McMaster Program for Faculty Development (MacPFD)

Spark Podcast

Official Transcript

Episode Number: Tenth episode of MacPFD Sparkle
Title of Episode: Sparkle Episode X: Providing Healthcare Education
Producer: Nick Hoskin
Music by: Scott Holmes
Featured Guest: Dr. Teresa Chan
Interviewers: Dr. Ruth Chen
Date of original release: January 12, 2022

Dr. Ruth Chen (00:02):
Welcome to the MacPFD Sparkle podcast. This is Ruth Chen, and in this Sparkle sub-series we will bring you shorter segments released in between our longer Spark episodes. We'll have new and exciting interviews with professionals from across the world helping you to achieve your personal and professional goals as a healthcare educator, researcher, leader or practitioner at any stage of your career. So sit back, listen, and enjoy this episode of The MacPFD Sparkle podcast.

Dr. Ruth Chen (00:37):
In this episode, I get to speak with Dr. Teresa Chen, our current Associate Dean of Continuing Professional Development in the Faculty of Health Sciences, who is an emergency medicine physician and all around visionary leader and team activator.

Dr. Ruth Chen (00:53):
Good to have you here, Teresa.

Dr. Teresa Chan (00:55):
Thank you, this is odd being on the other side.

Dr. Ruth Chen (00:57):
Yes, and this is exactly why I wanted to have this interview because you have always been the interviewer, or most of the time, and so now I wanted to turn the tables and interview the interviewer. So tell me more about who you are. This is what I wanted to know and what I wanted the listeners to know.

Dr. Teresa Chan (01:17):
Okay.

Dr. Ruth Chen (01:17):
Give us a bit of your background.

Dr. Teresa Chan (01:20):
Yeah, so I'm a Canadian-born, I guess, Taiwanese woman who grew up in Niagara Falls, and haven't strayed very far from where I grew up, right? I can get to my childhood home in, on a good day, one

with good weather, 45 minutes or so. And my parents pop by probably too frequently because I'm so convenient and close to the Asian supermarket that they like.

[laughter]

Dr. Teresa Chan (01:46):
And that's kind of who I am. I had a fairly interesting and atypical kind of a K through 12 experience with some really informative experiences that probably foreshadow things that I'm bringing to life now. Like I did things like something called creative problem solving, or Thinkful we called it, which was an annual competition that would allow little kids to solve big problems, like global warming. And they'd have us worked through kinda design thinking challenges in a day and a half and then do a little sketch, so instead of a pitch, we do a sketch and we'd have to kind of, you know, comedy and action and we have to fill up this big book. And it's something that we figured out and did along the way, so I have a big tendency towards wanting to solve problems probably because of that. There is a program called Junior Achievement, where I got involved in learning how to be an entrepreneur at the tender age of nine. They did these simulations where you would have to create a pen making company, and you'd have to source your products, and then you'd have to make the pens and hire people with fake money to make the pens, and then you'd have to market and sell them. And it was really cute, and to this day, I'm very glad.

[laughter]

Dr. Ruth Chen (03:00):
That's so cool.

Dr. Teresa Chan (03:02):
You know, I'm that weirdo kid that just kind of fell in love with doing simulations at an early age, probably a little bit of a dramatic streak in myself, but I enjoyed going to do Model United Nations from the time I was probably 12 or 13, all the way through to high school and then into university. And it was volunteering for those groups that I learned Robert's Rules for the first time, that I have a tendency of... I don't like brand standing and giving big presentations, but I am really good in the backroom wheeling and dealing and doing all the logistics of carving out an UN-resolution or negotiating what should go where and which clause should go where. And so I know where my place is when I lead teams and stuff like that.

Dr. Teresa Chan (03:46):
I'm probably not the person you send as the front person, but I logistically, I'm pretty good on the back end. I mean, I'm working on the other skills obviously, but... Yeah, so that's kind of a big part of my origin story, let's say. And I grew up as the daughter of an internist, Dr. Yong Kwan Chen, who just recently really retired. And my little sister is also a doctor, she's a cardiologist in Niagara, in one of our adjunct faculty there. Although she's currently on mat leave. I think she's coming back in action very shortly. And it's just one of those things, healthcare has always been part of my family.

Dr. Teresa Chan (04:20):
And so, yeah, that's kind of been interesting because I grew up knowing what a pager was, and I grew up knowing what being on call was about, and I took for granted how much medical knowledge I could get just by walking down the hall and asking my dad like, "What is this on my finger," or, "Am I gonna be okay?" All that stuff that someone else might have to go all with to the emergency

department now to get fixed up for taking a look at it. And so I grew up in that circumstance, and then I went to the University at University of Toronto. And I ended up getting really involved with a lot of extra-curriculars. Again, there I kind of restarted a non-profit organization that was doing Model UN, having to design some like new structures and build up a new volunteer core of just shy of a 100 people to put together a pretty big conference. And working on that was quite interesting because in high school, you'd always have a staff advisor. And in university, there was no one to look over your shoulder, and you just had to figure it out, and it was revealing the things that I ended up enjoying the most, which was actually teaching people how to do some of the procedures and stuff like that.

Dr. Ruth Chen (05:29):
Yeah, and...

Dr. Teresa Chan (05:31):
That's where I first got the clue that I might be interested in teaching. And also the entrepreneurship stuff too, because I've always loved the dramatic arts, I've always loved... And we never had a drama society at my high school. I realized I'm really bad at memorizing lines, so I was like, I cannot be an actress or an actor, but I am 100% someone that loves the arts and would like to support it. So they had called for someone to be a publicity manager, and I actually had some skills because in high school I had been the publicity manager for my choir. And so I said, "Okay, so I can help run publicity and front of house," and so I started off with, you know, a computer and Photoshop and a $500 budget. And by the end of four years when I was graduating, we had a $10,000 budget and we were able to fund a whole bunch of really cool productions. And I still have the posters and...

Dr. Ruth Chen (06:25):
Wow, that's amazing!

Dr. Teresa Chan (06:26):
I'll have to show you some time. But really fun memories. That was in the days before Facebook. Just before Facebook, right? Just before Facebook. And so the way that you found out about what play was going on is that there were posters all across campus. And you would find out what was going on, and so I parlayed some of those skills around marketing and thinking about how to reach your clients and stuff like that into that and continue to hone my craft. Spent many, many of time in the library or in chapters kind of like looking through for some hints on how to do stuff, reading Harvard Business Review, trying to get a sense of how to do some of this stuff for these non-profits and our arts University organizations really. And that was really interesting. Because I think, like I said, all those skills now are magically becoming useful.

Dr. Ruth Chen (07:12):
Oh my goodness. Yeah. As you're describing this, I can completely see how valuable those experiences were in shaping all the skills and all the strengths that you bring in to your current roles.

Dr. Teresa Chan (07:24):
So to kind of flash forward from there, I applied to medical school in third year of university, and in the middle of my interview someone asked me: "So why do you wanna do this?" And I have a massive moment of imposter syndrome and I actually didn't have a good answer to that question. I had been racking my brain about it, very nervous about the question, but when I got the question I fuddled my way through it. And I actually got an offer to be on a waitlist. Well, I actually ended up

turning it down because that was the moment I realized maybe I wasn't... I wasn't ready to go to medical school and that maybe that wasn't the career for me. And I took a step back and I re-calibrated and I thought, what have I really gravitated towards? And it was those moments teaching everyone Robert's Rules for Model UN, it was designing curricula to be able to fulfill and create training programs for people to learn things, designing simulations for them so that they'd be ready. And I'm like, I think that I really like teaching. And flash back, if you actually looked at the rest of my resume, I'd always done peer tutoring in high school, I'd always done mentor-y kind of stuff, and so it wasn't ridiculous that I would actually see that as I actually zoomed out and looked at my own CV, and I actually saw that maybe there was a thread there all along. So I applied to teachers college the next year. And only teachers college.

Dr. Ruth Chen (08:42):
Ah interesting.

Dr. Teresa Chan (08:42):
Didn't apply to Medical School. And I got into one teachers college at University of Toronto, and I went. And it was really interesting because I learned to be basically a high school teacher, a middle school high school teacher, intermediate senior bio-chemistry and science. And I spent many a day at the OISE building at UFT, right there on Bloor Street, talking about social justice, talking about assumptions that we make, talking about concepts like arrogant perception, like how you see the world is like from your own perception, but you can't generalize that, everyone's gonna have a different vantage point, right? And it was life-changing that year, all of such interesting thoughts and insights and talking to my colleagues and peers and just really wrestling with who I was as a person, and then how I would take that forward to help others become the people that they needed to be.

Dr. Ruth Chen (09:37):
Incredible! And so something must have triggered your interest to go back into medicine.

Dr. Teresa Chan (09:45):
Again, in one of those imposter syndrome moments again, I realized I was teaching about the neuron and I was literally reading about the neuron the night before in the textbook, Googling stuff, looking stuff up. And I realized, I am not done my learning on the health sciences side. I actually enjoyed that part of it a lot. And so I ended up deciding that I would apply to medical school, knowing that I also applied for teaching jobs, and we'd see what would come with it, and let fate sort of do some decision making for me in that way. And so I got pretty good letters of rec from my practica, and I still have my teaching portfolio, I'm still very proud of all the things that I did that year, and I also was a University don to cut the costs of that year.

Dr. Teresa Chan (10:29):
I was the equivalent of a resident associate, a resident advisor. I lived in the dorms with the junior students and mentored them, and you know had my accountability, did patrolling to make sure no one's having... Doing things illegally or in trouble. And so we did all that stuff. And then it came back to the fact that with all of that preparation, with all of that counseling and all the training, and a year of thinking about myself, thinking about my values, thinking about what kind of person I wanted to be, I got into medical school. And I found out the day before that I got on the eligible to hire list for Toronto's school board, which is actually pretty hard to do, at the time anyway, because they were very, very full. And so that meant that I would get job offers from groups that wanted to interview me, or interview offers at least, to see if I was a good fit. But I kinda looked at the two things, and

the eligible to hire lists had a couple hundred people on it and there was no guarantee for a job, and then I had this admission letter on the other side that was more or less in many ways a bit of a guaranteed job as long as I got a residency. Right? So yeah, it was a hard decision, but I think someone came to me and said, "You can still teach in medical school, right?" And I'm like, good point. And so, yeah.

Dr. Ruth Chen (11:51):
Helped you make that next step. How do you use the experiences that you've had in going to teacher's college, deciding to apply to med school again and moving in a different direction, how has that shaped the advice or the mentorship that you give to those that are interested in applying to med school, undergrads who aren't sure of what they want to do or what professional path they wanna explore?

Dr. Teresa Chan (12:18):
A big part of what we do is that I think as mentors it's about listening to what your mentee is actually saying and being able to reflect back to them stories that resonate with them. And so I've had a meandering journey, I think most people actually end up doing that. No one is ever really a straight shot, even though on the outside it might seem like it is, right? And so I do tell them about those moments where I had pivots or detours, but detours that were life-changing and made me a better person, probably made me a better clinician, probably made me a better person. Right? And so when you have to deal with all these interpersonal challenges, not just of your own, but then within the teams that you're working in, but you get exposed to a wider world. 'Cause teachers college, when you do your practical, I was placed in a fairly inner city school, right?

Dr. Teresa Chan (13:09):
And I had to teach kids that were very different from me. So there's academic level, college level, and then there's regular, and then there's a basic level. And so there were some people that I was teaching that were in that basic; they have to get this credit or they can't graduate high school. And this is their fourth language, and they've just migrated over, and they're refugee status. And when you hear the stories of some of these kids that I was mentoring in my practica, I was like, "Wow, the world is just so much bigger." And so all the things that we're wrestling with now, social justice and equity, it's hard to make that abstraction come to life. And so these were the experiences that really kind of put together what it is that we were able to put together. When you're a mentor, that's really what it comes down to, is being able to articulate some of those experiences in retrospect and then also to extract the lessons learned and to parlay just the lesson, with maybe a little bit of anecdote, but to contextualize it. And so, yeah, I think that when I mentor students of any sort or even junior faculty members, sometimes I get asked by fairly senior people like, "How did you get to where you are?" And I'm like, "Well, let me show you... It's not a vector. It's this meandering path of maybe I'll try this, maybe I'll try that."

Dr. Teresa Chan (14:31):
And you learn skills along the way, and you fold them into your deck of what you can do, and then you move on. And you make mistakes, and you learn from them, and you apologize. And hopefully, people will forgive you. And if you don't, you still learn, hopefully, along the way.

Dr. Ruth Chen (14:44):
So speaking of that meandering path, what has the path been like for you since graduating from med school, determining what you wanted to do for residency, determining where you wanted to go,

how have those decisions evolved for you? And also, what you wanna do in your professional life. So did you wanna just be a clinician? Did you want to be a clinician educator, leader, administrator, etc?

Dr. Teresa Chan (15:10):
Those are great questions. I think that the teachers college thing was very life-changing for me because having done a whole year of thinking about nothing, nothing but education, entering into medical school, where that level of training was not at the time very standard for a lot of medical teachers, nor was the curriculum because of accreditation, something that could be as agile as a K through 12 or a high school classroom. I had more flexibility like Will Schuester in Glee. In a medical school, it's like... It's not that way. In a nursing school, it's not that way. And PT and OT school, because of accreditation standards, your curriculum is pretty rigid, pretty standard. And so I was like, "What is going on here?" And I realized that I could still make a difference with the expertise I actually walked in the door with and had spent that time doing could be useful and helpful in improving curricula and creating stuff. So I actually got involved with curricular change fairly precociously because of really good mentors, like Dr. Peter Flajnik. And gave me a chance as a summer student after my second year of medical school. He needed to reinvent parts of a course, and he said... He hired me to make the student manual to help students be more successful in the course.

Dr. Teresa Chan (16:29):
And I said, "Great, do you wanna give me the curriculum map and I'll be back in a couple of weeks, and then I'll have a prototype for you." And he was like, "Why don't we start with the curriculum now?" And so we took a step back and we thought about redesigning that course together. And he saw that I had a passion for this, saw that I had some expertise in it, and he was willing to be one of my first sponsors to really open up a door for me to try. And he went to bat for me a couple of times in medical school, so I was very indebted to him because he's a basic scientist. He sees that I've got a passion for education. He always had a passion for education, and he let me run with it. And so I redesigned the patient center learning course with him and all the course directors across all of our curriculum. I met with them, I gave them templates and worked with them to design cases and stuff like that. And then they decided that they needed more students like that to be engaged in the summer times. And so after that, every year they had more summer students renovating the course. And since then, I'm sure there's been like actually about 15, 20 of them now, who have come through to leave their mark on improving the course, changing the cases, improving the course materials.

Dr. Teresa Chan (17:38):
And although I got to name the course, I'm sure it's not even close to the course that I had originally co-designed. But that hopefully is still a remnant of some of the contributions that I made. Because I think other people have been able to leave their mark, right? So the system changed a little bit behind, and that was pretty awesome. And then again, in fourth year, I was like, "Flajn, we need medical students as teachers. 'Cause we're gonna be residents soon. We're gonna have to teach the med students. Can we have a course?" And he found this old course, bypassed some systems, had this whole course, kind of generic course, that we could resurrect and shoehorn something in. And then we didn't have to then do all the paperwork that you have to do to start a new course. And we were able to do a seminar series on residents as teachers or students as teachers. And last I heard, I think a version of that still exists as well. So that's pretty cool. And then I came to Mac. And it was pretty awesome. Because I'd met some of my mentors locally, like Arlene Pardon, at a Paro dinner for my engagement in helping the medical school out. I had won an award, and I sat next to this guy,

and he's still one of my really good friends now and mentors and peer mentors and just all around solution guy that I go to when I don't know how to use Excel or something. [chuckle]

Dr. Teresa Chan (18:56):
Arlene's on my speed dial. Shoutout to him. And he sat next to me at the dinner. And he said, "What specialty do you wanna go into?" I'm like, "Emerge." He's like, "Oh, that's my specialty." And I was like, "Do you guys know this?" And they were like, "No, this is the one factor we didn't know about you." I'm like, "Okay." So it just happened to be.

Dr. Ruth Chen (19:13):
Yeah.

Dr. Teresa Chan (19:13):
And he was like, "When you come to Mac, look me up and I'll show you around." And he did. And I got to follow him around on shifts, and he was my senior resident on, and it was pretty awesome. And I thought, "Wow, I could really see myself here." I ended up ranking McMaster very high on my list, probably... I can't remember. I think it was my top choice in the end, and then I landed here. And it was a great fit. Because with McMaster's legacy of being educationally-minded school. John Kelton had made that happen in the time that he was dean. And Alan Neville was so enthused and so engaged with all of the stuff and PBL and the MMI all these other acronyms that McMaster was well known for. I was like, "Well, that's cool." I had no clue. But I had lucked into it. And then I got to meet some other people, like John Charbonneau, who's one of my mentors as well.

Dr. Teresa Chan (20:06):
And he was an emerge doc new to the town because he just joined our group from being a resident at UOFT. And I eventually went to him to seek some mentorship and when we went from there. And yeah, so I think, I'd always been interested in changing things up and improving processes along the way. And I'm not afraid of writing documents that are too long. To be able to get some of that done, the Model UN Came in handy. [chuckle]

Dr. Ruth Chen (20:34):
It's amazing because, as you describe your life journey, you can really see the key threads that, in terms of your strengths and your skills and your energy and abilities, that you've brought to the continuing professional development office. So now that you're the Associate Dean of CPD, the threads of leadership, of building up your team or building up others, of teaching and scholarship, all those threads really wove together well, in this journey of administration that you've also taken on?

Dr. Teresa Chan (21:10):
Yeah, I think so. I mean, at the end of the day sometimes when you look back on things, it seems to make sense. And I think that's the retrospective scope, we call it in the emergency department. I think it's called that in other places as well. But sometimes with those lenses, you'll see that the dots are all connected. But that's only because you walked that path, right? And there are probably a multi-verses out there where there's a different teaching out there that looks...

Dr. Ruth Chen (21:36):
Yes.

Dr. Teresa Chan (21:37):
There's a different teaching out there that looks completely different and things like that. So I do think that like the journey is how you learn. And so I think that that's the most important part. And like I said, I still make mistakes, I still am learning along the way. And I think a very wise mentor of mine recently said in a webinar to us all, John Kelton, he was saying, "If you make a mistake, and you don't learn from it, then that's a loss." And you have to parlay it, bring it really into success, right? So you have to learn from your mistakes and then you can prevent them from happening again, and that's how you grow. So, I'm paraphrasing a little bit, but that's... What we have to think about is when you climb up, you're gonna fall down, sometimes you're gonna scrape a knee or two, and you have to recalibrate and grow beyond that.

Dr. Ruth Chen (22:31):
It does seem like a common theme, in terms of your continuous learning, your growth, development and also the development of others along the way. So I will wrap up our time together with one final question about your role as the Associate Dean of the continuing professional development office. And that is, since you've taken this role on which was... Do I remember correctly in the middle of 2021? And now that we're in 2022, what would you say are some of the key highlights, new insights or really exciting learning that you've gained over the past year?

Dr. Teresa Chan (23:11):
Yeah, I mean, I think that what I've learned is that people that you didn't think could change can change. And I think that has given me a new hope that we can all learn, we can all grow. I think that we are all craving that interpersonal experience of flying to a conference and doing all the other stuff that's associated with conferencing. And I think we will go back to some of that, but I think that going forward, I think we'll have more diverse ways of being able to connect people and being able to offer opportunities for people to get into a jam with other people that are like minded or actually differently minded, to extend what they are learning, to grow themselves. And I think that's really exciting because being able to access the whole world at your fingertips is something that we have learned how to do.

Dr. Teresa Chan (24:03):
And I think that that's a very powerful thing. So I'm really excited to see where the world of CPD evolves to in the post pandemic era. I think we will need some in-person stuff, there's... You think about the core elements of what a conference does, and there's so many things that, that networking, that informal time, the random meet cutes that you have there with a collaborator that would someday become your best collaborator or your best friend, right? All these things, they can't happen in the same way on a Zoom. And so I do think that that is something that we can't replace and we'll probably need to think about how we can get back safely with public health blessing and stuff like that.

Dr. Teresa Chan (24:48):
But I think there's also affordances that, for people who can't travel, for people who can't access, I think we're gonna have different ways to be able to reach places in the world, decrease our carbon footprint and actually rejuvenate the way that people learn. So I think watch our space as we evolve. I think you'll see hopefully some really cool blended experiences, but also thinking about how we can engage in new ways to do digital learning. I think that's gonna be the exciting part for the next stage of what we do.

Dr. Ruth Chen (25:20):
Well, I'm excited hearing you share, because I look forward to seeing what the CPD office does over the coming year and recognizing that it's all built on the principle that everyone can learn. Everyone has the ability to grow and develop, and so the CPD office is there to continue and foster that growth and development in each of us. So thank you so much. I really appreciate the time we've had to talk to each other.

Dr. Teresa Chan (25:48):
All right, thank you.

Dr. Ruth Chen (25:52):
Thank you so much for tuning in to the MacPFD Spark Podcast. Just so you know, this podcast has been brought to you by the McMaster Faculty of Health Sciences, and specifically the Office of Continuing Professional Development and the program for Faculty Development. If you're interested in finding out more about what we can offer for faculty development, check out our website at www.macpfd.ca. That's www.macpfd.ca many of our events are actually web events that are free. Finally, I'd like to thank our sound engineer, Mr. Nick Hoskin, who has been an amazing asset to our team. Thanks so much Nick for all that you do. And also thank you to Scott Homes, for supplying us the music that you've been listening to. Alright, so until next time, this is MacPFD Spark signing off.