



## Going Public Review

# [Podcast Review] Tea for Teaching Podcast

### ABSTRACT

A review of the podcast *Tea for Teaching*, which is supported by the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching at SUNY Oswego. The podcast is co-hosted by John Kane and Rebecca Mushtare.

### KEYWORDS

podcast, higher education, interviewing, review

### INTRODUCTION

For over 400 episodes, an economist, a graphic designer, and invited guests have gathered weekly to discuss how to make “higher education more inclusive and supportive of all learners.” What a gift to the international SoTL community! With so many episodes, you can tell that this podcast has staying power, receives strong support from internal and/or external funding, and benefits from the deep passion the hosts have for engaging with teaching and learning practices through audio.

I offer an overview and reflection on the [Tea for Teaching podcast](#) and share thoughts on how other SoTL scholars might engage with this artefact and why.

### OVERVIEW

Produced by the [Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching at SUNY Oswego](#) (in the northeastern part of the United States), *Tea for Teaching* is a podcast in which the hosts John Kane, an economist, and Rebecca Mushtare, a graphic designer, sip tea while talking with guests from around the world about innovative, effective practices in teaching and learning. A sampling of recent episode themes include: dance and math, learning students’ names, teaching digital storytelling, becoming a SoTL scholar, and extending kindness. Episodes last roughly 40 minutes and are found on a range of podcast platforms: Apple, Spotify, Pandora, Podbean, and Amazon Music. Each episode has show notes, which include links to additional content referenced during the episode.

The accompanying *Tea for Teaching* website offers a clean, minimal look with shades of purple. Centered on the website is the delightfully simple podcast logo: a teapot with a teabag tagged with the letter “t,” and the title of the show stylized in all lowercase letters as “tea for teaching.” The website includes a curated experience of all episodes with little attentional content other than show notes and episode transcripts. In terms of website accessibility, page titles (Home, Episodes, and About) briefly and concisely describe the content of the page. The contrast ratio (light gray-colored text on a light cream-colored background) may cause challenges for people with visual impairments or reading disabilities, since there is little contrast between the text and background.

### LISTENING EXPERIENCE

I dove in with the intention to listen to three recent episodes. I stuck to my plan, listening to and learning about cross-institutional peer review with the hosts and two teacher-scholars in Ireland

(Episode #373) and then learning about “the disengaged teen” (Episode # 374). I planned to finish with the most recent episode on universal design for learning and AI (Episode # 375), but then a new episode dropped on Students as Partners (SaP, Episode #376). This topic piqued my interest, and I dropped UDL and AI in favor of the episode on SaP.

Episodes begin suddenly, with a tag about the specific episode from co-host John Kane. The theme music is cued—a lovely electronic ditty that takes me back to 1980s TV shows in the U.S. and the preponderance of synth-produced theme songs from shows like *Nightrider* and *Miami Vice*. The hosts introduce each other, the guests, and then share the kind of tea they are drinking. The brief tea talk recalls casual hallway conversations exchanged between colleagues at a conference and welcomes the listener in. Afterwards, the show unfolds into a question-and-answer format.

## REFLECTION

The tone and cadences of the hosts' voices convey their excitement for the topics and further draws the listeners in, but I wonder if their excitement might also be better felt in the kinds of questions they ask. Most questions are closed (inviting a yes or no answer; helpfully guests offer more than just a yes or no) or begin with the well-used cliché “Can you talk about . . . ?” The line of questioning often begins with “Can you talk about how you got interested in [insert topic]?”

I emphasize the passion, dedication, and knowledge the hosts bring to wide ranging topics. However, I found the tightly scripted question and answer format undercut some of the informal, casual, free-flowing conversation that one would assume would come with sipping tea and talking about teaching and learning. I wonder how the hosts might lean a bit more into the casual and free-flowing tone to loosen up some of the scripted questions and follow conversation where it may lead. Interviewing is hard; it’s a delicate balance between preparation and improvisation, between scripted, clear questions designed to engage and allowing the conversation to ebb and flow as new ideas arise.

To be fair, a benefit of this tightly scripted format is that episodes are more informative than entertaining. That’s not an absolute binary: either inform or entertain. But scripted questions often allow for inclusion of scholarship directly focused on the episode, while free-flowing conversation may bring in tangentially related scholarship. The scholarship mentioned during episodes is included in the show notes, which allows listeners to further pursue topics of interest. The podcast certainly builds on existing scholarship, but I feel the onus is on the listener to then bring this scholarship into their own context; episodes are largely focused on what guests have done with little attention to what listeners might do with the topic under consideration.

### **So, how might other SoTL scholars engage with this kind of artefact?**

I think of podcasts as teaching tools, for the students I teach each semester and for myself. I often assign podcasts in class. For example, when I teach a class on rhetorical theory, [I assign an episode of the podcast “Philosophize This!”](#) to help students better understand the differences between Socrates and the Sophists in early Greece. I see *Tea for Teaching* as a helpful teaching tool, but not a source of new scholarship for those already deep in the field. For example, for those already engaged in the work of, say, SaP, the episode might not yield much new insight. In that episode, two guests describe [their local SaP program](#), detailing why the program started and how it is funded, offering some data points about its impact, and explaining how they advertise it across their campus. It’s a great introduction to this kind of program, and if a colleague is newer to SaP and wants to learn more, this would be a great listen. Or if you want to encourage an administrator on your campus to support a similar program, then send them a link to this episode. But do you already have experience

leading a similar program and publishing in journals dedicated to SaP? Then this might not teach you much more than you already know, but you will certainly be buoyed by the work of others.

This episode is indicative of the other two episodes I listened to. The podcast provides engaging, informative overviews of key issues in teaching and learning that are best suited for listeners new to covered topics. The wide variety of episodes and the guests from various disciplinary backgrounds and countries helps this podcast appeal to a global audience. *Tea for Teaching* provides helpful introductory conversations that can draw in new scholars to the field. Overall, it may be a great listen for students, administrators, and colleagues looking to learn more about teaching and learning as well. So, include an episode or two in your syllabus, email links to your colleagues, and post episodes to your social media platforms. While the episodes are long (I wonder if they could be edited down by about 10 minutes), the knowledge and passion are readily heard.

As I finished the SaP episode, my mind turned to how it might connect it with my long-running engagement with SaP. I wondered: how might student partners help SoTL go public in new ways? What might “going public” mean for a student partner? How might students at my home campus understand and enact going public differently than me? Perhaps I might pass this podcast along to some former student partners for their insight. I wondered about the [Grand Challenges of SoTL](#), specifically [the fifth one on growing SoTL](#). How might student partners help me reimagine what going public means, and how might this new kind of going public help grow SoTL?

I thought and wondered as I drove along listening to the SaP episode. When this episode ended, my thinking did not. Maybe that is the goal of *Tea for Teaching*—encouraging thought long after the episode ends. If so, they met their goal.

#### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

*J. Michael Rifenburg (United States) teaches at the University of North Georgia. He is a recipient of the University System of Georgia Regents’ Scholarship of Teaching & Learning Award and serves on the ISSOTL Board of Directors.*

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