

CR: Welcome to Professors Talk Pedagogy, a podcast from the Academy for Teaching and Learning at Baylor University. I'm your host, Christopher Richmann. Professors Talk Pedagogy presents discussions with great professors about pedagogy, curriculum and learning in order to propel the virtuous cycle of teaching. As we frankly and critically investigate our teaching, we open new lines of inquiry. We engage in conversation with colleagues and we attune to student's experiences. All of which not only improves our teaching, but enriches and motivates ongoing investigation. And so the cycle continues.

Today, our guest is Dr. Jennifer Cognard-Black, professor of English at St. Mary's College of Maryland. Dr. Cognard Black has received 12 faculty development grants from St. Mary's College, as well as two internationalization and teaching and learning grants. And she has been given the highest honor for teaching that St. Mary's students bestow the Faculty Student Life Award at three different times during her career. She is also the 2020 recipient of the Robert Foster Cherry Award for great teaching, the nation's largest monetary award for university teaching. As part of her designation as the Cherry Award recipient. Dr. Cognard-Black is in residence at Baylor University in the Spring 2021 semester, teaching and collaborating with Baylor faculty. We are delighted to have Dr. Cognard Black on the show to talk about the promise, unpredictability, and politics of empathetic teaching.

CR: Alright, Jennifer Cognard-Black, welcome to the show. Thank you for being here.

JCB: Thank you for inviting me. I'm pleased to be here.

CR: Well, I know that you have just recently delivered your official Cherry Award lecture presentations. So I think this is probably fresh on your mind, but would you mind just sharing with us your thoughts about what it means to be a recipient of the Robert Foster Cherry Award for great teaching. How does it make you feel?

JCB: It's a combination of feeling humbled and elated, and also still after all this time feeling like it's not quite real. And even though I'm here and I'm teaching Baylor students and I'm living basically on Baylor's campus. The fact that I am the recipient of the Robert Foster Cherry Award for great teaching as the reason why I'm doing all of those things day in and day out, it still has that kind of uncanny quality to it. And I just, I feel so fortunate I really do.

CR: Well, we appreciate you being here on campus, especially during a semester that is not like anything previous award winners have experienced in terms of their semester of residency here at Baylor.

JCB: Well, it's all new and it was going to be all new anyway. So this is just a new kind of newness.

CR: That's right. Well, something that we have bonded over I think in even your short time that you've been here at Baylor is empathetic teaching. And so I kind of wanted to start there and

with what might sound like a simple question, but I imagine is quite complex. How do you define empathetic teaching?

JCB: Sure. And actually I'm going to start with a relatively simple answer, but I actually think that the answer has layers of complexity. I think at its most basic, that empathetic teaching is really teaching that encourages students to step out of their own shoes and into someone else's. And stepping into someone else's shoes is a cliché, but it's also a pretty powerful metaphor. We ask students to do--when we're asking them to foster, to build an empathetic response in whatever discipline, right? And that can be as a literature professor, because that is my vehicle for teaching empathy first and foremost, is to help people step inside other stories and other characters. Students are actually, at least in the discipline of English, but I think this is probably true across the board because everyone at some level is a reader, right, and so students are already primed for that empathetic response, and that's often a very joyful thing for them. So they read Harry Potter as a kid and they imagine themselves as Harry, right? Or they happen to get a copy of Jane Eyre when they were 13 and they saw themselves reflected in Jane Eyre or Celie in *The Color Purple*, whatever it might be.

They've had some kind of formative empathetic response to a character when they were younger--either they were listening to a story or watching a story or reading it. And so I can build on that in my literature classes and actually also my writing classes. I'm more interested in empathetic responses though, in my classroom, in which I'm asking people to step into the shoes of someone that they don't identify with. And so it's going to be an uncomfortable thing. Sometimes it may even be a hard thing to take on these identities and experiences of people and characters that may not have their beliefs, right, may not act as they act, do as they do. And that students might find these characters strange or disturbing or even offensive sometimes, right? And that's been, that has been central to my teaching from the moment I started at St. Mary's College of Maryland 20 years ago.

From that very first year, I started teaching seminars in women writers, making sure that I was incorporating people of color, particularly African-American writers, into my seminars and writers who identify as LGBTQ. And so oftentimes, my students may not have ever read anything by someone who identifies as gay or lesbian, right? So we read Walt Whitman or we read Mark Doty or read Alison Bechdel or Audre Lorde. And that's a completely new framing of identity for them. And it's a sexuality that they haven't really considered. And yet they have to step inside that, right? And they have to look through those eyes. And they have to think about why it is that they feel this way or that way about that identity.

Same thing for women writers. I had a class called *Woman Word: Anglo-American Women Write the Novel*. And still in the discipline of English, classic literature out there is usually by men, right? And often western men, white men. And so they know their Huck Finn and their Hamlet in there, David Copperfield and even their Jonathan Safran Foer. But they may not know their Aphra Behn or their Maxine Hong Kingston or their Jeanette Winterson or their Charlotte Bronte. And then, and then the African-American piece of this too, right? They may, they may have come across Frederick Douglass at some point or have a sense of a slave narrative. But they, they might not have read Toni Morrison or Samantha Irby, or James Hannaham.

And, so to have to imagine themselves as we often talk about in academe as the other, right. And to have to try to empathize with that. Now not just sympathize, but actually own it and understand it. It can be a very powerful thing. And I don't do that to shock students. I want them to read outside of their comfort zone because I want them to think about why, right? Why does an author depict this moment of oppression or this unorthodox love relationship, or create a really problematic character morally, right? And if students are able to maybe not identify with it, but imagine it in all of its complexity, then they're more likely to be empathetic. I often quote Henry David Thoreau on this. In *Walden* at one point, he says, Could a greater miracle take place then for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant. And again, that's another cliché, right? Looking through someone else's eyes. But if you really take that literally and you imagine what it would be like to be inside someone else's head, which is what literature is. Literature is telepathy. You're stepping inside someone else's head and you're thinking their thoughts right? Then, then that can be a very, a very profound experience. A very profound experience.

CR: As you said, literature and I would say the humanities sort of in general really thrives on this perspective taking and, and intentionality about the other. But I would venture to say that not all faculty are thinking as intentionally and deeply about this as, as you might be or many of our other colleagues might be. So what was, what was like the tipping point for you to be and to think about this as a thing in itself and put it in your pedagogy.

JCB: Yeah. So in some ways I've sort of been raised up in empathy from a very young age. I grew up both in the Methodist Church and then also in what I guess I've started to call the Church of Shakespeare. Both of my parents have PhDs in renaissance literature and both of them taught Shakespeare for decades. My mother, at the high school level, my father at the college level. And so as a young person, I would go to Sunday school and I'm studying the Bible and the teachings of Jesus, but I was also going to the church of Shakespeare. And I was being exposed to characters that are really complicated, right? Like Othello or Shylock or Macbeth, or even in a comedy like Catherine from *Taming of the Shrew*. And so I think that, that combination of biblical training and actually believe it or not, Shakespeare training kind of led me toward being sort of empathetic generally speaking, like, I guess kind of engaging the world with empathy, right? Because that was being asked to think about other people more than I was thinking about myself.

My own daughter, Katherine. I often say to her, I've said this to her since she was very little. I've said "Why are we on the planet, Kate?" And she says back to me a quote from Henry James "to be kind, be kind, be kind, be kind mom." That's right. That's it. Right. But I would say that in terms of fostering empathy in the classroom, this has become more intentional for me in the last decade or so. I think I was doing it, but not mindfully previous to that. And now I'm actually trying to make curricular choices and also adopt pedagogical strategies to really try to get an empathetic response from my students. In the last couple of years, I've become really interested in the work of Dr. Jameel Zaki. I mentioned Zaki when I was a finalist for the jury award and I gave my lecture, my public lecture. Dr. Jameel Zaki is a professor of neuroscience at Stanford. And he had a book come out a couple of years ago called *The War for Kindness: Building Empathy in a Fractured World*.

And in that book, he claims that psychologists, and including those who are interested in the biology of the brain, right? That they're really starting to tell new stories about why we are the storytelling creatures that we are as humans. And he says, you know, it's not just entertainment, it's not just getting around the campfire at night and telling those stories to both preserve memory and to perpetuate culture. It's not just a diversion. Or are kind of, again, memory keeping. But it's actually kind of this--that narrative arts are like, they're like an ancient technology. He says an ancient technology, but then he says they're performance enhancing drugs for untethering. And so what he means is that like we untether our minds, our imaginations, and also our soul stuff our spirits from our physical and temporal contexts when we listen to story, when we tell story, when we read story. He says that the more often that someone untethers their brain, And, and has that wander around beyond our physical being. The deeper and deeper were able to develop our empathetic response.

And he really thinks that empathy is a kind of untethering, which I think is a really cool way to, to talk about and think about empathy. And so his examples are really numerous. He talks about of all things, a soap opera that became super popular in Rwanda 10 years after the mass genocide. And it was a soap opera in exactly the way that you would think soap opera. It was over the top right? Really histrionic. It was called New Dawn. But it had characters from both sides of the divide. And it allowed people to really kind of process betrayal and violence and forgiveness in really profound ways. Another example that he gives is one that really speaks to me in my discipline. I'm a 19th centuryist by training. I'm interested in British and American women writers in particular. And so he talks about the political and social and spiritual impact of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin in the 19th century, which changed the course of slavery, African slavery in the United States. And maybe Abe Lincoln said it, maybe he didn't. But when he did, he definitely met Harriet Beecher Stowe in the White House and he said, well, you're the little lady that caused this great war.

And there's something about that, that, that there were so many people--it was translated into 44 languages by the end of the 19th century. And it was only outsold by the Bible in the 19th century. And so here this piece of literature, which was entirely imaginative but built on actual fact that she had researched and that she had heard about all of a sudden, all these people around the globe had a new understanding of the violence and oppression, the inhumanity of African slavery. And it changed everything in the United States as a result. So that's a really long answer to your question.

CR: That's a great resource. I'm going to put that in the show notes and I've set it on tape here now, so it's definitely going to happen. So I'm curious in terms of teaching practices and your teaching behaviors. How explicit are you with students that developing their empathy is what you're trying to do? Or do you think it's something that's better reserved for like sort of like an unconscious sort of development.

JCB: Yeah. I always, if I'm going to have a class where that is going to be front-and-center, then I put it into the course. And we usually have a reading toward the beginning of the semester where we frame that. Right. But I don't necessarily come back to it again and again and again as that concept. Instead, it's sort of, my aim is to have that concept be put in motion and for them to

experience it, and therefore to develop it. There's not a class I teach anymore where I'm not intentionally trying to do that at some level.

CR: Yeah. So you've talked a lot about developing empathy or thinking about empathy through the lens of literature and history too. A lot of people who I think think about empathy in their teaching also do it through as you were just starting to kind of touch on, through experiences, through service or experiential learning. So how do you think these things relate?

JCB: Yes, So I have at some level, incorporated experiential learning into my classes really since the beginning of my time as a full-time faculty member. Really early on, in part just because of the location of St. Mary's College of Maryland, which is this public national Honors College. And that's where I teach, but it's part of the University of Maryland system and we're about an hour and a half south of Washington DC. And so I taught a class on the literary letter. And so epistolary fictions. And I worked with an archivist at the Library of Congress and they pulled actual manuscript letters from all of these writers. Walt Whitman actually, Harry Beecher Stowe, other people, Ginsburg. And we got to actually go and see those letters. And then the students got to work with digital, digitized copies of some of those letters for their research. So I think, I think you know, if you can get students out of the traditional classroom and into another space, a museum, an art gallery, a living history museum outdoors.

St. Mary's is contiguous with historic Saint Mary's City. This is why we're called St. Mary's, because it was the first Catholic settlement in the New World in the early 17th century. And so it's like a little mini-Williamsburg. So in my literature survey, which goes from like the 17th century to the end of the 19th century. We always read a bit of Ben Franklin. And if we're going to read Ben Franklin's autobiography, why not take students over to historic Saint Mary City and have them work with the printing press over there. The printing press is a 17th century press, but it's exactly the kind of press that, that Franklin had, you know, and so have them have to set type and use, you know, little, little Franklin, Tony and Poor Richard quotes that kind of thing that they're setting. So that's something that hands-on experiences that I've wanted students to have from the beginning. Again, back to the idea of intentionality. I have become much more intentional about experiential learning.

And one thing I should say is that experiential learning and service learning are definitely related, but they are not interchangeable. I don't think they're interchangeable. To me, experiential learning is all about engaging a student's body, their senses, right? It's a kind of learning that is going to be three-dimensional for them. And that's going to speak to the way different learners learn, right? There are people who learn really well by reading words on a page, but other people who are visual learners or active learners or whatever it might be. And so I often like in my classes, this is kind of a little side note, forgive me, but I often like to change things up in terms of learning media.

So my English, sometimes I have them work with music. Sometimes I have them make art. And they always think to themselves, what the heck is this crazy professor doing? Why am I looking at this music score? I'm an English major. But I think that that helps, right? Because it's going to be firing in different parts of their brain and get them to be imaginative in new kinds of ways.

But that experiential learning, that, that learning of the senses, trying to make learning three-dimensional. It's worked really well, particularly well in my literature of food classes because food is an idea, it's a thought, it's a symbol, but of course also this thing in the world, right? It's of the senses. And so over the years I taught my first "Books that Cook" class--I should take a step back, So I kinda have two big iterations of my literatures of food class, kind of two big categories. The one that I've taught the most is Books that Cook. And then I've coauthored an anthology with the same name, Books that Cook: The Making of a Literary Meal with New York University Press and my collaborator Melissa Goldfrey. And kind of the bedrock of Books that Cook is that any, anything that we read in that class, whether it's a poem, a novel, essays, memoir, even watching a film, it has to actually have a recipe embedded in it. And so, you know, books that cook, we cook the book, right? As a class. And we cook at least one recipe out of each book that we study and share that with each other, which has been challenging. I'm teaching a version of Books that Cook at Baylor. And we are having Zoom dish days so that we can eat together because we can't do that in the classroom. So, are having that opportunity to do that.

And then I have this other one that is much newer. The first time I taught it was in 2018 and I've taught it a couple times now, which is my Just Food class: Food Writing for Social Justice. And that one I'll come back to in a second because that's even more about service learning than it is about experiential learning.

But back to the books that cook. So at its most basic right, with a food class, whether it's food writing or food literature or a combination thereof, bringing food into the classroom some kind of way, right? Having students cook that book is experiential and it means that we consume the text in more than one way. Not just consuming it with our eyes and our minds, right, with our souls and our hearts but were also consuming it with our bodies, our mouths, right? And that is, and I don't mean this in a blasphemous way at all--That is a kind of communion. Were all eating the same food at the same time.

CR: I was just going to use the word sacramental, so you're just fine.

JCB: Because we're all sharing literally in the same food stuff and bringing it into ourselves, which connects us all to each other, right, in this really powerful, wonderful way. So there's that. But I've done other things too. I've had storytelling dinners with local shops and bakers where they tell their own story coming into their profession. As, as chefs, as bakers through food. And they always make meals that are kind of tethered to their own identities, their own ethnicities, their own genders, their own ages, because these are the foods that they've eaten and these are the foods that interests them, right? And so they told the story of their own kind of food like their culinary life through the food that they give us. And then the students can ask questions and the students share back their own food stories. I'm going to do that with the Baylor students outdoors at a local farm at the end of the semester with Chef Corey MacIntyre, who is the owner and head chef for Milo All Day. So that's really a cool thing that I've done many times in Books that Cook.

Another thing that I've often done with Books that Cook is have a tour of a local small farm, often in an organic farm of some kind. I did that once with a with a vineyard, actually a grape grower, because he was a graduate of St. Mary's College of Maryland. And that was really cool to have an alum talk with my students about the struggles and the joys of growing organically,

which of course is not easy or straightforward. Um, it's kind of a lost knowledge that people are having to reclaim. And then also a new sort of science that people are developing right. And then, and then there's this small farm called Evenstar Farm, where I've worked with them many times and had students go out and, and we do taste—sort of field tasting. Like we're walking through the field and the farmer will just pull stuff out of the ground and hand it to my students and will taste it right there and then we'll talk about it. He's really into genetics. He has a master's degree as a, as a geneticist. And so he's always talking to us about that kind of thing.

And then we will do other things like have a cooking class. This has particularly been true if I've had an adult returning student, which I often do, I do this semester as well. There's a computer science professor taking my Books that Cook class here at Baylor, who is a self-proclaimed foodie as well. So that's really cool. And has actually, he brought--this is Matthew Fent, I don't think he'll mind me telling, saying his name out loud--and he did exactly what my adult returning students often do. At the beginning of the semester, we were talking about the strangest foods we've ever eaten. And he and his wife absolutely love really bizarre fruits. And they want to figure out what to do with these weird fruits. So they found a fruit called Buddha, the Buddha's Hand. And they actually found it at HEB. And it has, you cut it open, and it has no pulp or anything inside. It's all pit. But you can use it for zests and you can make candy out of it. So he candied it and he brought that in little Zip-Locs for the students in class and students took it off on their own. So I've had students, adult returning students in my classes, teach us East Indian dishes, Southern Maryland Food, oysters, stuffed ham, Jewish holla bread, and doing that together. So that's, that's another thing I've done.

So that's the experiential learning part, okay? [Inaudible] Again, it's that sense of like engaging the senses alongside the reading, right? Service learning of course, is also embodied, but it's also action-based. And it is more clearly tied, I think, to empathy. Because the idea of a service project is to help others right? To think beyond the self and to try to give oneself to, to sustain your, your community, whatever that is, right. So in my Just Food classes, although I'm also doing this semester in my Books that Cook class, we've done a few things that were service related. We've done something as straightforward as holding a writer's harvest creative reading where my students are sharing their own ethical eating essays that they've written for the class. And we've raised money for Share Our Strength in Washington DC, which fights against child hunger. But we've also done things like volunteer at local farms. My Baylor students are doing that this semester at the World Hunger Farm, which actually has, I didn't know this until relatively recently, the World Hunger Farm when it was founded, was about training missionaries, young people to go out to different parts of the world and take organic and sustainable farming techniques out to places like Africa or Latin America. But, and they still have that program, but they more recently have really pivoted to help Texans, particularly people in Waco, who are food insecure so that they have and--I think it's with the Waco Department of Health--They've done a partnership where they have this program called the "veggie prescription." And so there are families that don't have enough money or the ability to access fresh, healthy vegetables. And, and so they can get a prescription for veggies and so they get a box of veggies every week. So my Baylor students here are going out and they're each spending at least six hours over the course of the semester volunteering out there because it's a mission that is worth supporting, right? And then we're pairing that with some of our readings. We're reading *Eating Animals* by Jonathan Safran Foer, we're reading out of a wonderful anthology

called Food and Faith. And so, and so these, the readings wind-up kind of working hand in glove or maybe hand in spade with what we're doing--And then there have been other things. I mean, I don't want to I don't want to go on and on and on about this, but I've had students develop a cookbook for families connected to a local soup kitchen in St. Mary's County. Families that didn't know how to use some of the fresh produce, particularly in the summers because they were immigrant families that didn't speak English and for the most part didn't have food ways that incorporated things like yellow squash or whatever. So we spent the semester developing recipes for those families so that they could take not just the shelf stable stuff from the food bank, but also somebody's fresh products in southern Maryland and make recipes for their families out of that. So we've done things like that.

And then this semester with the Baylor [inaudible] students, we're going to be working with the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty (BCHP). And my students are going to work in pairs and they're going to write blog posts about all of these different initiatives that BCHP has been developing over the last few years to, to help the food insecure like right here on campus. So they have, I'm sure you've heard of this over in the Sid-Rich building, they've got the Store, which is a free food pantry for students. Anyone who needs it--faculty, staff students--go over and get food for whatever reason, they don't actually ask why. You just have to fill out a form and you can do that. But they also have the Fridge, these little fringes all across campus where people can access food if they need to. They have campus kitchens. They have Monday Night Meals which had been suspended because of COVID, but they're trying to see if they can do it outdoors this spring. And they are going to have the free farmers market this spring for people too. So, so my students are going to be doing some interviews and writing some articles about all of these initiatives so that we can raise not just visibility about those initiatives, but also try to dispel stigma. That notion that like, "oh, I don't have enough money to be able to eat well. And that means that like I should be ashamed." And really BCHP wants to just dissipate that and be like, "No, if you, if you need food, you need food". And that's, that's a basic human right, and you should have access to that.

CR: You're already going in the direction of my next question, which was, how, how do you, how do you make the connections for, for learning really central and explicit in those service learning experiences so that they don't just remain sort of an inarticulate experience that may develop a student personally and ethically, but so that you actually have some, maybe some assessment tied to it or some sort of academic product tied to that? So you mentioned the blogging. That seems like something right there. So what else do you do or maybe you want to talk more about the blogging?

JCB: Well, I mean, I think that this has developed over many years for me. You need a reading to tie to an experience, to tie to a project. And because I'm an English professor, that project is almost always a writing project, right? So it, it, it can be writing these blog posts for an organization like BCHP, right? But it can also be developing a website or a brochure. In the past, I've had students do that for an initiative in Maryland called So Maryland, So Good. Which was all about trying to raise visibility about local farmers markets and get more people in our county to patronize local farmers markets rather than always just going to the grocery store. And so students wrote parts of the websites and they wrote some brochures and they did that kind of work. Or the, or the cookbook that I mentioned for the St. Mary's Caring soup kitchen, right? Which was not just about using



some produce, it was awesome about the fact that in the summers, um, economically challenged families, all of a sudden, the free and reduced breakfast and lunch programs for their kids were gone, right? And so they, they have to make more meals at home. They have more mouths to feed consistently day in and day out. And so just that little thing of a cookbook made a big difference for how they were able to do that to make healthy, not very difficult meals. And we ran a test kitchen in my Just Food class that semester, where students in groups, did recipes they had to think about, “Okay, what ingredients can I assume they can have?” “Well probably just salt and pepper and a little oil. What equipment will they have? A microwave, maybe, a pan or a pot. Maybe not, maybe just a microwave.” And within those limitations, how can I make it healthy and tasty? And so we ran these tests kitchens. And so all of the recipes that were in that book had been tried by my, by my students.

CR: That's great and I'm sure that that is such a fun experience for the students too.

JCB: Absolutely. And they also put in some volunteer hours at the soup kitchen. So they met some of the people, the very people that they were that they were trying to support with the writing projects. So I'm more and more, I'm really interested in this idea of kind of the full circle. That you're reading what other people have to say about this, either from a literary perspective or a philosophical perspective, then you're experiencing something directly that is a way to kind of put that in motion. And then you are going to take both of those things together and you're going to have some kind of end product. It's going to be some kind of assignment that's going to have a real-world impact. I'm really interested in that, in something that is not just a final paper for professor, which I'm not trying to say that doesn't have meaning, it does, and I still assign those too because that's a culmination of somebody's thought process over an entire semester, which is important. But I more and more am interested in these real-world writing tasks.

CR: You, you mentioned some of the difficulties or challenges that are present in doing some of these things during COVID. And as, as all instructors have, have been dealing with some difficulty during COVID, but pre-COVID or aside from the pandemic, what are some challenges that you faced in developing empathetic teaching practices with students?

JCB: Yeah, so particularly in terms of what we were just discussing--experiential learning and service learning. The biggest challenges are time. It takes time to build community partnerships, particularly with people who are not connected to education or academia. I had an enormous learning curve with our local food, our local food bank, [inaudible] kitchen, because I had given to it monetarily, but I had not volunteered at it. I didn't know the workings of it. And the wonderful director there, Christine Mullen, you know, she, she's not an academic, right? So that's one example of many where having to kind of make that town and gown as we say, [inaudible], it just takes time. It just takes time. You also, one does not want to do a project that is not going to help your community partner, right? So last semester, I think I started in October, I started asking questions of people I did not know at Baylor, saying “What could my students do in the spring that could actually help this amazing stuff I'm reading about on the web, about the Texas Hunger Initiative and BCHP. How can we help?” We actually devised this idea of the blog posts to highlight various BCHP initiatives fighting against food insecurity. Because Craig Nash, who was my point person said, “We could really use this. We could use this and we can, we can get all of these blog posts. And I'm going to take my students through a revision process so that they are in really good shape.”

And then they can kinda have a set of them and they can release them, you know, not altogether, but one here, one there, one there, at strategic moments when they want to highlight one aspect or another of what they're doing. So that's another thing that just takes time, right? Not to laminate your own vision of what you think they want. Can really open your ears wide and listen to what they need? And then saying, okay, so how can we make this work, right?

So resources, so time. Resources--sometimes that just means money, right? So how do we pay to produce cookbooks for a local soup kitchen that doesn't have the money to give us to do that, right. So we also as a class, became fundraisers for a little while, right? And had to figure out how to crowdsource that money. Some of which we got from St. Mary's College, some of which we got from local donors, some of which came out of our own pocket, right? So, so that, that's another thing you have to think about are the resources.

Logistics--So we had a snow apocalypse here in Waco. And the Saturday when things started to warm up was the first day that part of my students were going out to the World Hunger Farm. And there were students who were not comfortable driving on roads that might have snow or ice. Because some of my students, of course, they're Texans. They have very little experience with snow and ice. And so what do you do? Well, I said to them because I saw this potentially happening. I said, "We can wear masks in my car. We can put down the windows and I can take at least three people in my car." And I wound up taking two people in my car up to the World Hunger Farm, right? So you also have to be constantly thinking about logistics. If you're going to have experiential learning, service learning, they're going to be times when you have to just get people from A to B to C. And how are you going to do that? If you're going to run story circles to try to gather information as one of my classes did for a Maryland state grant that is trying to improve the food systems in the state of Maryland, where are you going to hold that story circle? How are you going to get the recording equipment to be able to record what it is that people say in that story circle? How are you going to navigate the fact that you need to have some kind of release that people are going to sign to say, "Yes, I'm going to allow my story to be recorded," right? And so it really then becomes like this potentially exponential thing where you have to think about resources and logistics.

CR: Yeah.

JCB: So one thing I can definitely say is, and this was something that was an important thing for me to learn. The first time I taught Just Food in the spring of '18, we did three service learning projects. That was too much. It was too much and I didn't realize it. We were all just--our tongues were hanging out by the end of the semester. And so teachers, I encouraged professors if they want to try move into service learning as a really powerful means of developing empathy and students. Start with one service project. See how that goes. And don't assign as many things as you would in a normal semester--pull some things because that service project is going to take some time. And the only time that you can guarantee that your students will all be free is during your class time. So you're going to need some of your class time to do that work.

So a couple other things I want to touch on though, in terms of challenges beyond time and resources/logistics. There are also, of course, politics when it comes to service learning. Because whatever group you're working with, what you're saying is, "I want to help. I care. I'm coming out

of a place of privilege” right? “I’m being educated. I have a certain amount of wealth to be able to attend college at some level.” And you don’t want to have a situation where it’s like you swoop in, you’re trying, you are acting like a savior, right. This became this became an issue when we were working with the soup kitchen. Because we also that same semester were doing these story circles for this Maryland grant. And so one of the populations we worked with for those story circles to gather information about complexities and challenges in terms of food in the state of Maryland, it, it made a lot of sense to talk to people who were on kind of the line of poverty right--The poverty line--about how to better get food to them, how to better have access to food. But here are these people coming in as researchers, right, none of whom had experienced food insecurity in their own lives or used soup kitchens. And yet we’re coming in to interview these people about that experience, right? And so we actually, we talked with the director and we had a very open conversation about what that means, about the fact that we didn’t want to be saviors, quote unquote, coming in. And, and it was, it was initiated, that whole thing was initiated by a student in my class who said, “I’m uncomfortable.” And I said, “Okay, let’s talk about that.” And that was really powerful. That was a really important moment. And then I would also say that if you are going to teach a class of any kind, that is going to be grappling with violence or oppression. You know, there’s going to potentially be some psychological difficulties that your students are going to have. It might initiate memories of their own trauma. But it also just might be something that is really hard for them to deal with. And so I’m thinking here of books that I’ve taught in my literatures of food classes, both kinds, both Books that Cook and Just Food. There’s a very beautiful and heartbreaking book called *The Vegetarian* that is directly about violence against women. There’s a book I’m teaching this semester called delicious, *Delicious Foods*, which is about neo-slavery in the United States. And slavery not, not because of direct violence, you know, sort of the, the bodily violence of being chained and restricted or, or hurt, whipped and that kind of way; instead, enslavement through drug addiction. And so that’s--we haven’t read it yet. We’re going to read it later this semester. It’s incredibly well done. One of the narrators in *Delicious Foods* is crack cocaine, which is really interesting and really hard to deal with. Or a book we’re going to talk about next week, which is Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Eating Animals*. It’s, it’s now 10 years old. But it is, he’s a novelist [inaudible], but it’s a book in which he uses the techniques of the storyteller to really create a polemic against eating meat. And it’s about animal suffering. And it is a hard book, particularly since he’s a really good novelist. So he really makes kind of those Gothic moments of what’s happened in factory farming to fish and chicken and cows, palpable and real. And so I have learned through trial and error that I need to prepare students for that ahead of time. I can’t just assume that they’re going to read it and then we’ll deal with it. And then I also need to process with students and make myself available and say, “you know, if you need to talk about this, let’s get together and talk.” When I taught that first section of Just Food in that spring of ‘18, more than half of my students at one point or another in the semester, were in my office crying because of what we were reading and what we were talking about. And so I personally am not trained as a, as a therapist or a psychologist of course, my psychology colleagues are. But on the other hand, I do have an ethical responsibility to own these texts that I’m assigning because I am trying to push people’s boundaries, and it is uncomfortable and it is hard. And so I need to, I need to make myself available to support them in that reading.

CR: It sounds like you’ve learned a lot through trial and error. So I’m assuming you’ve learned from other people who teach in these kinds of ways as well, whether you’ve, whether you’ve

interacted with colleagues or read what other people do. Do you have any recommendations or just stories of how you've learned from others to kind of pursue this kind of teaching?

JCB: For sure. I mean, so I often look to other disciplines and try to read widely in what's happening in other disciplines in terms empathetic, pedagogical approaches. So one of the, one of the things that's happening in the world of theater and has been happening for a while now, um, and is being integrated more consistently into theater classroom, is this process called *devising*. And it's happening at St. Mary's College of Maryland. It's happening at my daughter's college, Bucknell in Pennsylvania. I wouldn't be surprised if it's happening here at Baylor; but it's where students collaboratively write, devise, a play, and then they put on that play. And so at my own institution there's a professor named Amy Staiger. And she did this a few years ago, maybe three or four years ago, and what she took on, what she had students take on was the, the slavery past in southern Maryland. And how parts of St. Mary's College of Maryland weren't built by slaves, but were, were named for families that were slave holders. And there is now a commemorative on my campus for the enslaved peoples of Southern Maryland. Because, because we're next to an archaeological site, there has been uncovering of the foundations of slave cabins. And so her devised play, which is called "Beyond the Sunset," because we have spectacular sunsets over the water at my small college, "Beyond the Sunset" was really timely: Not only talking about our slave past, but also talking about racist incidents at St. Mary's and, and students trying to navigate that and, and really kind of grapple with that. So having, letting go as a professor, letting go that control and saying, you know, we're going to read this and this and this. We're going to do this assignment; instead: "Okay, here's, here's a topic, research it. And then we're going to co-create something out of that." So I'm, I'm really thinking about how I can use devising as something in my, my classes down the road, I'd like to do that.

I also, I recently met Professor Jenny Howl, who is launching a program here at Baylor in theology, ecology, and food justice. And this semester, she's teaching a class out at the World Hunger Farm on the doctrine of creation. And asking the basic question with her students, "What is our relationship with creation?" And thinking about how, how Christ is within creation. And so the fact that she's holding her classes at the World Hunger Farm--And so it's literally a field school. And they're, they're, they're reading the Bible, they're reading essays, they're reading poetry. But then they're also actually standing inside creation at all times and thinking of it in that way, That's really fascinating to me too. And something I would not have thought of myself. So, yeah, so I, I look at other disciplines. I look at, I look at colleagues and try to, try to think about how I can incorporate that into, into my discipline of reading and writing.

CR: You mentioned that the devising the play writing. Is there anything else that you're thinking about or that you've maybe for some time wanted to try that just hasn't happened for whatever reason?

JCB: Yes. Actually, one of the things that I would I would like to do, I have another colleague at St. Mary's, name is Professor Beth Charlotte, and she has worked for a number of years. She's a Shakespearian professor. She's worked for a number of years in prison Performing Arts in St. Louis, Missouri, which is where it's located. She first got involved in that over her first research leave and, and has done things like collaboratively write a version of Hamlet called "Hip Hop Hamlet" with prisoners and has put those on. I would be very interested in trying to see if my students and

perhaps in collaboration with Beth could work on food stories with prisoners. I was really inspired, actually talked about this example on Monday when I gave the lecture during the Cherry Award Ceremony. I was really inspired by a story I came across in a publication called *The Counter*, which is all about stories, all about food and food ways in the United States. And there is a prisoner, although he's subsequently been released up in Michigan named Michael Thompson. And he asked for permission to create a dinner of bagels. These bagels were top with cheese and fried rice and sausage and crushed Doritos for his fellow prisoners. Because he wanted to commemorate and celebrate the life of George Floyd. And he was able to make 50 of these bagels. And he did all of it in a single microwave oven, just one oven. And so those kinds of stories I think need to be heard, right? And in my own classes, there is no, there is no assignment that is more profound for my students than the recipe recollection assignment that I have them write at the beginning of the semester, no matter what my food class is, they take a food from their own past, their own memory, their own families. They have to actually get the actual recipe and then they have to write the taste memory out of that, that story, out of that. And the profundity of those stories--Whether they're joyful or whether they're hurtful or somewhere in-between--is amazing. And so it's one thing to have college students who are English majors writing those kinds of stories. It's another potentially to get those stories from marginalized and invisible groups. And so I would be interested in having a Food Stories project. My students might be able to do with a local prison.

CR: That sounds fantastic and fascinating. Well, I think that's a good place for us to wrap up here. Jennifer Cognard-Black, Thank you so much for joining our show and for taking the time to share your experience with us. And thank you for being here on campus at Baylor as part of your Cherry Award work that you do.

JCB: Thank you, Christopher, for having me and I'm enjoying every moment with my fellow Bears.

CR: Our thanks again to Dr. Jennifer Cognard-Black for speaking with us today. In this episode's show notes you'll find links to the many organizations and books you heard about in this conversation. I do hope we got them all. Well, that's our show. Join us next time for Professors Talk Pedagogy.