

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Hello and welcome to You Got This!, a podcast about teaching and learning, community, conversation and your digital life made 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 right now, I am just utterly astonished that we are one month down, one month down people. How is it possible? Let's get into it.

Do you hear that? Do you hear that sound? That whistling sound? That's the sound of September leaving. I feel like I am still so governed by the academic calendar, especially now that my son is in school, so two thirds of this house is governed by the academic calendar, but I feel like I spend the whole year waiting for September to come and then it gets here and then it's gone. It's that fast every time. I'm constantly baffled by it. I hope that you are settling into a fall routine that's working well for you. I'm not a hundred percent sure that I am, but I'm working on it. It's new to me, this ferrying a tiny person from school to after school activities and managing time, these are all new things for me. And yeah, it's taxing in its own interesting way. I'm also finding that walking to and from campus after two years plus of only doing that sporadically is a bit of a challenge for me. I live in Upper Sahali and I used to find the walk to campus, no big deal and I still find the walk to campus, no big deal, but holy cow that walk home up the hill.

Anyway, September is about getting used to all kinds of things and the end of September I always think offers a good opportunity for a moment of reflection. I know if you listen to the show regularly, you're like "Brenna, you think everything is an opportunity for reflection," and guilty is charged. I do think that everything is an opportunity for reflection. The good thing about this moment as a moment for reflection is that we have more of the semester ahead of us than behind us. So we know our students well or we know the role that we're undertaking well, we have a month of experience under our belts and yet we still have three months to go, right? Well, two months of classes and then exams and marking and everything. But I do think it's a good moment for a stock taking, a moment to stop and ask what's working and what's not working. I'll include some tools for reflection, but I honestly think that one of the best things that you can do is give yourself 20 minutes and take 10 of them to free write under the topic what's going well and 10 minutes to free write under the topic what do I wish I could change? And if you can do that, you'll have a really good start on a reflective practice for the term. And it only takes 20 minutes. So consider it.

It can feel sometimes the pace that we have to go at to keep up with all of our commitments, it can often feel like taking that time to reflect is impossible. But I ultimately believe that what's really impossible is leaving it to chance because then you will totally feel out of control in perpetuity.

I am totally excited to introduce to you today's guest. This is a non-sequitur from reflective practice, although maybe it's not. Ben Mitchell from the Library hosts this amazing Tuesday night gathering for students and faculty and staff called Twitch Tuesdays. And I'm going to let him tell you all about it.

Okay, so I am here today with Ben Mitchell from the TRU Library. Ben, could you introduce yourself and maybe tell people a little bit about what you do, what your role is, and then where they might find you on campus?

Ben Mitchell:

Certainly. Thank you. I am the student success and outreach librarian here at TRU. I also do liaison work, so you might see me if you're in the business and economics or English language learning and teaching

or numerous other programs. You'll probably see me around the library. I spend a lot of time drinking London Fogs at Common Grounds as well, so might be sightings me in the wild there, and I try to get out to student events sometimes at the TRU Student Gaming Club.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Common Grounds comes up on this podcast more than probably any other location on campus, I would've to say. And I'm so thrilled you're here. I know you exclusively from Twitter, we have never met in real life, but I really wanted to have you on the show today to talk about this Twitch Tuesdays initiative out of the library. So I am only kind of tangentially aware of the huge phenomenon that is Twitch and how it functions. So I wonder if you could start by giving our listeners a sense of what Twitch is, how it works, and then talk a little bit about what Twitch Tuesdays is.

Ben Mitchell:

Certainly. Yeah, so Twitch is an online streaming platform. It's not exclusively for streaming video games, but that's kind of its main function. It's become a bit of a phenomenon where people are making careers on just streaming video games or interacting with an audience while they're streaming video games. Like a lot of these large proprietary platforms, it's not perfect and there's a lot of this privacy concerns, it has kind of a tiered gated system in terms of like, oh, you have to have this many followers to get these benefits and this many followers to get that benefit. So it's like a lot of platforms, the algorithm kind of pushes you to behave in certain ways usually, but it's been used by a lot of different people. In fact, honestly, this is perhaps telling about who I am as a person, but I really kind of discovered Twitch because when I found out that Chelsea Manning had a Twitch stream and I was like, I just want to watch Chelsea having a good time and kind of enjoying life.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I love that. I first heard about Twitch when Jagmeet Singh and AOC had that Among Us game on it during the last election. So I'm kind of right with you. It feels like the old person's pathway into Twitch.

Ben Mitchell:

And one of the things, I grew up with video games basically since I was six and also older video games because my family was not the wealthiest. So we were kind of a system behind where I was, so I have nostalgia for video games that came out literally the year I was born. But there's something about playing a video game with people, even if it's a single player game that I can find really rewarding, and I think a lot of people have my generation and younger can do. It's almost like reading together. There's a certain degree of sociability and almost intimacy and sharing that and sharing your experiences and your reaction to the media.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Oh, it's interesting you say that because I'm experiencing that right now with my son who is five and he has recently discovered Pokemon and like any five year old who's just a little bit bookish and a little bit obsessive, he has gone all in. So we have all the books out of the library and we're got one of the games out of the library and we're playing it and he has no interest in actually controlling it because he fine motor being what it is when you're five. He gets very frustrated, but he loves it, it's his favorite thing. He will beg us to sit and play it for him. It's more like he's directing a movie of the game because he tells us everything to do and we just control the player. It's not just about the fact that he loves Pokemon, it's

like it's much reading together. It's a very kind of almost intimate connection that it's this experience that just the two of us are sharing. So Twitch Tuesdays, what is it and why?

Ben Mitchell:

Yeah, so Twitch Tuesdays is every Tuesday from 7:00 to 8:00 PM through, we have the TRU library, we have our own Twitch stream TRU Library. You can find us on Twitch. We also record the videos. You can also find us on YouTube at Twitch Tuesdays at the TRU library just to try to make it more kind of a stable ongoing thing that people can see what all the fuss is about. I enjoy Twitch, but I also, I'm a historian by training, so I like having some sort of archival feature built into the system.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Does Twitch not do that on its own or is it's really just an ephemeral, unless you're record screen recording it yourself?

Ben Mitchell:

You have to have I think over 50 followers in order to get that privilege. And that's why I say it's kind of weirdly algorithmic gated to try to push engagement, you get certain kind of functionalities only if you can quote unquote build your brand.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Interesting.

Ben Mitchell:

So currently we have the recordings on YouTube and kind of the underlying logic of it, not just that I'm a giant nerd that, I mean I personally still think we're in a pandemic, but certainly when I first really developed it last semester, I was like how do we get virtual programming that is more than just talking to a person in a workshop or something? And having grown up more or less online, I'm like, you can play video games together. So we were trying to do it to help create more virtual engagement and content of the pandemic. But also thinking from an accessibility feature. I mean it's hard to get around Kamloops when you don't have a car. There's plenty of students who have trouble just navigating the university space physically because of sensory or physical reasons. The students who are agoraphobic, there are students who are immunocompromised. There's lots of reasons why having some virtual programming is, even pandemic aside, I think is an important accessibility feature too. Library spaces.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I agree with you completely. And also, when you said you still believe we're in a pandemic, that resonated deeply with me. I also still believe we're in a pandemic, Shocking though it is to say. So what happens on a Twitch Tuesday event? I don't know what to call it. It's kind of an event, right? It's like a kind of programming.

Ben Mitchell:

It's an event, It's a stream. I mean there's a few things. Sometimes I'm able to put some thought into it and develop some specific kind of content. So for two weeks for instance, over the summer we played Bee Simulator and I talked about bees because that's just something I'm geeky about. We had one episode on the kind of natural history of bees and another episode on the cultural history of bees.

Sometimes it's just multiple librarians playing Ultimate Chicken Horse and making each other have a hard time, which is a bit more chaotic sometimes. We invite on various student groups. In fact, we had club stay here was it last week. And I was just going around talking to student groups who are potentially interested in letting us talk about what they do, what they're interested in. So some of their events are. Already had the TRU Student Gaming Club, which I can talk about more the channel. And actually this week we will also be having members of the TRU Math club with us while we stream playing City Skylines.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

This all sounds wildly humanizing. When I was a student, I was afraid of the library for quite a while because it seemed like this big imposing thing that everybody else already knew how to use. This was in the days before library orientations and before liaison librarians and it felt very separate. And it's so funny because now I want to be a librarian in another life, but as an undergraduate I felt quite intimidated by the space. And so when I hear you describing the librarians getting together to stream a video game, that feels wildly humanizing to me. I can go and ask that person a question.

Ben Mitchell:

And then that's also a part of it too. I am glad you mentioned that because it's part of also just letting us be seen. I feel like it's important that I have my video on for it. Michelle Terrace, one of the law librarians is also a frequent co-host. Sometimes Erin May, we try to get a number of librarians on too, sometimes Amy Patterson as well, just so that people can get a better sense of who we are and how we are. We potentially share interest with them and I do think that's really important from not just in the library but in any educational setting that you feel like you're learning in relationship to your interests.

One of the other things that I'm big on in my studies is finding ways to explore and help provide supports for divergent students and staff. And I do find that a lot of us have really intense passionate interests and not everyone, but a lot of them are kind of geeky, Magic The Gathering or tabletop role playing or video games. The Venn diagram isn't exactly a circle, but it can seem like it's close to one sometimes. And so any ways of combining educational resources and guidance and resources to things that students are already kind of passionate or interested about I think is a win for everyone.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I really love this idea because we talk about meeting students where they're at and those kinds of concepts in student faculty development, but this to me is a really concrete example of using an existing medium or an existing form that hasn't typically been thought of for educational purposes and making the topic fit the space instead of making students always fit themselves to the topic, if that makes sense.

Ben Mitchell:

Honestly, for me, part of the idea came from actually I discovered YouTube just at the start of the pandemic to qualify that I knew that it existed, but I mostly just used it as a music remix finder thing rather than actually a media ecosystem. And so I started exploring a lot of these video essays who were generally combining elements of pop culture with educational material philosophy tube or most recently Spice Eight Rack or various other folks. We were talking talking about Magic the Gathering with a history of eugenics and it's kind of social implications or all sorts of topics. And I found that there's a lot of hunger and interest in this combination of an understanding of pop culture and its effects on our lives and relating it to other topics in history, philosophy, art, media theory, what have you.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I found YouTube for that purpose when I was still teaching full time and I found the crash course series of I guess educational YouTube videos. But they were great because oftentimes in a literature class you can get really bogged down with the contextual history. It's really important for students to have, but everybody's starting from a different starting place, and so making sure you understand enough about the politics happening around the romantic period so that you can understand what's happening politically in *Pride and Prejudice* or whatever. And so I always found that particularly the crash course videos have a particular style, a lot of jump cuts. My husband describes it as jump cuts and yelling.

Ben Mitchell:

It's a genre.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

But my students could get the same thing that would take me a chunk of a lecture to work through, but watching a five minute video, they would get enough, right? Enough so that we all had the same starting point when we came into the conversation in class. And I became a real fan at that point. But mostly because it became very useful to me I guess.

Ben Mitchell:

And it's on their own time and they can interact with it in whatever way they want to. And I'm a big fan of that too, honestly. I know there's been a lot of negatives about asynchronous learning for instance during the pandemic, but again, particularly for divergent students and autistic students, I found that that element is really helpful.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Well and is such a multi-modality built into YouTube as a format, at least as I think the big players conventionally use it. So I'm thinking about things like I had students who consistently watch those videos at one and a half times or 1.25 times, which blew my mind because it had never occurred to me. I'm one of those old school podcast listeners who still listens to them at the speed that they are recorded at.

Ben Mitchell:

I don't know it's old school or new school. I know that's quite helpful for ADHD students, for instance, that 1.5 thing is a good suggestion for a lot of students.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I had no idea. And the fact that so many of my students would just either scan the transcript for the video or watch the transcript, turn the captions on and have the captions playing at the same time. This was early 2010s and all of that was pretty new to me as modalities of learning. And so I think that's part of why I got so interested in Ed Tech is the sort of agency and choice that students have when they use some of these tools.

Ben Mitchell:

Very much so. Very much so. Higher education, it has some elements of a factory farm about it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

You don't say?

Ben Mitchell:

Just a wee bit of one there, but any idea, anything to actually help it be personalized to the individual students' needs and experiences, I mean I've taught courses that had 500 students in them. I can't say that they all had the best educational experience I could give them because there were 500 students and technology can't replace everything. But anything it can do to help personalize the educational experiences is one of the good aspects of technology, it's not all bad, it's not all surveillance data.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It is nice to sometimes remember the positives that we get into finding these tools in the first place. So we've talked a little bit about what Twitch Tuesdays is, and I guess this really fits into your larger role in the library as being a kind of point of contact for students. Is that right?

Ben Mitchell:

Yeah. It's technically under my outreach role, but I think outreach and student success are kind of intermingled in a lot of ways but that's the hat I wear when I stream.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

What kinds of supports do you find students are either seeking from the library or maybe what kinds of supports are they not seeking that you see as missing? I guess what I'm getting at is a larger question about the student experience right now in this second return to campus year. Because I still feel like things are really... I think we're all having different experiences of campus right now to come back to that earlier point about we're still in a pandemic. And I wonder what that's like from the perspective of someone who is in the role of being a kind of point of contact for student support right now.

Ben Mitchell:

Again, it's a mixed bag. I mean definitely we still have some of the standard research reference help type things, but one thing I particularly noticed even just since the semester started is I'm having a lot more students who are starting to just struggle because of social emotional reasons. I've had students break down after workshops because they're working multiple jobs and they're not from Kamloops and there's a cumulative effect. It's not like okay, the pandemic is over because it's not. But also it's things have been hard for several years now and that's not changing. So part of the thing is we talk about justifying everything in terms of pedagogical value, but part of pedagogical value is just trying to have an okay time and connect with other people and be exposed to new things. There are certain video games I tend to default to because I still just have what I have on my computer that I'm streaming from.

But I do try to mix it up to expose people to new games or new things and new topics that they might not have otherwise engaged with. And it's also just really cool to, I've never played City Skylines before to have the students be like, "Oh okay, if I get to be on the show, this is a game I'm really interested in right now. So let's also talk about that and play that." Letting the students tell me what they're passionate about.

I mean that's why I also played Genshin Impact. I'm kind of an older gamer so the kind of games I play might not be the kind of games that students are playing these days and which is also really interesting in terms of the different generations of gamers. So I think that's the biggest part of Twitch Tuesdays is

that it is a social thing, student success, there's an educational component but part of it is just how do you have a human relationship with people. And because I mean it's not also just for the students sake, to be entirely honest, I found out in 2019 that I'm autistic and I find it's a thing that I can still be passionate about and engage with really well.

And I think hopefully that shows because I mean enthusiasm is noticeable.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I think it's so important to model joy, it's something I've been talking about a lot on the show that, I don't know, we've built this institution and that is of traditionally interested in us primarily as brains in jars, divorced from the embodied experience. And we're slowly changing, especially when I talk to the folks in student development here at TRU, I'm just so impressed with what is happening compared to what was happening when I was a student. But I still think there's, especially in this moment that is so difficult and that is so difficult for so many of our students, and this rush back to a quote, unquote, normal, which I think can feel like a lot of pressure if that's not where you're at for all sorts of reasons, either because you have unresolved trauma from the last three years or because you don't feel safe returning to everyone else's normal. I think there's so much value in a space of just... Venting is the wrong word, almost relaxing into an experience that is still tied to the university in some way that is still a positive association with the university.

Ben Mitchell:

Commiserating perhaps?

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah. There's a lot of value in it. Okay. So I'm interested in your background before you came to TRU because am I right in saying you're relatively new to campus, Ben?

Ben Mitchell:

I've been here since January.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Okay. So very new. Welcome.

Ben Mitchell:

Thank you kindly. Yeah, so I've had a bit of a meandering background.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Oh those are the best ones.

Ben Mitchell:

My undergrad was in history of science and technology and German at the University of King's College in Dalhousie in Halifax. I grew up in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia more or less. I got my first master's at the University of Toronto in the history and philosophy of science and technology. Got my PhD in science and technology studies at York University and I got my second master's in library science again from the U of T. I've explored the big thing, science and technology studies is more the social studies of science and tech and medicine and stuff. So my PhD was actually on Friedrich Nietzsche and

physiological relativism. I did a look of history of mental health, history of medicine, political history of those topics, histories of madness. I spent a year as an assistant curator at the Lake Show Grounds Interpretive Center where we actually would do tours and exhibits around the former Lake Shore Psychiatric Hospital, Humber College in outside of just our side of Toronto. Its south campus is all on the former side of that institution and you can still see it in the architecture and the tunnels underneath it and whatnot. So I have quite a background in the history of psychology and mental health stuff and neurodivergent people. Even before I knew the term neurodivergence, it was kind of where my own research was taking me, anyway. That kind of you become what you study or you study what you become. I find when you do any really intense degree like that. So coming here also, I didn't know many people and I find, I don't know if it's a neurodivergent thing or just me thing, but I find the best way to communicate with people, the best way to connect with people is to do some kind of little project with them.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Oh my God, that's why I have a podcast. Yeah, no, that's hundred percent why I have a podcast.

Ben Mitchell:

Yeah, yeah. Because I find if you want things to happen the way you want them, you have to make them happen yourselves. I used to run salons, gothic salons in Toronto where we'd have music and contact juggling and I'd give little lectures about various things I was researching at the time. that's how I maintained my communities and that's how I maintained my connections.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

That's cool. That's really cool.

Ben Mitchell:

Well thank you. Having to move further away, just because Toronto was too expensive to live and not enough jobs for me, it's been hard to reproduce that just again, I've only been here since January, so this is me kind of being like, oh, what else can I do to help to create community spaces to combine my interests in a way that hopefully resonates with other people and still make it an educational experience. Because all of these salons and things I did, yeah, there was a lot of the cure and goth nerdy stuff. I mean goths are mostly history nerds in my experience, sharing what people know. We had to talk, one of my friends was a computational neuroscientist, so they gave a talk about theories of quantum mechanics and human cognition. It's a thing I've been doing for years and trying to incorporate some of that into dreaming and gaming and virtual space has been kind of my project since I got here.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I can totally see Twitch Tuesdays and as an extension of that, it makes perfect sense to me. I love it. And really, my colleague at Douglas, when I was back at Douglas College, he had this phrase that he found that he excelled at productive friendships. So he was always really good at finding someone and being like, "Okay, let's write an article together." "Let's make a podcast." "Let's do this cool thing." And I think for a lot of us who are, maybe it's neurodivergence or a kind of social awkwardness or just in my case just deeply and profoundly introverted, that can really help to, I think, just bridge that gap of just fear of approaching other people. It's like, I'm not just coming with just me. I have this thing we can do together.



Ben Mitchell:

Yeah. Yes. Hello fellow human. How do you socialize today?

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It's so true. Making friends as an adult is hard anyway, I think. And especially in this career, this academic career where you're just expected to just relocate periodically your entire life to continue being employed.

Ben Mitchell:

And honestly though, I find that's one reason why I like working in the library, because I feel like librarians in terms of academic spaces are so much more social than any of the more mainstream academic trajectories I've been on and whether it's history or science and technology studies or what have you, there's just more of a drive to cooperate. Whereas I feel like I know in my background in history is a lot more of don't you steal my project, I'm watching you.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah, yeah. The sort of forced scarcity model of interaction makes anything like that difficult. This was so interesting, Ben. I'm so excited about all of it. I'm particularly excited because I get to be on Twitch Tuesdays next month, which I'm super stoked about, which I'll share information about with listeners. Thank you for bringing this initiative to campus and also just for coming on to have a chat today.

Ben Mitchell:

Well, thank you kindly for inviting me and for everyone who happens to see me on campus, I'm usually wearing a weird hat of some kind. I have a big old tattoo on my left hand, so I'm readily identifiable. Feel free to say hello, and I'm happy to talk to you about any kind of geeky or research things you need.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I love it. Take care, Ben. Thanks so much,

Ben Mitchell:

Cheer. Have a lovely day.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So that is it for season three episode four 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, at Brenna C Gray in both cases, that's gray with 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.

I'm going to leave you today with a Tiny Teaching Tip, and if you've listened to the show for any length of time, you won't be surprised that I'm going to remind you that Monday, October the 10th is a statutory holiday. Some of our students will celebrate that as Thanksgiving, for other it's Indigenous People's Day, for many others it's just a day off. Now, notwithstanding the fact that many of the days off in the fall calendar this year are wrapped up in the colonial history, including the fact that our students had the Queen's Funeral Day off, very decolonial choice we're all making there.

But also the fact that students have just had the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, which I just want to remind us all is not a day off, it's a day of observance and ceremony and for many of our students, they're actively involved in those processes. So when we look ahead to the long weekend, I'm hoping that we can take a moment to take a look at our work schedules and for those of us who are teaching, take a look at the work schedules of our students and to really think about whether or not we've enabled them to have a restful long weekend.

We're four weeks into the term, and it's a term that is as fraught as any other recent one in terms of mental health and stress, anxiety, so is there space in the way you've conceived of your course to let your students take a pause next weekend? There are huge pressures on our time and content remains king and I don't want to pretend that those issues don't matter, but rest matters too. And so I hope very much that you and your students can plan for next weekend to be a restful one. Until next time, you know I'm rooting for you and you know I'm always rooting for rest. Take care of yourselves and each other and we will talk soon. Bye bye.