

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Hello and welcome to You Got This? A podcast about teaching and learning and sustaining community for the whole of TRU. I'm your host, Brenna Clarke Gray, coordinator of educational technologies and this podcast is a project of your friends over at Learning Technology and Innovation. We're housed within Open Learning but we support the whole campus community. I record this podcast in Tk'emplups technology Secwepemc within the unseated traditional lands of Secwepemcu'ecw, where I hope to learn and grow in community with all of you. Today I'm thinking about taking my time, which I don't get to do very often. Let's get into it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

You'll hear on the show today a conversation with Jon Fulton and Jason Toal, who I work with. It's interesting because we're working on this project right now. We're calling it the podcasting masterclass, the introductory podcasting masterclass. If I could go back in time, I would rename it, but here we are. One of the things that we are doing is... It's an asynchronous course. People can work through the material at their own pace. We're giving feed through to the end of November, but the resource will stay up and available in perpetuity. It's been really nice to move through content in a much more leisurely way than I'm able to in a typical one hour workshop. I love my one hour workshops, don't get me wrong, but one of the things I am acutely aware of is the do as I say, not as I do tone of relying on a slide deck in a virtual session so that we can move through our content, quote unquote, efficiently.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I don't want you to do that in the classroom and yet I do it in my workshops. We do a fair amount of discussion obviously, and I try to really not, quote unquote, lecture but this podcast project has been a lot more like the way I like to teach, which is give hopefully just enough context so that participants aren't or worried or scared and then ask them to go play. That's really what the podcasting masterclass is. It's a chance to play, to listen to podcasts and think about what you'd like, to test out the idea of recording your own little two minute bit of audio, and then to take that and, as I call it, dabble with distribution. Play with the idea of releasing it to the world. It's been really fun to see people actually get their hands on the tools, which we're able to do in some workshops, in meme and gif workshops, in some of our WordPress work. In the PIDP that I'm co-facilitating with Jamie Drozda, it's the same idea. Just having space to develop concepts with people.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It's got me thinking about the power of taking my time. As I talked about last week, I don't feel like I'm getting my time to do anything right now. I feel like I spend most of my week skidding in at the last minute. I'm supposed to be working on a book proposal today that is due... Real world, it was due two weeks ago, but I promised something today and I don't have it. I will on Monday, I think. That's about how it feels lately. I'm always three days behind where I'd want to be ideally. It turns out that's a crummy feeling and it turns out getting to take your time with things, especially things you love is actually kind of delicious. Who knew? Literally everybody, right? Yet we find ourselves in these spaces.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I'm thinking ahead to winter programming and I'm wondering how I can restructure the way I do things from this office to give myself and you, as participants, more time to play and less time sitting, looking at slides. That's my goal. I'd love to hear your thoughts on that incidentally. If there's any topic you'd really like to take a learning tech deep dive on, I'd love to hear about it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

As I teased, the conversation today is with Jon and Jason, two of my colleagues and two people who I really learn a lot about audio and production from. I feel like I have a fair amount of expertise on the why of scholarly podcasting and the theoretical uses of the medium, but I have a lot to learn when it comes to actual audio production. My friend, Joe, who I make my other podcast with and do literally no work towards is listening. He knows. He knows because he does all the work. Anyway, let's jump into the conversation with Jon and Jason and I guarantee you a few excellent podcast recommendations and some thoughtful thoughts about the genre of podcasting as a scholarly approach.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I have the joy of two of my lovely colleagues joining me today. Jason Toal and Jon Fulton. Guys, can you introduce yourselves and let people know what you do on campus?

Jason Toal:

Sure, Brenna. Thanks for having me. Jason Toal, ed tech coordinator with Open Learning, looking into a lot of educational media, video, audio and visuals.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Nice. And Jon.

Jon Fulton:

That was very succinct.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I know. Wasn't he good?

Jon Fulton:

Yeah, I'm Jon Fulton. I've been working for Open Learning for many years. My primary job is video producer and I basically create media that would go into our distance courses.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Nice. Also very succinct. Look at you both. You're pros.

Jon Fulton:

14 years of saying it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

The reason I invited you on the show this week is because we have been doing our introductory podcasting masterclass, which every time I say, I realize is a contradictory name, but whatever. It's a new way of offering programming for us. It's a four week asynchronous self-paced class, I guess. It's got four little assignments and then we're going to have two live sessions. We just finished our first one this week and you guys have been helping me. I just wanted to, I don't know, invite your general thoughts on how you think it's going as a way of offering programming and how you're enjoying the process of working with so many people all over the place because it's not just open to TRU.

Jon Fulton:

That is definitely one of the things I noticed right away was the amount of people that we have that aren't necessarily TRU affiliated. I think that's terrific. I really like the format. It gives people the breadth and flexibility, I think, to really find their time and space instead of having to be somewhere, getting a deadline. Inspiration for this kind of stuff happens at any time. It's good to be able to just do it on your own pace and then still have those little meetups and touchups to keep push and nudge people along.

Jason Toal:

Yeah, the flexibility. You have to appreciate people's time crunches these days. Like Jon says, being able to self direct yourself. Another thing that stands out for me too, which I've definitely thought about over the years, working in ed tech in a provincial level... People are all struggling or working with the similar types of issues. Podcasting for instance, it's not local to TRU. It's anybody who wants to get their words out there. I love, Brenna, the fact that we are highlighting the scholarly side of the medium and there were some great questions and people wanted to talk about that aspect, which really struck me as important for this course.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It's a big question. It's one I wrestle with all the time. What makes something a scholarly podcast? Yes, there are things like journals, who of people record audio versions of their papers and put them on the website. That's great for a lot of reasons. Super for accessibility. I can totally see points in my life where sitting and listening to a paper would be a lot preferable to reading. I dig all of that, but to me, it's not really a podcast in that context. It's like an audio book, but shorter, I guess. I've been thinking about what makes something a podcast. What makes something a scholarly podcast? I found the participants are really pushing me to actually be able to articulate these differences, which is mean of them. No, it's great. It's really good.

Jon Fulton:

It is. The definition of what a scholarly podcast is, is so wide and so spread out. Even the definition of what a podcast is... A lot of people, like we've talked about before, just come to us and say, I want to start a podcast. It's like, okay, what exactly does that mean to you? Yeah. You have to identify that and articulate that before you can realize it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It's that cast part that often gets lost.

Jason Toal:

Yeah. Cast.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

That notion of distributing it. Why do you want to distribute it and who do you want to distribute it to?

Jason Toal:

Exactly. In some ways that goes against the grain of traditional scholarship anyways. I think you spoke about knowledge mobilization as one of the key criteria, but I guess that's in some aspects of scholarship

when you're dealing with grants or when you're dealing with... In a lot of times it's a closed audience or it's more specific for a journal publication or something that's not going to be open.

Jon Fulton:

Yeah. I think of things like, yeah, you would put it into a journal, the people that subscribe to the journal would get it and then it sits on a shelf in a library. You can do that same thing with a podcast in terms of putting it onto your website, just having these audio bits on a website and that's your shelf. The casting part, which you identified, I think is the key to what we want to try to do.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It's a lot easier than people think, which is why I like the way we have the course structured right now in that it invites people to first actually listen to podcasts. You wouldn't write a scholarly article and submit it to a journal if you hadn't read anything that journal had published, right? Then ask them to play with recording, but then also ask them to play with the distribution. I think people can get really hung up on, I should subscribe to a service. I should sign up with a company. I should do this. I should do that. When really, the beauty of the podcast, especially in contrast with scholarly publishing and more traditional modes is that it's a pretty DIY punk kind of ecosystem.

Jon Fulton:

I don't have a lot of experience with the casting part of it necessarily. I'm definitely in the production side. That is very interesting to me. I've tried some of these services and stuff. Your journey to get stuff onto your show, onto iTunes and stuff I think is going to be really valuable.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah, because I think there's a lot of people who would like to make money off of your ventures. I think academics in particular can be pretty vulnerable here. There's a reason I use the phrase, knowledge mobilization all the time. It's because it's this key requirement for grant applications. You have to demonstrate how you're going to engage in knowledge mobilization. I think the lack of information about how to do that, how to engage with the public and this requirement to do it... That's a ripe combination for, whether it's a predatory web development company or a predatory podcast company, to just sweep in and make you feel like you have to sign up for these services. Part of what I wanted to do with this course is just help people realize that there's no part of it that's actually that hard. It's just time consuming. Editing a podcast sucks. Yeah, but it's not hard.

Jason Toal:

It sucks your time. Yeah. I hear that. The time is a barrier and also this idea of the website, because that is a core... I don't know if it's even essential. I think you could probably syndicate your podcast without a website. I don't know why you would do that, but I've had a few chats with folks and getting a website, choosing a theme, getting some graphics on there... This is an area of that TRU and LTI has the tools available through TRU box. I know that is much more difficult at my other unnamed institution. I don't know. I'm curious as to where other universities and colleges are these days with how we is it to get a website set up for free that I can then do stuff with?

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Our TRUbox toolkit is amazing.

Jason Toal:

It's astounding.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I don't always realize it because I work with it day to day. Then I was trying to help a colleague at my previous institution get her podcast off the ground. She was like, where do I host it? I was like, oh, you could just do it with WordPress. She was like, okay, I've got a wordpress.com account. I was like, no, you need a self hosted... Anyway, luckily in BC, we have access to the OpenETC so I could point her in that direction. That is also us.

Jon Fulton:

Yes. The man behind the curtain.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I want to talk a little bit about assignment number one. We sent people off to go and actually just listen to podcasts and think about what they liked. The first thing was I was super delighted that people did it. It's proof of concept for the idea of this kind of programming that people actually went out and did the assignment. That was cool. I wasn't a hundred percent sure that was going to happen. The other thing is that I really enjoyed finding out about what people are listening to and why they choose the podcasts they do and what they are then in turn trying to do with their own dabbles into podcasting. I wonder if you guys have any insights you gleaned from those listening journals?

Jason Toal:

There's definitely a community of listeners. I guess it's easier for me to think about it in terms of my own context. I tried to capture this in my journal post is my history of listening to radio, listening to music, the audio format in itself. I read a lot of similar posts in the journal. There's the history of listening and then there's this other theme or thread, which is where the listening is done. It's actually one of the forms of media where you can step away from a screen for however blessed long that may be. I'm reading one here who likes to do chores and I actually can't do that. I find I stop listening if I have it on in my ear... I'll just drift even though it's on. Of course everybody has a different mode where it works for them where they're listening is deepest. I love seeing those stories, see where are people listening and how does it get in there?

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I liked your post, Jason, about the single earbud. I have adopted that. Once I had a kiddo, it was like... I was really into true crime podcasts when my son was born, which I very quickly realized that I didn't actually want him absorbing all of that. I came to listen to a lot of podcasts lying in bed with one earbud in while he napped or I tried to sleep or whatever. That became part of like that intimacy that podcasts have in a way that other media can't really access in the same kind of way. I noticed that as a recurring theme in the journals too. Podcasting is simultaneously extremely public. You're putting it out there in the world and extremely private because it's not... I have heard of people having listening parties. I frankly can't imagine anything more awkward.

Jason Toal:

Oh, my god. Yeah.

Jon Fulton:

No. That is very interesting. That dichotomy between the intimacy of you listening to the same person and the intimacy of them sometimes sharing very personal things. Often, just talking about beer or whatever but it can get very intimate. Then also just, yeah, that public... I want to share this story with the world and speak to as many people as possible yet you're speaking to one person directly. I really like that, that kind of mirroring. The journals were terrific. It was nice to see some overlap in content. Some people were listening to the same things. I was super happy to gain some podcasts into my list. It's such a giant ocean to try to find something that you're interested in. That was one really quick little thing.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah. I agree. It's been really nice. My list has expanded and I've been checking new things out that I probably wouldn't have without a recommendation. It's so hard to tell from the pod catcher, if that's something you really want to invest time in. I do tend to think of podcasting as an investment of time now because I listen to so many of them and I'm such a completionist about it. I was impressed with one of the commenters who was like, I just stop listening when it sucks. I was like, oh I can't do that. I have to either be subscribed and hearing every episode or unsubscribe and never listen again. There is no middle ground for me.

Jon Fulton:

Can we talk for a second about how horrible the iTunes podcasting platform...

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It's so frustrating.

Jon Fulton:

Oh, my god. This is totally off, but three times yesterday I was listening to [inaudible 00:19:49] and then my phone turned off because I had to go do something else and I put it back on to listen. It had opened another podcast and I had to go and find it and it doesn't show up in the, you just listened to this and no, I had to like search it. Oh my God.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I only use the Apple podcast app because I'm some kind of, I don't know, sadist, I guess. I get so frustrated with it because I spend so much time customizing it. I found the easiest way to make it continuously play rather than stopping after each one is to set up a radio station of all of your shows and then it'll play them automatically one after the other. I have Brenna radio, but literally every six months they do some kind of update that changes the functionality in some significant way. It just drives me absolutely up the wall.

Jason Toal:

But not necessarily better.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

No, it's almost never better. While we're here, my other podcasting pet peeve is when podcasts change how they put out content. I was listening to It Could Happen Here and I had listened to all season one,

all season two. I really liked it. Season two was all about how do you prepare for disaster? I like some uplifting listening. It's a daily which is already... I listen to very few daily podcasts because that is too much, but they went to a daily format and I was really into the content so I stuck with it. Then they started releasing a digest at the end of the week with all the episodes in one long file in the same feed. I was just like, no, this is a bridge too far. I will not follow you here and I unsubscribed.

Jon Fulton:

There is a limit.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

There is a limit.

Jon Fulton:

With your life, I just can't imagine where you find the time to listen to so many podcasts.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I definitely grew up in a house where CBC was the constant background noise. I always have a podcast on in the background. If we aren't in a meeting, I'm listening... Or I'm not writing. I can't listen while I write. If I'm just doing like Moodle support tickets or fixing shelves, I have a podcast on constantly. This circles back to something Jason was saying. I definitely have two tiers of podcasts. I have the podcasts that I want to listen to and focus on and I save them for when I go for walks or when I can't sleep. Then I have the tier two podcasts that I lovingly refer to as background noise. The hosts have just become like good friends and I'm happy to have them just sit with me while I work on something. I wave in and out.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

A lot of CBC show podcasts that I listen to... Day Six falls into that category. I'll come in for a segment and then I'll fade out again, which is much the same way I would engage with it on radio. If it's more than a weekly show, it has to fall into that category or I will never catch up. I listen to Stuff You Should Know and Stuff You Missed in History Class and I've listened to those shows since 2008. I think I've heard every episode. It's wild. The number of stages of life I've been through since 2008 and this podcast has been with me. They really are. I pop them on at the beginning of the Workday and I listen. It really is like having pals, just hanging out in the office with me at home.

Jon Fulton:

At your little home office.

Jason Toal:

They have such a friendly attitude, those folks. I've forgotten their names actually right now.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Josh and Chuck.

Jason Toal:

Josh and Chuck. Yeah, I know. They were at my rotation several years ago.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I once saw them live at the Railway Club in Vancouver.

Jon Fulton:

Oh, of course.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It's funny. I said, I wouldn't go to a listening party, but I've been to several live podcast recordings and really enjoyed myself.

Jon Fulton:

I think that's different though, because of the live aspect. It does that same thing with the intimacy in a group. In a live show, you're still intimate with the performer on stage, even though they're performing to a huge group.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah, you have something to look at. I think that's the thing about listening parties that I can't get past. What are we all going to look at?

Jon Fulton:

Get the charcuterie board.

Jason Toal:

The accompanying slide deck.

Jon Fulton:

I want to talk about style for a second. That was one thing about all the recommendations and how many different styles of podcasts there are. I'm not talking about scholarly versus entertainment, but just the structure of how the material is presented and stuff. There's the one I was listening to quite a bit called Disgrace Land.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Oh yeah.

Jon Fulton:

I love that one. He's a very, very rote structured beginning that's really clever and really fun, but it's the same thing every time, in a good way, not in a, oh my God, you're doing this again. Where he talks about some other song and then he says... What's his tagline? Why would I talk about this oozy pop song when I could be talking about this? Cause I can't afford the rights to that. We're like, well, you can now. You're on Amazon. You can.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It's a good point. The segments, the beats of a podcast, they matter a lot. It's very disorienting when a show you've listened to for a long time changes up the beats or the rhythm of the show. It doesn't even



have to be big things, but just the introduction comes here and then there's a bit of music and then they move into the interview can be enough of a structural or a shape that you come to rely on as a listener. It's really quite strange. I guess it's in the absence of any visual cues, those ideas become much more important. You're both much stronger on the audio editing and the craft and art than I am. Is that kind of what's happening?

Jon Fulton:

Definitely. Those sign postings and bookmarking mentally refresh you and grab your attention again so that you're not drifting off into this just drone of voices. It's the same way with visual editing. You put the cut in to rejar the person's attention to make them refocus again and be... Wait, something changed. All of our vision and all of our brain works on detecting change. If there's no change, you drift off. Like smells, if there's a smell, if you've been around the same smell for a long time, it just goes away. Same thing with your ears and your brain. It's a psychological thing.

Jason Toal:

Detecting change and detecting patterns as well. If you were a fan of a show, there's a consistency and a repetition that you want to make you feel like this is my show and I know it's going to be 30 minutes. They're not doing a two hour special sometimes. There's no hard rules, but it's nice to stick with your... Design your pattern, design your structure, and then provide that on a regular basis so people know what they're getting.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

The hardest podcast for me are the ones that are chaotic, frankly, that have strong, chaotic energy so it's different every episode or the production schedule isn't clear. I don't think your podcast has to come out every week, but it has to be clear to your listener when they should expect the next episode. I think that it's hard for me... Possibly because I listen to so many podcasts, it's hard for me to make space for ones that are somewhat unpredictable, which maybe is a not very artful take on the medium, but it's definitely... I find myself unsubscribing from podcasts that are too unpredictable or don't establish clear rhythms over a few episodes for sure. I will say insomnia is a big reason why I listen to a lot of podcasts. That helps a lot. Last night, I discovered one that I am surprised I enjoyed. I'm about to post it in my now playing for this week, but I'll tell you about it right now. It's Seth Rogen's new podcast.

Jon Fulton:

Oh yeah. It's on my list, but I haven't listened to it yet.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah. It's called Storyteller or Storytelling. I'll have to look it up before I post, but it's a fascinating structure because it's an interview at its core. The premise is he asks one of his famous friends to tell him a good story, but he extrapolates from that interview to almost like a mini documentary format. The episode I listened to last night, it's the first episode. It's about a woman who was a devout Jehovah's witness, but questioning. She meets Paul Rudd in a movie theatre and she ends up going into comedy. That's a simple version. She had been interested in comedy before but the premise of the episode is the ripple effects of famous people being kind to their fans.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Then Seth Rogen interviews, Paul Rudd, who does not remember this exchange at all, but he starts to think about famous people who were kind to him. Then Seth Rogen goes and interviews the guy that he mentions and it's like this... In between, there's like excerpts from Jehovah's witness scripture and audio from Paul Rudd's movies. I don't know how to describe it, except it's sort of like a hybrid interview documentary form. I was surprised and delighted. I can't believe it. I was like, another famous person interview podcast, but it's genuinely good. I think it has a lot to do with the fact that, whether he or the production team or both, have really clearly thought about the structure of the show and how to make it something a little bit different than yet another famous person interviews people show.

Jon Fulton:

Oh, that's exciting. Yeah. Seth Rogen definitely knows about structure and comedic timing.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Thank you guys so much for coming and chatting with me today. I am really enjoying this way of delivering programming and I really want to do more of it. I really appreciated getting a chance to unpack it a little bit with you both today.

Jon Fulton:

No, thanks. I'm very excited for this and I can't wait to hear what the people in our sessions are going to actually come up with. Hopefully we can nudge them along so that they continue producing stuff in the future.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah. I'm hoping we can keep the Matter Most channel going as almost like a community of practice and maybe just add to it over time.

Jason Toal:

Dabbling in distribution coming up next week.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

That's true and we really do jump the difficulty level. Now we're like, record yourself, listen to yourself, put it into the world. We'll see how many people stick with us now that the difficulty level has jumped a little. All right. Thanks, you guys. We'll talk soon.

Jon Fulton:

You bet.

Jason Toal:

See ya.

Jon Fulton:

Bye.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

That is it for season two, episode seven of You Got This! As always, if you want to write to us, you can email me. I'm bgray@tru.ca. I'm also on Twitter @brennacgray. In both cases, that's Gray with an A. All of our show notes and transcripts are posted at yougotthis.trubox.ca. Of course you can always comment on individual episodes there. I'm going to leave you today with a Tiny Teaching Tip or a tiny workload suggestion. Those are really helpful. It's October and you're marking essays and some jerk who doesn't have to mark anything is like, I've got some workload suggestions for you, but I am really consciously restructuring my work life right now. As I look towards winter, there's only so much I can do with the hell that is my own making at the moment, but with an eye to winter and an eye to finding more time to take my time with the tasks that matter to me. I just want to gently offer you the suggestion as you start to look towards winter... I can hear you right now. "Brenna, I am marking midterms. Are you out of your mind?" Yes, I am. As you look towards winter, can you find spaces to take your own time, a little bit more than maybe you've had the luxury of this semester? None of us knew what fall was going to look or feel like. I hope we're all starting to settle into something of a rhythm that will take us through the rest of this academic year. At least that's what I'm hoping. Maybe you can find some space to take your time. That's what I'm going to be doing. Maybe we'll meet back here next week and talk about something else, but think about keeping space for ourselves to do the things we really care about. For me, getting to have these conversations with all of you. Until next time, take care of yourselves and each other, and we'll talk soon. Bye, bye.