

## Dead Ideas in Teaching and Learning Podcast Series

### Season 5, Episode 2: Rigor as Inclusive Practice with Jamiella Brooks and Julie McGurk

#### 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. Let's get started.

[00:00:23] Welcome to Dead Ideas in Teaching and Learning. I'm speaking today with doctors Jamiella Brooks and Julie McGurk. As a quick reminder for our listeners in this podcast series, we are exploring dead ideas in teaching and learning. 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."

[00:00:53] Dr. Jamiella Brooks is an associate director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of Pennsylvania where her work focuses on programming and support for equitable and inclusive teaching practices. Dr. Brooks earned her PhD in French literature at the University of California Davis, and has served as a Fulbright teaching assistant in France. Her current projects involve analyzing pedagogical practices of settler colonial education that persist in present day teaching practice. Prior to coming to UPenn, Jamila served as the founding director of the Teaching Assistant Program at Berea College. She's the author of several articles, including "Academia as Violence" in the 2020 second edition of *Presumed Incompetent: Race, Class, Power and Resistance of Women in Academia*.

[00:01:50] Dr. Julie McGurk is the Director of Faculty Teaching Initiatives at Yale University where she consults with faculty and runs various teaching workshops in collaboration with the rest of the faculty teaching initiatives team. Dr. McGurk is a neuroscientist by training with a B.S. from the University of Pittsburgh and a PhD from Johns Hopkins University. As a post-doc at the University of Pennsylvania, Julie taught at Rutgers Camden through the Penn Port program, a program dedicated to promoting diversity and inclusion in STEM through teaching. Prior to Yale, Julie worked at the University of Pennsylvania Center for Teaching and Learning for nine years, where she taught large lectures, small active learning, and online courses.

[00:02:37] Welcome to Our Dead Ideas podcast, Jamiella and Julie, it's such a delight to have you for this episode.

[00:02:44] **Jamiella Brooks:** Thank you for having us.

[00:02:45] **Julie McGurk:** Thank you so much.

[00:02:46] **Catherine Ross:** So let me set the stage for our listeners. Last fall and spring, there were a couple of Chronicle of Higher Education articles by one of their reporters, Beckie Supaino, and she was exploring the topic of rigor and rigor wars, which actually was the term coined by one of our guests today, Jamiella Brooks. The first of Supaino's articles was about the work of our two guests today who were presenting on this topic of rigor last fall at our annual Center for Teaching and Learning National Network, which is called the Pod Network Conference, and their session was titled, "Rigor as Inclusive Practice Beyond Deficit Models." The second article was titled "The Redefinition of Rigor," and this was a broader look at the ways in which rigor can be defined and about how the concept of rigor is being debated and contested across the academy. These articles were so interesting to me that I thought it would be fantastic to invite Julie and Jamiella here today to share their thoughts on their work with you all.

[00:04:00] So first question, Jamiella and Julie, one of the things that I really appreciated in your presentation was your approach to rigor as being an essential part of inclusive teaching practices that result in equitable outcomes for all students. You call out the role of the deficit ideology that drives many of our so-called teaching practices. Practices that lead to inequities in learning outcomes. Just a quick example for our listeners, things like curving of grades. So can you say a little bit more about this deficit ideology and maybe share some examples more than what the one I just gave for our listeners who may not have heard this term before?

[00:04:51] **Jamiella Brooks:** That's a great question. I think there are a lot of ways of looking at deficits, but I want to distill it down into two facets, and one of those facets is looking at deficits in our students and another facet is looking at deficits in our teaching. So I want to start with teaching. Actually as educational developers, as people who work with instructors to develop their teaching practices, we know that it would be very ineffective to say to another instructor, look your teaching evaluations are terrible. We've heard things. Your teaching is just not good. After 10 plus years of being here, we're going to put you in a remedial teaching program, and that will hopefully improve your teaching. Now what would anyone's reaction to that be? No, like it doesn't do

the work that we want it to do. It makes the instructor defensive, miserable, angry, and it really doesn't do anything to improve the situation.

[00:05:40] It focuses on deficits, which even if they do exist, stigmatizes that person in unhelpful ways and ignores the strengths and the expertise that that instructor really does bring into the classroom. And we would never say something as direct as that, but we can communicate it in other ways with other kinds of signals, such as if the instructor is talking and I just interrupt them as they're trying to explain their teaching approach. Or if I say, look there's this mandatory remedial teaching training, I think you should enroll. Or let's say I observe their teaching and I give them a grade. I say, I've seen your teaching. You get a C- for effort, and I don't give them helpful feedback. Your delivery of content was unclear. Your approach wasn't helpful. Your teaching methodology lacked rigor. So the question of deficit doesn't actually need to be said aloud. It's indicated in other signals as well. I think deficit ideology exists everywhere. It signals that there's a significant flaw in that person and leaves no room for improvement. It says that you need to fix yourself, but doesn't actually offer a concrete pathway towards that.

[00:06:42] And so that's how we're defining deficit ideology. So when we look at students, we ask that we approach our students in that particular spirit. One that recognizes that they really have so much more to grow, but that they've also been through so much to get here. Deficit ideology also ignores systemic problems like the fact that rarely do we as college instructors get good training and feedback on our teaching. Instead, it focuses on what instructors lack. So instead we want to focus on what strengths that instructor brings, and then translate that towards improving. So when we look at our students, we need to take the same approach. There are systemic problems, problems largely of access that explains why students find college challenging to navigate.

[00:07:25] And these problems of access are more inequitably distributed among our underrepresented and underserved students. Then, compounded by the fact that when they arrive at college, they're then treated by instructors as though they don't actually belong there. It's no wonder that they're not going to thrive in the classroom. So I think that we need to turn, when we look at deficit ideology, we need to turn the tables a little bit. We need to reflect on ourselves as instructors and say, well how would we like to be treated if we are trying to improve our teaching? Similarly, how would we like to treat students as we try to improve their learning in the classroom.

[00:07:57] So I like to ask a question actually of instructors that helps really produce empathy and get them in the mindset of what it's like to be a student

today. And the question is, what is one thing you learned in college, and it doesn't have to be academic, that seems obvious to you now? So when I ask this question, two things immediately become clear. One is it's hard to remember what one's time in college was like. It was a long time ago for a lot of us. And then secondly if we do remember, it really does call us to be more empathetic to our students because we came into college with a lot of dumb ideas and dumb approaches. And so it was not necessarily a deficit, it's just the fact of being a college student. So one of my favorite responses to that question from an instructor was someone who said, yeah you know actually everyone pretends to know what they're doing. And they pretend to have a plan, but they actually are just figuring it out just like the rest of us. And they had forgotten that. They had forgotten what that felt like. And so when we look at deficit ideology, we're actually looking at deficits in the system, deficits in the structures, and not deficits in the students themselves. I really want to encourage us to think about ways in which we can see the strengths that students bring to the classroom first. And then help those students say like, hey if you're really good at X, you're really talented.

[00:09:11] I asked my students, you know, well what are the strengths that you bring? And I had students say I don't have any, I don't bring anything to the classroom. And I had just pushed her and pushed her. And then finally she said, well you know what? I'm really good at baking biscuits. And I'm like, that's great. You know what? I'm not good at baking biscuit. So I want you to bring in like what are the kinds of skills that goes into baking biscuits? What do you need to do? What do you need to think about? And then use those skills and translate them to the same kinds of classroom practices that we bring here into the classroom. And she did. She had to think about how she measured things, how she was patient with her process, how she analyzed the quality of the dough, and then used that in terms of her analytical skills in the classroom.

[00:09:53] Julie, what do you think?

[00:09:53] **Julie McGurk:** So I'm just going to echo some of the things that Jamiella already mentioned, and also just mentioned that Jo Handelsman actually has a really nice new article out called "Achieving Stem Diversity: Fix the Classrooms" that I think really summarizes a lot of what Jamiella just mentioned of really thinking about the fact that we need to try to stop focusing on fixing the students and really focus on thinking about how do we fix our classrooms? How do we question our pedagogy to ensure that we're supporting students and helping them build on their strengths and not focusing on deficits.

[00:10:28] And then I think also the things that I think about, you know, are those systemic things that are leading into this sort of deficit mindset as well. Right? That, you know, bias and stereotypes are affecting sort of how we view students in the classroom and who we see as having deficits. I think we often talk about bias and stereotypes, thinking about you know, how are we making, uh, assumptions about students and their capability and their past experience, their schooling based on their identities and behaviors in the classroom. But adding to that, I mean, I think we also need to acknowledge that students may assume that we have those biases against them too. And there's really deep literature and stereotype threat that says that just knowing that we may have those biases as instructors, that that can actually have an impact on student performance. Similar to what Jamiella was saying, that you know, how we phrase things, how we frame them can really signal implicit biases whether we, we actually hold those biases or not. And then finally, I actually want to talk about the fact that biases can actually have an effect in kind of a different way. In that, we may assume that all students learn best the way that we do and often faculty will build on their own experiences as students to develop their teaching practices. And I think that's a great place to start. But implicit in that is assuming that everyone in the classroom learns the same way that you do, has the same experiences that you do.

[00:11:53] And, you know, even for students who seem to be similar to us, that actually might not be true. Right. I think we need to really question that because, you know, we'll end up in a place then that said like well that worked for me so I don't understand why this doesn't work for my students, right? There must be something the students not doing. They're not putting in enough effort. They might not just have the capability to achieve these rigorous standards in my classroom. So that is so interesting because, um, both of you are talking about, you know, that we're trying to say there are deficits in the students, right? That's not the problem we want to address.

[00:12:32] **Catherine Ross:** It's just reminded me very early on when I first started the podcast, I interviewed Carl Wieman, who is the Nobel laureate physicist who's at Stanford in both education and physics, and has spent the last 20 years of his career trying to reform science teaching and to convince instructors to use different pedagogies.

[00:12:54] His focus has been squarely on pedagogy. And when I asked him what's the biggest barrier to change that you encounter when you approach faculty, and he said, faculty believe that the problem is their students. And they never question their teaching. And this is exactly what you're saying, right? That um, and that's a very entrenched dead idea that's been around forever, right?

Students aren't as prepared as they used to be kind of theme right? And I said to him, Well, how do you deal with that? And he said, well the only way I found to convince people like that is to go into their class and teach students with them watching. And I thought, oof, that's, um, a heavy lift. Like that's a one person at a time kind of change.

[00:13:50] So I'm happy that, you know, we're now seeing in the work that you both have done and in the work you just cited, um, Julie. You know that people are trying to think about how can we approach this topic in a broader way, and not just trying to convince one faculty member at a time to change how they teach. So very much appreciate that.

[00:14:15] Another aspect of your presentation that I thought was really helpful was the way you distilled your work into three principles. I think that's really always helpful for instructors when you can give them, you know, a nice distilled version of principles to work from. And so you have these three principles to reframe how, how we think about rigor.

[00:14:38] And the first principle and I'm quoting here, "Rigor when defined a part from a deficit ideology is necessary to teach more inclusively." This principle, I think, addresses the problem that's caused by the legacy ideas about the deficit assumptions that you were just talking about. Both of you were just talking about right about students, and I'd love to hear you expand on how you see we can reframe rigor as being a necessary part of inclusive teaching. The other thing I like that you said is that deficits can often disappear when we think about pedagogy, which again goes back to what we were just discussing. So I'll open it up to you.

[00:15:29] **Julie McGurk:** I actually want to start this question with why we wanted to really state this too because I think too often we hear faculty think that if we're being inclusive, we're reducing rigor right. And so we thought it was really important to actually really state this aloud and emphasize the fact that rigor is really necessary for inclusion, right. And the big reason behind it is that if you communicate to students that you're low, lowering standards, you're also communicating that you don't believe in their capability.

[00:15:58] Um, and this goes back to stereotype threat. If students are worried that they're being viewed through a deficit lens, it's that much more important to show them that you have rigorous standards and that you believe that they can achieve those standards. This is particularly true for instructors from dominant identities within a field, so very important because they may not trust that you don't have biases in regards to their capability right. The hard part is that you

have to communicate this in a way that's authentic and demonstrates that you care about students achieving those high standards. You can't just say I have high standards and sort of leave it at that. And so part of that pedagogy is really thinking about sort of how do you communicate to students that you believe they can achieve and also give them a path towards achieving right, which is the behavior that shows that you care that they achieve those highest standards right.

[00:16:49] The classic experiment that we often talk about that really shows this link is a Triesman study that was back in the seventies and eighties where Triesman noticed that African American students coming into their mathematics course had D, F, and withdrawal rates that were very high, 40 to 50%. What Triesman might have done is to set up a remedial class, but instead what he decided to do was actually set up an honors class for these students.

[00:17:16] Um, and what he found is that through the honors class those D, F withdrawal rates went to zero to a high of 6% I think. And so just by sort of that reframing as well as adding structures. Triesman added group work within that he added practice problems that resembled the problems that were going to be on the exam.

[00:17:38] So just adding those supports in and reframing this as an honors class that had high standards clearly had a very strong impact on those students.

[00:17:49] **Catherine Ross:** Yes, his work was remarkable. I don't know if you ever got to hear Urie Triesman speak. I will never forget a keynote he did, and he ended with just a little bit of advice for instructors and he said, "Know your students. Know what their strengths are and find out what their passions are, and then you can teach." And I just thought that was really lovely the way he just nailed it.

[00:18:17] **Julie McGurk:** Yep. No, I've never seen Triesman, but I would've loved to have been able to.

[00:18:21] **Catherine Ross:** Yeah, and it's very much what you gave an example of earlier Jamiella, the making biscuits student right? Find out what their strengths are and what their passions are, and then with that you can work. You can help them connect right.

[00:18:36] **Jamiella Brooks:** We very much, I think we've learned this through pandemic as well that we have to humanize our classrooms. We very much have

to connect with students in some way, shape, or form because otherwise what's the purpose?

[00:18:47] If a student can just as well go onto YouTube or to, um, other modality of instruction and get instruction there, then they're going to do that. It just is practical, makes more sense. It's a lot cheaper. So if we really utilize our classrooms as a way of humanizing that space, I think that that's super important towards being able to connect with them, and that actually is the pathway towards better learning.

[00:19:08] **Julie McGurk:** I would also add it's a pathway to learning for all students too. So, you know I think it, we have, we see differential impacts for underrepresented and underserved students, but I think for everyone it has that effect as well. Y

[00:19:20] **Catherine Ross:** Yeah, excellent point.

[00:19:22] **Jamiella Brooks:** I had another response to, um, Catherine, to this question of rigor, defining rigor apart from deficit ideology, which is that I actually am a McNair Scholar. I was a McNair Scholar in undergraduate, and that's a program that was started by Ronald McNair, who was one of the folks on the Challenger Mission the spaceship shuttle that exploded. And this is his legacy program.

[00:19:44] It's a summer program. It goes throughout the year as well, where you have to identify with two of three categories, which is being a low-income student, being first generation, or being underrepresented in the academy through racial and ethnic lines. And back to the example Julie was giving of really making sure that, that we're not thinking about deficits. You know, this was a challenging program. It assumes that you knew nothing about grad school, but it gave you the tools for being able to apply to grad school. So it said, here's what you look for in grad programs. You're applying to the mentor, you're applying to the people. It's not like the undergraduate process.

[00:20:22] And we also did study for the GRE as well. And I think that that's just a great example illustrating again this idea that for someone like me. I'm a first generation PhD student. I really would not have done well in grad school. Grad school was still a struggle for me, but I really would not have done well in grad school if I didn't have this program that didn't assume the deficit was in me. It assumed the deficit was in the larger ways that we structure and prepare students for graduate programs. And so I think that that illustrates really this



idea that when we're thinking about deficits, we're thinking about these larger structural problems. And there's a quote in, uh, Craig Nelson's...

[00:21:01] **Catherine Ross:** the Dysfunctional Illusion of Rigor.

[00:21:04] **Jamiella Brooks:** Yeah. Thank you. Craig Nelson's "Dysfunctional Illusions of Rigor" is such a great piece. I like to just pick it up and reread it sometimes because it just really goes through that process.

[00:21:12] **Catherine Ross:** Yes, me too.

[00:21:13] **Jamiella Brooks:** Yeah, it just goes through it and like really is like, why did I think this? Like why did I think that this was rigorous? But he has this quote in his, in his article where he says, "When a student does poorly, an instructor or the student themselves may blame their lack of effort, but not flaws in pedagogy." And similarly you know when someone's doing poorly, we blame all these other things except for some of these larger structural things. Sometimes that's just because it's easier, but when we're looking at the whole picture, it's actually it's not a rigorous way of thinking for ourselves.

[00:21:43] **Catherine Ross:** Right. Oh, that's really a really good point, Jamiella. I wanted to give you a chance to speak to the second principle that you identified, which is that inadequate definitions of rigor produced poor learning outcomes, particularly for underrepresented and or underserved students. Can you give a couple quick examples of what that looks like? Like an example of an inadequate definition that would result in these poorer outcomes?

[00:22:12] **Jamiella Brooks:** Yeah, and I wanted to start with thinking about why we continue to use the term rigor because it has been advocated in some spaces that we just throw it out completely. That we get rid of the term. And as a linguist, I would like to say that that's not going to work because we will just find other ways, other words, to replace it that mean the same thing, which is this coded message that students are just not good enough or that they're lazy or that other ways that we use that actually undermine what it is that we're trying to do that are really inequitable.

[00:22:48] And so we really actually insist on using the term rigor because we want to make sure that we actually are on board with defining it. And what we like to do when we give when Julie and I give workshops on this is put faculty together and say, think about your definition of rigor, then talk with each other and how do your definitions match or not match? And it's really interesting because I think that instructors struggle. You ask them to define it, they say, uh,

um I don't know actually. And so when we're, we're thinking about inadequate definitions, we're really thinking about the vagueness that often comes with defining this. But we also think about the misconceptions of rigor.

[00:23:27] So the example of the grading on a curve, for example, is often inadequate because it's something that that is done because it's been done historically and it is not questioned beyond that. There's an article in Inside Higher Ed from Matt Reid. And I really like the ways that he explores what rigor isn't.

[00:23:49] And I think that sometimes it's often easier to reflect on what rigor isn't first and then reflect on what rigor is. And so what rigor isn't is he gives the example. It's not a mechanism for training students to be irresponsibly dependent on authority. So for example, we often think of rigor as you have to listen to authority figures, either in literature or the instructor themselves and agree with them. And that's not rigorous because we're just really training them to be parrots of ourselves or of these thinkers. Rigor is also not opaque or illegible. And so if you say to a student, your essay wasn't really rigorous enough, fix it. Well, that doesn't give them any indication about what it is that they're supposed to be doing with that essay. It just offers this really inadequate approach and it doesn't offer any direction for improvement. And so I think that when we're looking at the definition of inadequate, inadequate definitions of rigor, it really rests on having a conversation and expanding on what it is in great detail, what it is we mean by specific terminology.

[00:24:52] So we love the term critical thinking. I say what is rigor? Someone says, I want my students to critically think. Well, what does that mean? And what that means is going to look different for different people, right? It's going to look different in a literature course than it is going to look like in a history course, than it is going to look like in a chemistry course. But we also have to think about the ways that our disciplines also define and determine what we mean by rigor.

[00:25:16] **Catherine Ross:** Yes, as a linguist myself, I really appreciate your points here because there are many terms for rigor that are kind of the hidden signaling right. I've heard instructors say, you know, I always get low student evaluations because I'm a very demanding teacher. Or I'm, I'm really a challenging teacher right. So implicit in that is this concept, this often vague, as you said, vague and undefined sense of what rigor is for people.

[00:25:50] **Julie McGurk:** Catherine yeah, I think you bring up a great point in terms of thinking about liking a course versus rigor, right? I think those two

things are often put in opposition to each other, but certainly, you know, as someone who has seen a lot of teaching evaluations, students do like rigor.

[00:26:06] They do like it. When it's done well and they're given a path through. But it's when it's hard and they don't know how am I supposed to respond to that difficulty, how do I make it through this difficulty that bleeds over into thinking about not liking a course because of rigor right.

[00:26:21] **Catherine Ross:** Yeah, and in the research on student ratings, which is extensive, I've spent a lot of time in that research and it's clear that students give higher ratings in courses where they feel they have learned a lot or learned more. It's this place we get caught in when we think about how we've, how we're defining rigors. So what you were just saying, right. Students often may like a course, but not feel like they've learned much in it. Or they may not like a course that an instructor feels as rigorous because the kind of rigor that is involved is not the kind of rigor that leads to learning, right? It doesn't create that path.

[00:27:06] **Julie McGurk:** I would actually add a layer to this too, because you know I think students have a lot of the same misconceptions about rigor that we do as well, and they're not actually very good at necessarily identifying rigor as well, and actually may call a class rigorous that has a lot of readings and, um...

[00:27:24] **Catherine Ross:** Quantity right. Content, readings, pages written, right?

[00:27:29] **Julie McGurk:** Yeah and so just asking students, was this class rigorous? Actually may not be the best indicator of it, right? But they can talk about sort of, did I learn a lot in this course? Right. And I think that that's, um, really helpful. Then I also think in terms of approaching our courses, we have to get on the same page with students about what we mean by rigor so that they can begin to understand what it is that we're looking for. And that what that high expectation is. It's not just about, you know, pounding your head against the wall and getting stuck, but it's working through that and me as an instructor helping you through that difficulty.

[00:28:05] **Catherine Ross:** Agreed. So the third principle, "Rigor is not hard for the sake of being hard. It is purposeful and transparent" is exactly what you were just saying Julie. So why don't we go right into that third principle.

[00:28:23] **Julie McGurk:** Absolutely. And yeah, I think starting with an understanding of the purpose of what you're doing and a around that is

understanding what your definition of rigor is. And then being explicit about that with your students. Right. So that they know. Um, a colleague of mine, Meghan Bathgate recently did a presentation with, uh, a really nice analogy I thought. So what she ended up doing was showing a picture of a street landscape with house fronts, plants, different things like that. And said look at this image for a couple minutes. And then she stopped us and said, okay, how many windows were there? Right. And the point she was trying to make with this was, if we're not told what to look for, we're not going to look for it. We may have made lots of observations about that image, but we didn't know that it was the windows that we were going to be asked about. So if we think about a student's experience in our classroom and in college in general, they're being asked lots of different things to focus on, lots of different things, and lots of different ways. And when they come into your classroom, they might not know that the things that you need to focus on here are actually different than what you were asked to focus on in another class. And so just being really transparent with your students about sort of what is the purpose of what we're doing and scaffolding their experience, right. Giving them some sense of what is it that we focus on when we're here, and then we're going to practice that and practice those skills. And so I think it's really about sort of making the hidden visible. Right. And that could be as I mentioned, those practices of the skills that you have that you're trying to teach. Then, it also could be just sort of the hidden curriculum more generally. We mentioned office hours, but also thinking about sort of how does one approach reading in your field, how do you approach studying. Those sorts of things. Um, and then as a resource, I would actually offer a Tilt, which, uh, Mary-Ann Winklmes started and collated a lot of wonderful resources around how to be more transparent in our assessments. And so that's, uh, a great resource if we're looking to think about sort of how can we be more transparent in our assessments.

[00:30:25] **Catherine Ross:** Thanks for that. Julie. Jamila, you want to bring us home on the third principal?

[00:30:31] **Jamiella Brooks:** Yeah, I think that that is a great start. I think this question of being more transparent, what it is that we're expecting, showing students what it is that we value is so important because I'll give an example. I took Psychology 101 in college, and I failed it. It was one of the only few classes I failed, and one of the reasons why is that it was taught by three different instructors and it only had three exams.

[00:30:56] And you had to pass all of the exams in order to pass the class. And so you had one instructor came up, did their thing, you read the paper, and then you got this exam. And once you saw the exam, you saw what it is that they

valued. And so you're like well I studied wrong. So you study that way for the next exam. Only now you have another instructor who values something different. And then by the third it's just, it was a lost cause. I could not figure out how the instructor wanted me to study what they wanted me to focus on. And each of those instructors, even though they were teaching the exact same class with the same textbook, had different values. And so I think that that's why the transparency piece is so important.

[00:31:29] I think the last thing that I would say for this particular point is that sometimes our students don't come in with the same values. Often, always, actually, they don't always come in with the same values on what we're teaching. And so sometimes that conversation about transparency is actually asking students, what it is that they want to get on the out of the classroom? How are they going to challenge themselves in the classroom?

[00:31:49] And I say that because I am a former infrastructure of French. It was required that all students take at least a year of some kind foreign language instruction. And so of course I had students who came in who were like, I don't want to speak French. I'm never going to go to France, or I need French speaking country. I don't care. And so I said, Okay, well let's back up. What can you get out of this class? Because I'm not going to waste your time. Let's be real. You're spending a lot of money for this class. And so, and you're spending a lot of time. Because it was a language class, they had to be in class one hour every day of the week. So what are you going to get out of this? And so we had that conversation. Well, maybe you're not, your goal isn't to speak French fluently, but maybe your goal is to unlearn how you think language works. Or maybe your goal is to learn the connection between some of these words and what words we use in English today.

[00:32:37] I had another student who hated conjugating. And then I said, well what uh what is your field? Like, what are your, what is your major? And he said math. And I was like, oh great. Math is a perfect metaphor for conjugation. It's if this, then this, input this, then you get this. There are some exceptions. But that's also math. Right.

[00:32:53] **Catherine Ross:** Right.

[00:32:53] **Jamiella Brooks:** So it really becomes this conversation with students as what it is that you value.

[00:32:58] **Catherine Ross:** Well, as someone who's taught Russian for many years, totally resonates with me. All right. So to wrap up, I'm just curious. You

both are very inspirational and I wonder what keeps you inspired and motivated to keep trying to promote change in higher education because as I'm sure you have felt at times, it can be a bit of a, an uphill battle.

[00:33:27] **Jamiella Brooks:** I believe in change because I had really wonderful instructors who believed in me, and I think that it's really important to remember the personal and the humanity in what it is that we're trying to do. And so like rigor isn't supposed to be soul crushing. It's not supposed to be making things just so absolutely difficult and challenging that we lose sight of what's meaningful in it.

[00:33:51] And I love this quote from Christopher Emdin who does a lot of pedagogy, especially in urban spaces. And he says, "to be an effective educator who creates academically rigorous instruction, one's teaching must be centered around the infusion of life and joy. Academic rigor is about being loud, proud, mobile, unpretentious, and challenged to take on whatever obstacles comes one way." And I just, I love that. I think that, I like to talk about that because when we talk about rigor, we're actually talking about something that's really quite joyous. That's a lot of fun. None of us goes into a puzzle that's too easy in saying, I got a lot out of that. We go to puzzles because they're challenging. We play video games because they're challenging, and that's part of what it means to be human. And so I think that that's something that just really gives me possibility is really remembering that part of being in higher education is finding ways to center joy in learning and making that a continued endeavor throughout the rest of our lives. It's, we talk about a lifelong journey of learning, and yet we have to, to continue with that when we talk about rigor.

[00:34:57] **Catherine Ross:** Amazing. Love that quote.

[00:34:59] **Julie McGurk:** Well, and I, I'm going to add to Jamiella's joy of learning and transition to think about joy of teaching too, right? I think that's something that gives me hope too, is really seeing that when people really think critically about their teaching and dig deeply on what they're doing. Similar to how, as we're getting our students to dig deeply, as you know we can have joy in the process of teaching itself and thinking rigorously about our own teaching. So I think really thinking about, yeah, bringing joy to the work that we do as we think about our teaching. And then as Jamila says, As we bring the learning to the students as well.

[00:35:33] **Catherine Ross:** Great. Thank you so much Julie and Jamiella. This was fantastic and thank you for the inspiration in this last little bit. It helps all of

us to hear how you're inspired. So we'll take that forth. And thank you so much for taking time out and being part of our Fall 2022 podcast season.

[00:35:55] **Jamiella Brooks:** Thank you. This was fabulous.

[00:35:57] **Julie McGurk:** Yeah. Thank you for inviting us.

[00:36:01] **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 in Teaching and Learning is a product of Columbia University Center for Teaching and Learning, and is produced by Stephanie Ogden, Laura Nicholas and John Hanford.

[00:36:29] Our theme music is *In the Lab* by Immersive music.