



## Sparking Joy through Co-construction Circles, Empathy Mapping, and the Teaching Perspectives Inventory

### SPEAKERS

Tierney King, Karynne Kleine, Cynthia Alby, Caralyn Zehnder

#### **Tierney King** 00:00

This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast. I'm your host, Tierney King, and I'm here to bring you inspiration, energy, and creative strategies that you can utilize in your every day teaching. This week's episode is sponsored by the Teacher Professor Conference. This year, join us in person in Atlanta to pursue your passion for teaching. So today, we have have Cynthia Alby and Karynne Kleine from Georgia College, and then Caralyn Zehnder from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, who will also be presenting at our Teaching Professor Conference in June. So before we dive into what you all will be talking about at the conference, start us off by telling us one thing about yourself that most people aren't aware of, or they don't know about you.

#### **Cynthia Alby** 00:44

Well, quite possibly the most unusual thing about me - this is Cynthia - is that I raise a critically endangered breed of sheep. And at this very moment, as we're recording, I can look out the window and see them.

#### **Karynne Kleine** 00:58

And I think you should add that it's lambing season. You're getting them daily. This is Karynne Kleine - and I think that it's an unusual thing about me is how close I am to my brothers and sisters - my family. Even though we are all senior citizens, we regularly get together and we all live across different parts of the country.

#### **Caralyn Zehnder** 01:23

Hi, this is Caralyn, I think something interesting about me, so I'm a birder and my whole family, my husband and my daughter, we go out birding and just this past this past Friday night, when it once the sunset, you could, if you if you had been with us, it means you would have been at a local wildlife refuge searching the skies for Woodcocks. Because they do this really cool meeting display. And they do this cool little twitter dance. So that was our exciting Friday night.

**Tierney King 01:51**

Very cool. And so your session at the Teaching Professor Conference is called Reenergizing Faculty and Instruction Through Course Design in Community. So explain how you all came together, and why this topic of sparking faculty joy and reenergizing faculty is so important to each and every one of you.

**Cynthia Alby 02:10**

Well, we came together initially, and we've been friends for a very long time, but we really came together to write a book, Learning that Matters. Because I think because we were writing it during the pandemic, the issue of joy and the importance of reclaiming our joy really just ended up being a theme that was woven through the whole thing. And at this point, nowadays, I even say that my primary research question is, How can we reinvent learning? Because I just think that's what we need to do right now for ourselves and for our students.

**Caralyn Zehnder 02:41**

Yeah, and I think especially now, I mean, I remember feeling in, you know, at the end of the fall semester, that it was just hard. Like in terms of, you know, for both my colleagues, for my students and courses, for me I really wanted to be intentional and deliberate about like, okay, what are some things that I can do to really bring joy back into the classroom back into, you know, my professional role. The last two years of teaching have been really challenging. And I think we have been so so reactionary, and now really wanting to be okay, like, I want to be able to plan a bit more, so I don't feel like I'm just constantly having to react.

**Karynne Kleine 03:28**

And another thing I'll say about that is one of the things that we have thought about and focused on is actually the importance of our collaboration. What is it about the four of us, we actually have a colleague, who's a coauthor with our book, who isn't able to join us today, but we've always noticed how important it has been that we do these things in supportive environments, and how what comes out of our work together seems so much more, not only meaningful, but having a greater impact because we do it together. And we're really strong advocates of collaboration and working with others.

**Tierney King 04:10**

Yeah, I think that's, you know, it's so profound is that, through these past few years, it's been hard. And we've kind of realized that we can lean on each other and you know, we kind of need to and needed to and still need to in the future to kind of propel forward and to still do this teaching successfully and help our students and ourselves at the same time. So going back to your your session at the conference, you're going to provide accessible strategies that help spark joy in taxing times, with both course design and equity-minded approaches at the core of it all. So kind of explain what is your favorite or your most used strategy that you implement or you use the most in your own courses?

**Cynthia Alby 04:54**

So I guess I would say a strategy that I use in my own courses tends to be what I would call construction circles. Where it's kind of based on the literature circles theory, but where every student at home is focused in on something particular in a reading. So maybe someone is coming up with discussion questions, and someone else is thinking about the connections they're seeing between this

work and things that we've done previously and their own lives. So that when they come back together, they all have something different to bring to the table. I feel like that's when they're truly co-constructing knowledge. I'm not handing it to them. They are truly building it together. By each bringing something special to the table.

**Karynne Kleine 05:45**

For me, I'd say the focus is, I don't know that it's a strategy as much as it's a continual goal that I'm trying to reach. And that is that we develop a true learning community, a true, you know, community of practice that we recognize our particular ways of doing things and that we're learning with, and from the others that we're working with. I would say something that's probably pretty typical in anytime I'm teaching.

**Caralyn Zehnder 06:16**

And I think, thinking about how I've been approaching, you know, teaching differently, and what we'll be talking about, like in the workshop, and it's just a common theme is, I think, the power of reflection, and even pre-reflection. So, in our book, we start each chapter with a preselection of questions. So you can come together as community, a community of practice, and that's something I'm trying to do a lot more in my courses, and like, that's no matter the size, be it a, you know, 20 person class or, you know, 200 person large intro lecture, because I've just realized that, you know, we all need space to to think and process and that it can be really powerful to have that. We know, if we devote class time to it, I think that is right, like we're saying, "Hey, we think this is important. We think this really belongs and is something we want everyone to participate in." And I just find that it, it really can change that the tone and really allow for people to connect and engage in a much more meaningful way.

**Karynne Kleine 07:20**

Caralyn is our expert, like all of our things we recommend, you know, we've all tried out, but she does them in classrooms of 200, 300, 400 people. And I don't know, I just really admire that, you know, she's put that to the test in these really large sections. And it works.

**Tierney King 07:41**

And going off of that, you know, have you ever had a time where it doesn't work? And kind of how, you know, how do you pivot? Or what do you do in that case?

**Caralyn Zehnder 07:48**

Like, I'm sure, yes, we've all had those moments. And sometimes that is like, especially when you're trying out a new teaching strategy, just the being able to pivot in the moment in the classroom. And I think now, and something I wouldn't have been able to do, like, you know, 10 or 15 years ago, when I first started, is being able to own up to that in a class or share with students like, "Hey, okay, this didn't work. Here's what I meant. Here's what I was trying, and this is what we'll try to do to you know, okay, we're going to try something different." Or even if I like, I can't recover that lost time, because I don't have a time machine, but I think it can be really powerful to be like, okay, I don't want to be the like, director of everything, and I can't control everything. And so, yeah, sometimes it's not going to work out and acknowledging that I think, especially for students to see like, oh, wait, the person in the front of the

room is willing to say, yeah, that was a mistake, or that didn't work is I think just the owning up to a part can be very important.

**Tierney King 08:49**

And then I'm gonna go back to sparking faculty joy. And I just want to ask each of you, you know, what brings you joy in your class or what have you implemented from the pandemic, or maybe it was before the pandemic, that really sparked joy, either in your teaching for your students or for yourselves while teaching?

**Cynthia Alby 09:08**

So something that has just really done this for me and that's why we work, and it's part of our conference presentation, is something that we call empathy mapping, where we really ask the question, Who are we designing for? Because when I've asked faculty this over the past 10 years or so, the answer is generally one of three things: I'm designing for a younger version of myself. I'm designing for kind of, you know, the average student, or I'm designing for the student who gave me trouble last semester, and I don't want that to happen again, almost a design from a like a point of fear. And what I have found is that there's this incredible joy in designing for a broader, more diverse group of students like really carefully imagining their interests and their needs, kind of at a gut level. And it allows me to focus kind of less on myself. I think I was focusing in some ways on myself when I was originally designing, and more on others considering their needs, considering what they might enjoy. And we do that through building narratives that describe diverse student experiences and perspectives and like using our own creativity, to think about how to design for them.

**Karynne Kleine 09:08**

Something that brings joy to me is opportunities to be introspective. Here, I'm thinking specifically about faculty having opportunities to be introspective. Again, I think you'll see this in the presentation that we try to look at the different kinds of good teaching. We use a tool called Teaching Perspectives Inventory to get at this notion of who are we and then appreciating who our colleagues are, as well. So there's not this, like, good teachers do this - good teachers do all sorts of things. And we don't have to start having these kind of binaries of good and bad, but rather, okay, what can we appreciate it out of that person's perspective? What can we appreciate from that different angle, and that's what you know, having that opportunity, and providing that space to do that, I think brings me joy.

**Caralyn Zehnder 11:29**

And then thinking about, you know, just bringing that all together. And something you mentioned earlier, like we need to, we've realized how much we need to lean on each other. And so let's be intentional and deliberate about building community, both in our departments, in our colleges, you know, with other faculty, but also in our classrooms, like with students, and being able to, you know, really think about being intentional of, okay, there's gonna be time and space for us to get to know each other and to share ideas, because leaving a class like that is just like, you walk out of the room feeling lighter and better. And also just the giving, you know, hoping that if students from my class are able to do that, too, and feeling that way, like, how now are they going to be feeling about the subject and their learning and where they can go from there? So really thinking about that building community?

**Tierney King 12:24**

Yeah, I think, you know, sparking joy right now is just, it's such a big topic. And you know, the wellness and the community aspect of it are just something you you can't talk about enough. And there's so much to say about it. So, you know, it's so important right now. And then lastly, I'm excited to see everyone at the conference. It's been a while, I mean, we did have our in-person last year, it was a little bit smaller. So hopefully, we can see some more faces but with the Teaching Professor Conference, but what are you most excited to share with others at the conference?

**Cynthia Alby 12:55**

I think back Caralyn and I presented in New Orleans when the conference was last in New Orleans, and which is what an amazing experience that was and we couldn't believe the crowd, it was amazing. So hopefully, we'll start to see that again. Because those just those crowds of people who all share this kind of passion for teaching it's just the greatest thing. And so I think I'm just I'm really hoping to just talk to a lot of different people, just really have conversations with complete strangers, who if I found something interesting what they were doing, or they found something interesting that I was doing, and that's what I'm most looking forward to.

**Karynne Kleine 13:34**

Piggybacking on that actually is seeing those connections, you know, when you're in person with people, and you're, like, oh, I read your book, or I went to your session or even I never even heard of you. But suddenly finding a way, you know, like, oh, our ideas fit together in this way. I just that's that's kind of the magic for me.

**Caralyn Zehnder 13:56**

And I love conferences like the Teaching Professor because it brings together people from so many different institutions, different geographies, different places in their teaching careers. And you realize like how much you can share and build on each other's ideas. And it just you know, it's really it's hard to do that in the the regular sort of day to day, you know, weekly schedule and to have that opportunity - it's just really great.

**Tierney King 14:23**

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