Speaker 1: I really enjoyed this one more than I think any of them that I've ever been to. I thought the keynote, Dr. Imazeki, is just excellent. She has good ideas.

Speaker 1: And also I think that the way that everyone chimed in and gave their ideas, I learned quite a few new things.

Liesel: Welcome to the Magic Mountie podcast. This is a podcast that is dedicated to helping faculty and other college employees as they try and navigate the challenging fabric of serving students, especially at Mount San Antonio College, but everyone's welcome.

Christina: Hello, its Christina, we have part two of Jennifer Imazeki's keynote taken from Inspired Teaching Day, which was hosted by the DEST team, by the way.

Christina: You'll hear more of the discussion they had around active learning and employing pedagogy for a flipped classroom. And just to refresh, Professor Imazeki is the Director for the Center for Teaching and Learning at San Diego State University, a Senate distinguished professor and professor of economics with a passion for teaching in education at all levels.

Christina: Once again, here is Professor Imazeki.

Jennifer: Does somebody who uses a flipped classroom want to explain exactly what that means?

Speaker 4: Well, a flipped classroom in general is just having the students do any form of the learning outside of the classroom before they come to class. So in theory just having a student read a textbook before coming in so you can discuss or engage in it would be considered flipped. But the tradition, or the way people intend to see it is watching video lessons, and that's the way I use it in my classroom. I created my own video lessons for math that students watch before coming to class so that during class we have time for activities and then to work on math problems.

Jennifer: Thank you. The reason that it's called flipped, and I would add to that just that it's not just having students do stuff outside of class, because we've always had students do stuff outside of class for millennia, right? We called it homework.

Jennifer: The key difference and the reason the flipped model has become such a big thing is what we're having them do outside of class is changed in the flipped classroom environment. Instead of coming to class, hearing the lecture, getting the content through the classroom and then going off and doing the homework like the problem sets or the things we have students do, the homework in a flipped classroom is the content itself that they get before they come into your classroom. They watch a video, it could even just be reading the textbook.

Jennifer: I have a dear friend in my history department who hates the term "flipped classroom" because she insists this is what history classes have always done. Students have to read a bunch of stuff and then they come to class and discuss it. That is what they do in the humanities according to my friend. I would argue not all of her colleagues are doing that, but she's got a point, that to a certain extent instructors from the beginning of time have asked students to do the reading before they come to class so that you can do something in class.

Jennifer: One problem is that if you ask students to do the reading before class and then you come to class and lecture on all the same stuff, why in the world would they do the reading? And yet it's a chicken egg problem because faculty will say, "Students didn't do the reading so I have to lecture about it in class so they actually get it."

Jennifer: Yes?

Speaker 5: One thing that I've been doing for three semesters now, I think, I ask them to review the PowerPoints and the book before, and they all have to come in with three questions. And their three questions have to be phrased like, "Please help me understand this better. When I was preparing, I didn't understand this," or, "I didn't understand this graph from the book."

Speaker 5: And then they talk for 10 minutes with the people at their tables trying to answer each other's questions they came in with and then they pick one, I have Post-its, they pick one that they put up on the board for me, and then that is what I am going to lecture on.

Speaker 5: So I tell them, "I'm not going to regurgitate the whole chapter for you because there are some things that are easier, that you all know. Why should I waste our class time on that?" And so they usually have recurring themes that they all had a hard time with and I'm like, "Well, that's all I'm going to be lecturing on." But you will get lost in this class if you don't spend that time.

Speaker 5: So, it works and it doesn't work. That's why I'm always trying to figure out good ways to do it, because of course you see some students come in the beginning and write down three questions real quick because they know they get three points for doing that, and so I'm at the point in the semester where when I notice that, I'm telling them, "You are not doing this for the three points. I hope you understand this. You're doing this because you want me to actually help you in the learning," and so, well, I think they're starting to think more about it, but it takes effort.

Jennifer: It takes effort, yep. It definitely takes effort. And it takes repetition, and for a lot of students it takes a while for them to believe you. What you just described is sometimes referred to as "just in time teaching," where you are getting feedback from students in the moment so that you can respond to that feedback and talk to them specifically about things that they need help with and they want to talk about.

Jennifer: Yeah?

Speaker 6: How have you seen students respond to that method in the last three semesters that you have been doing that?

Speaker 5: I'm trying to still collect more data to see actually if student performance, their grades, basically, have gone up. I think you always get a group of students that really embrace this method, and you have some that give up.

Speaker 5: I think its working, I like it, and like you said earlier, it makes the teaching so much more fun, it really does, because you're like, "Oh, okay. Three of you all wanted to learn about this more." I think they see more meaning in the lecture.

Speaker 5: So, overall I really like the approach. I agree it's the students who love this structure. I meet my classes twice a week, so that's always on Tuesdays. This is how we start our classes on Tuesdays, your questions, and then I lecture on Thursdays. I try always to have a hands-on activity and then a quiz.

Speaker 5: But it's hard because you also need to push, push, push them to, when you get behind, you don't want to break that pattern. You want: Tuesdays is always this, Thursdays is always that.

Speaker 5: But I like it, and I think the students are responding well.

Speaker 7: I was at a meeting in Orlando two weeks ago, the national meeting, and another presentation was given on the active learning and everything. To me, it's not the type of active learning that you use. No matter what you use, it seems like group work is at the heart of it. You have a lot of students do group work.

Speaker 7: So a question came up, how do you group the students? Especially at the community college where we have a diverse group of students in terms of level of preparation. So there were discussions. If you put the good students with the bad student, the good the student is typically unhappy and the bad student tags along. And if you basically put the good students together, the other ones with their level of preparation, then you basically will be widening the gap in the classroom.

Speaker 7: So my question to you is how do you group the students, especially if you want them to work together throughout the semester? And second, did you try your TBL in a lower level class and you did the group work?

Jennifer: I do full day workshops on collaborative learning, so it's hard to answer that question in just a few minutes.

Jennifer: I will say that in my mind, how you put groups together is not nearly as important as what you are having them do. If your group activities are constructed and designed well, the formation of the group shouldn't matter or doesn't matter as much.

Jennifer: The other piece of group work that I think is really important and faculty don't spend enough time thinking about is having a conversation with your students about group work. It was mentioned earlier, explaining to them why you're having them do group work.

Jennifer: In addition to that, talking to them about how to do group work well, so one activity I use at the beginning of my TBL course is I have the students generate a list of all the characteristics of group activities that they have done in other courses that they thought worked well, and a similar list of all the things that have not worked well.

Jennifer: And you can guess the things that are on the second list. My good students come into my TBL class, and when they find out they're going to be working in groups all semester, they don't groan out loud, but you can see the eye rolls. It's usually the good students who don't like group work because of free riding. They just assume they're going to do all the work and other people are going to get some credit for it.

Jennifer: So you really have to think hard about how you can construct group activities to minimize that free riding component. And that is a function not of who's in the group but what you're asking students to do and how you're holding them accountable for what they're doing in the groups. And so that's, I think, a much bigger conversation.

Jennifer: I will say that from an equity standpoint, it is better for you to assign the groups in some way even if it's just randomly than to allow students to choose their own groups, but again, the best practices for good collaborative learning vary by context. Are you having students just do a quick thing, pair share at their table, and it's going to be one shot and go on, or you're going to have them work in groups throughout the entire semester? You're going to have different practices for how you put those groups together.

Jennifer: Are you going to have them working in class? Are you going to have them working outside of class? I strongly discourage faculty from having students work on group projects that require the students to get together outside of class. This is definitely true at San Diego State and I would think would be even more true here. That is a real challenge for students because of the diversity of backgrounds. And so if you are going to have them do group projects where they have to do some of that work outside of class, you just have to, I think it's an ethical imperative, to give them time in class as well so they don't have to find the time outside of class that they can all get together.

Jennifer: So that's not really answering your question. I'm sorry, there just is no one right answer to that, but I can point you to a ton of resources. Again, I think it really is about what are you having them do in those groups? How can you design the accountability so that there is both individual and group accountability and having conversations with your students about what does it mean to be a good member of the group.

Jennifer: Along with that, especially if you're having them work in groups for any extended period of time, group evaluations, peer feedback. So in a TBL course, you do peer evaluations at multiple points in the semester. So they get the feedback at a point where they can do something about it before it actually impacts their final grade. And that's a really key piece of it.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Speaker 8: One of my professors, I'm taking classes at Cal State Fullerton, what she has done is she has broken the class down into three six-week periods, and in the first six weeks she chose the groups that we would be working in. She didn't know any of us, she just randomly chose who would be working together. And then in the next six weeks she let us choose who we wanted in our group, keeping in mind that we had a project that we were going to have to work on together. And then the third six weeks she chose now that she knows who we are and how we work together, so she was strategic in who she put in what groups. So it was really neat how I think, you were kind of worried that you'd be stuck in a group where you have certain people who aren't doing anything and some who are. And so changing it up made it really nice.

Speaker 8: And then with the group project where we did have to actually work together outside of class, this helped too because she said, "Think about who you want in your group. Make sure you have similar schedules." Mainly that was it. Do you have a similar schedule so that you can work together? So I thought that was really cool as a way to address ... You're not stuck in that group for the whole time. And it could be just different days it's a different group. It doesn't have to be the same group for the whole semester.

Speaker 9: We do a ton of group work in my Fitness for Living class in kinesiology, but in hearing what you were saying, my volleyball background came to mind. I'm an indoor and beach volleyball coach here, and the same type of ideas apply in athletics where you have some of your athletes are at a tremendously higher level than others, but if you don't incorporate the higher ones with the lower ones, the lower ones will never catch up. At the same time. You don't want to hold the ones up here back.

Speaker 9: So we collaborate and change up those groups in those pairings every day. So they have different challenges. The way we challenge the highest groups is the coaches are much more involved, so the coaches will compete against them, which is the highest level out there at the moment. I don't know how many more years we have about that, but at the moment.

Speaker 9: But what I find is when we pair the highest level athletes with the lower level athletes, the higher level athletes are able to teach, thus increasing their own knowledge. So I use that model in my classroom as well, where after our first quiz, I will group them by grade for the next assignments and then intentionally completely flip that grid so you have a very high achiever with someone who missed the boat, and we'll continue to mix that up and similar to that suggestion about the professor from Fullerton, by the end of the semester, they've met everyone in class, they've worked with everyone in class on some type of activity, and then when we get to the meatiest part of our class, which can be very personal where we talk about addiction and depression and suicide, where it's very, very personal, that's the point where I allow them to choose their own groups because they're able to choose who they're most comfortable with for that discussion.

Jennifer: I want to give you one more strategy that I use about getting student buy-in, because that is really a theme running through a number of the different comments about concerns that students don't value the active learning, that they don't want to come to class if they know that they're going to have to do this, there was a comment earlier, the comment students will make, "I pay you to teach me." I really love that one. Even worse is, "I pay your salary." I've gotten that from a couple students.

Jennifer: So it is challenging. My research background is education policy. With my econ hat on, I do work in K-12 school finance and teacher labor markets policy. And so when common core was adopted in California several years ago, I was psyched, because I was optimistic that it would mean students coming to our K-12 system would be exposed to different kinds of pedagogy because you have to teach differently to do the common core well compared to content standards that we had before.

Jennifer: Not seeing it as much, but what I do find interesting is that as students come in who have had exposure to different levels of active learning, I'm starting to see somewhat different comments from students, still get a lot of the, "I expect to sit here and you just talk at me," but I also have had a handful of students, and maybe this is just San Diego. We have a couple of charter schools, High Tech High that's entirely project based learning. And so students who come to San Diego state from High Tech High are really used to active learning and doing. And they actually get very frustrated when you expect them to sit there and listen to you talk. Those are the ones who just don't show up.

Jennifer: My point was that you still do have plenty of students who are expecting a "normal class." What I started doing was being a lot more transparent with my students about not just what I was doing but why I was doing it, explaining to them why I'm asking them to do the group work, why I am asking them to do these quizzes every day, why I'm going to have them work in groups the whole semester. And in my TBL class in particular I mentioned it's flip it on steroids. They work in permanent groups the whole semester together.

Jennifer: On the first day of class, this is from an article by Gary Smith from a decade ago now. First Day Questions for the Learner Centered Classroom. On the first day of class, I explain to them what we're going to be doing, and then I pose this question. I use poll everywhere so they right off the bat have their phones and they respond. "Thinking of what you want to get out of your college education and this course, which of the following is most important to you? Acquiring information, learning how to use information, knowledge in new situations, developing skills to continue learning after college."

Jennifer: I have them vote or register their responses. There are always a few who answer A. And then the rest of the class is split between B and C. That distribution I get every single semester, which contributes to a good conversation because I point out that A is necessary for B and C. You can't use information and knowledge or develop skills to continue learning if you don't have that base foundation.

Jennifer: But if that's all you got out of your college degree, if you walk across the stage and get your diploma from San Diego State and all you have is an encyclopedia in your brain but no understanding of how to access or use that, would you really feel like your degree was a worthwhile use of four to six years?

Jennifer: So then I ask, "Of these three, which do you think you can most easily achieve outside of class on your own versus working in class with your classmates and the professor?" So I ask the first question first, of these two goals which you think you can most easily achieve outside of class. When I say, A, every hand in the room goes up. I have yet to get anything but a unanimous response from my students that A is easier to do on their own. They aren't dumb. They know acquiring information is something they can do on their own through their own reading and studying.

Jennifer: So once we've established that, it's really easy to explain why I do my class the way that I do. And when you talk about, "Isn't it strange that the traditional classroom does A and leaves you on your own for B and C? I mean some of you are smart enough to put together study groups, hopefully. Right. You might have other classmates to work with on B and C, but a typical classroom, you go and your professor lectures and you get all that information and then you go off and do homework where you apply that information on your problem sets."

Jennifer: "In this class, we are going to do that the other way around. I'm pretty sure you guys can all do the reading on your own and get those basic concepts. But what I want you to be able to do with that information is go deeper. And that's harder, and so I would like to be here with you while you're doing that and give you an opportunity to talk that out with your classmates. So we're going to do that part in class and that's why we do this class the way that we do it."

Jennifer: That typically gets them at least on board enough to stick around for a couple weeks till they can see how it works. And then you have to follow up. You have to make sure that you're actually structuring what you're having them do in a way that they can see that that's what you're having them do. I come back to this over and over. You can't have this conversation once, unfortunately.

Jennifer: You have to have it multiple times, but any time a student comes up and says, "I just don't like this team thing," I will say, "Okay, so let's look at the problem we just worked on in class. If you hadn't had your classmates to talk to about that, what would your response have been?" And they'll give me whatever it is and then I'll say, "But what about this? What about that? What about this other thing that your classmates came up with?" And that they did not.

Jennifer: Again, that's a function of the kinds of problems I'm asking them to do. It's a data analysis class and the whole point is that there are multiple ways to approach quantitative questions, but I think it has that function of helping students understand that what we're doing in class is actually helping them learn at a deeper level. And even if they don't want to admit it, they're in college because they want to learn.

Jennifer: So, I do think that it is a conversation you have to have over and over again. It not only helps students understand what you're doing, it also communicates to them how much you care about their learning, which goes back to the emotion thing. And that when students know you care and know that you have their learning at the top of your priority list, they, I think, will give you some leeway that they are less willing to give you when you feel like you're just wasting our time.

Jennifer: Let me just end with one thought. Every discipline so far that I have encountered has somebody in it somewhere in the country who is thinking about pedagogy specific to your discipline. I think a lot of active learning techniques transcend discipline, you can do them in lots of different kinds of classes, but it also is very important to talk to other folks in your discipline who are doing these kinds of things and getting those ideas.

Jennifer: And so I really encourage you to seek that information out. Find other folks in your discipline, even if it's not in your department, there are now tons of journals, academic journals out there where people are writing about the work they're doing. Some of it discipline specific, some of it interdisciplinary, but you really do not have to reinvent the wheel. For every question you have about active learning, I can almost guarantee you there is somebody around either at this institution or others who has thought about it and who has tried something that might be helpful.

Jennifer: And so I strongly encourage faculty, we tend to treat our classrooms like islands, right? We forget that a lot of other folks are thinking about these things, events like this are the perfect opportunity to chat with other folks. And I just really encourage faculty to think about where can you go to get those resources to talk to people. The folks who organized this event, I would think would be on this campus, the first place to go.

Jennifer: But it also is your own context that you need to think about when you talk to other folks. Okay, they did that. It worked this way. I may need to tweak it this way, but again, just that idea that you don't have to reinvent the wheel, that you just need to perfect it.

Sun: Does anyone have questions for Jennifer?

Speaker 10: We're studying parasites right now. So this is the parasite's scientific name. This is its life cycle. This is how an animal gets it. This is how you treat it. I don't know how to make something like that interesting.

Jennifer: I understand what you're saying. Sometimes it seems like, particularly introductory courses, material can feel dry. And that's why I really think that's where I think going back to your baseline outcomes. I think for a lot of us, what we want our students to walk away from our classes with is rarely just information. Or if it is, it's information we think is important for some other purpose. So thinking about what is that other purpose, whether it's so they can be more informed citizens, more informed students in their next class, to use that information to understand the world around them ... I'm not in the sciences. Well, economics likes to think it's a science, but I'm not in the natural sciences, but there's so much in those fields that I think must be useful for us as people who live in the world.

Jennifer: And so thinking about where students might encounter this information, where it might even be useful to know this at a cocktail party, or what have you, and using that as an entrée for the students, maybe in that case you start out with talking about, I don't know, mad cow disease, or having them read stories about situations where having this background information would actually be useful.

Jennifer: At the very least, it gives students a hook for why they might want to learn this information even if the actual learning itself, even if the content, the concept seem fairly dry once they get into it.

Jennifer: Yeah.

Speaker 13: My students, they choose speech topics, they choose them, and I tell them, pick a topic that you care about that you're credible with, that you can research more and become even more credible, and then make sure you can relate it to the audience.

Speaker 13: And then when we start working on the outline, it's usually that component, why should the audience care? And they're like, "I don't know." And I'm like, "Well, why do you care?" That was the first step in getting this topic. You should care about this topic. And then when you just said like public health, my mind just, and I think this is the spirit of today, share ideas and think of active learning, you said they affect the public, having students make a 30-second public campaign message about a parasite in my mind as a student, I would love that as opposed to writing a paper, make something like that. Parasites in Your Pork, right?

Speaker 13: Something that would be all the things that you want them to know, like the essentials of a parasite. Because I think sometimes, it's just like the students who say, "I don't know why this is relevant." It clearly is, right? All their topics have a niche audience that they want to tell them about, but sometimes it's the method of the activity that we get them to do that makes them even more excited to do it.

Speaker 13: So I think today, thinking about all this stuff that you don't do is important because we're in our comfort zone and we haven't really thought maybe there's something out there that might even scare us to do. It might be something that like, oh, that's going to take a lot of time. Or it might even fail. Even alerting students that sometimes this is not going to work. Our active learning sometimes does not produce work that we want to show and then say, "To believe me, come to a professional development workshop that faculty do. And you will see often times things do not always work as expected."

Jennifer: My favorite definition of a professor is somebody who thinks the entire world will be better off if they just knew a little bit more about their field. And so I think it's really important for us to remember, especially when we're teaching the principles and introductory courses, to think about why did you get into this? What made you excited about that?

Jennifer: Economics, believe me is a topic that the vast majority of students are taking it not because they have chosen to, but because they think they need to or it's required for something else. And so I have spent lots of time trying to think about why do I think econ is so important, and I try to spend as much time as I can on those aspects of the course that tie into those reasons for me.

Jennifer: And when I can't figure something out, monopolistic competition, I can't figure out why that's important for my students or the way it's typically taught in textbooks, I either try and leave it out or I find colleagues, again, who are excited about that and have figured out good ways to do it and ask them what they do, and ask them why they think that's relevant.

Jennifer: Thank you again for having me here.

Liesel: Hey, thanks so much for joining us for the Magic Mountie podcast. We love your likes, we love your shares and we love your comments. So please engage with our community, download from wherever you love to get your podcasts, iTunes, Google, Rate My Professor, we're there and we want you to be back with us next week.

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Liesel: We'll see you next time.