

NCTL Newsletter - Fall '23, No. 2

From the Jane B. Nord Center for Teaching + Learning

In this newsletter, I share news from the 2nd annual Teaching Summit along with updates from the Neurodivergence Learning Communities and other activities that address some of the current issues in higher education.

Teaching Summit



Guest speaker Megan Kohler headlined the 2nd annual Teaching Summit. Her workshop, **Distinct Minds, Inspired Designs: Creating Neuroinclusive Experiences**, provided attendees with a better understanding of neurodivergence along with teaching and learning strategies that are supportive for all learners.

The afternoon included a state of the sector presentation by AICAD's President and Executive Director, Deborah Obailil and a session on classroom management by Ali Martin Scoufield, Associate Vice President for Campus Engagement & Dean of Students at Cleveland State University.

One moment of the morning session particularly stood out to me. During her workshop, Megan Kohler described the experiences of neurodivergent individuals in education, where they can receive an **onslaught of negative messaging** about their worth and ability to succeed. As a neurodivergent person who was diagnosed in adulthood, I am intimately familiar with the kind of formative experiences that come from being told that you are lazy, unmotivated, not working to your potential, or that you are too emotional in relation to academic work. This kind of negative messaging is **hard to shake off and easy to internalize**, even after one has received a diagnosis that provides some explanation to behaviors often perceived as individual failings. Kohler used this data to underline the importance of our work to create more inclusive environments and focus on accessibility in designing learning experiences for our students.

After the summit, questions still lingered, particularly about how to translate the incredible wealth of information on accessibility and neurodivergence to our specific context, particularly the studio setting. This is part of the important work of the **Neurodivergence Project at CIA**, a multifaceted organizational undertaking to increase understanding and guide inclusive action. The project includes reading groups, **learning communities**, and community partnerships. At the beginning of Spring semester, the learning community will share results of a recent student survey on the climate for neurodivergence and their plans for end-of-year outcomes and deliverables.

Current Topics and Offerings



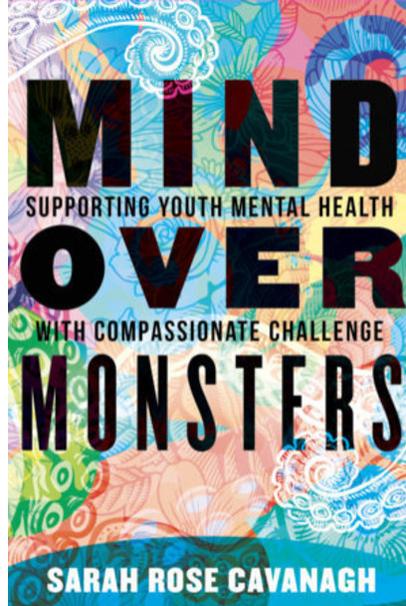
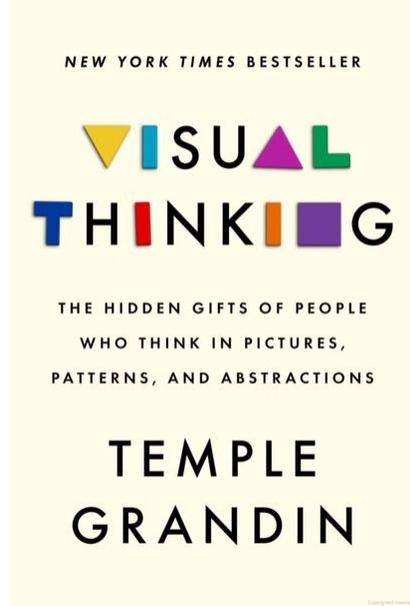
Across this semester, I have had conversations with faculty, staff, students, and external peers about various issues and approaches that are worth sharing:

- **Disability and Masking:** my student ambassadors for inclusive learning environments (who co-designed the student survey on neurodivergence) discussed a desire to help others understand the issue of **masking**, where individuals work to hide or minimize thoughts, feelings, behaviors, or challenges related to their identities or abilities. The essay, [An Incomplete History of My Teaching Body](#) (Cruthers, 2021), helped me to contemplate what both visible and invisible disability looks like in higher education, including the pressures to appear as able-bodied as possible.
- **What is Critical Race Theory, and What Does it Mean for Higher Education?** This theory continues to be a topic of inquiry and discussion pertaining to higher education. As a contested topic, the academic and legal theory is subject to misrepresentation and confusion. This semester, one of my professional organizations came together to discuss two readings that examine these issues and work to build a better understanding of CRT: [All Education is Political: Critical Race Theory, White Power, and the Killing of Black Academic Freedom](#) (Caldwell Jr., 2023) and [Critical Race Theory and the Assault on Antiracist Thinking](#) (Jaleel, 2021).
- **Students' Desired Outcomes of Higher Education:** Dr. Jesse Grant, CIA's Associate Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Students, shared a report on the latest [Student Voice survey from Inside Higher Ed](#). The results of this survey, focusing on life after college, indicate that students' most important outcome of higher education is a growth in knowledge of a subject area they are passionate about. This survey made me think about the role of joy in teaching and learning, and how we can sometimes lose sight of the enjoyment and passion that brought us to our areas of expertise in the first place. Barton (2019) addresses that precise issue in her blog post, [Emotions, Pedagogy, and the Recovery of Joy](#).

Upcoming Free Webinars and Online Conferences on Teaching and Learning

- [Empower Your Work with AI: A Beginner's Guide to ChatGPT for Faculty](#) (December 13, 12 PM ET). This webinar is for educators who are newer to artificial intelligence. Content includes ways to use AI for course preparation and other faculty tasks.
- [Focus on Teaching and Learning Virtual Conference](#) (January 10, 10 AM - 1PM) . This biannual conference is organized by Loyola University Chicago's Faculty Center for Ignatian Pedagogy. The theme for this conference is "[Decolonizing the Future: Possibilities and Alternatives for Promoting Justice and Equity](#)."

Reading Groups Continue This Spring



The book choices for this academic year are helping us explore issues of mental wellness and neurodiversity. If you want to join in the conversation during Spring semester, please email Kari (keweaver@cia.edu).

The first book, **Visual Thinking: The hidden gifts of people who think in pictures, patterns, and abstractions** (2022) is written by Temple Grandin. Dr. Grandin has authored several books illuminating her own experiences as a person with autism and investigating the ever-expanding research on autism and differences in cognition. In this book, Dr. Grandin's focus on visual thinkers "makes us understand how a world increasingly geared to the verbal tends to sideline visual thinkers, screening them out at school and passing over them in the workplace. Rather than continuing to waste their singular gifts, driving a collective loss in productivity and innovation, Grandin proposes new approaches to educating, parenting, employing, and collaborating with visual thinkers." **The Gund Library has provided electronic copies of this book.**

The second book, **Mind over monsters: Supporting youth mental health with compassionate challenge** (2023) is written by psychologist and professor Sarah Rose Cavanagh. Increases in anxiety and depression prompted Dr. Cavanagh to offer a "an invigorating tour of pedagogical, neuroscientific, and psychological research on mental health" that seeks solutions through interviews with "a roster of experts across the country who are dedicating their lives to working with young people to help them actualize their goals, and highlights voices of college students from a range of diverse backgrounds. **The Gund Library has provided electronic copies of this book.**

---Please contact keweaver@cia.edu if you would like to receive a personal copy of either of these books.---



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