

Meet Your TLX Team Podcast Transcript

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NICKI MONAHAN: Hello and welcome to the first episode of Xchange Pod; a podcast for faculty and by faculty. Today, members of the TLX have come together to talk about who we are, what we do and how we can support you in your work at George Brown College. My name is Nicki Monahan and I'm a faculty facilitator and faculty coach. In my role at the TLX, The Teaching and Learning Exchange, I support faculty through workshops, consultations and coaching to achieve the highest levels of performance in the teaching and learning world. Informal sessions, I facilitate the *New Faculty Academy* for newly-hired full-time faculty and we work with understanding outcomes-based learning; principles of curriculum development; and how to become reflective practitioners. More informally, faculty can drop by our TLX sites at Waterfront, Casa Loma and St. James to talk about any challenges they may be facing in their classrooms. Maybe they're struggling with group work or want to come up with some more interesting or exciting or authentic assessments. Or maybe they're looking to find ways to increase levels of student engagement. These informal conversations could be something as simple as a half an hour discussion or maybe more formal and ongoing consultations. Recently, I've started to provide coaching with some of my colleagues in the TLX. And in coaching, it's a more formal contracted arrangement where faculty come together with a TLX coach to really address a particular area of performance. Coaching is a collaborative kind of relationship where a faculty member sets goals and a coach works with them to collaborate to create strategies to meet those goals and monitor progress. It's a great way to improve your performance and feel really great about the work that you're doing in your classroom, kitchen or lab. So that's me. I'm Nicki Monahan, faculty facilitator and faculty coach with the Teaching and Learning Exchange, which we call the TLX. So the rest of the team is with us today so I'm gonna hand it over to Lazarus Simeon and Laz could you just start by introducing yourself and what your role is in the TLX?

LAZARUS SIMEON: Thank you, Nicki. So I've worked in the Teaching and Learning Exchange for about 10 years. I started teaching here at the college back in 1991, so that was a long time ago.

NICKI MONAHAN: It was.

LAZARUS SIMEON: That was. I'd like to tell students that it was the year before the Blue Jays won their first World Series and they are both shocked that I am that old and that the Blue Jays actually won a World Series. And-- but it was, you know, you think about it, it was the time before the internet and before cellphones, so all this kind of stuff has impacted, you know, our culture generally and certainly what we do in the classrooms. Back then I was considered an innovator when I would roll a TV set into the

classroom with a VHS and, you know, have the numbers written down, you know, the three--- the dial number written down. I gotta stop-- play, you know, fast forward it to 3:38 and play here and then... So it was-- it was quite a different scenario. And back then, you know, it was-- it, it was expected that you got in front of the class and you lectured for three hours and you really can't do that anymore. So most of my work is now here in the TLX is with contract faculty. There's a lot of folks out there who fall into that category, whether they are part-time, partial load, sessional. And I-- what I do is I try to develop or connect them with the work that we do; connect them with other professional development opportunities. And a big part of my job is taken up with offering the Contract Faculty Academy, which is a six or seven week-- I can't remember. It keeps changing.

(laughing)

NICKI MONAHAN: That's right.

LAZARUS SIMEON: It keeps changing course that we look at stuff like, you know, hmmm...active learning; we look at how assessments are designed; we look at lesson planning and really just kind of designed to give faculty, who are really in many, many cases subject matter experts and are real professionals in their-- in their areas of expertise, a bit of a background to teaching and learning. And, and certainly teaching and learning the way that we do it here at the college. And so that's one thing that I do and the other big part of what I do is I do some training on educational technology. I do-- you know, we look at stuff that can be used in the classroom to engage students, to connect students with content, to connect students with each other. I do a lot of the online teacher training as well. Right now we're in the process of revamping one of the offerings that we provide, so there was a course that I taught, it was fully online called *Designing Courses in the Online Environment*. It's-- we're gonna change it up a little bit because, you know, stuff changes and the, the environment changes, the culture changes and we're, we're thinking about mixing it up a little bit. So those are the two big pieces that keep me busy. But of course, you know, Nicki, I do stuff with you as well. Work with faculty planning the *Instructional Skills Workshop* that we do every, every semester. That's a three day workshop that we run usually around the intersession. So the middle of the semester. And so that-- that takes a fair bit of planning. And then of course three full days that we work really closely with groups of faculty to develop their instructional skills, introduce them to the ISW format and the rationale behind that.

NICKI MONAHAN: And thanks for mentioning that 'cause that's one of our favorite things to do together, the ISW. Three intense, full days where people teach in front of each other, get videotaped and, and watch themselves and then get some feedback. And, and, you know, a lot of the work that we do in the Teaching and Learning Exchange is in collaboration with others. We collaborate amongst ourselves and we collaborate with others. I'm wondering if you could also speak very briefly about your

collaboration with Ravinder Brar, the Access and Inclusion Coach and your work on Universal Design for Learning or UDL.

LAZARUS SIMEON: Absolutely. The ISW, just to get back to that, is one of those events where, as we lead up to it's kind of like, 'oh my gosh it's so---' but at the end of it, it's one of those-- one of those feelings that's just really glad that you took part in; everybody's really happy that-- about it. It's-- it's a really rewarding experience. And, and so to get back to the UDL that you were talking about, so the Universal Design for Learning is something that I was part of the pilot about-- oh geeze, about I guess about two, three years ago that we started here. And we explored the whole idea of UDL and what kind of impact that it would have on teaching and learning here at the college . And then I guess about a year or two ago, we hired Ravinder Brar who is-- who works solely to promote and advocate and, and develop the whole UDL piece here at the college. So we work together. We do two workshops. We may be expanding that to a third one. The first one is basically just an introduction to UDL; its key tenants; what it kind of looks like in the classroom; why, you know, we do it; why it's, you know, an approach that we're trying to get faculty considered. And then the second one is more of an application. So here's the principles, how would you apply them in your particular teaching context, in your particular class. What does it mean for your assessments? What does it mean for how you engage students? What does it mean for how you deliver content? And so it's, it's a fundamental kind of shift in, in the way a lot of people think about teaching and learning where you start out with a learning outcome, and then you work towards developing activities in the classroom or lecture formats or whatever and then there's some kind of assessment that takes place. Hopefully all of these three things are aligned and match up with each other. But with UDL, after you develop your learning outcomes or your learning goals, you kind of have to sit down and think about the barriers that you can encounter when students are in the classroom that may impede them from successfully achieving these goals. So that's, that's a big difference in the way we approach teaching and learning with UDL. That's one thing. I mean, I'm making it sound really simple, but there's, there's a lot more going on there. But in a way, it is kind of simple. It really is an opportunity for teachers to really sit down and think about what they're doing and how they're doing things, right? And if you're keen for, you know, reflecting on your own teaching practice then you're a good candidate for adopting UDL.

NICKI MONAHAN: Terrific. Thanks so much, Laz. Thanks for taking us down on a little trip down memory lane and also to get us thinking about how the TLX helps people really deal with the challenges and complexities of education in the 21st century. And technology is a big part of that so, I'd like to turn the microphone over to Lis and ask her to introduce herself and talk a little bit about her role and her work in the TLX.

LIS ROMERO: Thank you, Nicki. Part of my role at the TLX is to work as instructional designers. And my work involves working with faculty members to create meaningful and challenging online learning experiences. My design work focus in teaching using

real-life problems. And the reason for using this approach is to help students work with problems and situations that they most likely encounter when they get into the workforce.

NICKI MONAHAN: Lis, thanks so much for bringing students to the forefront because at the TLX, we primarily work with faculty but we work with faculty so that they can have their learners have the best possible experience whether in the classroom, in a kitchen, in a lab or in online learning. How do you support faculty members to really develop rich, online learning environments that, that will help learners meet those needs of 21st century workplace?

LIS ROMERO: That's a good question, Nicki. Actually, our faculty member are great content experts. They have all that wealth of knowledge and experience. And what I do as instructional designer is to unpack that knowledge, that experience and that the skills that they bring to George Brown, in light of their course outcomes. And then we work with the experiential learning framework, problem-based learning, learning by doing and we translate those outcomes into real-life activities. The problems, the stories, they have them in the workplace, so we facilitate the creation of those stories. We create frameworks. We create templates to get that-- to unpack that.

NICKI MONAHAN: That's fantastic. Thanks, Liz. I really appreciate that and just in a few short sentences, what would you say is your favourite part about being an instructional designer with the TLX?

LIS ROMERO: I love being an instructional designer because you start with nothing; just with an idea. And you end with a product. I am a quantitative person and I like to count. I want to know how many courses I develop, the impact of those courses. I always say that I like to be busy, but meaningful busy. Means I like to be busy when I am contributing. I am contributing with students, with faculty members. We are a teaching institution. We are a college. We need to focus in providing the students all the skills that they need to get that job.

NICKI MONAHAN: Thanks so much, Lis. And I really appreciate your passion and your intensity for supporting our faculty to make those great online learning experiences for our learners. I'm gonna turn the microphone now over to Mike Avis. Mike, I'm wondering if you can tell us what your role is in the TLX and what are some of the things that you do to support faculty here at George Brown?

MIKE AVIS: Well, thanks Nicki. Thanks for the-- thanks for the shout out and the introduction. So I am a comms professor. I've been working in the department of English and Communications for about six or seven years and I moved over to the TLX a couple years ago. And I have the great privilege of working with these fine folks here. And I sort of found a niche-- I found an area within the TLX that I find really exciting and interesting and one of the things I really enjoy is working with the community of faculty and learners

and teachers here at George Brown. I've been teaching for 20-plus years in the classroom and I know what it's like to sort of struggle through finding connections with, with people within an institution. Because sometimes you get spread out and you can't find like-minded folk. So being in the TLX just gives me an opportunity to meet lots of faculty who are doing really interesting things. And one of the things that I really like is trying to connect those faculty together. I did a pilot project using iPads in the comm classroom about five years ago and I found just sort of by looking around that there's other faculty doing very similar things. Sometimes it was hard to find them. So with that in mind, I'm trying to find out what are the interesting things that are going on around the college, putting people together, building a community of learners and having faculty kind of work together, brainstorm together to think about innovative ways of teaching. Another thing that I'm really passionate about right now is the immersive learning-- immersive learning that's happening and the experiential learning that's sort of becoming very, very popular. I've been doing a lot with VR and AR. I'm thinking about ways that faculty can really enliven their classes and engage their students by thinking; by using new technologies; by having immersive video in their classroom; by having the students-- have the ability to go out and do a virtual tour of something while they're sitting in the-- in the-- in the room. So I'm spending a lot of time trying to do that.

NICKI MONAHAN: Mike, sometimes faculty come directly to you and ask for help. Can you tell me a little bit about how that works?

MIKE AVIS: Sure. Without boring people with long history but I was-- when I did my Master's, I was in London, England and I had my first experience with the Smartboard and I just thought it was one of the most amazing teaching tools I'd ever seen. And how you could move things around and this was probably, I don't know, 15 years ago at least. And once I got my hand on one of those I thought, wow, what are the things that you can do to engage your students and to help them learn just by using that technology? And as I sort of continued teaching, I continued dabbling and using a lot of these things. And faculty come in to me and they say, "You know what? I'm thinking of-- my students are bored of reading textbooks all the time and they're bored of my PowerPoint slides. What can I do to engage them and to help-- help them learn a little bit more and a little bit more for the interesting environment". So they'll come to me and I'll sort of sit down and think about what can we do? What is-- what's out there in the industry that we can-- that we can start to use and experiment with? And I'm a big risk taker. I'm always willing to, to try something that hasn't been tried before that I am not really comfortable with. And I think one of the things that I help faculty do is maybe just sort of get around some of the fear of actually doing it in front of a class with no safety net. So maybe what I do is maybe provide a little bit of a safety net for them so that if they want to try something new, I can be there to help them troubleshoot at the moment in the classroom. I'm very happy to go into a classroom with faculty when they're trying something new to give them that support. Give them some places to be creative. Give them some places where I can support them in developing their curriculum and their content. So yeah. I, I think of myself as maybe just a bouncing springboard for faculty to

come in and try something new. And besides that, as I said, I really like to explore. So one of the things that-- the thing that I think I provide at the TLX is just always looking for new and innovative ways to, to teach; to engage the students; to make their learning real and realistic in what they're-- in what they're trying to do. So, I think that's what I-- what I offer.

NICKI MONAHAN: Thanks so much, Mike. I know you've established a really-- a reputation for yourself at the TLX as a person who, when a faculty member comes forward and says, "I'd like to try something new", you're the person who says, "I can help you with that." So thanks for being here on our first podcast. And now I'd like to turn the microphone over to Ian Craine. And Ian, I'm wondering if you could introduce yourself and say a little bit about what your role is in the TLX.

IAN CRAINE: Okay. Thanks. Thanks, Nicki. I'm an instructional designer at the TLX and I've been at George Brown for about five and a half years. My role in the TLX is to help develop online courses. That's sort of the main part of the job. But the job also involves finding new ways to teach in a virtual space and working with faculty and departments and designing sort of virtual learning. And it's kind of a broad-- it's sort of growing every day. What I like about my job right now, particularly is that it's, it's project-based. And as a result, I am constantly doing new things. So every term, every year, I'm working with all the different divisions and departments at the school. And I get a chance to work on courses and projects with all kinds of things. I'm working on something fun right now which is in the robotics area, which is not, not my field at all but it is actually pretty cool. Yeah, so it's very nice to work with everybody at George Brown and not just be in one department or working on one thing all the time. So it broadens your horizons, it gets you to be interested in many things. And like Michael Avis was saying, I'm also interested in VR and, and AR and how they can use-- how their use can be expanded here.

NICKI MONAHAN: Thanks, Ian. And what a great job to have a job where you not only get to contribute your skills, but learn and grow and be challenged as well. Stella, Stella Bastone is also one of our instructional designers and Stella, Ian mentioned that he helps people, helps faculty develop online courses and I know that's part of your job but I'm wondering if you could talk about the parts of your job that maybe would appeal to faculty members who might not want to develop a fully online course but want to develop their skills and teaching and learning in the online environment.

STELLA BASTONE: Yeah, that's a good question, Nicki. So there are other things that we instructional designers do apart from strictly fully online course design. So among those things are training on production software like Camtasia. So if faculty want to produce a video of their own and edit, then we do training in that kind of thing and all faculty have access to the institutional license for that. Another thing that we do is promote Open Educational Resources. And we're always happy to talk to faculty about

ways that they can incorporate these resources into their online or face-to-face or blended environments. And also the open pedagogy that goes along with that. And another thing I wanted to mention is that we are going to be trying out a new format for PD-related to teaching online. So it's going to be moving in the direction of a sort of micro-credential format. So that rather than it being a full-length course of 10 weeks or just a micro session of two hours, it's going to be something in between. So it'll be two-week sessions and we're going to be posting the information for that on Cornerstone shortly.

NICKI MONAHAN: That sounds great and I'm sure people will be really interested in the micro-credentialing component. Thanks, Stella. It's been great to talk to our listening audience about the Teaching and Learning Exchange which we fondly call the TLX, the work that we do and we look forward to working with you all. Have a great day.

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