

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 today's episode would have been the first episode of the semester except that I was sick and then last week's conversation took precedence -- I thought it was more important -- so this week what I want to do is take some time just to chat with you a little bit about our Digital Detox project which will launch on February 1. I want to tell you a little bit about what a Digital Detox is, how we're approaching it this year, and what you might want to know before you register. So, let's get into it.

You're probably familiar with our Digital Detox project -- I hope you're familiar with our Digital Detox project. We offered it in both 2020 and 2021 and, you know, we approach Digital Detox a little bit differently than you might hear it used, more popularly, I guess. Every January, every magazine offers you some tips for a quote unquote Digital Detox. But it's stuff like turn your phone off after work or put it in the freezer or don't check your email and none of those things are like wildly realistic for many of us. I often hear about these like Digital Detox retreats where you go away and you don't take any devices and you just get to be like meditative and at peace and I think yeah, that would be great except I have a kid and a job, both of which involve staying pretty connected.

So our Detox is not an abstinence Detox. We're not going to tell you to stop using your devices. Pretty impossible in this particular moment anyway, and although I think there are ways to have healthier relationships with the actual time spent on our tools, I am not the guide for that journey! I leave that to people who are far better and more self-disciplined than myself. What I do think though is that we all have the capacity, by learning more about the tools that we use every day, particularly the tools we use to deliver education, I do think that we all have the power to have a less toxic relationship to our technology. And that's what our Digital Detox has tried to do. It's tried to offer information, details, research, data to show that some of the practices that we engage in are troubling, and to help us argue for more healthful practices. That's kind of like the nutshell description of what I think a Digital Detox can offer.

In year one our Digital Detox was really a hopeful space. Oh my gosh, way back in February of 2020. Does anybody remember January and February of 2020? Wow -- who even was I then? The Detox at that time -- we still offered you know, research and critical comment but it was very much about how do we improve what is already an existing fruitful relationship. And then last year 2021 -- oh level of hopefulness dropped, some of the hopefulness kind of got stripped away. Unfortunately, the headspace that your writer was in perhaps. We looked at the post-pandemic university what our aspirations were for that space. Now the very idea of being post-pandemic feels wildly hopeful to me as I sit on the cusp of my booster dose, but at the time I

really wanted to imagine a better university into the future and to do that I was really taking stock of some troubling practices that had come about as a result of the pandemic. You know, I talked a lot last year about disaster capitalism and the kinds of things that are possible even perhaps likely when we're all so focused on surviving day-to-day, class-to-class.

This year's theme is something really personal. It's about overcoming apathy. That's the subtitle I've given it. I'm using apathy here to describe maybe a general sense of malaise. Overarching doom. You know, however, you want to frame it. But I'm really struggling with the fact that as I look back at those essays I wrote a year ago, I mean they all still seem so appropriate. So true that I really struggled with the idea of even doing a Detox this year because if nothing ever changes, why do it? Why try? "Why try" is a question that I am struggling with a lot. I talked about last week how I've increasingly been reading about the Great Resignation and the way the Great Resignation is likely to unfold in higher ed, which is not as a great resignation but as a great pulling back. A great working to rule.

It's hard to feel like our efforts matter right now. I can't help but feel in a lot of what I do day-to-day like I really am fiddling while Rome burns, you know? I don't like feeling this way.

Let me tell you a little anecdote that's going to make it into the first essay probably. I'm making a podcast for a larger project that I've talked about on this show before: the Amplify Podcast Network. After hearing some of my rough cuts, the project team got back to me with some feedback. And -- but feedback was like -- so this is depressing I laugh because otherwise I don't know, I guess I would cry. It's hard to talk about higher ed right now. It's hard to talk about critical pedagogy right now. It's hard to talk about the state of the game right now and not feel defeated and evidently, when it comes to audio, it's hard for me to not sound defeated. Sorry about that.

So that's what I want to tackle in this year's Digital Detox. I want to reorient us to the things that matter. I want to talk about fatigue and burnout and what fatigue and burnout might be enabling in the kinds of procurements going on, the kinds of digital tools that we're reaching for, the kinds of practices that we're imposing on students. The goal is not to make you feel guilty if you have withdrawn a bit. I have also withdrawn a bit. The goal is to re-energize us in the fight for a more equitable ed tech relationship for our students.

So what's that gonna look like? Well, at the moment I think it's gonna look like about 5 essays. We're gonna start by looking at patterns of fatigue and burnout. We're going to think about why it is we need to stay engaged, what kinds of practices are going on that we may not be aware of or that we may not be tuned into. I'm going to talk about the dangerous new normal. The way surveillance has become such a standard part of our educational practice during the pandemic and why it's important that we take this moment to push back against it. I'm going to talk about what I think of as maybe the Covid emergency that got left behind, and that is accessibility: the critical importance of making our courses accessible and the struggle to undertake that labour as we battle burnout and fatigue. And then finally in my attempt to leave

us on a hopeful note, I'm going to talk about what activism can look like right here and right now.

These 5 essays taken together I hope are an attempt to Detox the relationship between technology and education. In this particular moment when I think -- I don't want to overstate the case and say that it's never been a more dangerous moment. I don't know that to be true. But it feels dangerous to me right now. I look at the kinds of ed tech companies that are circling and consolidating, I look at the kinds of data that are being collected, I look at the way it's being monetized, and I feel anxious. I feel anxious about the future of education if we don't step up and stop it now.

This year's Digital Detox is me battling through my own apathy, my own frustration, my own sense of impending doom to try to argue for why we need to tune back in and why we need activism right now, within this institution and across all institutions, to argue for better.

I would be lying if I said that this project didn't feel overwhelming to me right now. There's a way in which apathy, taking a step back, giving myself permission to say eff-it, has been part of my own battle with burnout, right? Stepping back and letting go and letting someone else fight for a little bit -- that's an important part of staying healthy. I don't want to reject that. I don't want to ignore the importance of that. But I also can't let go of the critical nature of the fight that we are in, right? This very second. And so this year I invite you to join me on this journey. Digital Detox: Overcoming Apathy will launch on February 1. You can register for the Detox at [digitaldetox.trubox.ca](http://digitaldetox.trubox.ca) and I will flood your inbox every week, every Monday, with a new essay after February first so you'll get an essay on February first and then from then on it'll be every Monday. We'll also have a couple of opportunities for lunchtime chats, probably February 12 and 26 [editor's note: nope, it's February 18 and 25]. I'll link to the LibCal entries. And you're welcome to join those whether you're part of the TRU community or coming in from outside.

It's my hope that we can work together as a community of educators who really deeply care about the future of data and privacy and ed tech and how our students are served by all of those tools -- or often, sometimes, not served. It's my hope that we can work together to think through the solutions and to encourage each other to stay in the fight.

So that's the Digital Detox I'm really really looking forward to having these conversations. And on maybe a selfish note or maybe just a therapeutic note I'm hoping that I will find my way past this sense of doom and back to a version of myself that I miss from before the pandemic, who is really hopeful about what was possible in the world of education and who really believed that we were on a trajectory towards the good. I don't like not believing in that anymore and I want to find my way back there. So [digitaldetox.trubox.ca](http://digitaldetox.trubox.ca), please join us. We need you, we need you in the fight and we need you in the conversation. And until the essays start coming, you can see all kinds of resources at that site. Please don't hesitate to check it out.

So that is it for Season 2, Episode 15 of You Got This! As always if you want to write to us you can email me. I'm [bgray@tru.ca](mailto: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](http://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 today that Tiny Teaching Tip is to invite you to schedule a check-in. We've been back in the face-to-face class for two weeks. How are you doing? How are your students doing? And what mechanisms do you have in place to talk to each other about that? This is a good time, two weeks into term, to remind students of the kinds of resources that maybe you put in your syllabus but you never got a chance to talk about in detail, so things like the Wellness Centre, the Writing Centre, all the resources that are available out of Student Services for students to reach out to and engage with. This is a perfect moment to remind your students of all of those things.

It's also a perfect moment to check in with yourself about how you are building in rest and care for yourself in your term. These things maybe don't sound like teaching tips. But you have to be healthy and your students need to be reminded of the importance of their own health and the value of who they are as members of our community. So two weeks in is a really good moment to do that work.

I hope that you are okay. I hope that you're feeling safe and healthy and cared for, and I hope that you have the bandwidth to extend some of that to your colleagues or your students or the people around you. We're a community, and it's never been more true than right now that we're a community that needs to lean on each other.

So that's it for me. Until next time, I'll be -- well I'll be writing furiously, to be perfectly honest as I prep for the Digital Detox. I'm looking forward to checking in with you next week. Take care. Bye bye.