



UNIVERSITY OF DENVER
OFFICE OF TEACHING & LEARNING

Ripple Effects Mapping: Capturing Impact of the Department Action Teams (DATs)

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BUTLER INSTITUTE
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

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Butler Institute for Families
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER



Office of Teaching & Learning

Department Action Teams (DATs)

Ripple Effects Mapping Session Report

Background

The University of Denver Office of Teaching & Learning's (OTL) **Department Action Teams (DATs)** were unit workgroups who applied to participate and were selected by the OTL in consultation with Faculty Affairs leadership. Each DAT consisted of about 3 to 5 faculty, staff, and students (depending on the size of the department). DATs were tasked with creating sustainable change concerning a broad-scale issue related to 1) teaching evaluation in the unit by shifting structures and culture; and 2) helping DAT participants become change agents by developing facilitation and leadership skills.

To meet these goals, external facilitators from OTL supported the DATs by providing expertise in teaching evaluation practices, facilitation, organizational culture, and education research. DAT facilitators adopted the change management process outlined by Ngai et al. (2020) and utilized the Teaching Quality Framework (TQF) proposed at CU Boulder as part of their participation in the National Science Foundation-funded TEval Project. The TQF defines seven dimensions of high-quality teaching and recommends that departmental teaching evaluation practices should include self-reflection (self-voice), student evaluation (student-voice, beyond Student Evaluations of Teaching), and peer input (peer voice, through evaluation, observation, or other means).

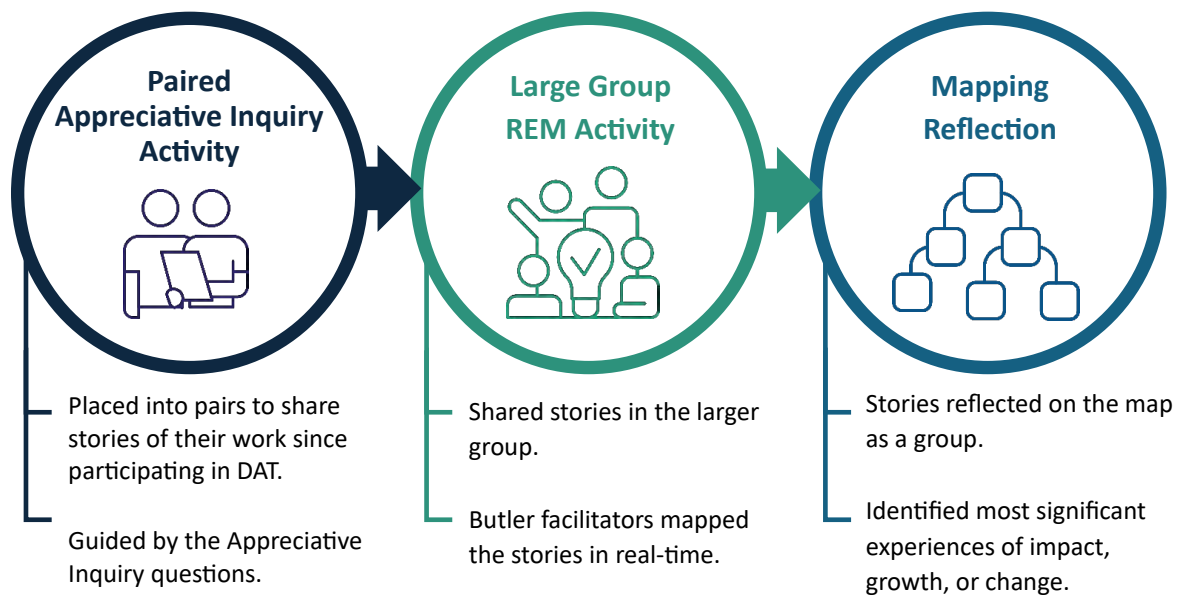
Over the span of three years (2022 to 2024), there were three cohorts with a total of eight DATs. Each DAT participated in a 10-month program which included a curriculum of speakers, both local and visiting, DAT meetings with their facilitators, and a retreat. At the end of the formal experience, DATs presented a proposal for revising their teaching evaluation practices to include self-voice, student-voice, and peer-voice.

Approach

On October 11, 2024, Butler Institute facilitators conducted an in-person Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) session with participants to capture their experiences and stories of impact since participating in a DAT. REM participants were those who participated in one of the three DAT cohorts, and represented over ten departments and units across the university.

REM is a participatory and strength-based interactive approach that aims to illuminate diverse perspectives and reveal both anticipated and unanticipated outcomes of an initiative.¹ REM celebrates accomplishments through a process that combines elements of Appreciative Inquiry, mind mapping, group interviewing, and qualitative data analysis to gather stories of impact. Participants' stories and reflections are mapped in real-time to demonstrate connections and relationships. The REM session consists of three components (see Figure 1):

Figure 1. REM Session Process Steps



¹ Chazdon, S., Emery, M., Hansen, D., Higgins, L., & Sero, R. (2017). A field guide to Ripple Effects Mapping. Minnesota Evaluation Studies Institute, University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing. Retrieved September 14, 2022, from <https://ucanr.edu/sites/CEprogramevaluation/files/317076.pdf>

The following are the **Appreciative Inquiry** questions used during the REM session.

- What do DATs do exceptionally well?
- What are you most proud of doing or accomplishing since participating in a DAT?
- What have been some highlights for you in efforts related to teaching evaluation processes (e.g., shifts in departmental structures and culture) since participating in a DAT?
- What are short or long-term outcomes of DAT-related work that stand out to you?

DATs REM Participants

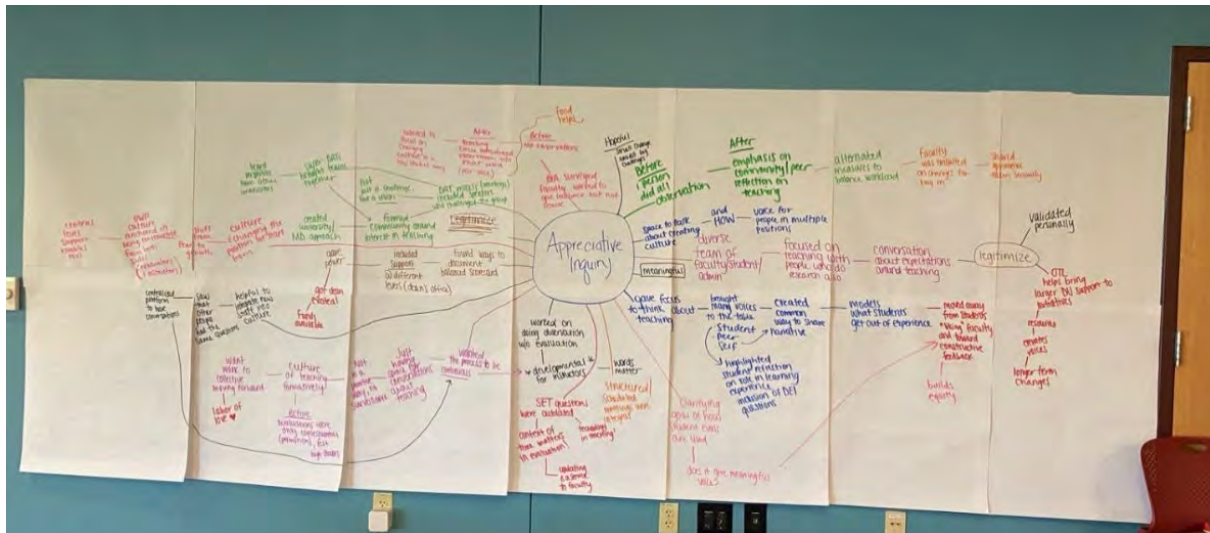


Analysis

Following the in-person REM session, the Butler team used XMind software to create a digital Xmind Ripple Map from the hand-drawn map created during the session. The Butler team then sent the updated digital XMind map to the REM participants so they could review and confirm that the map accurately reflected their group’s conversation and make any necessary revisions. The digital XMind map is in Appendix A.

The Butler team then identified themes from the XMind map by grouping the impacts/ripples and stories participants identified into broad, meaningful categories.

DATs REM Session Hand-drawn Map of Participants’ Stories



Results

Four key themes emerged from the OTL-DATs REM session:

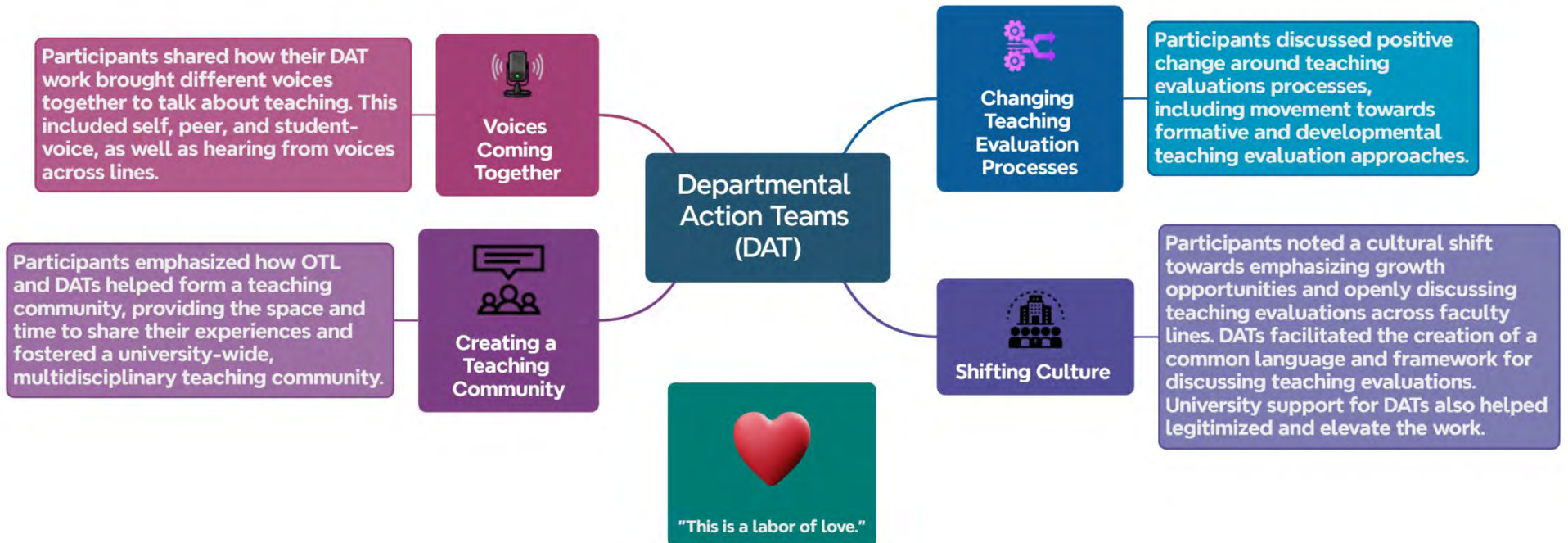
1. **Voices Coming Together:** In this theme, participants shared how their DAT work brought different voices together to talk about teaching. This included self, peer, and student-voice, as well as hearing from voices across lines.
2. **Creating a Teaching Community:** In this theme, participants emphasized how OTL and DATs helped form a teaching community, providing the space and

time to share their experiences and fostered a university-wide, multidisciplinary teaching community.

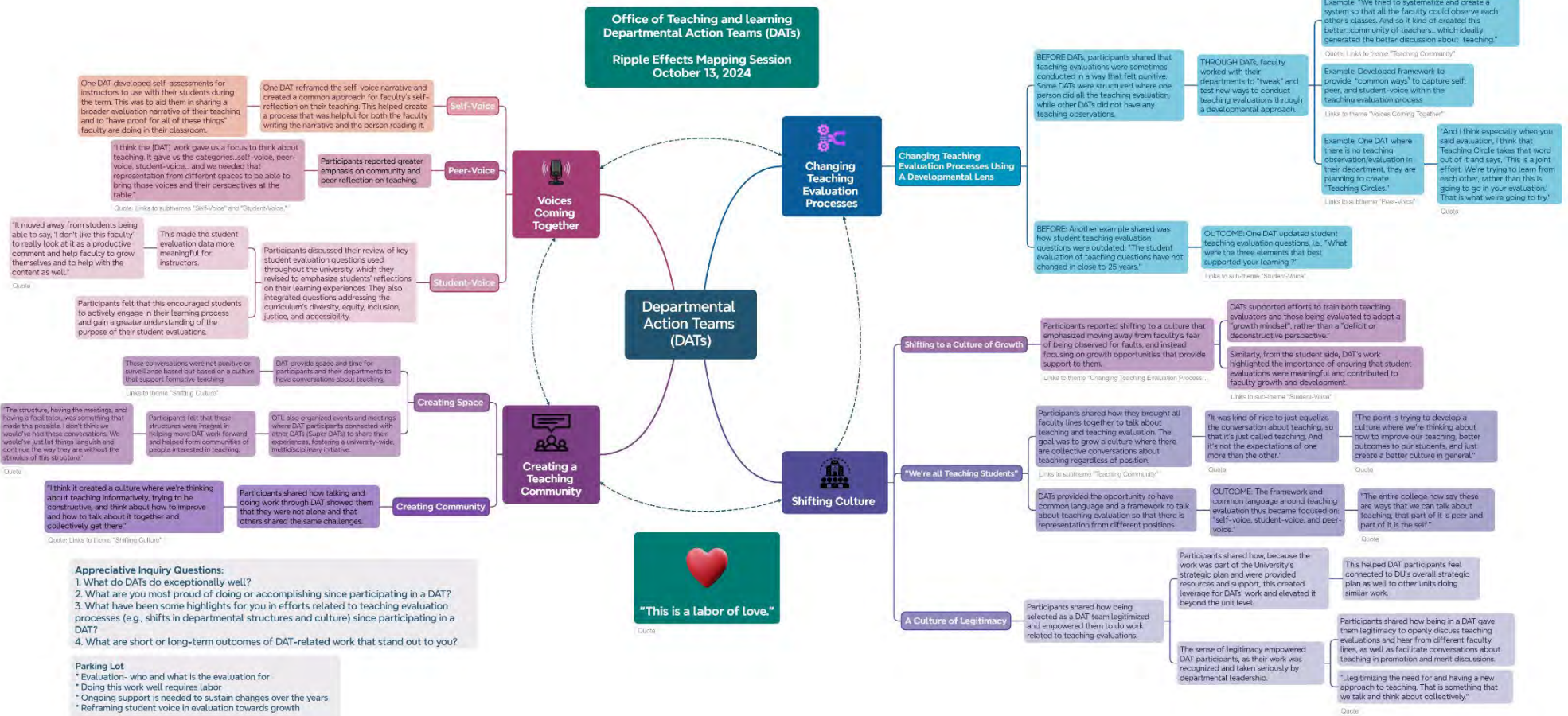
3. **Changing Teaching Evaluation Processes:** In this theme, participants discussed positive change around teaching evaluations processes, including movement towards formative and developmental teaching evaluation approaches.
4. **Shifting Culture:** In this theme, participants noted a cultural shift towards emphasizing growth opportunities and openly discussing teaching evaluations across faculty lines. DATs facilitated the creation of a common language and framework for discussing teaching evaluations. University support for DATs also helped legitimized and elevate the work.

The key themes map from the OTL-DATs REM session, the full thematic map, and individual-themed branches are provided below. The WORD version of the full thematic map from the DATs REM session is in Appendix B .

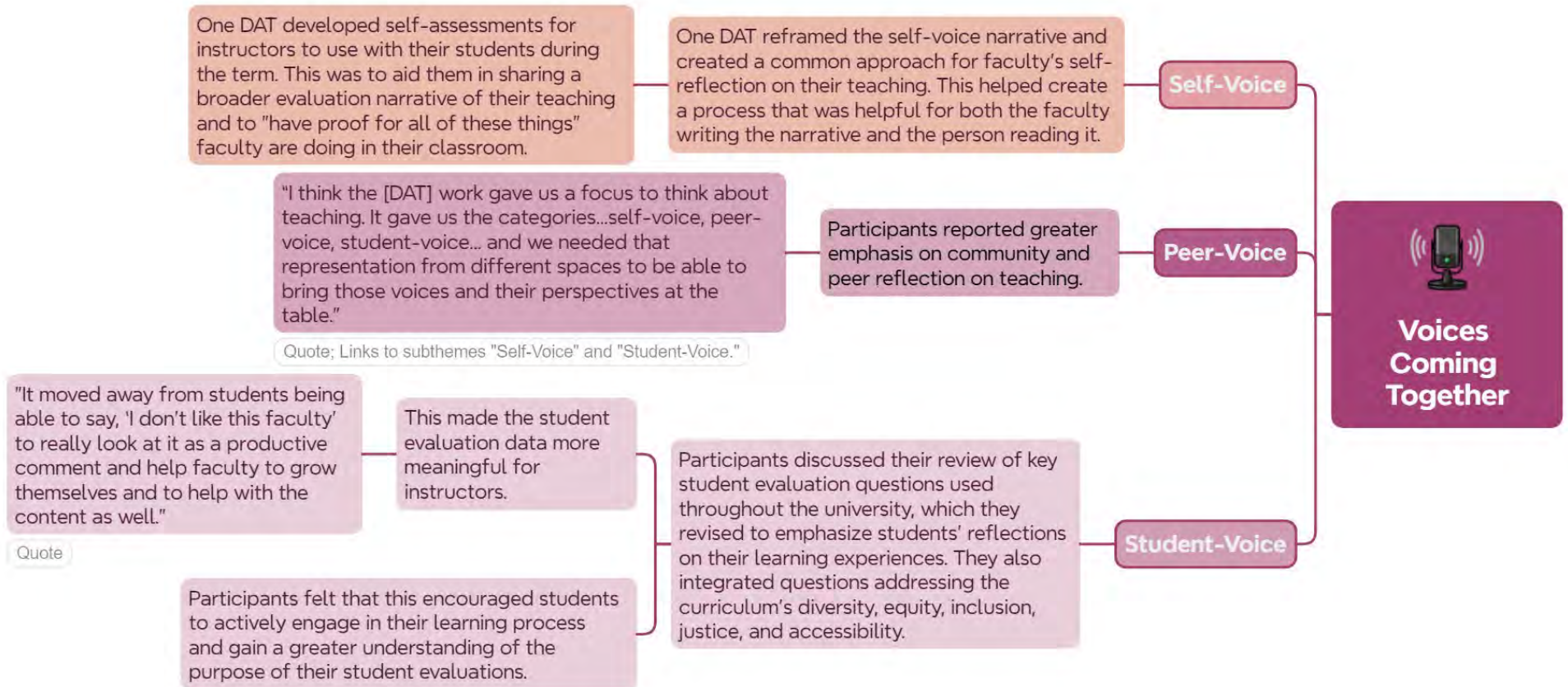
Key Themes Map from the DATs REM Session



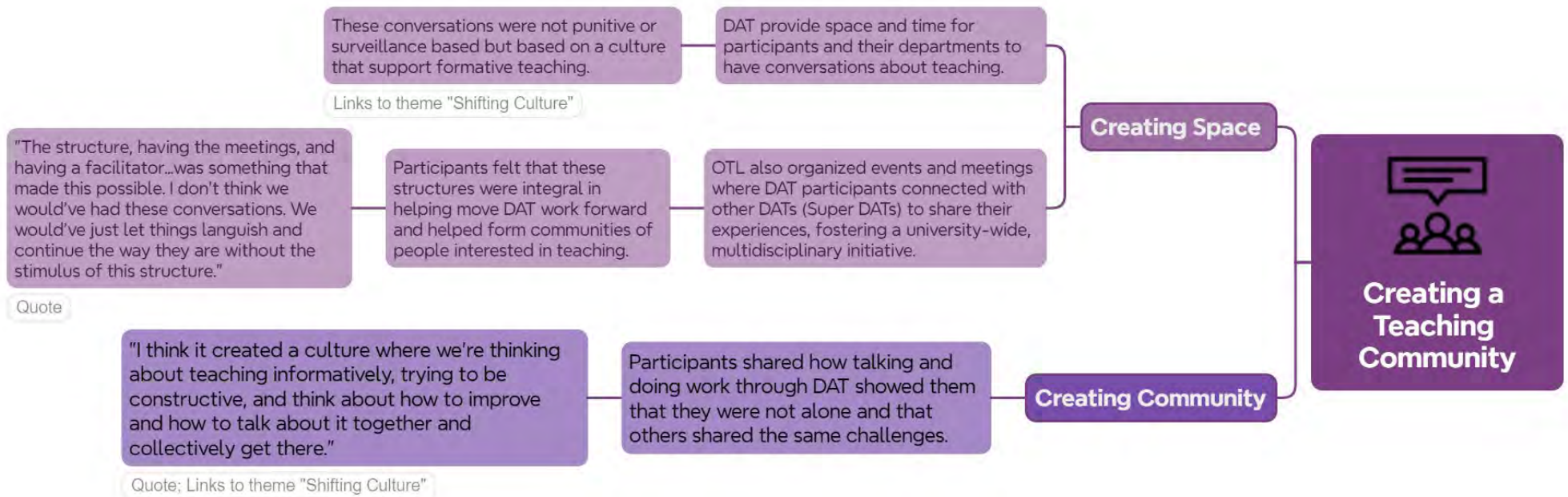
Full Thematic Map from DATs REM Session



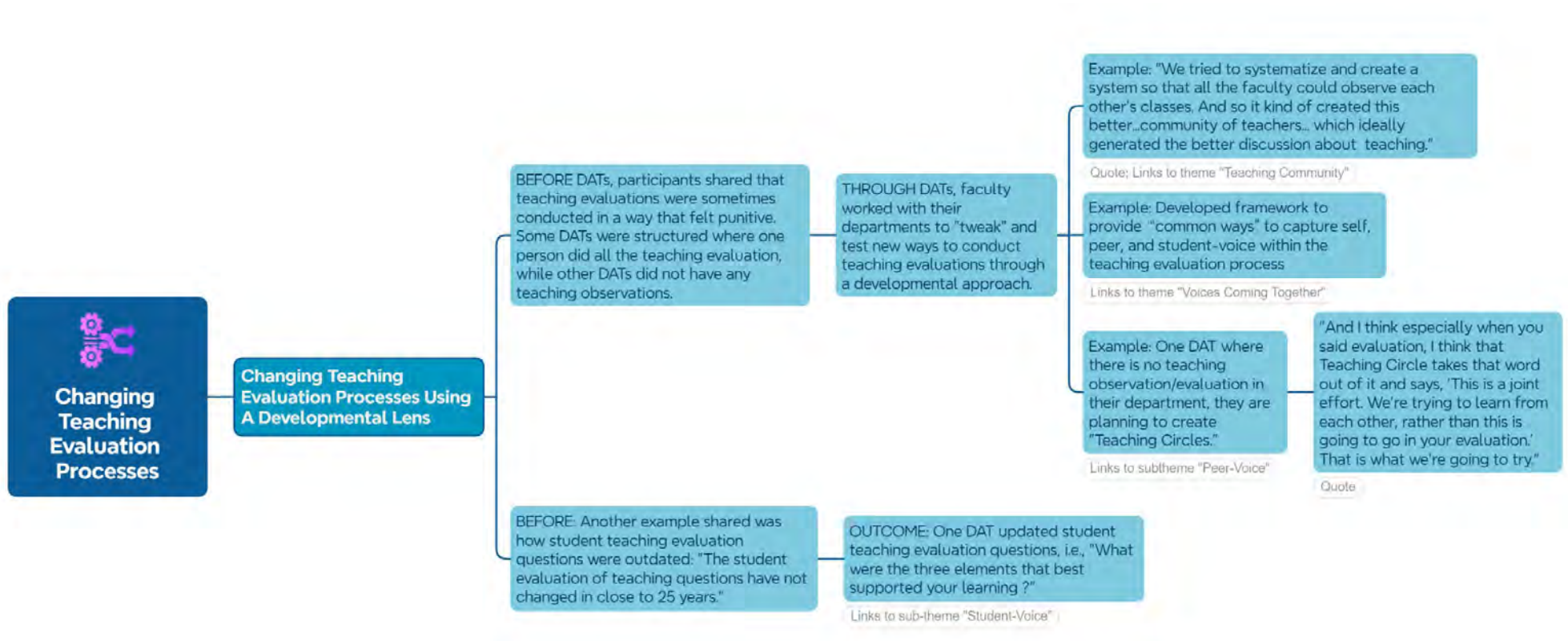
Key Theme 1: Voices Coming Together



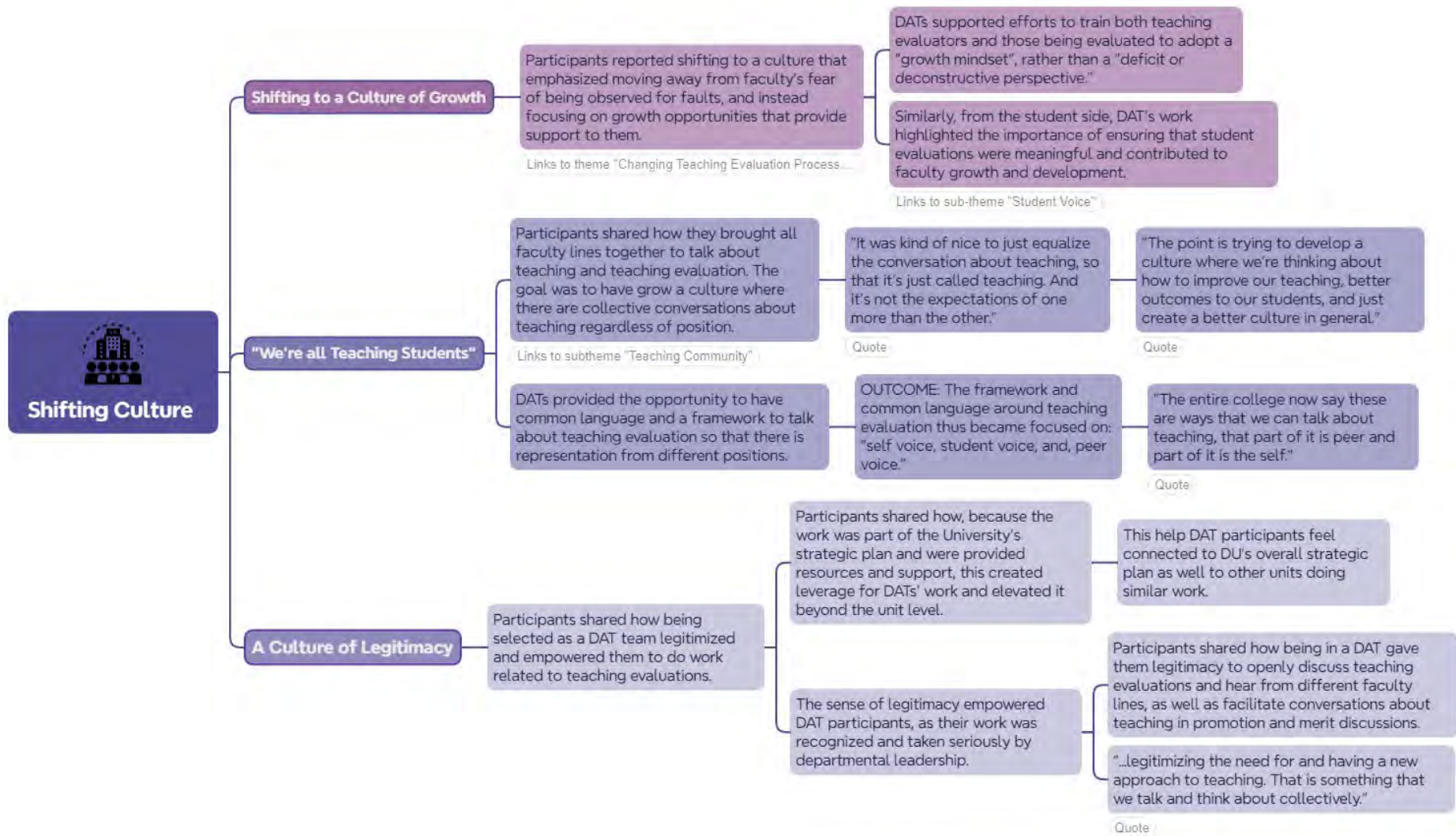
Key Theme 2: Creating a Teaching Community



Key Theme 3: Changing Teaching Evaluation Processes



Key Theme 4: Shifting Culture



References

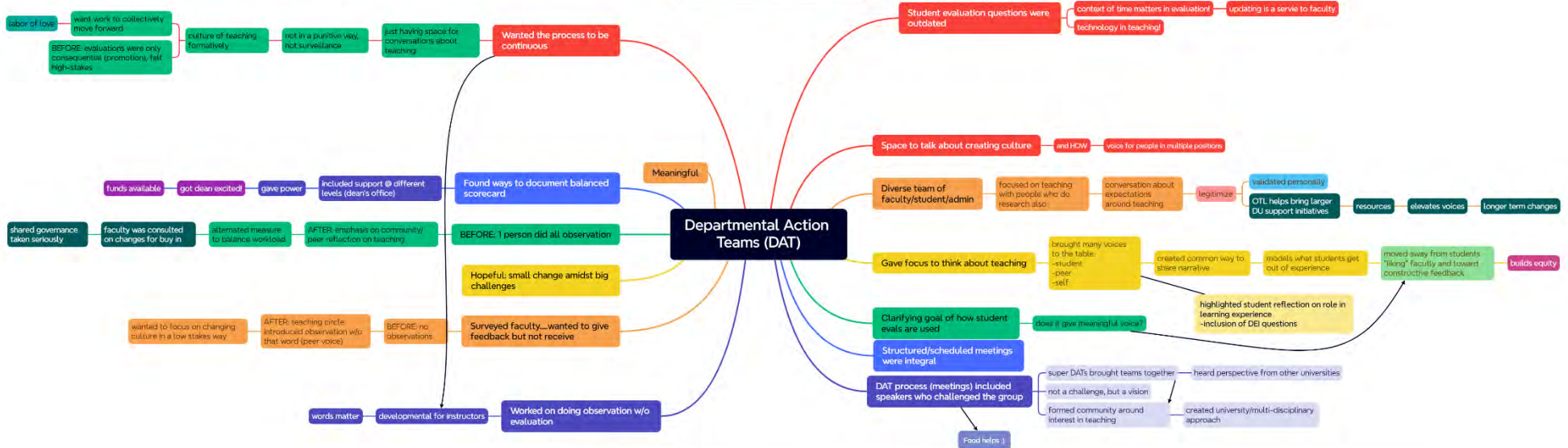
Ngai, C., Corbo, J. C., Falkenberg, K. L., Geanious, C., Pawlak, A., Pilgrim, M. E., Quan, G. M., Reinholz, D. L., Smith, C., & Wise, S. B. (2020). Facilitating change in higher education: The Departmental Action Team Model. Glitter Cannon Press.

Transforming Higher Education-Multidimensional Evaluation of Teaching (TEval) (n.d). teval.net

University of Colorado, Boulder (n.d.) Teaching Quality Framework Initiative.
<https://www.colorado.edu/teaching-quality-framework/about-tqf>

Appendix A: REM Session Digital Map

Office of Teaching and Learning
Departmental Action Teams (DAT)
Ripple Effects Mapping Session
October 13, 2024



Appreciative Inquiry Questions:

1. What do DATs do exceptionally well?
2. What are you most proud of doing or accomplishing since participating in a DAT?
3. What have been some highlights for you in efforts related to teaching evaluation processes (e.g., shifts in departmental structures and culture) since participating in a DAT?
4. What are short or long-term outcomes of DAT-related work that stand out to you?

Parking Lot

- * Evaluation- who and what
- * Doing this work well requires labor
- * Sustained changes over the year, need of ongoing support
- * Reframing student voice in evaluation towards growth

Appendix B: WORD Version of Full Thematic Map from DATs REM Session

Key Theme 1: Voices Coming Together



Self-Voice

One DAT reframed the self-voice narrative and created a common approach for faculty's self-reflection on their teaching. This helped create a process that was helpful for both the faculty writing the narrative and the person reading it.

- One DAT developed self-assessments for instructors to use with their students during the term. This was to aid them in sharing a broader evaluation narrative of their teaching and to "have proof for all of these things" faculty are doing in their classroom.

Peer-Voice

Participants reported greater emphasis on community and peer reflection on teaching.

- "I think the [DAT] work gave us a focus to think about teaching. It gave us the categories...self-voice, peer-voice, student-voice... and we needed that representation from different spaces to be able to bring those voices and their perspectives at the table."

Quote; Links to subthemes "Self-Voice" and "Student-Voice."

Student-Voice

Participants discussed their review of key student evaluation questions used throughout the university, which they revised to emphasize students' reflections on their learning experiences. They also integrated questions addressing the curriculum's diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and accessibility.

- This made the student evaluation data more meaningful for instructors.
- "It moved away from students being able to say, 'I don't like this faculty' to really look at it as a productive comment and help faculty to grow themselves and to help with the content as well."

Quote

- Participants felt that this encouraged students to actively engage in their learning process and gain a greater understanding of the purpose of their student evaluations.

Key Theme 2: Creating a Teaching Community



Creating Space

DAT provide space and time for participants and their departments to have conversations about teaching.

- These conversations were not punitive or surveillance based but based on a culture that support formative teaching.

Links to theme "Shifting Culture"

OTL also organized events and meetings where DAT participants connected with other DATs (Super DATs) to share their experiences, fostering a university-wide, multidisciplinary initiative.

- Participants felt that these structures were integral in helping move DAT work forward and helped form communities of people interested in teaching.
- "The structure, having the meetings, and having a facilitator...was something that made this possible. I don't think we would've had these conversations. We would've just let things languish and continue the way they are without the stimulus of this structure."

Quote

Creating Community

Participants shared how talking and doing work through DAT showed them that they were not alone and that others shared the same challenges.

- "I think it created a culture where we're thinking about teaching informatively, trying to be constructive, and think about how to improve and how to talk about it together and collectively get there."

Quote; Links to theme "Shifting Culture"

Key Theme 3: Changing Teaching Evaluation Processes



Changing Teaching Evaluation Processes Using A Developmental Lens

BEFORE DATs, participants shared that teaching evaluations were sometimes conducted in a way that felt punitive. Some DATs were structured where one person did all the teaching evaluation, while other DATs did not have any teaching observations.

- THROUGH DATs, faculty worked with their departments to "tweak" and test new ways to conduct teaching evaluations through a developmental approach.

- Example: "We tried to systematize and create a system so that all the faculty could observe each other's classes. And so, it kind of created this better...community of teachers... which ideally generated the better discussion about teaching."

Quote; Links to theme "Teaching Community"

- Example: Developed framework to provide "common ways" to capture self, peer, and student-voice within the teaching evaluation process

Links to theme "Voices Coming Together"

- Example: One DAT where there is no teaching observation/evaluation in their department, they are planning to create "Teaching Circles."

Links to subtheme "Peer-Voice"

- "And I think especially when you said evaluation, I think that Teaching Circle takes that word out of it and says, 'This is a joint effort. We're trying to learn from each other, rather than this is going to go in your evaluation.' That is what we're going to try."

Quote

BEFORE: Another example shared was how student teaching evaluation questions were outdated: "The student evaluation of teaching questions have not changed in close to 25 years."

- OUTCOME: One DAT updated student teaching evaluation questions, i.e., "What were the three elements that best supported your learning ?"

[Links to sub-theme "Student-Voice"](#)

Key Theme 4: Shifting Culture



Shifting to a Culture of Growth

Participants reported shifting to a culture that emphasized moving away from faculty's fear of being observed for faults, and instead focusing on growth opportunities that provide support to them.

[Links to theme "Changing Teaching Evaluation Processes"](#)

- DATs supported efforts to train both teaching evaluators and those being evaluated to adopt a "growth mindset", rather than a "deficit or deconstructive perspective."
- Similarly, from the student side, DAT's work highlighted the importance of ensuring that student evaluations were meaningful and contributed to faculty growth and development.

[Links to sub-theme "Student-Voice"](#)

"We're all Teaching Students"

Participants shared how they brought all faculty lines together to talk about teaching and teaching evaluation. The goal was to grow a culture where there are collective conversations about teaching regardless of position.

Links to subtheme "Teaching Community"

- "It was kind of nice to just equalize the conversation about teaching, so that it's just called teaching. And it's not the expectations of one more than the other."

Quote

- "The point is trying to develop a culture where we're thinking about how to improve our teaching, better outcomes to our students, and just create a better culture in general."

Quote

DATs provided the opportunity to have common language and a framework to talk about teaching evaluation so that there is representation from different positions.

- OUTCOME: The framework and common language around teaching evaluation thus became focused on: "self-voice, student-voice, and peer-voice."
- "The entire college now say these are ways that we can talk about teaching, that part of it is peer and part of it is the self."

Quote

A Culture of Legitimacy

Participants shared how being selected as a DAT team legitimized and empowered them to do work related to teaching evaluations.

- Participants shared how, because the work was part of the University's strategic plan and were provided resources and support, this created leverage for DATs' work and elevated it beyond the unit level.

- This helped DAT participants feel connected to DU's overall strategic plan as well to other units doing similar work.
- The sense of legitimacy empowered DAT participants, as their work was recognized and taken seriously by departmental leadership.
- Participants shared how being in a DAT gave them legitimacy to openly discuss teaching evaluations and hear from different faculty lines, as well as facilitate conversations about teaching in promotion and merit discussions.
- "...legitimizing the need for and having a new approach to teaching. That is something that we talk and think about collectively."

Quote

Parking Lot

- Evaluation- who and what is the evaluation for
- Doing this work well requires labor
- Ongoing support is needed to sustain changes over the years
- Reframing student voice in evaluation towards growth