

Ep. 046: Contemplative Teaching

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We take a first look at the theme for the 2019 University-Wide Teaching & Learning Symposium, *Contemplative Teaching: Connecting Meaning, Purpose, and Values*. Dana Karraker joins us to talk about this wide-ranging approach to making teaching a first-person act. We also talk mindfulness, posters, sessions, and preview both our keynote speaker's morning workshop and luncheon talk. Plus, breaking news as Claire learns something unexpected about dessert.

The 2019 University-Wide Teaching & Learning Symposium will be held on Wednesday, January 9, at the Marriott Hotel and Conference Center in uptown Normal. The event is free for faculty, staff, and graduate students at Illinois State and other area institutions. Find out more and register before Friday, December 14, at CTLT.IllinoisState.edu/Symposium.

Transcript

JIM: Hi there. I'm Jim.

CLAIRE: And I'm Claire.

DANA: And I'm Dana.

JIM: Let's Talk Teaching.

JIM: Welcome to Let's Talk Teaching, a podcast from the Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology here at Illinois State University. I'm Jim Gee, and joining me today, two of my colleagues first Dr. Claire Lamonica. Our director. Hey, Claire.

CLAIRE: Hi, Jim.

JIM: And Dr. Dana Karraker, our coordinator for faculty development and special events. Welcome, Dana.

DANA: Thanks, Jim.

JIM: This is a special little one-off episode that we've, I guess Claire's become a tradition because this is the second time.

CLAIRE: We've done it twice now.

JIM: It's a tradition. And we're talking about our upcoming teaching and learning symposium. So, the theme for this year's university wide Teaching and Learning Symposium — I say this year's it's actually in 2019 — is contemplative teaching, connecting meaning, purpose, and values. So, the \$64,000 question and data this is for you. What is contemplative teaching?

DANA: What is contemplative teaching? Well, that's a new-ish thing for me. Well, it is a new thing for me. So, uhm, but it's very intriguing. So, I can talk enough about it to entice people to, to come learn more. Okay, I hope that's my intention. So—

CLAIRE: I can't wait.

DANA: So, it changes the teaching approach from a third person approach to a first-person approach. So, when we think about teaching in third person, the third person approach to teaching is the didactic approach that pile of fairy describes as a banking model of teaching, which is where the expert in the room, the instructor is responsible for taking their information and depositing into the heads of the learner, not a particularly productive way of teaching and learning. So, he, he talks about that banking model and offers other options for, for approaching learning in, in the classroom. And so, a purse first person approach, which is what contemplative teaching is, is more about centering the learning on the people that are in the room, the students and connecting students with their learning, using their own experiences, motivations, and giving them opportunities to connect with their personal worlds, build relationships with peers, and also then extend their learning into the communities.

JIM: So, we talked a lot about Paulo Freire, and the banking model, and then building a community of learners in a previous episode of our podcast, so is contemplative teaching one way of doing that?

DANA: Yes, because community is a big part of it.

JIM: Okay.

DANA: So, the people that do this work, have kind of conceptualize the ideas of contemplative teaching using a tree, and at the root of the tree is the communication and the communion and connection. And the other is awareness. So, part of, of this contemplative teaching ideas in that community of learners, instructors and students together, are becoming aware of who they are in the world, how their discipline plays out in the world. And then making those connections. So that's, that's the route and then it branches out into a lot of different ideas.

JIM: Yeah. So, what are some of those ideas? Because I think that might help people understand kind of the concrete, you know, what the takeaway is of this idea of teaching.

DANA: Alright, so there are several ways to incorporate aspects of contemplative teaching in the classroom. And when you hear the term contemplative, a lot of people turn to mindfulness. And that is one yeah, that is one part of it—

JIM: Even Claire, I'm hearing a little something— a little buzzing in the audio is that again?

DANA: And then, so if people are familiar with mindfulness practices, and and that has to do with with preparing your mind to do the work. And so there has been research done on these types of practices that help with improved concentration and focus. So, when

we incorporate those practices in our classroom, you know, it improves concentration and focus. And there are different ways that instructors can do that. So, it's a time, you know, at the beginning of class, where instructors take a little bit of time to help the students transition into the space and get themselves ready for learning. And that can take you can do that in a number of ways. And I don't know a whole lot of those. But right, it's certainly something that, that I'm sure we'll learn through at the symposium.

JIM: Well, and I guess that's a that's an important point for us to probably get out there early, which is the the whole idea of having a symposium is that we're coming together and exploring things together. Right, Claire? So, we're—

CLAIRE: We're going to be a community of learners.

JIM: Exactly. So, we're for that day, we're going to do that. So, we don't have all the answers right now,

CLAIRE: I went to a conference session one time on, on mindfulness and teaching and the presenters started the session by saying, "how many people in the room have ever driven to the mall, parked their car, gone in, run your errands, you come back out, have no idea where your car is?"

JIM: Right?

CLAIRE: It's like, just you're just clueless. And, and she'd said, "that's because we're not mindful in our everyday life, we don't take the time to look at where we are, and think about where, where we're going next, and be able to come back to that place." And she said, this is what, you know, this is what I work with my students. When we come to class, I say, "okay, we have to all be here; we have to concentrate on being in this place, in this space, with these people, talking about this subject; and so that it sticks with us. And we don't just leave here and go on to the next class without ever really taking this in." So, I really liked that analogy. And it really stuck with me and I, you know, I do from time to time, at the start of something; a workshop or a class or something, just say, let's just stop for a minute. Silence our phones, gather our thoughts. Just be here, we're just gonna sit, and even just sit for 30 seconds. And, you know, then go on.

JIM: We could model that right now. But I don't think you'd make a very compelling podcast.

CLAIRE: No, that'd be really bad radio.

JIM: Would be really bad radio. So, you know, when I remember when we were talking about what are we going to call the theme we're coming up with, the title for this year. And I think mindfulness was was, was very late in the game, we were still talking about working that term mindfulness into the overall theme. But then we realized that there are other aspects of contemplative teaching beyond mindfulness. So, what are some of those?

DANA: It's also about, well, we talked about community of learners. So, how are you structuring your, your classroom environment to foster peer interactions, and there are several strategies that encourage students to find their own voices? And then of course, that's that connecting the learning, you know, getting to that first person approach to learning that you're connecting the learning to yourself, and, and your world and your experiences. So, different practices that we can incorporate in our classroom would be incorporating teaching students and offering opportunities for them to do deep listening. And some people may be familiar with the term active listening, and it differs a bit from from deep listening in that deep listening encourages, engaging with others body speech in mind. And so really paying attention to what others are saying listening to their words and trying to understand the motivations and perspectives behind those words, whereas active listening is more listening strategies that that indicate to the speaker the person delivering the message that you are hearing them, asking clarification and paraphrasing, you know, just to know that you that you've heard. And I think the deep listening is that you understand; and it isn't always to come to agreement with what that person saying, but just to know that, that you're at least her understanding their perspectives. So, that's one, one way you can foster those peer interactions. Helping students see how your discipline works in the world. So, this is the civic engagement piece. So, one thing that, that you'll notice in the literature is contemplative teaching, is this mindfulness piece, but it's also strongly connected to social justice and, and strong connections to civic engagement? Which sure nice with our, with our mission at our university?

JIM: Absolutely.

DANA: So, ways to do that, you know, again, we're moving from that didactic, third person approach that sit and get approach to teaching, to really encouraging students to think about how the content relates to them, their lives, their worlds, and we can do that through a variety of ways. And one thing that our Keynote will be doing and is bringing art into it, and she'll be doing it through music, which I'm very intrigued by. So, I'm looking forward to seeing how seeing how she does that. So, you know, bringing in the arts, incorporating reflection, journaling, free-writing, and then also asking your students to interact with the readings in particular way. So yeah.

JIM: So, let's talk a little bit about the the actual sessions that are going to be going on. Because, you know, this is a, this is a broad topic, because it encompasses a lot of things that normally like civic engagement, or mindfulness would have been a theme, right, Claire in and of its own—

DANA: By itself, yeah.

JIM: And so, we have, we have, I think, a pretty interesting variety of sessions that were proposed by faculty members on campus, and by staff on campus, are there a couple of stand out to you that you want to highlight right now?

DANA: We do have some people who are are actually incorporating some components of contemplative teaching in their courses right now. And so, we have some sessions, from faculty who will be sharing their, that what they've been doing in their classes, so

on mindfulness, the student-centered type learning thing. So, we have several sessions on on that. Of course, our Keynote will be doing a session, a workshop, a workshop session in the morning. And she's calling that advancing youth of color thriving through mindfulness and critical contemplative approaches.

JIM: And we should probably introduce our keynote speaker, Dr. Dr. Michelle Chapman, from the—

DANA: University of Washington, DC.

JIM: Cool.

DANA: And so, she is a professor of criminal justice. And so, she has been studying this and incorporating it in her research and her teaching. So, in both of her sessions, she is, like I said, one of the one thing you can do with contemplative teaching is bring in the arts. And so, she will be using music and both of her sessions, jazz in particular. So, I'm very intrigued by that, and to seeing how she how she does that. And she'll also be incorporating spoken word, as we take those art forms and think about how we interact with others in the classroom.

JIM: And we should tell people, our complete the complete schedule is already online. So, if you go to our website, ctl.illinoisstate.edu. You can't miss the big symposium logo on the homepage. And that will get you to the main symposium page. And from there, you can get to the guide in many forms. And more forms are coming. And you can get a complete list of all the sessions which is which is great, because the registration deadline is December 14. Claire, isn't it nice to be able to know what the sessions are before the deadlines are registered? That doesn't happen all the time.

CLAIRE: I hope, I hope that everybody will. I hope that everybody who hears this will go on to our website and check out the sessions because I'm sure you're gonna find something that will appeal to you. And I mean, you know, well, there is the caramel apple pie which appeals to everybody.

JIM: Actually, actually.

CLAIRE: Oh, no, no caramel apple pie.

JIM: You didn't you know,

CLAIRE: This is just being broken to me

JIM: Breaking it.

CLAIRE: Okay, never mind, forget the caramel apple pie.

JIM: Uh the caramel apple pie is apparently no longer available available, there is something new that we're cooking, we're gonna we're going to we will, this may be our chance to practice mindful eating as well. And we shall see. So now the famous

now infamous caramel apple pie is not available. But we do have some cool swag we're giving away though we won't tell people what it is. But we get some swag.

CLAIRE: Come for the come for the swag stay for the sessions. Yeah, I'm really, it's really fun hearing Dana talking about this. Because as I'm listening and hearing all of the elements that are pulled together, when we're thinking about contemplative teaching, these are all things we're talking about on our campus. You know, I mean, this, the importance of closing the retention gap, we have retention numbers that look great until you start breaking them down by, you know, specific groups of subgroups of students and realizing that we have real gaps in terms of retention. And I think that it sounds like the keynote will address that to a certain extent. And of course, civic engagement, which is really important, really important to all of us. So, there's a and, oh, and teaching and learning which, yeah, they're teaching. That's what we do here. So that's pretty exciting, too. And I had a great standing-in-line conversation with somebody yesterday who's doing a poster that is just spot on about this about this topic. She's been researching the effects of mindfulness on her students. She's been introducing mindfulness practice into her teaching and and researching the results and the impact that it's having on our students, even to the point she has a colleague, they're doing some I think it's biological testing or brainwave testing or something. I mean, they're really, they're taking this from a lot of perspective. So, there's just gonna be a lot of good stuff there. I'm really excited about the way this has come together.

DANA: And we are to— I should mention the poster. So, I don't think we've discussed the different formats for presentations that we have. We'll have individual presentations, we have panel presentations, and poster presentations. And then we'll start off the day with a keynote workshop. But we also have what we call our idea cafe. And for those people who attend conferences, sometimes they're called roundtables. But we like the idea of Cafe because a lot of times, a lot of interesting conversation and learning happens in those informal settings in coffee shops, cafes, where people sit in at tables and, and talk. So, we will have some people leading some conversations to start off the morning. And that's a kind of easy way to

JIM: Yeah...

DANA: Into the day.

JIM: I think this is the second or third year that we've done something like this, and it kind of takes the edge off the morning a little bit. I kind of liked it. And then I think also going on at that time, we're also having a session with Adobe who's coming in, which is which is just kind of an opportunity. Since the faculty is going to be there. They're going to be talking about the new technology that we're we brought to campus. And and with a focus on teaching and learning, of course. So.

DANA: So, several options in the morning. Yeah, as people think about how to plan their day.

JIM: And then and then the poster session is in the evening, it laid out it caps the day as it were; speaking of taking the edge off, I do believe they're great tickets involved. So—

CLAIRE: Please tell me we haven't canceled the drink.

JIM: No, no, no—

JIM: That would be your call...

JIM: No, no, the you know that that is still apparently procurable.

CLAIRE: Okay, that's great.

JIM: As opposed to the aforementioned caramel apple pie. So. So to wrap it up, Claire for people who have never come to the symposium here on campus, or for those folks who haven't been back in a while, why should they bother?

CLAIRE: You know, this is just, this is just the best way to start off the semester. I mean, I I can't, and that's, that's not an original quote, that's something that I have been told over and over and over again, by faculty who come to this, you know, it's almost it's almost sort of a meta, contemplative or, you know, mindfulness thing. It's, it's getting your head back into that teaching space. But it's after, you know, after a winter break, but it's also making connections with people that you may only see a couple of times a year or a few times a year, having great conversations with colleagues, we try to we've been very intentional the last few years, in response to feedback that we got about we want more time to talk to each other. And so, we've, we've tried to build in additional time for people to have Hallway Conversations or to sit down at the Idea Cafe together or just have a cup of coffee. So, it's really it really recharges your energy, with a teaching focus in a way that having a break. You know, it always sounds really restful, but in a way, it sort of pulls you away from that, you know, it can sort of pull you away from that teaching thing. And then when you get back, this was a great way to just sort of plug back in, get re-energized and you're off and running for the semester.

JIM: Well, we hope people will join us. So, the actual date for this symposium, which I don't think we mentioned yet. Is Wednesday, January 9, Wednesday, January 9, it's at the Marriott Conference Center in normal, and—

CLAIRE: It's free.

JIM: It is; it is free. You have to register by Friday, December 14. So, to do that, again, go to our website, ctl.tl.illinoisstate.edu. Claire, Dana, thanks so much.

CLAIRE: Thank you, Jim.

JIM: And that's all the time we have for this episode of Let's Talk Teaching. Find out more about the symposium and about our podcast again. ctl.tl.illinoisstate.edu. For Dr. Claire Lamonica, for Dr. Dana Karraker, for all of my colleagues here at the Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology until we talk again, Happy Teaching.