

Tanya Domey: Hi, this is Tanya Domey. Welcome to the Thought Project recorded at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Fostering ground-breaking research and scholarship in the arts, social sciences, and sciences. In this space, we talk with faculty and doctoral students about the big thinking and big ideas generating cutting-edge research, informing New Yorkers and the world.

Tanya Domey: Luke Waltzer is the Director of the Teaching and Learning Center at the Graduate Center, where he supports graduate students in their teaching across the CUNY System and beyond. And he works on a variety of pedagogical and digital projects. He previously was the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Baruch College. He holds a Ph.D. in History from the Graduate Center and serves as Director of Community Projects for the CUNY Academic Commons, and is a faculty member in the Interactive, Technology, and Pedagogy Certificate Program. He also directs the development of Vocat, an open source, multimedia evaluation and assessment tool. He serves on the editorial collective of the Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy. Welcome, Luke.

Luke Waltzer: Hi, Tanya. It's good to be here.

Tanya Domey: In researching the work of the Teaching and Learning Center at the Graduate Center, I was struck by the ... in your mission statement, the acknowledgment that quote, "Knowledge is never static, and a community's approach to teaching must never be as well." End quote. This solution is actually not revolutionary, but it's affirmative. It's embraced in your mission, formally, and I want to explore that mission as it's situated in the City University of New York particularly today.

Luke Waltzer: Great.

Tanya Domey: So, tell us. What is the mission of the Teaching and Learning Center?

Luke Waltzer: So, our mandate is to support graduate center students as they're becoming college teachers. And that means supporting them at each step of the development of that process. So, as in their first semesters in the classroom when they're in the process of moving towards master in their field, and then learning about who the students at CUNY are. Then in subsequent semesters in the classroom where they're starting to get their legs under them a little bit, starting to find their voice, both in their scholarship and in the classroom, and maybe having the space to experiment a little bit with what they're doing in the classroom. And then ultimately, at the end of their graduate careers where they're thinking about going under the job market with what at CUNY is often very deep and very teaching experience. That prepares them to do work not only in college classrooms but in a lot of different spaces as well.

Luke Waltzer: So, we've been building programs that seeks to connect with graduate center students at each step along the way.

Tanya Domey: So, it's a ... not only teaching skills and methods, but it's also a level of professionalization as well.

Luke Waltzer: Certainly, certainly.

Tanya Domey: I think it's probably fair to say, and I've been teaching for ten years at the graduate level, that it can be awfully intimidating to walk into a classroom.

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domey: And here you are. When do you start teaching at ... in your graduate education here at the GC? What year is it?

Luke Waltzer: So, GC students who are on the five-year fellowship package start teaching in their second year.

Tanya Domey: So, yeah. In your second year, you're really actually young -

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domey: ... in your graduate education and now you're gonna go over to Baruch or Hunter, or Lehman College and you're going to walk into a classroom of people who come from all kinds of backgrounds with all different levels of knowledge. Not necessarily with all the same teaching prep that -

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domey: ... they walk into a classroom with.

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domey: So, that's gotta be really intimidating.

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah, it is and it was for me. When I was a graduate student here, and taught a U.S. history survey in my third year of graduate school. And the preparation I had was I had lunch with Carol Burkin who was a senior historian at the Graduate Center and taught at Baruch College. We went over a syllabus, talked about some strategies, and then the next week: boom. I was in the class. I designed the class myself. I had two sections of 45 students each. I was in my early 20s at the time, and some of the students were what we think of as traditional students who would come directly out of high school. Other students were two or even three times my age who worked full-time. And this was kind of information about the CUNY classroom that hadn't been made available to me.

Luke Waltzer: And the experience before our center was founded was common. That was what every graduate center student who taught at CUNY kind of encountered.

They were kind of thrown into the deep end. It was a course that they designed. They were lucky if they got some mentorship from within their program. But for the most part, they had to figure out on their own.

Luke Waltzer: So, several informal spaces kind of emerged over the past decade or so at the Graduate Center. Different programs, comparative literature, English, urban education ... have internal structures to think about teaching and learning. But it's wildly uneven, and one of the missions of the TLC is to find the support structures that have existed and have kind of evolved over time and dialogue with the needs of the students who use them. And to connect those, and then to build support structures where they haven't previously existed.

Tanya Domey: Talk about the Mellon Grant that you are working with and how that came about. Just for me, I'm listening to you talk about your own experience. I was never given anything at Columbia -

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domey: ... where I teach. I was never given a class, I was not given an orientation.

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domey: It's like, "Okay, here's the syllabus." In this case, I stepped in for somebody.

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domey: And I didn't have to design it, but my head was reeling.

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domey: I was reeling.

Luke Waltzer: Yeah.

Tanya Domey: So, this Mellon Grant. It's very interesting. Of course, I was part of the announcement of it. But, talk about how that is informing the work and helping fund the mission of the TLC.

Luke Waltzer: Sure, so the Mellon Grant has ... provides the funding for the Mellon Humanities Alliance. And what the Alliance does is it places graduate center students as graduate teaching fellows for the first time in a community college context. So, our partners in the grant are LaGuardia Community College. And graduate center students who are teaching as part of their five-year package here at the GC have for years only been placed at the senior colleges at Baruch City College, Brooklyn, Hunter, CSI, Queens, John Jay. And there is increasing demand for faculty in community college context, and we're seeing more of our alumni from the Graduate Center take these positions. But there hadn't been much

conversation within this building about what it means to teach in community college context. What pedagogy travels between senior college context and community college context.

Luke Waltzer: So, this grant really allowed us to explore that process in a robustly supported way. So, the grant provides the funding for the Graduate Center teaching fellows, three cohorts of nine each who get 2-year fellowships. But it also provides resources for intensive training for those graduate teaching fellows, and the training is designed by my office at Teaching and Learning Center. Elizabeth Alsop, who's the Assistant Director at the TLC in the Mellon Humanities Scholar, is our point person on that by the Center of Teaching and Learning at LaGuardia Community College and our colleagues, Eric Hoffman and Michelle Pizzo. And then the future's initiative here at the Graduate Center is also involved in designing and facilitating that training along with the Grant Director, Casey Holman.

Tanya Domey: That's -

Luke Waltzer: So, we've got a lot of folks who are working on this, and they've built a curriculum that sometimes has been informed by the other activities that the Teaching and Learning Center is designing for students at the Graduate Center who are not part of the Humanities Alliance. And sometimes that influence works the other way where we take ideas or challenges, or opportunities from the Humanities Alliance and integrate them into what we're doing more broadly.

Tanya Domey: That's quite a commitment from CUNY itself.

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domey: And the Graduate Center, and LaGuardia, but also Mellon recognizing this and responding to it.

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domey: And I think in a really profound way that lots of people are getting education at the community college level. And especially, it seems more now since the 2008 recession.

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domey: There's been a reinvigoration in community college.

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domey: Education and delivery of it.

Luke Waltzer: Yeah, and that work has really allowed us to think in concrete ways about, and in new ways, about questions of access and how we define access within the context of the City University of New York, how we make sure that our teaching and learning materials are accessible to students who are coming from a wide variety of backgrounds with a wide variety of resources. Sometimes they don't have internet access. Sometimes they have to do all their reading on their phone. Sometimes they are working full-time and have limited capacity to engage with the readings for a course. And this project has really allowed us to think about how pedagogy needs to accommodate those different realities, and the community context ... community college context expands the kinds of populations that our students are working with.

Luke Waltzer: Now, many of the students in the community college context at CUNY end up at one of the four-year campuses. They transfer into the four-year campuses. But those are students who maybe have more support or additional resources. So, we're now learning more about what their early college career is like.

Tanya Domey: That's fascinating. So, just hearing about what you do and your mission, and the Mellon Grant with community colleges ... how do you really identify and prioritize all these programs? It's, it seems a bit ... it's robust but it seems also massive -

Luke Waltzer: Yeah.

Tanya Domey: ... in a way.

Luke Waltzer: My staff is key for that. In addition to Elizabeth Alsop, who's the Assistant Director and Elizabeth Decker, who's Program Coordinator at the TLC, I have six graduate fellows who work with the TLC, and these are all folks who've been teaching within the community context for multiple years and have thought about the kinds of support, both at ...

Luke Waltzer: They would have benefited from, but also their other students in their cohort would benefit from. And, so we're very connected to the student body here, which creates lots of feedback loops. So, we hear what students are interested in, and design programs in dialogue with them. For instance, one of my fellows, Sekina Laxmimoro, who's a student in urban education, has for two years been doing a series of workshops and focused-inquiry groups on developing a socially conscious pedagogy. What does that mean? What does that mean in different disciplines? What is it mean ... leads to questions about disrupting or resisting the cannon, or examining our own positionality in the classroom.

Luke Waltzer: Another student, Anika Gherstma, whose an international student, has built support for the 1,000 graduate center students who are teaching as international students. And we didn't know that there were that many until she started doing this work. And these students often are unfamiliar with the university context in the United States. Pedagogy is different curricular,

different expectations, the students are different. And just like everyone else, they have been for years thrown into the deep end here at CUNY. So, Anika's been working with them to suss out specific support needs that they have. Challenges of intercultural and cross-cultural communication in the classroom. Kind of cultural expectations of students and how they differentiate between nations.

Luke Waltzer: And so, these are just two examples of some of the programs that we have that are responding to specific needs that we hear about from the students who come to our workshops, our office hours ... who chat with us in the hallways.

Tanya Domey: Mm. Interesting. Not only does knowledge not remain static, but technology doesn't either.

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domey: And I think integrating technology into the classroom and leveraging it to advance learning is ... I think it's challenging. And I think you have to really think it through -

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domey: ... and you have to think about what works and what doesn't work, and some of that's experimentation. Can you talk about using those tools -

Luke Waltzer: Sure.

Tanya Domey: ... and how you taught, teach students about utilization of technology and learning?

Luke Waltzer: Sure. So, my own background is as a Digital Historian, and an Educational Technologist. And in fact, I ended up at CUNY to work with the American Social History Project two decades ago, who have for more than a generation been leaders in this field. And there are ... there's a cohort of us at CUNY who are really thinking about how do we integrate technology into the various functions at the university? Teaching and learning, foremost among them, but also scholarship and publishing. In ways that really reflect the needs of our constituencies, and really empower them through the work that they wanna do.

Luke Waltzer: So, what that means for classroom practices is that making sure that students at the Graduate Center who are integrating technology into their teaching, are doing so purposefully, that they're not necessarily just receiving the tools that the university may want them to use. But that they are able to select from freely available software often on the open web, that allow them to teach their students in the kinds of spaces that their students will be expected to work in when they leave the university. This led us to found projects like the CUNY Academic Commons, on which Director of Community Projects, which is a word-

pressed, buddy-pressed platform, an open source platform that anyone at the City University of New York can teach a class using.

Luke Waltzer: There are other platforms like that throughout CUNY, blogs at Baruch, the open lab at City Tech, cue writing ... and these really give graduate center students the tools to teach the way they wanna teach on the open web. With attention to privacy, with protection of student data, but taking advantage of the network capacity of the web. Of the interoperability of different tools via the web. And so, a lot of our workshops are oriented towards helping students who are coming from different levels of experience and different levels of comfort with that process. Get their head around the kind of foundational questions. What does it mean to teach my students in open spaces? What do I need to make my students aware of as they're working in these open spaces? How do I design spaces which are unique or that which allow me to extend my pedagogy in very specific ways that aren't possible without the technology that we're developing here at the Graduate Center?

Luke Waltzer: So, it's one of the most exciting elements of our work.

Tanya Domey: Very interesting. Can you tell us about how the center ... I mean, you've been telling us about how the center thinks about doctoral education, but also now. We're looking at, especially the Graduate Center, is a big push now to think about we're training doctoral students but not necessarily for the academy.

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domey: They may want to go a different route. They may wanna go work in a museum.

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domey: Or in a think tank, or ... there's all kinds of ways to leverage a Ph.D. Doctoral education. So, how does the sooner help the Graduate Center think about that, about the future and also, really, as the largest urban-based university in the country, about the future republic education as well?

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domey: Which goes well beyond just the Graduate Center.

Luke Waltzer: Right. Those are big questions, and this is the right place to be exploring them. This ... over the past five, six years, there's been an investment in this whole layer of centers, institutes, and research initiatives devoted to kind of exploring those questions and positioning the Graduate Center to answer them. There's my shop, there's the Graduate Center's Digital Initiatives, there's the Future's Initiative, there's the Office of Career Planning Professional Development, there's the Early Research Initiative, there's the work that Polly Thysaloyd has been doing at the library, which is public facing.

Tanya Domey: Right. Open Access.

Luke Waltzer: Open access -

Tanya Domey: Right.

Luke Waltzer: ... and so it's one of the greatest things for me about coming to work everyday is collaborating with the folks at each of these units. But, also thinking about how the work that we do in developing teachers is transferrable within the context of their own career. Right? That the skill of translating the complexity of the discipline that you're learning here at the Graduate Center, where you're reading the latest reading and producing. The latest path-breaking scholarship in your field, and translating that for these incredibly diverse student bodies, who the student ... who our students are teaching on the campuses. That's transferrable skill. How do you create digestible access to complicated concepts? Public speaking is something else that our students get a lot of experience in the classroom, learning about how to organize a series of events which essentially designing a course requires certain kind of organizational approach where you have to think about questions of scope, and staging, and scaffolding knowledge.

Luke Waltzer: That's something that's transferrable into wide variety of fields. And then, also thinking about our role as educators within the public context, as you noted. There's an activist impulse that runs throughout this building. And it's present within our students teaching and their research. And the teaching that they do and the work that they do, they do with the Teaching and Learning Center allows them to refine that, and to see their impact as something that goes beyond just the way that they've brought students to engage their discipline. But in the ways that they themselves think about the notion of the public, the role of the university, the impact that education has on our communities, the connectedness that we all within CUNY feel and kind of harness in our political and scholarly lives. Teaching is a central component of that.

Luke Waltzer: So, it's a pretty fluid, a fluid relationship between the teaching that students do and the way that they can imagine their impact as scholars beyond their time at the Graduate Center. It's not a mechanical or kind of Utilitarian enterprise, but it's deeply integrated into the formation of their identity as scholar.

Tanya Domey: I think one of the things I get from you and all my colleagues in this building talking to faculty, working with them, and some of the graduate students that are just incredibly impressive ... is the idea of higher education as a public good, and ensuring that in the public domain, of course that's part of my job -

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domey: ... is to get your ideas out into the public domain, and leveraging this knowledge to advance the public good. And I think in this current climate that we face in

the country, we need more people who are educated and can go into the public domain and explain that in effective ways through books, and presentations ... and just like you're talking about like TED ex talks, whatever.

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domey: Leveraging knowledge and being able to communicate it.

Luke Waltzer: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tanya Domey: I think it's an admirable, important, vital mission of CUNY.

Luke Waltzer: Hear, hear.

Tanya Domey: So, speaking of graduate students, can you tell us and tell the audience how the masters program's accessed and work with the TLC?

Luke Waltzer: Sure, we ... we have a variety of initiatives, and they're all open to all Graduate Center students. And many of them are open to the public as well. We have workshops that run weekly during the semester, and master students tend to come ... they make up about 20 percent of the attendees at those events and they may be on ... approaches educational technology or teaching as an international student, or creative approaches to assignment design. Or, using archives or museums in your teaching. And the master students who come to those, many of them are in the M.L.S. Program. Some of them are in the Digital Humanities Track, and they're thinking about careers in educational technology or instructional technology. Or, maybe they're a high school teachers who are enrolled in a Masters program as the first step towards getting a Doctoral degree, and they're thinking about pedagogy in their day jobs. And they see that the TLC is a way to kind of connect with that work in the graduate context.

Luke Waltzer: We also have a grants program that we run, and we've given a couple grants to Master students. One, who's a student in Digital Humanities who is producing a resource on language instruction. He teaches Chinese at Hunter, and he's working with the student who teaches French at Hunter, to kind of extract some ideas about best practices for language instruction within the community context. There ...

Luke Waltzer: So, they participate in our workshops, in our grants program ... we have Master students who've participated in our focused-inquiry group. We have one, a focus-inquiry group which are kind of extended workshops. Groups of students who get together and we fund them to think about an idea over multiple meetings, over six to eight weeks or sometimes a whole semester. We have one on inner-disciplinary approaches to teaching water justice issues. We have another one on integrating museum pedagogy into the undergraduate classroom. And we've had Master students in both of those focus-inquiry groups as well.

Luke Waltzer: So, it's ... they come to us if they have some interest in pedagogy. Some desires, perhaps, to explore entering a Doctoral program, into ... become college teachers themselves. But, often it's just because they're interested in the topics that we're discussing within those events.

Tanya Domey: Terrific. Thanks for being with us today.

Luke Waltzer: Thanks so much for having me, and for doing this.

Tanya Domey: Thanks for tuning in to the Thought Project. And thanks to our guest, Luke Waltzer.

Tanya Domey: The Thought Project was produced in partnership with CUNY TV, located at the Graduate Center in the heart of New York City. With production, engineering, and technical assistance, by Sarah Fisherman and Jack Horowitz. I'm Tanya Domey. Tune in next week.