

Hello and welcome to You Got This! A podcast about teaching and learning and sustaining community for everyone at Thompson Rivers University. 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'emlups te Secwepemc within the unceded traditional lands of Secwepemcú'ecw, where I hope to learn and grow in community with all of you.

Because I'm a nerd I'm thinking about authentic assessment. Yeah that's right, that's what I am sitting at home thinking about right now. Let's get into it.

Okay, so there's actually a reason I'm thinking about authentic assessment. As you'll hear on the podcast today, Jamie Drozda and I have been co-facilitating one of the PIDP courses — if you're outside of TRU lingo that's provincial instructors diploma program. It's a credential here in the province of BC that allows folks to sort of upgrade for teaching in a post-secondary context and it's offered through Vancouver Community College but here at TRU we offer a few courses in-house for instructors. CELT offers the instructional skills workshop and a course on assessment and our team occasionally gets to offer a course in technology for teaching and learning and it's a hoot. It's so much fun.

You know much like the podcast class that I talked about last week it's it's been so good. To have these sustained conversations with a group of people who are really committed to learning the content. It's so much more rewarding than one-off workshops where I only ever get to show you a tiny bit and then hope you tell me later what cool thing you came up with. Instead I get the pleasure of really working with folks and that's really been the joy of the PIDP.

One of the things that Jamie and I have implemented as you'll hear in our chat today is a portfolio for the assessment where students have a buffet of assessments to pick and they just have to kind of present them all in a portfolio. It allows them to choose things that they're most interested in but the other thing that it allows for is it encourages faculty to choose assignments that help them learn technologies they might actually use in their classroom. I know, wild idea, right? It's been really nice because rather than dictating what they spend their time on, we're able to give them quite a bit of freedom and I've been thinking about how useful the authentic piece is in finding motivation, particularly when motivation is something you're struggling with. I'm really having a hard time with anything extra these days and so my heart goes out to anybody making PD commitments. It's a lot to take on on top of — you can't see me but I'm just I'm just gesturing wildly, just, just gesturing.

All this to say I think that authentic assessment can look different for a lot of different disciplines but one place where we can always opt for the more authenticity is inviting students to reflect on their learning as a piece of our assessments. We're so fixated on content and right or wrong that sometimes we miss the opportunity to ask students what they've learned in our courses and give them space to show us. Sometimes they surprise us. One of my literature courses when I taught at Douglas, I used to regularly ask students at the end of the final exam tell me one interesting thing you learned this semester that you wish had been on the exam. A really basic kind of reflective question, right? Asking students to think back on the term unprompted and pull something interesting out. And I was always surprised at what students told me was most important to them. It was rarely what I thought was most important but it was always something that spoke directly to their lived experience and gave them an anchor point on which they could hang their semester. It's easy to lose track of how important that is, you know? All this to say, if there's a space for authentic assessment in your class consider this an invitation — even if it's just to change one of your midterm or final exam questions to offer a bit of space for reflection. You'll be surprised at what you learn, and it helps to give you a sense

of why students care about your course. Because they do. Knowing that can be really helpful in the doldrums of fall.

As I promised, I'm talking with Jamie today and when is that ever not a delight? So I'm going to let her take it from here.

Brenna: Today I am joined by my frequent collaborator Jamie Drozda. Jamie, how's it going?

Jamie: Good. How are you.

Brenna: I'm good. Would you introduce yourself to folks in case, they're new to the podcast and don't know what you do on campus.

Jamie: Sure I find it hard to believe that people wouldn't know what I do but I am Jamie Drozda. I'm a Coordinator of Educational Technologies here at TRU, and I work alongside Brenna of course. We do a lot of Moodle Support and other learning technology support and right now we're co-teaching the PIDP course, "teaching with technology."

Brenna: Yes, which is so much fun. So that's why I invited you on the show today I wanted to talk a little bit about our experience. It's been nice being in a classroom and getting to — I don't know — teach! It really feels like it's been a long time. Can you give people kind of an overview of what the class is and then maybe we'll talk a little bit about how it's going.

Jamie: Sure so the class. Well it's part of the PIDP. The provincial instructor diploma program offered through Vancouver Community College and I believe that's a required course too. So that's amazing that we get to teach that. The course has really — the way we've designed it is really going over ethical practices of using technology in the classroom, why should you use technology in the classroom, how to teach with technology, and we're drawing out different ideas from our participants on ways that they can see themselves using technology which has been amazing and amazing to hear the ideas and thoughts and our robust discussions especially on ethics. It was really quite impressive.

Brenna: Yeah, the discussions have been really robust. I don't know what I was expecting. It's it's an evening professional development course and I was I guess I was expecting people to feel about it the way I feel about PD in my evenings which which is slightly resentful but instead they just seems super engaged and willing to talk and they bring great ideas. So it's been really fun. And yeah, as Jamie says we're trying to balance off like some of the big picture stuff and like the why alongside actually getting your hands dirty and playing with the technology itself. And I don't know how you feel, Jamie, but so far I think it's been a pretty good balance. I think we're going to have to help people get rolling with their eportfolios over the next little while but it's been I think really interesting to have some of these high-level discussions alongside of like, "Okay, but how do I make a post in the first place"

Jamie: I think I think part of the the robust discussions that we're having is really part of the way we design the course content in our lectures because both of us have taken some time to put forward some thought promoting questions and then we welcome the discussion from our participants and they we are so lucky they have engaged. And I think I think it's really important because based on our readings and how we've assigned and our discussions, the participants have been able to formulate their own answers together rather than just us giving an answer — which really wouldn't work in this in this course because every and every participant is

teaching a different subject or discipline. So it's really important they come up with their own answers.

Brenna: And we really do have a range of subjects being sort of represented I think that surprised me too, that people have come from all over different parts of the university to have these conversations and it does make the conversation more robust. So I think generally having people from across the university is a big plus. But also as you said the fact that they're like coming up with their own answers to these questions because really the PIDP this provincial instructor diploma program It's designed to help people with their postsecondary teaching. So it's like it's really important that people who are part of the class are finding their own answers that fit with their own teaching style already right? Otherwise they're just going to walk away from whatever we teach and be like. Well never mind that didn't have anything to do with me, right?

Jamie: Yeah, exactly Yeah, if they can't relate it back to their own practice and how to move their own practice forward with technology. They probably just won't use the technology after the course.

Brenna: This is the thing and you know it actually ties into the assessment structure, which is something I wanted to talk about today because I think it's something I would love to see in more classes. It's something I've come across in a few PD scenarios and I've heard of different instructors doing it but depending on your course. You know I think I think it has broader application — I guess is what I'm saying — and that is that our participants are putting together a portfolio and we've basically kind of given them a buffet of assignment options and we've given them all like a points value based on what we think the relative difficulty level is and they just have to do enough of those projects to total I think it's 60 points or whatever. It's sort of arbitrary, but it means that like you could have somebody who does a whole bunch of little tiny assignments. You could have someone who focuses all their attention on one or 2 big projects for the term. But for us it was really important that they pick technologies that they actually thought they could use in their own classrooms right? And I kind of think we're getting there with it. It's early days for the projects.

Jamie: I think we are, too. I think. I've had some feedback throughout the sessions where where the participants are going, “Well I can't really see using this,” or “why would I use this,” or “why would I want to use this.” And I think the way we've set it up, where you know some of the smaller tasks or — I guess they're not smaller, they're worth points — is to reflect on the topics we've covered in the lectures and I think that's really important because should we ever find ourselves in the situation where we have to pivot again, then people who can't see themselves using technology in the future once Covid is over will have the tool set and be able to remember what they reflected on for that next time it happens. If it ever happens again. Which I'm hoping it doesn't. But it could, and having that tool set to to make decisions in the moment like that again is really important.

Brenna: Well, and just having the time and space to think through your pedagogy like that's a hard thing to do. It's a hard thing to find the time to really focus and just say like what do I care about in my teaching, what do I not, and in the case of our course how does technology fit in, where does it fit in, where do I not like it. And like having the chance to play around with enough different tools that maybe you will find something that you do like right? Like maybe Moodle wasn't for you. That's okay, there's lots of people Moodle's not for.

Jamie: And you know we're having participants build portfolios in Wordpress and maybe Wordpress isn't for them and that's also okay, but having an experience to these different tools... You know, generally, we're not builders of the systems. We don't build Moodle. We

don't build Wordpress. We're going to introduce to them H5P. Well, we didn't build H5P. We're users of the systems. And once you know how to use a few systems, a few softwares, you can carry that forward really easily to learn other softwares, and when they come across something that is for them and is super useful, they can move forward with it easier. The learning curve will be less steep.

Brenna: Yes, and I think I think the thing I really hope for for our participants at the end of this course is comfort. Like, just enough comfort with enough different technologies that they don't feel intimidated or alienated from or anxious about using technology, that they know that they can just get in the same way you and I do when we're confronted with something we've never used before: we just mess around with it right? And like it's so hard in professional practice and in the kind of education system we have where everyone is so overworked. You know, many of our participants are sessional instructors, many of our participants are instructors on the side of doing other things. It's like. Just having the time to mess around and gain confidence is so valuable and it's something that is often — it's just hard. It's hard to get that time and that freedom.

Jamie: It is, and I think — I mean of course you know I think teaching with technology is great. It's what we do. I think it allows us to engage ourselves or students or participants or whomever the learner is with multiple representations of the same information, which I think is what we're trying to get across with our assessments in this course, by giving our participants many ways to engage with the content and to engage with their own course content.

Brenna: Well, that's the key thing right? One thing we keep trying to, I don't know, hammer home, I guess, with the assignment structure is that we want folks to build things for their own courses. So. Don't just build a random H5P exercise for the sake of doing it. Take one step further and think like okay, but if I had to use this in my class, how would I structure this multiple choice quiz in H5P in a way that would actually do something useful for my students and then, oh check it out, you've got a little artifact that you can actually use again, which I hope is the case for the majority of stuff folks are building in this course.

Jamie: Yes. I think — I hope so. I hope participants in our course are really going to figure out or understand that it's not what the technology can do for them. It's what they can do with the technology. So if they can figure out how to use the technologies where we're gonna we're offering, then they can figure out what they might want to do with it. I think if they can find a tool that they can use easily, it will help them support their goals or their goals with their students. Whatever their learning needs are.

Brenna: One of the things I like about this course is that it — well, first of all, everybody is there because they really want to be, which has not always been my teaching experience, Jamie. I've taught a lot of courses where literally nobody wanted to be there but everybody had to be. And so you know we're doing it online in the evenings, people are joining us because they really want to and when they can't make it because there's something else going on, that's totally fine too. So you know the PD feel of things is really nice. I think it gives us a kind of a motivated but relaxed atmosphere, I would say, but the other thing is that you know you and I spent a lot of time talking to people about authentic assignments and learning in the open and moving out of Moodle and this course is giving us the chance to kind of test drive a lot of things we talk about, which is fun and I think our participants are willing Guinea pigs. I'm not sure, we really give them a choice but you know, ah.

Jamie: Well, we didn't we didn't give them a choice but no one — I will say, based on the engagement of our participants even in our drop in sessions, they're super engaged so they're not mad at us.

Brenna: they don't seem to be so far. I'm looking forward to tonight because we're going to start talking about teaching philosophies, and I find the teaching philosophy one of the hardest genres I guess to write in because you have to simultaneously be like really aspirational and philosophical and also super concrete, because nobody wants to read a teaching philosophy that's just all about the things you coulda, woulda, shoulda done. You have to actually, like, tie your philosophy to things you've done in the classroom, and it's really hard to do. And then we're adding this additional layer onto it which is, fold technology into this somehow! Like, talk about how different tools or different technologies you've engaged with help to facilitate your teaching philosophy, which is a pretty big task. Like, that's a hard thing to do. But at the same time if we can all do that, I think it helps make the technology, I guess, a much more intuitive part of our practice right? Because we know why we're doing it. We're not just trying to use something because we went to a workshop one time and it looked fun. We have some sense of how it's, I don't know, an authentic part of our teaching, an authentic part of our experience if that makes sense.

Jamie: It does make sense and I think the timing for this is right. We're all coming back face to face, many of the classes are now face to face at TRU, or they're blended or hybrid. There's a real mix of what's going on right now. So coming off of a year of teaching with technology even though many folks didn't have a clue at the beginning of what they were gonna do even — they they literally had to take their face-to-face course and twist it online in a matter of what was it a week, 2 weeks, to finish off the semester. A week I think I think it was a week.

Brenna: Yeah a week, I think. My gosh.

Jamie: Coming off of all of that and knowing how you've already used technology and how it did help over the course of a year, I think the timing is right for weaving technology into your teaching philosophy. If we had asked them to do this two years ago, if we were teaching this iteration of the course, I'm not sure that that would have been a really great thing to ask of our participants.

Brenna: No, you're right because you need a certain amount of familiarity with it before you can think in that way, and I mean if nothing else that's one thing the pandemic gave to everyone. Which is, whether you loved it or hated it, a lot of hands on time with technology, which I guess is — I mean it's why you and I made the conscious choice to move this course all the way out of Moodle right?

Jamie: Well I think our participants became somewhat experts in Moodle already so reteaching Moodle —yes, they may have learned a few handy tips and tricks. But I'm not sure it would have been enough to warrant a course.

Brenna: I agree completely. I think two years ago we would have felt a certain amount of requirement to work within Moodle because I think there would have been an expectation from participants that they would leave with a certain amount of facility in Moodle, whereas now they kind of already have that. And I've never been quite so conscious as I have in the last I guess twenty months about how strongly the learning management system that you choose shapes the choices that you make as an instructor right? Like it's for better or for worse you know, and I don't — actually, I used to be really down on the LMS and I am not anymore. Moodle saved our butts last year; we could not have survived without it. But it it really changes, shapes, dictates some things you do structurally in the classroom and. It's been nice to show this small group of participant what life can look like on the other side of that wall. You know, even if they don't want to go fully open with their own teaching anytime soon, just giving them

a chance to dabble with it has been really rewarding I think. And I I kind of think some of our participants are like, really enjoying customizing their Wordpress portfolios.

Jamie: I think so. I know so! I spent a fair bit of time Monday helping customize some portfolios and it was fun. I really enjoyed myself.

Brenna: It is fun. It's such a rabbit hole thing. I can spend so long — I was talking with one participant on Monday, we've been having our office hours on Monday, and I was talking to one participant about Unsplash, which is — I'll link to it in the show notes if you're not familiar with it. It's just a site where you can get freely usable images. We use Unsplash a lot around here and, like, how much time I can burn looking for the exact right image. Like we were having this conversation about sometimes it's good enough. Like sometimes there's an image that is just good enough and you don't need to keep searching for the absolute perfect image. But you know sometimes that is really fun and the creative side of things I think a lot of our participants are surprised and delighted by. I don't think they necessarily thought they'd get to get really creative signing up for a technology and learning course.

Jamie: I think within our drop-ins too, for me the most exciting part is that people are coming in. Participants are coming into our Monday drop-ins and they've come so far with their portfolio or their assignment or technology they're using and and we're there to take them to the next step to help them learn more and and I think it's for me, it's quite rewarding, I find. And I find I spend a lot of time I usually go over time actually, but just because you know you're helping move someone forward with their learning of the technologies at hand and they have really good ideas and strong ways they want to use the technology and they just need the little boost to move them forward.

Brenna: Yeah I will say one thing for all of our participants. They all have really strong senses of how the tools should work for them which is really nice. Like, I actually think that's the first step in becoming comfortable with technology is kind of having an end goal in mind. And sometimes that's frustrating because the gap between what you can do and what you want to do or the gap between what you want to do and what the technology actually does. It can sometimes be frustrating, but it's also really motivating and I'm seeing that in drop-ins the sense of like okay it looks like this but I want it to look like that. How do I get there.

Jamie: And that's a hard one too because sometimes you are confined by the technology and you can't get it to go there and sometimes you just have to accept what is, and I have a hard time with that.

Brenna: It's very zen in its own way, you know. Like you just sometimes have to roll with what you can do. The nice thing with moving into a space like Wordpress is that what you can do is just so much broader, and it is fun to see our participants exploring that aspect of things so far. I'm really eager to see their finished portfolios. Like, I'm not trying to wish away the last five weeks of class or anything but part of me just can't wait to get there to their presentations at the end of term and seeing what they've done.

Jamie: I agree, I'm excited to see.

Brenna: Well, Jamie I'm going to see you in a couple hours to do this class. So maybe we'll leave it there I'm so glad you came on today to have this conversation with me I'm hoping a that we get to teach this course again in the future but—

Jamie: All right. Ah, me too.

Brenna: We can use the assessment structure and the course design of this class in our workshops. Like I'm hoping we can show people that these kinds of portfolio-based kind of competency assignments, it's a really good way to let students decide what's most important to them and and give them the space to focus there. And I know that that doesn't work in every discipline but I think where it does it can be a really empowering experience for learners.

Jamie: I absolutely agree with you on that one, and while you were talking it made me think of our Life Beyond Moodle course, which is full of alternate and authentic assignments and I think we can really take what we've done in the PIDP course and blend the two together and then it would hit more disciplines, more context. Because you're right, giving students choice and giving students choice in my mind allows students to bring their learning and their takeaways forward and it it's really empowering.

Brenna: It's also like just on a nuts and bolts level. It's also like a lot more resilient to crisis. You know what? I mean like if your students just have to hand in these five artifacts at some time over the term and they can choose what they focus on then it doesn't matter so much if you have to miss a class because of illness or because of forest fires or because of snowstorms right? like well seriously the more I know but I mean if there's one thing the last year has taught us. It's that we have to think of more resilient ways.

Jamie: You're traumatizing me from the last year but—

Brenna: Like, well, seriously, the more I know — but I mean if there's one thing the last year has taught us, it's that we have to think of more resilient ways to approach teaching and it surprises me to recognize just how much offering students more choice gives them more resilience. You know, like, I think about our participants who are all balancing really busy professional and personal lives on top of taking this course and it's like — if they know that they want to put an H5P object in their portfolio then they know they can't miss that class and they know it. They have that information, they can make their choices accordingly. And likewise if we're covering a technology that they're not that interested in exploring the same thing, you know, and I just find the older I get the more I realize that we can just relinquish a lot of control and everything goes a lot smoother.

Jamie: I think so. I think I think by offering students choice, too, you're tapping into their creative side. You're gonna get — I was just helping a faculty member with a gamification assignment and I received an email and she said I am enjoying marking these assignments so much and the reason why is because she didn't get kind of boiler plate templated reflection or you know when when it's an assignment that everyone is handed and there's no room for creativity.

Brenna: It's such a joy. When I used to teach academic writing there's this main assignment you have to teach in academic writing the summary — you have to teach students how to summarize an article. And you know it's an important skill and they got to do it. But here's the thing with marking summaries. They are either boring or wrong. Those are the only two options because they've either restated everything in the article: boring but correct. Or they've gone on some kind of wild tangent, which is not the job of a summary right? And so there are obviously places in our teaching where those kinds of assignments are necessary when we need to make sure students have a very particular skill but the rest of the time. Let's try to avoid things that can only be boring or wrong. That's my new teaching philosophy. It's very short, but that's what I'm going with.

Jamie: Ah, boring or wrong. Okay, that's what we're going with?

Brenna: Ah, thanks for this, Jamie. Take care. We'll talk soon.

Jamie: Okay. Bye.

So that is it for Season 2, Episode 8 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. And 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.

And it's kind of cheating because I already gave it to you off the top, but I'm going to challenge you to find a space for some piece of authentic assessment in your course. So maybe that's asking students to make a video of them performing a skill you need them to do. Maybe it's teaching a concept to someone else in the course in pairs; that can be a way of accessing, authentic assessment right? Challenging us to teach is always a great way to learn. Or maybe it's just about a little bit of reflective practice encouraging students to tell you what they have learned in the course or maybe what they would still like to learn. These are all ways of connecting the learning experience to our authentic lived experience, which is always powerful for content retention. That's not the only reason to do authentic assessment by the way and I think you all know that. But content retention sounds like pretty good at the end of October, doesn't it? Well, you can't tell me it doesn't.

Until next time I'm going to be actually marking! Kind of, not really. Recording grades. Our participants did self-evaluations this week so I need to read them and record their grades. But that's what I'll be doing but I'll do it authentically. Oh I'm losing the plot anyway, until next time take care of yourselves. We'll talk soon. Bye bye.