

“The Tools Have Always Been There”

Dr. Karen Burgard, Texas A&M University—San Antonio

On February 11 at 6:00 pm, the Collaborative provided a forum for a guest lecture (available online) featuring Dr. Karen Burgard, Associate Professor at Texas A&M University—San Antonio. Dr. Burgard’s presentation, *The Tools Have Always Been There: Excavating Classroom Practices and Materials to Create New Approaches to Teaching and Learning*, attracted over 40 participants from around the United States and the world. Karen Burgard’s lecture focused on reexamining well-established pedagogical methods while emphasizing the goal of enhancing reading comprehension, analytical skills, and student-led classroom discussions in both K12 and higher education settings.

Dr. Burgard began by emphasizing how traditional instructional tools can be repurposed to meet current educational needs.

She emphasized that “Often, we overlook the resources right in front of us. By adjusting how we use these tools, we can radically improve student engagement.” She went on to describe strategies to promote students’ critical thinking and active involvement, including the use of primary sources in all content areas. These sources, she noted, not only help students connect more deeply with subject matter, but also encourage them to develop transferable analytical abilities.

Throughout the session, Dr. Burgard provided concrete examples of classroom activities, ranging from guided reading exercises to small-group discussions that empower students to take a more active role in their learning. One attendee shared, “The practical demonstrations made me realize that simple tweaks—like giving students structured roles in discussions—can make a huge difference in how they engage with complex texts.” Another participant remarked, “I never thought of using primary documents in my math classroom, but Dr. Burgard’s examples illustrated how these resources can spark curiosity and contextual understanding.”

In addition to demonstrating effective classroom strategies, Dr. Burgard offered insights into fostering a culture of collaboration among educators. She stressed the importance of professional dialogue, calling it “a crucial component for ongoing pedagogical improvement.” Audience members expressed enthusiasm for her approach, with one stating, “It was refreshing to see someone bridge the gap between K12 and higher education. I feel more confident applying these methods in my college-level courses.”

To support participants in implementing these techniques, Dr. Burgard provided a handout summarizing her main points, along with a curated list of web links for further exploration. One teacher commented, “Having immediate access to resources means I can start making changes in my lesson plans right away.” By the end of the session, attendees praised the lecture’s clarity and relevance, noting that Dr. Burgard’s approach to “excavating” familiar classroom materials would enrich their instructional practices and foster deeper student engagement.

