Episode 3 - Applying SOTL and Educational Philosophies to the Classroom (with Dr. Meghan Dougherty)

Hi, and welcome to our podcast. Teaching and Learning at LUC. We are your hosts. I'm Bridget Colaccio. And I'm Polina Pine, streaming to you from Loyola University, Chicago. We love teaching, and we're excited to introduce you to our colleagues from Loyola. And from around the world who study their teaching practices through SOTL, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Thanks for joining us for today's conversation.

Bridget: We're excited to welcome our guest Meg Doherty, our colleague from Loyola University Chicago, who is going to share some of her passion and enthusiasm for the scholarship of teaching and learning. Among it sounds like maybe some other passions that you have going on. Maybe we'll have time to get into those as well. So thanks for joining us, Meg.

Meghan: Thanks for having me.
Bridget: We'd love to just invite you to maybe start by introducing yourself.

Meghan: Sure thing. I'm an associate professor in the school of communication. I teach digital communication. Um, I've been at Loyola for 15 years. Um, I started as an adjunct for a year and then applied for a tenure track position and moved into that space. Um, it's been a long ride. But I love being in the School of Communication. There's a lot of real interesting flexibility for me in my research area. So.

Bridget: That's exciting. We'll look forward to hearing more about that. Just to start thinking about yourself as an educator, how did you get into teaching? And how is it that you decided that teaching was going to be a major focus of your career?

Meghan: Well, yeah. I wanted to be a professor since I was 10. Um, when I was 10 years old, I went to visit my sister who was a student at Cornell university and she took me to see a huge, huge lecture room, um, where Carl Sagan was giving a talk. And so I went to this lecture and it was unbelievable. I had no idea anything like that existed and I was sold and I, I wanted, I wanted to be Carl Sagan. I'm a little far off the mark from that now, but I was sold on being at a university and being in those big expansive lecture halls where big ideas were happening and people were thinking and playing with different ideas. And so that was where my interest started. Now the line from being 10 years old to then getting a PhD was up and down. I played with a lot of different things. I think I had, you know, five majors and two schools in four years through college. So I tried all kinds of different things. I was a physics and astronomy major. I was a studio art major. I was a sculpture major. I was all kinds of things on my way to ending up in communication. But the space where I think I really found teaching to be most fascinating was my first year as a graduate student at the University of Washington in Seattle. I was part of a TA team. So the class was introduction to communication. I was getting my PhD in communication at the time and I was TAing for the introduction of communication and the class I believe had 750 or more students and so there was a professor who taught the class and we had seven TAs.

And every TA had 100 to 150 students. And you would attend two lectures during the week. And then on Friday, the entire school basically had breakout sessions. And so you would meet with 25 students with a TA and review what happened during lecture. And you would talk about assignments and you would talk about how to apply what the professor had said and you would talk it through with this TA who was a PhD student. And each PhD student would do four or five of those every Friday. And each PhD student was sort of in charge of their 100, 150 students. We graded all of their work. We had input with the faculty member about what the work was, how to grade it, what should be happening, and what the assignments should actually be. And we had this one really interesting moment. The professor that we were all working for was pretty experimental in his work. He was a professor in, oh geez, it's a program called CHID, C-H-I-D, and I can't remember what that stands for, unfortunately, but it was something about the history of ideas. And so it was sort of this real wide ranging, really interesting program that he was working in. And we sat down to discuss what the final project for the class would be. Right. What are the students going to do? What are these 750 plus students going to do at the end of the semester to show that they learned something? And everyone else said they should write a paper. Yeah, several people said final exam. Several people said write a paper. And I said, I think they should do whatever they want. And the professor luckily looked at me and said, that's a great idea.

Bridget: Amazing.

Meghan: And that turned into a total nightmare because the other TAs didn't know, no one could understand how to grade. And so everyone got really upset because they really were thinking about grading as a comparative project as opposed to an individual evaluation of understanding of something. And so it taught me a lot about grading and it made me really question it. It's made me have questions about grading since then and how do we understand what learning is? How do we know what it is that we're actually doing when we're teaching and what does learning actually mean? So I think that's where my interest in teaching really started. I can still sort of viscerally remember being in the room with the, you know, in this grad lounge with all these other TAs and sort of saying this thing. And I'll tell you what, the teachers, the TAs, everybody got different stuff from their students. And I think it had everyone got, all the students got the same rules for the assignment, right? Everyone got the same assignment and the same requirements for the assignment. But one of the TAs, she got 150 papers, right? Long-winded research papers. I got a remix video. Now this was, right, this was 2000, the year 2000. So a remix video was something that like, it was on VHS tape or I guess it was on a CD-ROM. I got zines that people made. I got like a really interesting literary magazine. I had sculptures, I had paintings, I had all kinds of really, really interesting projects. I had one group of students, this was a group of football players, right? This was University of Washington, Seattle, the Huskies, they were a good football team. And a group of the students, a group of my students was on the football team. And these guys decided to do their own version of the show from MTV Cribs, where they walked through their house and did this whole episode of Cribs. And I mean, they really applied the concepts and they wrote something and talked about or in some way presented what they had learned from the class that helped them produce this thing at the end.

And the other TAs were all like, how did you make that happen? I don't understand. And I, I didn't do, I don't think I did anything different, right? If I go back and I observe what I did, I presented the materials in the same way that everyone else did, but I really think that the teacher's personality, that the teacher's approach to learning, the teacher's understanding, the teacher's sort of set up of the classroom. How I created a space between me and the students for learning in certain ways, changed what they felt they were able to come back at me with. They felt a lot more freedom and a lot more flexibility in what they could do because of the way that I created space in the classroom. And the woman who got 150 papers back, she was very rigid, very by the book. These are the rules. Hit the rules and you'll get the A. Right. And she was very cut and dried approach to things. And I never visited her classrooms. I don't know what her lectures were like or what her discussions were like during those breakout sessions, but I'm guessing they were a lot different than mine.

Bridget: I'm sure, I'm sure. Yeah. Wow, that's really fascinating. Thanks for sharing all of that in terms of your journey to being an educator and some things that stand out, you know, about making lots of twists and turns. I think that sometimes people look at an educator, especially at the level of higher education and think that they've got it all figured out and they probably had it figured out from the beginning. I think that that's not true, of course, for most of us, but certainly your story demonstrates some of those twists and turns. Then this bit about that class, that sounds amazing. I'm curious, the theme of freedom came up. And that is one of the pedagogical aims, I think, particularly in values based education, one that we're trying to offer in our classrooms across the university here at Loyola and wanting students to really deeply engage in a way that sets them free in some respect. And so I'm wondering if you could maybe tell us a little bit about some of the teaching that you do currently, and are any of those themes still resonant in the work that you're doing now in terms of tapping in, creating space for students, connecting to them in a way that really sets them up to explore and discover and maybe experience some of that freedom that you talked about?

Meghan: Yeah, absolutely. It's funny, I hadn't really thought back to that, that sort of origin story for such a long time. And now looking back at it and seeing that sort of flexibility and that moment of, I'm still really proud of those students for all of those wacky things that they handed in. And looking back at it now, I see all of the themes that I'm still working with as a professor and as a teacher. I think I lost them for a little while on the tenure track. Right? I mean, the path you have to take to get through academia in an administrative way. Gives you some guardrails that you really can't move. You can experiment within, but you can't, you can't really have the same kind of freedom. And so I think I lost a lot of those values for a little while as I was moving through that space, because I was trying to adhere to something and now most recently, since the pandemic and since doing more work in scholarship of teaching and learning, I've sort of brought those values back to center stage. Because the other values weren't so there were someone else's right and so it wasn't there. They weren't working for me. I've never been able to teach in the ways that I think Others, others, maybe expect me to or the way that other people do. And so, um, so bringing those values back to center stage has been really helpful in the past few years. And so what I've been experimenting with in the more recent, my more recent teaching experience has been with teaching online, certainly since the pandemic pivot to online learning. That's something that I really love. I am a professor of digital communication.

My background is in media ecology. I'm very interested in how media technology, creates an environment for us to relate to each other within. And those technologies, those channels, those particular technological channels change how we relate to one another and how we relate to ourselves, what our expectations are of others and of ourselves and others' expectations of us. All of these things change because of the medium that we're in. And so that translates really perfectly to teaching online that. It's a very, there are very specific sets of expectations in teaching and learning that I think are changing, but we can come back to that, but there are specific expectations and you can sort of put a, a, a loose box around it and say, here are the expectations and here's the way that we're going to behave and relate with one another inside these channels. And it opens up a ton of freedom and flexibility and fluidity. So these are the things that I'm working on in scholarship of teaching and learning, trying to understand what flexibility and fluidity can really be inside a classroom and inside a space for teaching and learning, right? Inside a classroom. And so I have a ton of different ways that I play with that. I have a lot of ways that I fail at that also, but I have a lot of ways that I play with it in all of my classrooms.

Polina: Thank you, Meg. I have more practical questions maybe for our listeners who are maybe less familiar with the scholarship of teaching and learning, right? So I would assume that teaching is something that gives us freedom to allow students to look at the same question, at the same problem from different perspectives. But at the end we need to have some sort of boundaries, right? Because we need to assess, we need to give the grades, the least favorite thing we need to create, right? So how do you put your amazing initiatives in teaching in the framework of scholarship of teaching and learning? So could you please give us some recipes. So how do you start with the idea? How you put it on the paper? How do you apply for, I don't know, certain ethical approvals? And finally, how do you disseminate the results?

Meghan: I'm going to do the second one first. The way that I approach the research is very much like an autoethnographic approach, I'm using my entire career of teaching and looking back through notes that I had, looking back through old versions of my Sakai classes, looking back through my old syllabi, looking back through old emails and notes and, and sort of trying to do an auto ethnographic data gathering approach to moments of flexibility and fluidity that have changed over time in my classroom. And so, um, I'm still at the beginning of this I know I've been at it for a year and a half now, but maybe more at this point, but about the scholarship part, but right, and ethnography can take a very, very long time. And I'm still at this point, trying to understand where the themes are. And so, I've done a lot of different, really interesting assignments inside classrooms that have generated data in certain ways. And so, I'm going back to revisit those things. And I'm mostly revisiting those things to understand my sets of themes that I'm then going to go back and look for and start coding and doing all of the data analysis that's really complicated. Right. And so, so I haven't gotten to the, how do I actually shape it up and design the research and still at those beginning stages and, and those design choices will become clearer to me as I move through, but I think the important part to think about for those listeners who may not be familiar with scholarship of teaching and learning or for whom this is completely new, right, the idea that you can reflect on what your teaching is and actually produce some sort of scholarship about it, that education is a field of scholarship where there is knowledge being produced, that we're the ones doing the things, right, we're the ones

not only producing the knowledge about what we've done, but we're the practitioners. We're the ones who are in the space doing the things. And we have firsthand knowledge of why we make certain choices and how we box students in or allow them more freedom. And those choices, you know, hopefully for all professors are based on other scholarships that people have done in the areas of scholarship of teaching and learning, but also their reactions to what's happening on the ground, their reactions to what's happening in the discourse of the university, their reactions to what's happening to the state of your field that you're studying, all these different things. And so I would encourage faculty members who are teaching and want to say something about their teaching in a scholarly way, right? They want to produce knowledge about teaching inside their field to consider that what they've done as sort of a social scientific field of study. That you can look back at all of your teaching materials and mine all of that for, you know, to do text analysis, to do theme analysis, to do all kinds of discourse analysis, all kinds of different kinds of ways of thinking about how to collect data and how to analyze it, to be able to use your own experience to then add to the knowledge of what teaching and learning really is. So, to get back to the first part of the question about what do I actually do in the classroom? I take all of the rules that you set out at the beginning of your question, Paulina, and I throw them out. I kind of, I don't disagree that. There are rules, but I don't like them. And I don't know that they apply all the time. There's probably a more suave way to say all of that, but I just, I don't. I think learning and teaching is a very individualized thing. And that each student comes to a classroom with different interests, different prior knowledge, different goals, all kinds of different experiences, all kinds of differences. And when they come to a classroom with all of those differences and then you box them all in and say, you need to know X, Y, and Z, and you need to know it to this standard. I think there's something lost. And now I don't, I'm not arguing that I think that this teaching philosophy applies across all disciplines. I think that if I were to go get a PhD in education, I might consider how to think about that more carefully, but I think it's gonna take the rest of my career in higher ed to really flesh all of these ideas out. I'm really at just at the beginning of them. So I would accept any critique from any of your listeners that says this is a fairly naive approach to thinking about the philosophy of teaching, but I really don't, I don't subscribe to the idea that students need to learn A, B, and C in order to leave my classroom. On a very base foundational level, perhaps, yes, that's true. But more importantly,I want to see them grow. I want to see them have those aha moments. I want to see them grapple with an idea and really mess it up and then try again. I want to see them take feedback from their classmates or have them, I want to see them be challenged by their classmates. I want to see them challenging each other's ideas or expanding on each other's ideas. I want to see them interacting with each other and collaborating with each other on producing knowledge in a really casual way. Right. And so, um, so my sense of flexibility in the classroom ends up being pretty wild. And like I said, at the beginning, there are ways that it succeeds and there are ways that it fails pretty dramatically. And then I'm allowed to do that. I'm able to do that now because I have tenure, right? And so I have a little bit more freedom and a little bit more, right? I have more academic freedom and I have a little bit more stability to be able to fail at something and take a risk that the students are really gonna hate it or really gonna dislike it or really leave some bad comments because I can play and I can try again and I have that freedom to do that. Right. So we've, we keep mentioning freedom and flexibility and fluidity and, and it's, it's at all of these different levels and you can't ask someone who's up for their, you know, mid probationary review to really push the limits of flexibility. They can't, they're just in a space where they cannot

be flexible. Um, and then someone who's gone through and has achieved tenure and, and feels more stable, often those people are burnt out and that. You know, trying to come back and add some sort of flexibility, it takes a tremendous amount of creativity and a big risk and getting outside of your comfort zone, which are all things that are extremely hard to do when you're burnt out from the 10 year run. And so, um, so it's difficult. It's really difficult. Um, there's no magic thing. There's no one assignment that I would say is a perfect way to do it. I think it really. Again, it's really individualized just as that student who might not have learned one of the three basic things you really wanted them to learn in the class. But man, they played with a lot of different ideas and they were really creative in their thinking and they really stretched themselves and they may have screwed it up a couple of times, but they really tried and tried and tried again and got something that student learned a ton in my book and deserves an A, and will be able to take that practice into the next classroom and catch up, right? They'll be able to get that concept because now they'll see it in a new light. And sometimes you just need to sit with an idea for a little while. And I think this is true for faculty too.

Polina: Megan, it's really inspiring. Thank you so much. And especially for me, a person who's coming from hard sciences, right? Where you cannot, I don't know, derive integrals if you didn't learn some foundations, right? So we still unfortunately need to box the students at a certain level to move forward. And I'm just wondering, you know, one of the privileges that I see from being part of the SOTL project is to talk to my colleagues like you, who take me from my, you know, fumes of the chemistry and bring me to a completely different world. So wouldn't you mind just to maybe give a real example of one of your classes, of one of your activities where you apply SOTL. So this way we can travel to a completely different world.

Meghan: Yeah, I do want to say though that even in the hard sciences, I mean, sciences and art, there's a lot of creativity happening in hard science spaces. There's also a lot of boxing in, there's also a lot of, right, there's certainly there's procedure and there's understanding basic levels of knowledge so you can actually do the thing you're trying to do. Certainly important, those basic skills. And sometimes not so basic skills, but also there's a level of art to understanding and interpreting your results to sitting with the results that you got and try to understand what they mean. There's an art to speaking to other scientists, right? So there, I think a lot of this does apply to the hard sciences. But like I said, I think that there's some, I have I think some extra wobbly guardrails coming from social science, right? We have procedures also and we have methodologies and practices that are also important to have the basic knowledge of and theories that it's important to have the basic knowledge of so you can move forward. But I think that there's, maybe we err too far on that side because then we're sort of pushed to do assessments and grade and do these things, which I don't know that they're helping anyone. That I just, I don't know. I don't know that grading's helping anyone anywhere at all. Yeah. And so, so some of the things that I do in my classroom, I'll tell you about my class that I'm always afraid is about to fail. This is the class where I really push the boundaries of flexibility. So in all of my classes, and I do this to varying degrees, I teach regularly four different classes. I teach a sort of second level, like upper next level introductory class on digital media and society. So what societal impact is there of digital media, how is AI going to take over the world? Like that, those kinds of questions, right? So we deal with those kinds of questions. There are lots of theories that we deal with, lots of different things that students need to learn so

they can then take those things to upper division classes and apply them in different fields. I teach a history of media technology class where we talk about chronological history of technology. Right? First, there was the telegraph, then we had the telephone, then there was television, right? So we talk about the history and a chronology. It's very specifically the history of the technology, but at each technological change, what were the social impacts of those? So we talk about that, we talk about theories of how society relates to technology. And then at the end of class, we read Jenny O'Dell's book, How to Do Nothing, and we talk about resistance and what it means to resist social change that we might not be incredibly comfortable with or recognizing social change that has happened that we maybe aren't so psyched about. I also teach a cultural criticism class that's called new media criticism where students criticize, they do a critical cultural project of some new media object and mostly it's a writing class. So they come up with a project, they start collecting some data, but then for most of the class, they're just writing, writing, writing, rewriting, rewriting, rewriting. So it's just writing, writing, writing. And then my favorite class is a class called digital sustainability, where we talk about where the internet meets the environment and how internet infrastructure and digital media infrastructure has an impact on the environment. So we spend a lot of time talking about cell towers on tops of mountains and cell towers in neighborhoods. And we talk about undersea cables and we talk about communication satellites and space trash. And we talk about mycelia networks and mushrooms and all kinds of funny things that are about how to understand how communication moves through the earth and the environment and our sort of physical space and what impact that has. And so the class, all of those classes have some level of, of sort of intense flexibility, but each of them has a different structure around it. So for all of them, students are given way more readings than are possible to finish in the class period. Every section of the class is just overloaded with all kinds of choice. And I tell students, you are not going to get through every single reading in this lesson. There are too many readings for you to complete. There are too many sub lessons for you to complete. So choose your interests and focus on something and skim the rest. And if they start getting behind, I tell them you skip these things and just focus on these two. What's the thing that's really interesting to you? So I try to get my students to really focus on following their interests and zeroing in and for the students who want to have a survey, they can cover all of it. And some students do, they really do cover all of it. And some students really need to hone in and just pick the one thing. And they learn a ton about that one thing. And they're encouraged to go outside of the classroom and move around. But so each of my classes has some sort of structure that allows them to pick and choose and sort of choose their own adventure through class. Most of my classes have set deadlines and set assignment deadlines, which sounds pretty normal. The history class has one deadline. All of your coursework is due the week before Thanksgiving. That's the deadline. That is the only deadline that I offer. I do in my syllabus offer sort of like a serving suggestion. If you need help with planning or you need help with scheduling, here's, here's how I would move through this course but you don't have to follow that because you're not living my life. You probably have a job. You've got 85 other classes and a bunch of other assignments, all of these different things, and you've got other professors who aren't as flexible as I am. So treat my class as the one you can back burner because you can come back to it at any time. We're also, all of my classes are online and asynchronous. So students are allowed to engage with class materials at any time that fits their schedule. So I try to look at my classes and my students schedules in much larger chunks, like month long chunks, not even week long, but like month long chunks that you should really

schedule 10 hours or X amount of hours. And you should break down your hours in your schedule this way. Spend this many hours reading, spend this many hours responding to discussion board posts, right? So the students can mix and match inside their own schedule. And in my history class, that one class that has the one massive deadline, I spend a lot of the class white-knuckling it to that Thanksgiving week, where there are several students right now that I've heard very little from. And surprisingly, though, this year,there are zero students that I've heard nothing from. Every single student has logged in, has engaged in this in the class in some way or another. They have handed in something. So everyone has engaged in the class. No one's disappeared. That's the first time that's happened. Usually it's a it's on a bell curve, right? There's a good 10 percent of students who just don't show up until the last second. So it's tough, right? I give them a ton of freedom and I consistently get comments back from students thanking me profusely for all of that freedom. And more importantly, those comments are always saying, I actually learned something, right? Like I was actually able to learn something from this assignment because I wasn't just trying to hit the mark. I wasn't just trying to check all the boxes because you didn't give me any boxes to check. And so I could actually learn something and they hand in pretty high quality work. I mean, it's a 200 level class and I'm expecting 200 level writing. There's a lot of sophomores and freshmen. And so it's on par with where I would expect the work to be.

Polina: That's really impressive.

Meghan: So I've found that when you give them a ton of freedom. It works. They, they don't just walk all over you. They don't take advantage of you. They, um, all the things that, that I know people who have asked me, Oh my God, how do you do that? With what really just one deadline, isn't that, doesn't that make grading crazy for you? Doesn't that make it so hard for you? Doesn't, you know, do students just not hand anything in? And the answer is, yeah, it makes it hard to grade. And students often do wait until the very end. There's a good chunk of them that do that. However, there are some students, I've got two students now who are done with the class. And do they have- They're finished. They finished their final exam.

Polina: Do they have a single assignment to submit with a flexible deadline or they are more than one?

Meghan: They have a whole host of assignments. So the class is broken up into three lessons and each of those lessons has a bunch of readings, multiple prerecorded lectures from me, um, outside resources that they have to do, they have to write an essay, they have a quota for discussion board posts and a couple of other things. There's quite a bit of work that they have to do for each lesson, but I don't need them to complete lesson one in order to go on to lesson two or to go on to lesson three. They're not chronological. So if they want to start with lesson three, because it's most interesting to them, it's going to change how they think through the ideas in lesson one. And they're going to bring all of that interesting thinking to the discussion boards and teach each other in really interesting ways. And so the discussion boards I find are far more rich because they're not all in the same place. They're not all trying to say the same thing. They're not all trying to get the right answer that I think is the right answer. They're just thinking. And they're thinking with each other and in relation to each other and in relation to the contents

of the class in really, really creative ways. And so yeah, while it is a little bit of a white knuckle ride through the semester for a handful of those students, the ones who are, you know, middle of the road to highly advanced are really getting the work done. And they're doing it creatively and thoughtfully and in a way that I feel for one of the first times in my career, wow, my students are really learning. They're really learning how to think and they're learning how to think creatively and they're learning how creativity is part of the learning process and they're learning about things in relation. And how in relation, once that variable changes, how things are in relation to each other, then the outcome changes a little bit, right? There's a different color to it. There's a different valence to it. When you, when you do lesson three first and you learn about resistance to technological environments and capitalism and all of these other things. And then you go read the history of communication technology, you know, wrote history. It's a really different approach to history and a really different approach to what we have now and why we went through this technological advancement process and why it happened that way and why didn't it happen some other way. They ask really different questions and they surprise each other. My discussion boards, you know, in this space, my discussion boards end up being really robust. I know that that ends up being, um, the biggest surprise to a lot of people. And that, you know, students, you know, the, the overarching discourse is that students hate discussion boards and they're so stupid and everybody doesn't want to use them and professors who use them are lazy and all of the different things that are terrible about discussion boards, but I've got like close to a thousand discussion board posts every single class, every single semester, tons and tons of comments. And I have a very small quota and the students are commenting way more than I asked them to. They're always way over the quota. And the discussion board threads are always like 10, 12 deep. They're really robust and they're kind, they're respectful, they're incredibly thoughtful to each other. And they're always drawing in new ideas to help each other think through. And the original poster always replies. And I think that that's because I allow them to have their own freedom and choose their own adventure through the materials. It allows them to bring their own thinking to class.

Polina: Megan, I would assume that you have a system developed for your classes. Do you think it will be transferable to smaller size classes or to the classes with, let's say, 100 students. So my classes have, well, the enrollment changes every semester, right, just to based on who's enrolled, but my caps are at 49 and 100. So my 200 level digital media and society class, that sort of intro level class, usually has between 70 and 100 students. And I use this same model for that. My history class, I think has 35 right now, something like that. They're usually they're around, the enrollments are around that. So I'm using this model with, I'll call them semi big classes. Remember I came up teaching 1000 student classrooms and so having 100 students is like, nothing to me. I really love the big classroom. Yeah. Yeah, I actually I prefer that to the tiny class.

Bridget: So, Meg, this is so exciting to hear about all of this. And, you know, as you're describing the strategies that you use, and the assignments and how you've structured things, it just seems like your work, your your pedagogical work is so rich for subtle questions that there's just so many, I can imagine for you, opportunities to wonder and sort of have these questions in your mind. How is this affecting my students? And if I change it this way, what's going to be the impact now? And what are they walking away from? What was the most valuable thing for my

students? And these are questions that we ask ourselves as educators. And how to proceed in seeking answers to those questions. And sometimes we don't. And so I'm wondering if maybe as we sort of seek to wrap up just a little bit, this has been so fascinating to, as Paulina said, just get a little window into the life of your teaching world. I'm curious about what kind of questions do you have on your mind now that are SOTL related that maybe you're going to explore and maybe you're not. Maybe somebody listening could say, ooh, I'll pick up that question and I can look into that. But what are you curious about? What do you want to look into?

Meghan: Well, so the work that I'm doing in SOTL as a faculty fellow for the Faculty Center for Ignition Pedagogy, I'm really looking into posthumanism and education. Post-humanism not as the sort of like Silicon Valley fever dream of panhumanity, but post-humanism as an understanding that a lot of current thinking or recent past thinking is based on Western-centric humanism or Euro-centric humanism and is anthropocentric. And that we might need to break free of some of that to try to understand this space that we occupy now, this media ecology that we occupy now, that is now not just digital media, but digital media in a very sort of specific flavor, right? The sort of downfall of social media, the rise of AI, all of these different elements that are variables that are changing the digital media ecology. How do we need to understand who we are and how do we break free from that Eurocentric humanism and the anthropocentrism to be able to have a more broad understanding of who we are and how we are in this digital ecology. And so that's sort of driving my questions in education right now. And so my questions are very much about where post-humanism and Jesuit education come together in a digital ecology. And I'm looking for emerging discourses around post-humanism in education in a couple of different ways. I'm looking at technology in the classroom, right, so specifically chatbots and AI and how AI is being used in the classroom or not being used in the classroom or sneakily being used in the classroom because somebody wants to outlaw it, right?
Bridget: Right.

Meghan: Like how does that actually work? And how is AI changing the nature and the most basic definitions of what we think teaching and learning is? Right, what are we learning if we're just having students write the same essay over and over again? And yes, I know there are some places where students really do need to learn a basic skill, but is that learning anymore? With AI in the mix? I'm not sure. I don't have an answer to yes or no yet, but it's definitely, I don't know, but it's changing. So I'm looking at technology in the classroom to see what sort of themes around posthumanism are emerging from technology in the classroom. I'm also looking at flexibility and fluidity, trying to understand how opening up your classroom, opening up your assignments, allowing students to be more free, allowing students to determine what their own learning is, allowing students to help other students learn and learn from each other and create new knowledge to get them to understand that maybe it's not their only goal to learn the knowledge I've produced or that my colleagues have produced but that they are active players in producing knowledge at a university setting. Um, so I'm looking for those themes that are coming up through flexibility and fluidity. I'm also looking into online learning and the discussions about remote work. I mean, there's just such a rich discourse going on about remote work that cracks me up and, um, it's very much focused on, um, really the most surface level complications of online learning without ever really delving into the values that can drive positive uses of online learning. And finally, I'm looking at different pedagogies and how post-

humanism appears in different pedagogical approaches. So for example, how do we understand situatedness? How do we understand some views of the world that are not anthropocentric? How do we move away from Eurocentric humanism? Critical digital pedagogy does this through media ecology foundations with sort of a tech forward approach to understanding the classroom and learning spaces. Sancho-Pensante pedagogy does this through affective foundations, through really understanding emotional influence. Indigenous or red pedagogy does this through like situated liberation and foundations of decolonization. Environmental justice pedagogies do this through anti-petro pedagogy stances. There's all kinds of really interesting pedagogical discussion happening where there are moments of post-humanism coming up. And to me, there's something really interesting about this understanding of post-humanism while being situated at a Jesuit university that is so focused on the Eurocentric humanism understanding of the world and is very anthropocentric, but also with Laudato Si and trying to understand the environment. There are some movements, I think, in Jesuit pedagogy that are leaning away from that, but also not quite ready to lean too far away from it. So there's a little bit of attention there, but also a collaborative notion happening there. And so that's where my questions in the scholarship of teaching and learning are. They're far more about values and about very overarching, real writ large philosophies of teaching and definitions of teaching and learning, then questions like, well, what did the start, how do the students, do the students feel like they've learned? I am not entirely sure that you can answer that question right away. I think if I had walked out, if I was 10 and you had caught me as I walked out of that Carl Sagan lecture and said, what did you learn? It would be a very different answer than the one I give now. So learning isn't just the thing that you do inside this classroom in this moment for this semester. It's something that sticks with you. And, you know, like you carry those things with you and that learning changes and shifts and molds and adapts to new context and takes on new valences in different situations. And so the learning's never done. And so when they leave my classroom, they may not have learned the thing yet. They might not learn the thing until they're 45. And I don't know that I can track them down and ask them to respond to a survey at that point, right? So I'm not sure that those are questions that really don't interest me because I don't think there are useful answers to them. That doesn't change how I engage in the classroom. It doesn't change how I engage with my students in the moment or think about how to deliver the things that I'm trying to deliver to them so that they can integrate those things into future learning. So I think my questions are less practical.

Bridget: Yeah, but there's something almost kind of mystical and beautiful in the way that you just described the educational process and with some very concrete practical strategies that you use, but then these really grand questions about the meaning of education, the meaning of being human, what is this learning all about? And I think hat gives us a lot to think about for ourselves, for our listeners, but also just, I think, reignites what can be so exciting about education. And I think that remembering, and we try and do this work to help people stay connected to the passion for learning that brought most of us here, that we've all experienced at some point, whether it was when we were children or hopefully many times since then, but the joy of curiosity and the excitement of asking questions and discovering new things and finding ways to keep ourselves connected to that, to share what we're learning, but certainly to expose our students to learning processes that allow them to tap in to all of those joys of exploring, of curiosity. That really comes across from what you're doing. And we're just so grateful to have the chance to talk to you, Meg.

Meghan: Well, thank you so much for having me. It's been really fun. And I feel like I could continue talking for ages longer. I have so many more examples of all of the things that I do in the classroom. And it really does, I think, like you said, Bridget, come down to a focus on creativity and joy and surprise and I love blowing minds in my classrooms.

Polina: So, Megan, thank you so much for coming and sharing your experiences.

Meghan: Thank you. Thank you so much for having me.

Bridget: Excellent. Well, thanks for joining us for teaching and learning at LUC. We're glad to continue the conversation and maybe we'll have you back Meg to continue this with you specifically. We really appreciate your time.

Meghan: I would love to come back. Thank you.

Bridget: Thanks so much. Wow. What an interesting conversation. Stick around for a few more minutes while we reflect on the episode.
That was so great.

Polina: It was really interesting. Especially, I know Bridget for me as a person who's coming from sciences, right? Sciences is very, I find sciences very inspiring, right? To apply flexibility and fluidity. And we do it, we do it in higher level classes. That's exactly what we wanna see in our students to be independent thinkers.

Bridget: Right, but those intro level classes probably, it feels like it needs to be much more in the box as we were talking about. I knew that she'd be great for this conversation. She's got so much energy and excitement about what she does and she's doing some really interesting things. And I think that the way that she's offering these learning experiences, I just always think that, you know, one of the things I tried to suggest there at the end, but one of the things we sometimes get disconnected from is sort of this very innate human desire to know things. And we've crafted these educational systems that are all about checking boxes and that is so far away from that desire to learn and the innate curiosity and I love that what she's doing is really tapping into that.

Polina: Yeah, I really like that with a SOTL, we can look at different perspectives on teaching and apply some I don't want to say boxed approaches, but let's say traditional, more organized approaches as well as incorporate some creativity or vice versa to give a lot of creativity but still have some more of the traditional approach embedded.

Bridget: Sure, yeah, and figuring out the balance there. And obviously it matters. The instructor needs to be comfortable with what they're doing, whether the degree of flexibility, the degree of trying new things. If the instructor's not somewhat on board with doing that, obviously it wouldn't work. So it is interesting to imagine how to help people explore the balance.

Polina: Yeah. Okay. I guess that, um, this, uh, this time around again, we'll get an amazing guest and we had an inspiring, inspiring talk. And I would like to invite our listeners for our future podcasts.

Bridget: Absolutely. And we'll definitely have Meg back again. No doubt. Thank you for, uh, chatting and we'll see you next time.

Polina: See you next time.