

Brenna Clarke Gray:

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. And this week, what a week, hey? I'm thinking about the news of the last week. I'm thinking about practices of gratitude. And I'm thinking about how we model that in our ever changing classrooms. Let's get into it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Well, if we ever wondered if the rest of the year was going to go easy on us, I guess we have our answer now. For those of you who are stranded in the lower mainland or who have friends and family impacted by the flooding, my heart is with you. It's been a difficult week to do anything. A friend of mine said this week that academia feels right now like fiddling while Rome burns and yikes, it does. It really does, Rome or an RV dealership, I guess. I'm thinking about the fact that there's never been a greater advertisement for resilient pedagogies than the kind of year, two years, I guess, we've been through. Our classrooms are disrupted all the time, and when we decide what the university's going to look like after, are we really going to go back to attendance marks and bums in seats and staring at a PowerPoint slide? Does that even make sense in a world where classes are canceled because of forest fires and mudslides and pandemics? Does it make sense to all have to be all in the same room all the time when all we've seen for the last two years are reasons why that's just not always possible?

Brenna Clarke Gray:

The social and emotional component of learning is so important, and so too is being aware of reality. Sometimes I think that in our desire to give students the best possible experience this year, we ran headlong back into the classroom. And I don't know, time will tell if that was right or not. I'm tired though. Are you tired? We fielded a lot of questions this week, watching folks pivot content back online for students who were stuck or who were impacted. And I just was really struck as always by the sense of gratitude I have to work with all of you. This is a campus full of teaching professionals who care very deeply about their students and their students' wellbeing. And it's a pleasure to know all of you.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I guess I'm also thinking about gratitude because it's American Thanksgiving next week, and so my Instagram feed is already full of celebrities with platitudes of gratitude and then ads for Black Friday sales, equally important of course. The practice of gratitude as a scholarly practice is something I was ever exposed to in my undergraduate career. I thought of citation practice as a hoop to jump through so I didn't get dinged for cheating. I didn't really think of it as a way of demonstrating my gratitude for where my ideas came from, but I increasingly see that as the power and the beauty of citation practice. In my own work, I'm trying to increasingly be more transparent about my thinking to show who I owe a debt of gratitude to. It's not usually just the people who end up cited, and it's not always works that are directly relevant that help to get you to the question you're answering.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I don't know why these thoughts are all jumbled up in my head together this week, except that I guess the regular ways of doing things don't seem to be working for us in a myriad of different ways. And I

keep coming back to a practice of gratitude, true gratitude, community building gratitude, not please stop complaining about your workload gratitude webinar, but real honest gratitude. I wonder if it's a way forward, out, and through from this movement and if we can teach students to live within the academy differently than the way we were taught. Something that strikes me when I take the time to think about it is that I didn't see the first citation on a PowerPoint slide until I was in my Master's degree. I never saw a single undergraduate instructor cite their sources on a slide. I look back at it now, and I think that's really, really weird. Making overt the practice of gratitude, having ethical citation practices, these are things that help to change the kind of academy that we model for students. And maybe it offers us a different kind of way to imagine being in this space that seems so untenable right now.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

These observations are scattered, but they're really shaped by my conversation today with Tenessa Gagnon from the Knowledge Makers Program. Tenessa describes the kind of university that I want us all to get to live inside, and I'm glad she's found it. An editorial note, Tenessa joined me from the All My Relations space in the old library building on campus and it's a lively space. You can hear a joyful conversation going on in the other room and you can hear how full of life that space is. To a certain extent I can edit around those kinds of things, but I'm really grateful to hear that this week and to think about the university we exist within and what spaces there are for joy. I'm going to let Tenessa tell you all about it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Today on the show, I am so excited to invite Tenessa, who works with the Knowledge Maker Program here at TRU to come and chat. Tenessa, would you introduce yourself to our listeners and also let them know where maybe they might have seen you around campus?

Tenessa Gagnon:

Yeah, of course. [Tenessa introduces herself her her language, following in English with:] Hi everybody. Good afternoon. My name is Tenessa Gagnon. I am a research assistant for All My Relations, the office space on the second floor of the old library. And we are the publishers of the Knowledge Makers Journal, an academic journal that we've been putting on for the last, this will be our seventh volume, so 7 years. And yeah, it's a research opportunity as well as a scholarship opportunity. Our publishers have gone on to be RAs, researchers, Master's students, PhD students, and we still have a contact with a lot of them, so we also use them as resources for new students coming into the program.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Ah, that's fantastic. I've been reading up on the website and learning a bit about the research circles and the journal. Can you tell us a little bit about the kinds of things that get published in Knowledge Makers?

Tenessa Gagnon:

Yeah, of course. We have a wide range of what gets published in it. We don't have restrictions to what discipline you're in as long as you are an indigenous student, and then an indigenous subject is about our only restrictions is that you do write about that. But other than that, we've had artists, we've had teaching students, we've had math students. And when they start the program, it's a learning opportunity to figure out how to encompass indigenous studies, as well as whatever field you're in, so that can look like a lot of different things. One of our alumni did statistics. She was a math student, and

how many indigenous students were a part of the program and at TRU? We've had artist students create, they're called zines. So it's almost like a magazine or a small graphic novel.

Tenessa Gagnon:

We've had teaching students. We've had nursing students and each one of them turns their own spin on their story, so it could either be about self identifying or researching more into your Aboriginal ancestry and what that means for you. Or if you do have confidence and you want to write about that or even share your story, it's been that. Or if you don't want to include yourself, and if you want to just talk about what you're passionate about. Every journal entry and publication has been a different journey for each student. And so we are very fortunate to help them through that journey and give them the best sources and resources that they can have to create whatever they want it to be.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Oh, well, I'm hearing as you're describing a fantastic mentorship opportunity for any young scholar or student who's looking to expand what they do and talk to the world about it. It sounds to me like a big part of your role is helping to mentor students through that process.

Tenessa Gagnon:

Yeah, it is. I've been fortunate enough. I am alumni with the program and when I first started, I had no idea what research could look like, especially as an artist. It was a journey to figure it out and what it meant for me. I was fortunate enough to have support with the original creator of Knowledge Makers, Sereana Naepi. Unfortunately, she has gone back to New Zealand, but we still have her support from across the ocean. It was a step by step process helping me find resources, supporting me. We all have a bit of a breakdown when we're going through it. There's usually a lot of crying, which is not uncommon in undergrads. Nice to have the support. And if you don't know what you're doing, or if you're caught up in space or you need that extra power, it's been a domino effect.

Tenessa Gagnon:

So it started with Sereana, Dr. Rod McCormick, Dr. Airini, who has now gone to Saskatchewan. After these people put their imprint on it, we still have RAs here and available that have gone through the program, have continued to be alumnus with it and republish, and because of their knowledge and the support that they got from previous scholars, they can go on and help the students that are in the program now. So as well as myself, we also have another alumni RA, Tia Stanley. She works in social work and I forget the exact company, but she's Métis, so she focuses primarily on that. And that was what her research was about. But even then she started off as a student. She's working full time in social work, but still continues to help support students that are coming in as new publishers. And there's been a lot of overlap with teachers or other social workers that come into the program.

Tenessa Gagnon:

And because she created a starting point in that department, we can send them to her and she helps support them. So not only is a great learning opportunity, it creates jobs and it also creates connections from one generation to the next, I suppose. There's not much of an age gap between the two of us. And she'd be a little upset to know how old I'm making her sound. She's not. But it's nice. We have continuous connections. If there's even something that I don't know about, I can still reach out to Sereana and what would be the best option. Because even though I do have experience now, it's still

nice to have even greater experience, students that come in and create that space for themselves, they have now created a starting point for students to come after them.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It's really a phenomenal program. I was reading on the website. You guys have the outcomes listed and the kinds of accomplishments of alumni. I'm going to read the list because I think it's amazing. So among the Knowledge Makers alumni, you have two national scholarship winners, a SSHRC research grant holder, 15 research assistants, six graduate research scholarships, four have continued on to Master's program, one to an international internship, two post-baccalaureate studies, one awarded an undergraduate research grant and two presented at an international conference in 2018. To think about that wealth of success and accomplishment and the fact that it takes so different forms, you can see how an individual student's path might be completely different from another, but that they've been influenced by being part of this process.

Tenessa Gagnon:

It's been nice. Just to put in a side bit too, we are also the winners of the Alan Blizzard Award. One of our elders actually went to Manitoba to receive it on behalf of the department. It is. It's an amazing program. And even though it's a research opportunity and it teaches students how to go through the academic process. We try to personalize it as well. So part of the program is a two day workshop. Unfortunately with COVID it was online, but this year we actually have the opportunity to have it in person. But over that two day period, we have breakfast together. We have lunch together. We have sharing circle together. So not only are we supporting the students academically, but we're keeping true to our roots. Not only is it an academic journey, but a spiritual and emotional journey.

Tenessa Gagnon:

And that may take different forms for other people. We still give space to create what that could be for somebody or to give them the opportunity to figure out what it means to them. When I first started Knowledge Makers, I didn't realize how much my indigenous identity could incorporate into my studies or what that could even look like. It gave me a space on campus to explore that, safe spaces to ask questions. After publishing in the journal and going through that process for myself, I realized the better benefits that it could continue on for other students. Yeah, it's not only just a great academic resource, a scholarship opportunity, it's a starting point for a lot of students to reconnect, to have resources, to find that connection. Even though it is such a great academic source, we take pride in making it more than that.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Well, I can hear that pride you feel and how deeply you are connected with this program and how much you care about it. I mean, I think it's marvellous. The institution talks a lot about making space for different ways of knowing and in particular for indigenous ways of knowing and supporting that work, but I don't think I was aware until I spoke to you today just how critical that space clearly is. And I hear you talk about what it meant to you to have access to a program like this. I feel terrible that I've made you all emotional, but also I'm so grateful to hear how significant it is. I think it's really important for everyone at the institution to understand the value of these kinds of spaces for students to be able to do their best work and understand themselves on a deeper level. I think it's wonderful.

Tenessa Gagnon:

It's nice at least for me personally, because it gave me a better understanding of other indigenous students here at TRU and here on campus. It connected me with friends and people that I still talk to to this day from my first year. When I first started at TRU, I did not know a lot of people. I didn't have a lot of connections. I had one family member that came. I'm actually not from this reserve, so the only connection I really did have was my family. And again, I'm sorry, I cry at everything. You don't realize how much that affects you until you start exploring it and finding out about other's stories.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Well, you're making really clear the, something that we know from the "research" in education is that students do better, they are mentally healthier, they are more successful, they are happier when they have a cohort of people to work through their courses with. We know that students who struggle tend to be students who feel like they're on the periphery, or they feel like they attend a handful of classes, but they don't see the connections between them. They aren't making bonds with people. And so it seems to me that what you're describing is an incredibly successful cohort model for indigenous students to come together and feel community and feel support and feel a connection to the institution that might be difficult to achieve otherwise.

Tenessa Gagnon:

I was a fine arts student and I was primarily in that department. And there is a sense of community with everything that you are a part of and the connection and everything else. But there is something that sitting down with somebody, having circle, sharing a meal together, it opens up an opportunity for vulnerability, open discussion, and things that necessarily wouldn't come up or be discussed as heavily in other circles or sources. My year, I was actually able to connect with another student, Geraldine Jules, if she doesn't mind me saying her name, a student I had no idea was indigenous until we met through the program. And to this day, we still talk or chit chat or we share resources of famous indigenous artists that just make us smile. And it started a friendship that, we were in the same department, but it was nice to have something in common that was equally important to both of us.

Tenessa Gagnon:

And sometime those conversations it's, you just need somebody that understands. Something that's very valuable about this space is there's so many people that you can have those discussions with that you, even if you aren't on your reserve, you have resources, you have family. I've had creative sources of how to get information and the Fine Arts department is amazing for that. But to incorporate it in such a way where it's part of our lifestyles is, it was life changing for me. And I see how it affects other students and what it does for them. And it's an amazing process because it's not only just verbal discussion, but it's emotional and it's therapeutic because even though I do cry at everything and Sandra, again, will point this out and so will I. I make jokes about it all the time, but there's something healing about it and to be able to get that out. And it's a beautiful combination of academic seriousness, learning how to exist in these spaces, all while still being able to be true to your lifestyle and who you are.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

One of the things that I noted as I was reviewing the materials about Knowledge Makers for today and listening to you speak now, something that I often complain about within the university and I don't mean the university as in TRU, I mean the structure of the university, is that we make very little space for the affective experience of what we're going through for the emotional experience of what we're

going through. And it is such an emotional journey. I was just talking to someone about putting together my tenure portfolio and that's very scary. Am I allowed to talk about the affective experience of how scared I am, for example? And one of the things that I really remarked on, particularly I was reading about the celebratory dinners that come at the end of this process each year and this making space for the emotional part of the journey, the emotional part of the work that you're doing, but also, I was reading about the opportunity that each person in the program has to talk about the people who influence them, their community, their family, how those pieces fit in with the journey. It's just something so humane and also deeply radical for the university structure to make space for that kind of thinking and knowing.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

And increasingly, we're hearing people talk about ethical citational practice, so not just citing the sources you quote from, but trying to think through, who did you learn from? How did this knowledge come into being? And this is just a really clear, to me it's a really clear demonstration, honest and open and clear demonstration of how important that is to the student moving through the program. But I think it goes far beyond an individual student as well.

Tenessa Gagnon:

Oh no, it most definitely does. And something we prioritize is incorporating people's families or having even children present after the workshop and after they've gone through the publish. That's another thing I've learned throughout the years is nobody tells you the mental struggle or what you go through emotionally when going through academia, and even the pressures of finals, the pressures of getting a Master's thesis and Master's of tenure, it's on paper, you have a to do list and it's manageable sometimes. As I've experienced, when you're going through that personally, it can feel like the end of the world. Or even when I was doing my year I would panic email Sereana or the other coordinators, or just you'd get to a wall and you'd almost feel like you'd want to quit. And that struggle of it is never really, well, I shouldn't say it's never brought up or talked about, but you don't realize how crippling it is until you experience it.

Tenessa Gagnon:

But something that we prioritize is having that support, or even with young families who can't find babysitting and the stress of that, they bring their families. We welcome them and make them a part of it. And then afterwards, when the publications have gone through all their steps and we have the papers in, we actually throw a celebration dinner, and we ask that they... Well, number is restricted now because of COVID. But before we would ask them to bring their families and like traditional practice when hunting, they're asked to give their first journal out. It's a process of respect where you get that knowledge from. We prioritize encompassing family members, children, because traditionally indigenous teachings is verbally passed on. It's things that we all know because it's part of our lifestyles. And even when we're resourcing, if you have an elder or a grandmother or someone in your family, that is completely a valid source, and we help students incorporate that. It's academic and lifestyle incorporated. We take value in all kinds of knowledge and what that looks like. And we value when it's brought forward, because we understand. We understand the vulnerability of the people bringing that information forward, and it's beautiful to watch. And it's treasured.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I'm so grateful for your vulnerability here today. I'm in awe of it. I think that we can often have a very intellectual sense of what it means to make space, but to hear the value of the practices of Knowledge Makers in your life as both a participant and an alumni and now someone who is in that mentorship role yourself, I think that that's a really profound knowing and understanding of the value of the work that you guys are doing. And I'm just really, I'm really grateful for your willingness to share it with me today and to talk about it. The listenership of the show is I think mostly faculty and staff at TRU. I wonder if there's anything you would want faculty to know about the Knowledge Makers Program or about how they might connect students with finding out more about this resource. Or if you could sit down with somebody who's got 300 undergraduates, is there something you'd want them to know about Knowledge Makers in particular or All My Relations in general, if you want to speak more generally?

Tenessa Gagnon:

Well, All My Relations in general, I would just like to say, if you have indigenous students, whether they want a scholarship opportunity, or if they need mentorship, or even just a place to smudge, we are an open resource for all of these things. We have other faculty that have other resources. We're fortunate enough to share space with the Aboriginal Education. So if there's questions or resources that even we can't get, there's other people to lean onto. And with Knowledge Makers, we have no restrictions for what kind of indigenous you are, whether that be status Métis, or even if you want to look into what your identity is, and you don't have resources to talk to or people or an idea where to start, Knowledge Makers is a scholarship, is a workshop, is so many things, but it's even just an opportunity for people to have a connection or somewhere to sit and talk and chat and have tea.

Tenessa Gagnon:

If you want to get to know the elders on campus, we constantly have them going in and out of here, just talking to students. Ironically enough, we have one of our Métis elders, Marie Sandy, or Auntie Sandy, just outside my office. They're actually putting on a Métis event. And even if you send them here to learn about Knowledge Makers and just figure out what this resource could be, it's a shameless plug, but it is a thousand dollar scholarship opportunity that you can spend the money on what you need it to be, whether that be your research, whether that be rent. We understand how difficult it can be financially for students, so a resource, a place of understanding, somewhere to smudge. If you have Aboriginal students or even somebody that wants to learn about it, send them our way. We love talking. We love having students in our study space.

Tenessa Gagnon:

We have open chairs and quiet rooms. We have elder rooms. We have board rooms for students that want to have a quiet place to study. I take full advantage of it as a student and as a faculty member, because my first year, when I first started, I know the chatterbox that I am now, it's unbelievable, but I was scared to talk to people. I was unsure of where to go or even what we had available, but being in this space and being just present. Me and Sandra make joke, but you get voluntold a lot. I started hanging out because I knew one of the faculty members when I first started, and then I would hang out in that space. Ironically enough, I didn't even know about the scholarship opportunity from that, but actually from one of my teachers, Donald Lawrence, who is also an amazing art researcher. And if you ever see any of his pieces or any of his works, I encourage you to go see it. He is an incredibly educated man. And he is one of my favourite people. I still pick his brain when it comes to research and he started this journey for me. He actually was able to, he just handed me a Knowledge Makers Journal. I think it

was the first volume. One of our graduates from our Fine Arts program completed the project. And then we did it the first year and helped design, Levi Glass was actually the designer of our symbol. It's a pine needle basket, and it starts in the centre, and as it expands, you see the thread weaving in and out and you can see the thread coming off of it as well. It's an unfinished basket, but you can see the thread coming off of it as well as the cedar, or not cedar, sorry, the pine needles.

Tenessa Gagnon:

And it's a continuous story written. I wish I had his artist statement available, but even then it's, I found out from it and it started this domino effect weirdly enough, into a whole career that I had no idea I even had an interest in. You hang out long enough and you get thrown into these, well, I shouldn't say thrown into these things, but I accidentally stumbled on something and it started this whole process. It made me realize what I wanted to do with my studies, what I wanted to continue on into my Master's. And I wouldn't have even started it if it wasn't for Don, if it wasn't for my aunt, if it wasn't for All My Relations and Sereana. And now I have opportunity. I have interests in what I want to accomplish in my scholarly journey.

Tenessa Gagnon:

And the best thing I think about is fresh first years coming into the program. The scariest question you can get asked is, what do you want to do after you graduate? And that was the first question I got asked. Horrifying. But by just being around people that were supportive and like-minded, and I could have safe conversations, it started this domino effect into a scholarship opportunity, into a job opportunity. And now I want to go on to my Master's and my PhD. I think about other first years coming through the program and what they can turn into, what our teachers did for me, what the support did for me. And I only hope that I can mirror that and hopefully do that for future students.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Tenessa, something you're really highlighting for me is the importance of faculty taking the time to help students find and make those connections.

Tenessa Gagnon:

Yes.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

The fact that Don put that journal in your hand was really important. And I think that sometimes it's so easy to forget that piece because there is so much to mark and there are so many people and there are so many deadlines and we are so overworked, but that deeply necessary human connection that helps a student feel a sense of belonging, I mean, you've just given us the most perfect articulation of why that is such a critical part of what we all do here.

Tenessa Gagnon:

It's not something that I realized that I needed until later on into my Bachelor's. When I first started at TRU, I had the hardest time focusing. And my mom says I have a very creative brain and how I think about things and how I process things or even just visuals. I've quickly learned that the best way that I learn is with hands on experience, and not all people learn like this, but to have a step by step process, to have somebody to show me what to do and then for me to do it myself. I struggled with writing and even papers when I first started, and now 5,000 words doesn't seem intimidating to me. I enjoy that. I

talk too much and I need more words to complete my thoughts. And I didn't realize the effect that, I shouldn't even say a positive teaching method, but a different teaching method would help me excel in such a way.

Tenessa Gagnon:

And I didn't even know the difference or that it could change or what it could change. And when I started this process, it was so different than any class that I had taken before, or any opportunity that I participated in before. It was exactly the teaching style that I needed. And the process helped me understand what it was for me. And something just clicked. And I was like, "Oh, so this is why I've been so bad at this." It did. It was an opportunity for me to better understand how I learned the best and what I needed from my teachers and my support. And it wasn't figured out overnight either. It was trial and error and honestly, a lot of my family pushing me to finish. See, that's another fun part. They tell your family about it, so they keep asking and then it keeps you on pressure and then you get it done.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Love that.

Tenessa Gagnon:

It does. It's like nothing I've ever participated in before. And I think that's why I get so passionate about it is I saw the successfulness of how this teaching method and style, I just, it just clicked with me. And even now, too, I want to get my Master's and I want to focus on indigenous studies and indigenous art history, but I have the hope to be a teacher because I realized what I needed and unfortunately, sometimes I wouldn't always get, but it gave me the drive to be a teacher and create those learning experiences and opportunities and styles for other students. Because when I spoke to other Aboriginal students -- or even not even just Aboriginal students, but students who learned the same way as me and how they struggled -- it wasn't just me, it wasn't just my process. And even though at first I didn't talk about it, and I didn't -- I just thought, oh, you'll get there eventually. You have to keep doing it this way. Work harder and it will come. But, going through KM, it taught me a new way of thinking and it just clicked. It drives me to create that opportunity for other students, other people.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Tenessa, I can't thank you enough for sharing your time with me today, for sharing your journey with me today. It's been really powerful, and I think it's a necessary story for lots of folks to hear. Because everything you said wraps up the importance of making connections and making space and empowering you to take that space and to see what you do with it next is really exciting. So, thank you so much for being here, I just so enjoyed this conversation. I mean, I always enjoy it when we get to work together, but this was really special. Thank you so much.

Tenessa Gagnon:

Yeah, of course, thank you for the opportunity of talking about Knowledge Makers. I could go on about it forever. I'd probably cry some more. But. It is, it's a wonderful opportunity, and thank you for letting me talk about it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Thank you.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So that is it for Season 2, Episode 12 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](https://twitter.com/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 not going to leave you today with a Tiny Teaching Tip. We have all been through such a long, long stretch. And this week has been so full of bad news, that all I want from you is to find some rest, and some space, and to use that to extend to your students a little bit of extra grace as we round the home stretch and head into the end of term. Take care of yourselves. I'll be thinking about you. Bye bye.