This is a transcript of the T/TAC William and Mary podcast ""Creativity for Collaboration and Differentiation" Dr. Carol Tieso, Keynote Speaker: W&M Symposium on Professional Collaboration and Inclusive Education (2013)

[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Intro]

Debbie **GROSSER**: We are talking with Dr. Carol Tieso, Interim Associate Dean and Associate Professor at the College of William and Mary, and keynote speaker for the 24th Annual Symposium on Professional Collaboration and Inclusive Education. Welcome, Dr. Tieso.

Dr. Carol **TIESO**: Thank you.

GROSSER: Your keynote topic was "Creativity for Collaboration and Differentiation". You shared some blocks to creativity (TIESO: uh huh) that teachers find when they collaborate around students' needs. If you had to pick one for co-teachers to consider, what would that be, and what tips do you have for overcoming that barrier?

TIESO: Well, uh, I wish I could take more than one, but if I had to say one the most important one I would say the emotional blocks... because it seems that if there have been hard feelings in the past, if teachers have had trouble working with each other, they've had differences of opinion. Sometimes that can cloud and get in the way of having a truly honest and open relationship. If they've had a relationship in the past where they have not been able to talk about difficult issues I think that's probably the biggest issue. con...trying to overcome conflict.

GROSSER: So what would you recommend for teachers who are in that position?

TIESO: One thing is to make sure that, that you're open and honest about differences of opinion. That everyone who's at the table, whether it's the two co-teachers or multiple folks at the table in a conference, that you create a climate in which everyone feels free to speak because if you have a hostile climate that is not conducive to creativity. It's not conducive to problem-solving. I think you have to set the ground rules. Let's say using de Bono's Thinking Hats, for example, the person who's wearing the blue hat is kind of the facilitator of the group and that person sets the ground rules for the discussion before they get started. So there's no question exactly how long you're going to talk, what the problem is on that table. We talked a lot about problem definition. I think that's one way to do it is, is to lay the cards out on the table. What is the problem? How long do we have here? How long do people want to speak? Um, and, and lay down those ground rules before you even have the meeting.

GROSSER: Eh, you mentioned that it's difficult to only have one block. Would you like to share another that you think may be a barrier for co-teachers?

TIESO: Besides the emotional, I think we might have the environmental. One of the things that I see in, in a lot of discussions is that the issue of resources always comes up, and at some point you have to say, "Yes, I know that there are only so many things we can do with the resources that we have." But, you also have to say, "How are we going to...? We're just going to set that block aside for now and try to deal with what we can deal with." But another thing often is, like, just the environment in schools is not conducive to private conversations and, and conferences.

GROSSER: So, again, how would you suggest or recommend that teachers try to overcome that barrier?

TIESO: Well, I think you have to find a place that, um, has enough space for everybody that they need. And, in some cases, a classroom will work as long as there are not interruptions from students or other people coming in and out, but obviously the most ideal situation would be to have a conference room somewhere in the school. And if not, then I'm not adverse to taking over the assistant principal's office for a conference if you have to have it, but you have to have privacy and you have to feel comfortable speaking and so I think the , uh, emotional and the environmental blocks are the most important to overcome in terms of co-teaching.

GROSSER: So, let's shift from the barriers to the positive aspects. You know, how creativity really supports that collaboration and then the differentiation in the classroom.

TIESO: Well, I think because creative problem-solving and de Bono's Thinking Hats and talents, which can all be used interchangeably. I think what they do is they help you clarify the ground rules. So you're not sitting there and, um, one person is being being very emotional. Like, for example, may... maybe you do have a group of three co-teachers and one of them has issues or has, is very emotional about a certain child or something. If you use de Bono's Thinking Hats, for example, you could spend thirty seconds with the red hat, everybody getting their emotions out so that you can really fix, fixate on the problem. And then I think creative problem-solving is perfect for problem identification. Because if you're sitting down to have a meeting and you have concerns about a child more than likely there are lots of different concerns. So it's important to identify the one that's most important that you want to address, and then having that action plan. Each one of these programs, for example, you put the blue hat on back at, at the end with de Bono's hat. You say "OK. Now what are the next steps?" and that's, of course, an, an integral part of creative problem solving at the end is the next steps, and I think that's were sometimes-- a lot of times-- we miss the boat. We have this discussion. We go, we talk over and over and over again, um, we don't have any time limit so we just keep going and going and people keep saying the same thing over and over again. So, having an actual time...say, "We're only going to say...speak for a minute and get, get out what we need to say...This is the problem, as defined. We're going to have 45 minutes to discuss it and at the last ten minutes this is the action plan. Who's gonna do what by when?" And then you go from there and, to me it's a much more efficient use of time than just sitting there going over the same areas and all the same people always bringing up the same issues all the time. And, and, but I think problem definition is the first step...is knowing exactly what you're there to do.

GROSSER: And it sounds like some structures to support the problem-solving (TIESO: Absolutely!) process (TIESO: Absolutely!)

TIESO: And then, t...to help the kids, too.

GROSSER: So, let's shift to students, um (TIESO: uh hmm) particular students with special needs and creativity and how that supports their learning. How can we foster that in our students to enhance, you know, how they're processing that information?

TIESO: I think sometimes we really take a backwards view of kids with special needs. We always focus on the deficit and I think we're facilitating their work and teaching them about these creative thinking strategies, and I think you'll find that a lot of these kids are really very good at divergent thinking, and they never really get a, a chance to demonstrate it because we're always so fixated on their deficits. So as I think I really tried to hammer home yesterday is I want teachers to be talent scouts. And so I think unless we are able to pop off that roof and say, you know, "What are all your creative ideas?" And brainstorming is always a part of divergent thinking, but other strategies, too. Now once we brainstorm this whole list how do we give the kids the kind of feedback they need to be efficient thinkers, and, you know, not th... not

say everything is red and everybody keeps repeating red over and over again, but make them more efficient and also then, ok, now what? And that helps kids, too, especially if you're trying to do something problem-based learning because one of the things that Carol Tomlinson's always talked about with respect to differentiation is that all kids need to be engaged in respectful work, and if the gifted kids go to the computer and play every day, and the struggling learners always get another worksheet to work on, then that's not respectful work. So by structuring the, the activities or the problems, or whatever they...so that all the kids are doing something that's respectful, and then just providing the kind of scaffolding you need, and this is where once you've taught these kids, and even they can help one another or you can have, uh, a learning center set up in the classroom with CPS or de Bono's Thinking Hats, so the kids can do it on their own. But, allowing them the opportunity to go from A to Z, or from Z to A--big picture down-- is much more powerful in terms of their enduring understandings than trying to always focus on part-part-part-part and hope someday they get the whole. This way we can go whole and now I'm going to give you the tools to understand all the parts. And that's typically where the learning issues come in is putting all those pieces together to create the whole-the synthesis piece. And I think that's where these creative strategies can really help kids with special needs.

GROSSER: If someone were to say to you, "Well, I don't really have time to foster that in my classroom. I have these SOLs, this curriculum that I've got to meet." What would your response be?

TIESO: Well, I've done a lot of training with teachers on that very issue. Um, one of the presentations I've done in the past at conferences is how to use creative strategies to address state standards, and I th...instead of looking at state standards, whether they're SOLs or whatever they're called in other states, we always tend to look at them--each one of them-- in an isolated way. We have to address this standard and then thi--number one and then number two and then number three and number four. This gives teachers to plan together, if they're co-teaching or co-planning, to plan together to look at an umbrella---a big picture SOL strategy that actually includes three or four so that kids are now getting work to do that is engaging and meaningful for them, because any time you have an emotional connection to a, to learning you..that kid's gonna have a better chance of remembering those details later on than if you try to teach them isolated details. And also I think creative skills give kids a schema. Uh, I think one of the big problems with kids with special needs is some kind of processing issue where they're not being able to synthesize all the information that's being tossed at them. They're not going to remember isolated details--that's what Google is for! But, what we need to do is to give them the schema or the skeleton--the structure that they can hang all of their learning on.

GROSSER: If you were asked to give just one piece of advice to teachers about fostering their own or their students' creativity--really kind of wrapping this up in one or two sentences. What would you say?

TIESO: For teachers I would say learn to be a talent scout instead of looking at kids with disabilities as kids who have problems that need to be fixed. Look at them as a child. A great, a great child who has talents, and we just have to find them and help them nurture them. And then the other thing is be a model for creativity yourself. Creative thinking has to be modeled, and the metacognition that we just touched on yesterday--that idea of you're thinking aloud as you do something on the board so the kids are not only getting two modalities, but they're also getting a modeling of the thinking process. But, more important than anything else, is to take a talent development approach instead of a deficit-based approach.

GROSSER: Is there anything else you'd like to share?

TIESO: It was, it was my pleasure, my honor to speak yesterday. I had a great time.

GROSSER: Dr. Tieso, thank you for a wonderful **(TIESO:** Thank you) Symposium presentation **(TIESO:** Thank you) and for your time today.

[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Outro]