

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 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's episode is a little different, a little shorter. I have found myself overwhelmed. I'm trying to be like Dr. Bonnie and not admit to being overwhelmed. I am merely whelmed, but we are past the point of whelmed and I am overwhelmed. So no interview this week. I didn't get it together to organize one. I'll tell you all about why I'm so overwhelmed after the break. Let's get into it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

As I mentioned last week, this is the beginning of conference season for me. And I'm sure for many of you as well, last week, I recorded my keynote for Cascadia. And this week I had OER21, which was a fantastic online conference and a really great experience. But the problem with really fantastic conferences that are really great experiences is that you want to do all the things. And I did. I saw so many great talks and I gave two that I think went pretty well. And I get to host another session tomorrow. I'm recording this on Thursday night. So it's been a really busy week. And then next week is Cascadia and I get to have the joy of apparently watching my keynote occur in real time, which sounds terrifying. And also two additional sessions on the Tuesday. I'm excited because sharing my work and talking about the things I care about so deeply about care and burnout and moral stress and how we look after each other and getting to talk about the cool programming I get to do with all of you and discussing my projects with people who are really into it. Like this is the good stuff, right? This is why do this job? It's the best stuff.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

And also, simultaneously, a thing that is also true, is that it's a lot. I'm finding with online conferences in particular, I'm not very good about blocking out the rest of my day. So I will get myself into a situation where I give a paper and then I am on the help desk for a couple of hours. And it's really draining as much as I love all of it. So yeah, it definitely ticked over from whelmed to overwhelmed this week. But I thought it might be good to talk about that. Because as I said to Crystal Huscroft on Twitter today, I think somehow I've gotten to a place where my practice and my research agenda are mostly about admitting my shortcomings in really public venues.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So here we are. There's something about the university that really runs on a sense of scarcity, you know, and it's something that I know intellectually, like I could say no, or I could pass on an opportunity. But there's some voice in the back of my head, well-trained by, I guess, my experiences in grad school, that's always saying: no one's ever going to ask you again if you say no to this. And you know, for most of my life, I've just gotten on with it. If there's been an issue, I've managed it. If I get behind in projects, I pull a few all-nighters and I come out on top. It's always been fine. I won't pretend that I've always done my best work under these circumstances, but you know, it's always been okay. It's always worked out fine for me.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

The biggest change that came in the pandemic is things stopped being just fine. I stopped being able to just rise to any challenge that crossed my desk. I'm in a situation now where I think I'm producing good work. I'm really enjoying the conference presentations and I'm enjoying the things that I'm doing. And at the same time, I know always there's a pile of work on a desk somewhere that's not being done. I'm behind on deadlines, which is unlike me. And I'm finding it really difficult to find that extra push, whether it's in the evenings -- you know, I used to put my son down and then work, you know, after that. And I don't do that anymore most of the time, unless, unless I'm madly editing this podcast. Most of the time I put my son down and I fall asleep with him or I roll out of his room and fall asleep shortly after. I think the pandemic and the experience of being, I guess, anxious to, to a greater or lesser extent for the last 14 months has really worn, right. It's taken a toll and I've obviously worked hard during this time. We all have, right? I don't, I don't know anybody who hasn't worked really hard during the last year, but it feels like a different kind of work, perhaps. Like we're not in the circumstances we want to be in, or we're not achieving the outcomes that we hope for. And the end result is somehow something less.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I want to talk about it today because I spend a lot of time encouraging you to be gentle with yourself. And I never want you to think that I don't know how challenging, how difficult that is. It's not a minor thing to be gentle with yourself to find the space in a moment of overwhelm to say, Hmm, we need to step back. It's really hard to do. I'm avoiding an email right now. I've been avoiding it for a while. I need to pull out of a project I committed to. This is the kind of thing that was unthinkable for me in the version of myself I was a year ago. What makes it hard perhaps is that this is a version of myself that didn't change dramatically with the birth of my son. It didn't change dramatically when I was in a really difficult work relationship previously, where I was finding it difficult day-to-day, but I was still achieving. I was still accomplishing what I wanted to accomplish. It didn't even change for me when I was changing jobs or new in an environment -- I've always sought solace in work. I think many of us who gravitate towards academia have that as a bit of a personality trait, right? Burying ourselves in work or overwork.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

One of the hardest things for me in the last few weeks has been to really step back and think about why it is that I so clearly define my worth and my sense of self through the work that I do and what it might mean to have to try to define myself differently, more generously, in other ways. What if, who I am was not about what I accomplished, but about the relationships that I build, the people I care about? That sounds like a really good life. And also like something I've never really had to face before. And talking about all of this in my very public forum today. (Well, very public. How many people really listen? That's the question.) But I want to talk about it today because I think for many of us figuring out where this year and the changes we've undergone fit into the rest of our lives is going to be something we're processing and putting back together for quite some time.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

You know, every second lifestyle story in the newspaper talks about how we have to get used to our post pandemic bodies. I don't really care about my post pandemic body. God love it. We've been through so many physical changes, many of us in the last year. And I just feel gratitude that I'm healthy, that my family is healthy, that I've been able to care for the people I love. What I'm not seeing a lot of discussion about -- and what I think we will have to reckon with, all of us, to a greater or lesser extent, is how do we manage our post pandemic brain? What is our relationship to the person we are now? How different is that person from the person we knew well over a year ago now?

Brenna Clarke Gray:

You know, the experience of isolation has been different for all of us. And the experience of moving out of isolation is going to be different for all of us. I already feel a bit of anxiety about the expectation of socializing. Again, I have a little bit of social anxiety. I don't -- not a crippling amount, but you know, I think the usual bookish English major amount. There's a reason some of us go away and hide in books. And there's a part of me that has felt some relief during aspects of the pandemic, because the requirements to socialize are gone or different. I feel pretty at home in a video conference, even as I recognize the cognitive load that it places on my brain. All of this to say, if you're reckoning with change, as we think about maybe getting towards the end of this thing, you're not alone. And if the things that worry you have less to do with whether or not you're coming out of your pandemic experience with the same physical form that you had before and more about whether you're the same person on the inside, I got ya.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I think sometimes I'm drawn to these kinds of conversations because I feel like through vulnerability, I can make sense of what I'm experiencing, because I gotta be honest with you, this whole year it's been difficult to make sense of anything. I've certainly struggled with it. And so I hope that if you're listening and anything I'm saying is resonating with you. I hope that it's at least in some way comforting that you're not the only one. I'm going to tell you that you need to be gentle with yourself. I'm going to tell it to you probably every time we chat from now until forever. But today I'm also going to tell you that I know how hard it is to be gentle with yourself.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

The timing of this episode has a lot to do with conference season, but it also has a lot to do with the end of term, for many of us who are in a traditional fall-winter rhythm. I'm not really, but I still think of myself as being on a traditional fall-winter rhythm. This time of year, late April or early May, as we wrap up our marking, as we submit those final grades, we're used to feeling like this is a time when we will get back to our writing or we'll get back to our research or we'll get back to that project, whatever it is you've been waiting all this time to jump back in. And as someone who's been trying to do that kind of work for the last few months, let me just urge you to be patient with yourself, to try to find the downtime that you need and to not be afraid to say no, if something isn't working for you. When I finish recording this conversation -- Oh, maybe I'll give myself the time to edit it too, cause I am a chicken -- I will go and write that email. I will withdraw from that project and I'm going to work on feeling okay with it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It's a new space to be in. It's super weird, but you know, if Dr. Bonnie can get back to a place of whelm, so can I, and so can you.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So that is it for a very unorthodox episode 26 of You Got This! we'll be back to the more usual format next week. In fact, I'm excited because next week, I think I'm going to be able to give you a bit of a sneak peek of our summer programming over in LTI. So that'll be exciting. 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.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I'm going to leave you today with a Tiny Teaching Tip. And it's a Tiny Teaching Tip I've given you before, around this kind of time of year. And I'll probably do it again. It's the last week of April folks. Whether you're finishing up your winter semester or gearing up for your spring/summer semester, or for the saints among you, the absolute saints among you: both -- try to find some time this week to rest. The forecast looks good. Maybe we'll get some sunshine. Maybe you can get outside, but whatever you do try to find some restorative space for yourself. And don't be afraid if that restorative space looks different than it used to. For me, it's never looked restorative to walk away from a project, but here I am doing exactly that. Here's to growth here's to our post pandemic brains and here's to everything we know we once were, can be again, and will be in between. Until next time, you got this! And we'll talk soon. Bye-Bye.