and requires a lot of self-initiative to find.

Quick Audience Question (feel free to post responses in chat)

What motivated you / when did you start seeking out teaching development workshops like this one?

Systemic Inertia Sustains the Myth of the Natural Teacher

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Systemic Inertia Sustains the Myth

Two kinds of systemic inertia discourage improving teaching:

- Structural
 - Scattershot teaching development programs at the graduate level
 - Minimal reward in promotion and/or tenure policies
 - Limited systems for assessing teaching efficacy
- Cultural
 - Assumption that content expertise == teaching expertise
 - Minimal “peer review” of teaching

Cultural Inertia

“Faculty members feel very comfortable talking about their research, and maybe even their research failures with their peers. It might even be a badge of honor that they tried something and it didn't work out and they're going to try again. Research is peer review, and yet when it comes to teaching, it is this kind of private and personal thing.”

- *Beth McMurtrie*

A Brief Aside About Teaching Centers

“They often say that they feel like their focus group is the coalition of the willing, right? That small percentage of faculty members who were eager to try something new, who can't wait to take the next workshop, who are willing to stick their neck out and experiment with something in their classroom. And that's great, but it's almost like a fixed percentage of people on campus.”

- *Beth McMurtrie*

Breakout Rooms Discussion (8 Minutes)

Please discuss one or both:

- Consider one of your recent research activities in which you interacted with peers or mentees (journal club, project meeting, demonstrating/documenting a method). How could you integrate practicing teaching skills into your existing professional activities?
- Do you know how the different instructors in your department approach teaching? How can departments encourage sharing ideas?

Supporting Teaching as Scholarship (Balancing Competing Pressures)

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Supporting Teaching As Scholarship

Where are the ongoing shifts in university teaching?

- Gateway-to-major courses
 - Pressures towards prioritizing inclusive teaching practices
 - Large class sizes = large sets of analytical data on student learning
- Departmental Culture
 - Creating safe spaces for instructors to debug ongoing classroom issues
- Pandemic-Era and Post-Pandemic Learning Environments
 - Heightened awareness of student success and “new” teaching methods
 - Rethinking role of educational institutions, teachers, students

Supporting Teaching As Scholarship

Actionable benchmarks for “Good Teaching”:

- Effective communication of syllabus and course goals
- Management of class time and learning environment
- Learning from previous approaches and adapting to feedback
- Involvement in learning communities and workshops
- Doing research on own teaching

Breakout Rooms Discussion (8 Minutes)

Please discuss one or both:

- Have you noticed a recent shift in your institution's approach to teaching and/or professional development? What are the trends in conversation since the pandemic?
- How do you balance competing pressures for the different aspects of your professional development (teaching, research, etc.)?

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Closing Thoughts

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Further Reading/Listening

On Good Teaching as a Skill:

- Beth McMurtrie, [“The Damaging Myth of the Natural Teacher.”](#) The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2021
- Dead Ideas in Teaching and Learning Season 4, Episode 3, [“Teaching Development at Its Best: A Graduate Student Reflects”](#) (a sequel to this episode)

On Supporting Evidence-Based Teaching:

- USC’s Excellence in Teaching Initiative (<https://cet.usc.edu/usc-excellence-in-teaching-initiative/>)
- Your institution’s Center for Teaching and Learning :)

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