

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Hello, and welcome to You Got This! A podcast about teaching, and learning, and pivoting to digital for the whole TRU community. I'm your host, Brenna Clarke Gray, Coordinator of Educational Technologies. And, this podcast is a project of your friends over Learning Technology and Innovation. We're housed within Open Learning, but we support the whole campus community. I record this podcast into Tk'emlups te Secwepemc within the unseeded traditional lands of Secwepemcúl'ecw, where I hope to learn and grow in community with all of you.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

And, today's episode is about inspiration, because I've been having a hard time finding it lately. And, I thought maybe we should talk about what we do when the spark feels like it's gone. I spend a lot of time talking to folks every day in office hours. And, I can just tell there's a sense of exhaustion that has settled over campus for really good reason, by the way, not going to try to talk any of you into not being tired today. But, I do want to talk about how we find our energy and our inspiration when it seems to be lacking, because this is all the harder when you're feeling run down. So, let's get into it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

What a weird Friday, by the way -- this snowstorm? Now, I'm new to Kamloops everybody, but I've got to say October 23rd feels very, very early for this much snow. Maybe it's normal, but nobody put this on the brochures. Let me just say. Now, I'm from Eastern Ontario, and I am no stranger to snow, but I was struck this morning by how unprepared I felt to deal with snow. I was digging my son's snow suit out of the cupboard, trying to find a matching set of mitts, almost impossible, praying his boots still fit. They do, thankfully one pair anyway, for a few more weeks, anyway. It kind of got me thinking about how it doesn't take much to turn everything in a different direction on you, when you least expect it. I will say, I had to run a few errands, had to go up to the hospital for something today. And, when I came back and parked, and had that great feeling that you have when you don't have to do anything else for the rest of a very snowy day, that I could really just enjoy how peaceful, and calm it felt to sit and watch the snow come down. I was feeling good about my ability to reframe something that it started off making me awfully grumpy. I like snow, but come on, you guys October, no. And instead, making myself a cup of hot chocolate, sitting to answer the work emails under my electric blanket, and enjoying the feeling of being in a snow globe (in October though, you know).

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Anyway, it got me thinking about inspiration, I guess, because of the way my whole perspective had shifted so quick. I'm struck by how hard this semester is for all of us. And I think, that, you know, week eight in the semester was never my favourite point. I always found it was a time when everybody was just feeling so done. When I taught, I always tried to put a guest speaker in week eight or week nine, or have a reason to watch a movie, because I just felt like everyone was sick of me by week eight. And I just, I was kind of sick of listening to me by week eight, but that's all compounded now by just how overwhelming the workflow is, and how seemingly unstoppable the flow of just things we have to get done. And, the extent to which I think we're none of us are our best selves right now, as we've talked about on the show before. It's all just harder. I think we owe it to ourselves though, to try to figure out a way to find that inspirational spark again, something that can get us through. There's lots of opportunities for it. My guest on the show today is Carolyn Ives from CELT, who's going to talk about a book club for a phenomenal book called Radical Hope, that really will help to spark something for you, if a book feels doable for you.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Speaking of books for me, when I've lost my sense of why I do what I do, I always pick up an *Urgency of Teachers* by Sean Michael Morris and Jesse Stommel. It's actually an open access PressBook, so I'll link to it in the show notes today, but it's a really great one. It's all about teaching and learning online, and how to do it with care, and how to do it effectively. It's very focused on larger problems, yes, but practical hands-on approaches to teaching and learning as well. And, my favourite thing about it is that it's broken up into the teeniest, tiniest essays, they're just a couple of pages each, most of them. And so, when you're so stressed out, it's the easiest thing to just pick up, and dip in and out of. It's just a good one, you should check it out.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

But, not everybody fills their cup with books. And for not all of us does reading feel even possible or probable right now. I'm a voracious reader, and I'm struggling to get through books, to get to the ones I want to read right now. So, maybe we could think about some other things that can fill our cup, and remind us of why we do what we do. Is it the kind of thing that, maybe you need to cancel a class, give everybody a break. I saw the nicest tweet this week, an instructor cancelled a class. She was just feeling too overwhelmed, and had a sense that her students were struggling and falling behind, so she cancelled the class this week. And, she got an email from a student thanking her, because she slept in, and then she made herself some pancakes for breakfast. And, it was the first time she had actually properly eaten breakfast since the semester began. We forget sometimes about the ripple effects of allowing for rest, right. It allows other people to rest too. Maybe what you're missing are those casual meetups with friends and colleagues, and maybe a virtual coffee chat, or a virtual pub night is in order. Maybe one last backyard visit. I'm looking out at this snow and thinking, no, maybe backyard visits are behind us.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Or, maybe it's just that you need to take some time to quietly sit and think about why you got into education in the first place. You weren't expecting this. None of us were, but can we still channel the things that we care about when it comes to teaching and learning, even in the midst of the worst semester ever, even in the midst of our exhaustion. Maybe we can try. I'm struggling with inspiration these days when it comes to finding new solutions, or thinking through our programming. I'm actually really grateful that we're doing programming again. The first workshop was last week, and it was extremely energizing to be in a virtual room with so many of you to chat, and talk about teaching. And, just remember that there are solutions to some of the problems that we're struggling with. So, maybe coming out to our programming will be a place for you to have those conversations, or connect with that community. As I said earlier, one of the ways you can do that is checking out the CELT book club, which I totally recommend. Even though they don't have stew and chilli anymore, which was my favourite part of the book club when it was on campus, but it still has great conversation. And, Carolyn Ives is here to tell you about why, so I'm going to let her do that.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Okay. I am here with CELT's own Carolyn Ives. Carolyn, would you introduce yourself to people, let them know what you do on campus, and where they may have run into you?

Carolyn Ives:

Sure. Thanks Brenna. My name is Carolyn Ives, as Brenna said. And, I am one of the Coordinators of Learning and Faculty Development in CELT. And yeah, you might have coming in contact with me on various committees, or with new faculty orientation or with the FLIM course, that was the Facilitating Learning in Moodle course this summer. Because, we run programming that is primarily for faculty, and we're your go-to-stop for many things teaching and learning.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Oh, including peer reviews. Right? I guess, people are probably still doing those even in the online times.

Carolyn Ives:

Yes, yes they are. For sure. Thank you for reminding me of that. That's the other thing you can contact us for.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So Carolyn, I invited you on the show today. Well, we're talking about inspiration, and how you get that spark back. I think a lot of people are missing their spark right now. And, I was particularly interested in talking to you about the CELT book club, and how it might be a place where people could go to get some inspiration, or to find some excitement again. So, can you tell us a little bit about just the book club as a structure, and how it works? How long it's been around? And then, we'll get into this semester's pick specifically.

Carolyn Ives:

Absolutely. So, we started the book club in winter of 2019. And, at that time we were only meeting once a month, and just reading large chunks of the book, and we called it a bookable in a bun, because we were meeting at the lovely ESTR's Market, and they were supplying us with lunch. And, it was just so lovely to come together as a group, and talk about teaching and learning through a book that we were all reading together. To have that whole community of like-minded people to really engage with, and share a meal with, it was really quite lovely.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Also the food at ESTR Market is so good. And, I miss it so much.

Carolyn Ives:

I'm with you on that.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It's my favourite place on campus that I really miss. I mean, I found out about ESTR's Market, because I came up to book club, but it was one of my favourite places on campus to gather.

Carolyn Ives:

Yeah, we really appreciated them. And, it was a lovely environment for creating community. And so, we were doing one book a term, and then when COVID happened, we decided that, although we don't normally do a book in spring or summer, that it might be a good time to do it, because a lot of people were missing out on that community. And, although we couldn't offer people a meal, we thought it

would be a really great way to spark some excitement about teaching in this new alternate mode of delivery.

Carolyn Ives:

And so, we started reading as a group, Flower Darby's *Small Teaching Online*, which is based on Jim Lang's *Small Teaching*, that we had read the year before as a group. And, people really liked it, so I thought it would be a good one to do. But instead of meeting once a month, we met weekly. We read only one chapter at a time, and we had incredibly good uptake. We sometimes had up to 40 people come to those sessions. And so, we actually had to break into small breakout groups for everybody to be able to talk about it. We kept getting the feedback that people were so appreciative of the community, and they were just thrilled to have a space where they could come together, and talk to each other about something other than COVID.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

And, such a timely title too. Like, that *Small Teaching Online* book is so good for just concrete, practical advice for moving into online learning, for people who have never done it before. It's a perfect book choice for the moment we were in.

Carolyn Ives:

Absolutely. The practical solutions in there are many. And, it doesn't matter what platform you're using. It doesn't matter what tools you have at your institution. There's something in there for everybody. So, it was a really, I think, helpful book. And then, we ended up picking a few chapters from it, for that *Facilitating Learning in Moodlecourse*, we ran over the summer a few times.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah, it's that practical hands-on piece that I think... Just judging from our own Summer Camp programming over in LTI, everybody was really hungry for this summer. We were getting huge numbers out for those programs too. And, I just think you're right, this sense of needing community, and really wanting to talk through what was either happening for those faculty who were teaching in the summer; but also, for what was about to come, giving people a sense that they could anticipate some of what was to come, I think was really valuable. So, you've continued the book club now, and you guys are a few weeks in, I think, right, to the semester's book club choice. But, it's one that you started reading in the summer. Am I right?

Carolyn Ives:

Yeah. I started reading it in March. It was a book that I pre-ordered at the POD conference last November, thinking at the time, of course, nobody I knew had heard of COVID, I hadn't heard of COVID. So, I ordered the book because it wasn't coming out till spring, and it arrived in my mailbox in March. So, right about the time that people were being sent home, and classes were moving to Moodle, as opposed to being on campus.

Carolyn Ives:

And for me, it came at exactly the right time. So, the book is called *Radical Hope*, and the subtitle is *A Teaching Manifesto*. And, that's really what it is. It is an inspiring, hopeful book about teaching, and how to be allies with students rather than adversaries, and how important that is both for us to feel inspired when we teach, and to produce really, really good learning for students.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It's so important, just conceptually to get away from the us and them thinking, that shapes so much of how we structure teaching. And, I'm thinking about it particularly in regards to like, how we think about academic integrity. I think sometimes when we're too focused on the, I don't know, that adversarial relationship, I guess, assignments start to be like traps that get set to... Especially tests, right. Traps to get set to test academic integrity, instead of opportunities to evaluate learning. So, I really like thinking about that relationship in much more hopeful terms. Right?

Carolyn Ives:

Exactly. And, the thing I love about this book, Kevin Gannon, the author, asserts that we have to show students, not just tell them that we trust them, because we can say we trust you. But then, if we set up signals that we don't. So for example, trying to trick them with exam questions or whatnot, or opting for heightened measures of surveillance in these new digital classrooms, by insisting on very short timeframes for online testing, all of those things can signal to students that we don't trust them.

Carolyn Ives:

And that, if we can show that we do trust them, great things can happen. And yeah, so he talks about, I guess, finding ways to help your students envision themselves as participants in their own learning, and helping them envision themselves as participants in the discipline, and thinking about that through things like your hidden curriculum. So, if all of your examples come from all your readings, all of your examples in your textbooks come strictly from one demographic, maybe white men, for example, it might be hard for a woman of colour, for example, to see herself as successful in that discipline.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). I like that idea. I think oftentimes, maybe not anymore, but I think traditionally we've really felt like that was the job of graduate school. Like, in graduate school, you become part of the discipline. But, those students who are most successful in graduate school are often the ones who have had the opportunity throughout their undergraduate career to envision themselves as contributing to the discipline, because that's what makes them want to go to graduate school. Right?

Carolyn Ives:

Exactly.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

And so, I think it's really valuable from the first year course, to give students a pathway for themselves, to see themselves through the material. Even if it's an elective that they're taking. How many of us changed our majors, because of one really inspiring elective class, it happens all the time. Certainly happened to me.

Carolyn Ives:

Absolutely. And, one thing that Kevin Gannon also says is, "This pedagogy of radical hope is life affirming."

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Carolyn Ives:

And, I can't think of anything more inspiring than that.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

And, more necessary. I talk to faculty all day long who are so, so tired and overworked. We are all stretched so thin right now, that I think anything that can help us remember why we wanted to teach post-secondary in the first place is really, really valuable. Right?

Carolyn Ives:

Absolutely. Remember our own passion. And, lot of his examples in the book are, I think, especially timely, because he talks about how he came to love his discipline, yet he wasn't modelling in his classroom those very strategies that made him fall in love with history, which is his discipline. And, they talked about how that realization really helped him turn his teaching around, and reach students who might have otherwise, taken the class because they had to take it and moved on, and then never looked back. And, just talking about that shift, helping students find things that they're interested in, and piquing their curiosity about that particular discipline. He also talks about the importance of centring student agency of inclusion and of praxis, that whole theory and practice combined element. And, I found it really inspiring. So this book came to me, like I said in March at the beginning of COVID, and we didn't have a book club running at TRU at the time. So, I put a call out on Twitter to see who would like to read this with me. And, I got a few responses, so we ended up with a book club with people from different institutions in different provinces, reading this book together. And, we met Sunday afternoons. We just did one chapter a week, because we didn't want it to be hugely onerous. And, it was so inspiring and affirming for us to come together as a community. And this book club is actually, it's still going on. We still meet weekly. And, it's ended up being probably one of the most sustaining communities that I have experienced through this pandemic. And, our membership grows, it waxes and wanes periodically. At the moment, we have a couple people from institutions in the United States, and a few from across Canada. It's just been one of those things, as one of those places to go, or I can talk about anything other than the pandemic. And just, yeah, talk about teaching and learning in the best possible way.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I think that is so valuable right now, because it's so easy, as I find in casual conversation right now -- it's so easy to talk about how tired we are, how overwhelmed we are, how much work there is right now. And, I'm not taking anything away from the truths of all of those statements. We are absolutely all overworked and exhausted. Yes. But, it doesn't really fill your cup to talk about that all the time. Right?

Carolyn Ives:

Exactly.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah. The idea of a group of people who can come together, and recognizing the parameters that we are in, and not pretending the pandemic doesn't exist, but remembering that there was more to teaching than arguing with Moodle. It's really important. So, you've taken this book then from your rogue book club, I'll call it, to the TRU book club in the last few weeks. Is that right?

Carolyn Ives:

Absolutely. And so, we're just starting chapter four for next week, and of course, people are welcome to join any time. And, I'm really hoping that this book will inspire people and conversations at TRU as much as it did in our rogue book club. I will say that a good discussion about an interesting chapter is probably one of the most energizing conversations that I can have. So I'm really hoping it will do that for TRU faculty.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

And, I think that's really needed. I think if people can find the time to just browse through the book, and think about popping into a book club meeting, I think it can be really helpful. I'm just noticing how down everybody seems lately. And, I really wanted to take a minute this week to talk about, where we find inspiration, and how we move through the bad stuff to get to the good stuff. And, it's nice to know that the book club is here, and running right now. And I will say, I am technically a member of the book club, but I have a conflicting meeting until next week. So, I'll be joining about halfway through. And, I just hope people will think about coming and finding that spark, and that inspiration with their colleagues. And also Carolyn, I think what you just said is really, really valuable, fuel some of the larger conversations at TRU. The pandemic is changing the shape of the institution in ways that are going to carry forward. And, it would be nice to have that informed by some hope, and some critical pedagogy, and some really inspirational ways of thinking about our relationships to students, instead of always getting mired in the muck that is always going to be there. I wonder if you might tell folks who have never been to a CELT book club before what they can expect from arriving, particularly in this new, like virtual weekly book club with no chilli. Which makes me sad Carolyn, the chilli was really good.

Carolyn Ives:

It was really good. You're right. We can't offer food, but you're welcome to bring your own.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I might. I might bring a bowl and a bun when I come.

Carolyn Ives:

I think you should. It's pretty informal. It's pretty casual. We essentially get together, usually there are a few words spoken by somebody from CELT, and then we open up discussion. I often send out prompts in advance just in case we run out of things to talk about, but very rarely do we need the prompts, we usually get going pretty well. The book club is small enough right now that we haven't been breaking off into breakout groups. But if it grows, of course, we can certainly do that to make sure that everybody has an opportunity to speak, but there's no requirement. I mean, some people just come and sit and listen, they turn the cameras off, and occasionally will pipe up in the chat. Lots of people have their cameras on. Some contribute more frequently than others. It's whatever participants are comfortable with.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

That's nice. It's really nice to hear about a flexible learning environment right now. I'm taking this great class at BCCampus, and I'm really, really enjoying it. But, there's an expectation of cameras on, and it really does change my relationship to the learning environment. I feel very self-conscious about my own performance of learning sometimes. It's nice to have the option to switch off, once in a while.

Carolyn Ives:

I will confess, I recently quit a community of practice, because of the requirement of camera's always on.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It's just a lot. And, I think about it in relation to our students, and everybody who's listening to the podcast regularly is rolling their eyes right now, because I talk about this all the time. But I just think, I feel that way in this class I'm taking once a week for my own professional development and joy, that I'm really committed to the material of. I think about a student who's taking five classes to which they have varying degrees of commitment, and they're in front of their screens all the time. And, what the impact of being required to have my camera on in that environment would be. It wouldn't be good.

Carolyn Ives:

Yeah. I think anytime we can promote compassion and humanity, now is the time to do that, for sure.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I can hear the humanity of my household as Groot has come upstairs to do something. He's supposed to be in the basement right now, Carolyn. That's where I keep him, when I record the podcast.

Carolyn Ives:

Hi Groot. I should add that our library now has this book electronically too. So, it's free access for all TRU faculty.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah. I'm going to include a link to the library's permalink, so that people can find it easily. So, hopefully they'll dip in and get inspired, and decide to come and join their colleagues for a chat. I think part of what is making everybody so tired. I mean, week eight is always hard, like week eight is just... Midterms are in, and students are tired, and inspiration is low, but we don't have those opportunities to bump into each other at Common Ground and laugh, and remind each other why we're here. And, I think that we've got to be a little bit more intentional about seeking out those opportunities. And, I say that as an introvert who would really rather not, but I think it's important right now for all of us.

Carolyn Ives:

Yeah. I agree. I'm with you on that. Brenna, it might be an opportunity now, just before we wrap to promote next term's book as well. If you would like...

Brenna Clarke Gray:

That's a good idea.

Carolyn Ives:

If you would like to mention that.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I would love too, so I will include a link to it in the show notes. I'm really excited CELT and LTI are going to pair up to facilitate the book club in the winter term. And, it's a book called Critical Digital Pedagogy, which is in fairness, not the most inspiring title in the world. But, it's a really great collection of essays,

about the topic of teaching and learning online from a range of different perspectives, with a whole bunch of different voices, many of whom we don't usually hear in the larger conversation about teaching and learning online.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I'm really excited to get to dig into it. It's brand new, it's an open access title. I'll link to the press book in the show notes to maybe get your interest peaked. And yeah, Carolyn and the CELT team, and I and the LTI team will be leading folks through that in the winter. I think it's going to be a fun one.

Carolyn Ives:

Me too. And, I think part of what's going to make it more palatable for people is, it'll be easier to drop in or drop out, because they're essays, it's not a one coherent book of chapters. So, maybe people are only interested in one or two of the essays, and they don't want to come to all. So, I think it just increases the amount of flexibility we can offer.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah. It's really nice in that way. If you can pick up the chapters that are of interest to you, and leave the rest and that's totally fine, or maybe you'll get hooked, and you want to do the whole thing with us, and that's even better. So yeah, I'm looking forward to it.

Carolyn Ives:

Me too.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So, I'm grateful for you spending the time with me today, Carolyn. I'm wondering, just as a reminder for folks, if they are looking for some help and guidance and advice from CELT, how do they get a hold of the team?

Carolyn Ives:

Oh, absolutely. They're certainly welcome to email CELT@tru.ca. We also have a form for people to request consultation right on our website, which you'll probably link to in your notes.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I shall.

Carolyn Ives:

And, they can also email me directly, it's cives@tru.ca.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Thanks so much for taking the time to chat with me today, Carolyn. It's always fun.

Carolyn Ives:

Thank you for inviting me. Lovely to chat with you, and to hear Groot.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yes. He's much louder than I expected him to be. I really did not think he was coming upstairs for the duration of this interview.

Carolyn Ives:

I kind of love it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I hope the listeners do too. Second week in a row, he's made an appearance. It's all right.

Carolyn Ives:

Excellent.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

All right. Take care, Carolyn. Thank you so much for joining me

Carolyn Ives:

Thanks, you too. take care.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Bye.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So, that is it for episode nine of, You Got This! As always, if you want to write to us, you can email me, I'm bgray@tru.ca. And, 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. And of course, you can always comment on individual episodes there.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I'm going to leave you today with a Tiny Teaching Tip. In the spirit of trying to find your inspirational spark. This is something I did this afternoon, and it really helped, so I'm going to offer it to you. Whether you journal or not, whether you're the kind of person who maintains a reflective practice or not, I think that in times of real stress, it can be useful to just put your pen to paper, or your fingers to the keyboard, if you prefer, and write. The prompt that I wrote from this afternoon, because I was frankly struggling with what to come and talk to you guys about that wouldn't be horribly depressing. The prompt that I gave to myself is why do I love my job? I know, I know, I am this hokey and Pollyannish just all the time. I apologize, it's just who I am. But I asked myself to sit down, I set a timer, and I wrote longhand about why I love my job just for five minutes. And at the end of it, I remembered a bunch of things that I had forgotten, just a few minutes before, including that the thing I love best about my job is you, and connecting with you, and talking to you about the things that we all collectively care about. And, talking about how to demonstrate that care for our students. It's a gift and a privilege that I get to do that with you, even when it's hard.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So, that's my challenge to you for this week. What do you love about your job? Can you sit and write for five minutes about it? It doesn't erase the structural inequalities, and it doesn't erase the precarity, and it doesn't erase the startling and never quite sinking in for me reality that institutions actually can't return your affection. But, it might help you find that spark, if you're missing it, like I have been. I hope you're not. I hope for you, things are going swimmingly well. If that's the case, why don't you reach out to a colleague who maybe is struggling, and help them remember where that spark came from. Until next time, take care of each other, take care of yourselves. Put down some salt, it is icy out there, I've already fallen once. Kamloops, honestly, snow. And, I'll see you next time. Bye-bye.