

## TLX XChange Forum Podcast – Ramon Delgado

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PATRICIA ROBINSON: Hi, everyone, and welcome to Xchange, the TLX podcast for faculty by faculty. I'm Patricia Robinson, faculty facilitator with the TLX. And I'm hosting a new segment of Xchange called Xchange Forum, in which I interview our faculty colleagues from across the college. So today, I've invited Ramon Delgado to join me. And he is a professor and coordinator in the Centre for Arts, Design, and Information Technology. So, thanks for joining me, Ramon.

RAMON DELGADO: Hi, Patricia.

PATRICIA ROBINSON: Can you tell us a little bit about your role at the college?

RAMON DELGADO: Well, I'm a coordinator for the School of Media and Performing Arts. I coordinate three programs in there -- the video design and production, the visual effects, and the media foundation program. I've been with the college now since 2013. I don't count years. I count from the time I started. And as an educator, I've been doing this now for 23 years, actually.

PATRICIA ROBINSON: Okay. Those -- that's -- you're counting years there, 23 years.

RAMON DELGADO: Yes, exactly. You're right.

PATRICIA ROBINSON: So right -- so you've been working in education for quite a long time. So, in your role, you've been supporting faculty as they transition to online teaching? What have you been learning about your experiences with working with faculty that you could share with us today?

RAMON DELGADO: Okay. So, you know, even though this has been an extremely difficult time, there has been a lot of positive things that we have learnt unexperienced during this time. I think the number one is how important it is to inspire other people to love the technology that we have. The second one is that, and especially what we do, which is very hands-on, is teach principles, not tools. And the last one, and I think is the most important one, is don't be afraid of making mistakes. I would summarize

that as the top three things that we have learnt.

PATRICIA ROBINSON: Okay. And I really like how you've -- like, inspiring other people to love technology, I think that's huge. And then teaching the principle. So that's super important. So, let's just start with the first one. Can you tell us a bit more about how you actually inspire others to love the technology?

RAMON DELGADO: Well, I mean, there is always -- and it's totally human. We all do that, which is, I wish I had this, I wish I had that. I wish, I wish, I wish. But the reality is that we do have a lot of tools. And those tools, even though they're not perfect, they are very good. And they --really, if we love them, if we at least try to love them, they will help us. And I got to start with, you know, what I call the cornerstone of what we have at the college, which is Blackboard. Blackboard is not perfect, but Blackboard is really good. And there is a lot of things that when the tool is used to the maximum, when we give it the love that it deserves, if I can be a bit romantic with that statement -- and I think black Blackboard is going to love you back, you know. And it's really going to give you the ability to excel at what you do and provide, you know, the right avenues that will help the students learn. So for me, that is the number one. The other thing is basically, you know, get really familiar with your computer. Get really familiar with your mobile devices. So you know, in essence, love what you have because it might not seem like much, but in my experience, there is plenty there. And that allows, you know, allows you to do your work more efficiently. And the students will respond positively to that. In my case, it has been mostly faculty that I've been trying to help transition. And the responses that I'm getting once we do the little things are fantastic.

PATRICIA ROBINSON: So -- and that really makes me think of, you know, just having a positive frame of mind and, you know, being grateful for what we have. So, you know, instead of looking over at my neighbour's yard and admiring their garden and how mine is full of weeds, I'm going to -- you know what, actually these -- some of these weeds are edible. You know, dandelions can be edible.

RAMON DELGADO: And they're very good for that nature. So it's a good thing.

PATRICIA ROBINSON: Exactly. So yeah. So, approaching with a positive frame of mind and appreciating what we have and exactly learning about it and, trying to use it to the best of our ability. So, I love that. So, you had a second point, which was about teaching the principles or learning the

principles and not the tools. So can you elaborate on that?

RAMON DELGADO: I'm actually going to use an example from the video design program. I have three faculty in there that had to do something extremely different from what they were doing before. So, these are the faculty that teach our camera equipment. So, our technology. And then suddenly, we're asking them to teach this online. So, we embrace that challenge. And we came up with amazing ways of teaching them the principles behind filmmaking, principles that really apply to everything you use. It doesn't matter if it's a cell phone or if it's one of the most expensive cameras, you're still dealing with exposure. You're still dealing with aperture. You're still dealing with depth of field. So, they figured out amazing ways -- and that's the strength of these faculty, which, again, we are extremely happy and blessed, if I can use that word, with, you know, the kind of faculty that we have. They were able to -- we. You know, I helped a little bit on that. We were able to come up with ways of making sure that the students were able to use whatever they had at home, if it was a cell phone or if it was a camera, by teaching the principal and not the tool. We weren't saying this is the only equipment that you're going to use. But rather, these are the principles that you need to learn. They were very successful. And, again, the feedback that we got from most students -- of course, there were students that were not happy with this. You know, it's normal. It's human nature. But those that embraced what the faculty were doing were extremely happy about what they came up to. And that, to me, is the best example of teach principles, not tools.

PATRICIA ROBINSON: That's a great example. And I think we can apply that in other fields as well because, again, if, you know, if students have the skills, have the understanding of maybe the theory behind it and how to apply those skills, it -- you know, they can transfer that across whatever the tools are. So yeah, so for example, if somebody has never used Blackboard before, but they were teaching somewhere else, and they use design to learn, perhaps they -- you know, they have learnt some of the principles about how to, you know, add learning content or something. So, they hopefully will be able to transfer that to a different learning management system.

RAMON DELGADO: One hundred percent. One hundred percent. That's a great way to look at it. Again, if you understand the principles behind what you're doing, it doesn't matter what tool you have in front of you. You're still going to succeed.

PATRICIA ROBINSON: Okay. And you mentioned earlier about the point of

not being afraid about making mistakes. So, Ramon, can I ask you, have you made any mistakes that you've learnt from and would like to share with us?

RAMON DELGADO: Absolutely. I got to go a bit back on these because that, I think, taught me some of the lessons that I'm applying now. Earlier in my career, I really disliked rubrics. And, you know, full disclosure, I'm not the biggest fan of rubrics, you know. I do feel that they limit a little bit of creativity. However, don't be afraid of making mistakes, right? I made the early mistake of going without rubrics. And I spent so much time explaining to students why they got the grades they got. But then one day I realized, okay, if I use rubrics [inaudible]. And then I started, right? And I started. So, you might say, well, but the mistake that you made was not using rubrics. Actually, the mistake was my attitude. And I learnt from that attitude that sometimes, you really have to embrace things. So, I did learn a powerful lesson. You see, I strongly believe to this day that if I would have just, you know, embraced rubrics, and just do a poor job on it and just write very fundamental, a very basic thing, which, sometimes, we do. Honestly, I would not have become as proficient as I am with them right now. And I still have a lot to learn. I'm not an expert by any means. But I do realize that, you know, going back to the tools, mistake of not using them properly. It's very easy, when you track your views, when you use Blackboard and track your views, to basically see what things the students are using and what they're not. And sometimes, you can use that to, you know, in very controversial things like a student that's saying you never shared with us the outline. I can say, "Actually, I did. And I, also, can see that you have spent very little time on Blackboard, you know." And that is like, okay, it helps me as a teacher. But some other things -- when I see that the students are looking at content a lot and still not getting what I'm trying to say, I am making a mistake here. What I'm saying is not very clear. So learn from that and figure out ways to, you know, share it with the students, what ways are going to help them improve. And, you know, again, learn from every mistake that you make. And you will have a much easier time moving forward, in my opinion.

PATRICIA ROBINSON: Yeah, I agree. And I think, you know, sometimes when we make mistakes, we don't kind of -- we don't want to, you know, be in denial about it because, again, it's such a great learning opportunity. And as you said, like, especially, like, related to rubrics, you know, you were kind of, you know -- like you did -- you really didn't want to use it. And a big part of it was just changing your attitude. And so for future, it has saved you so much time. You know, you don't have to repeat the same thing to 20 students, right? It's in one rubric. And you could refer them back to there.

RAMON DELGADO: Absolutely, absolutely. It really helps you. And, you know, I guess the biggest mistake that I have made in the past, it's always been related to my attitude toward things. And as I matured in my career, I realized that, you know, whenever -- nowadays, whenever I'm confronted with something new, I immediately put a cheque on my attitude. All right. Wait a second. Let's see what is really going before we go, oh, I don't like it. And it has helped me.

PATRICIA ROBINSON: Right. And that's something -- again, that's something that you've learnt about yourself. Right? So, this is a tendency that you have. And now that you're aware of this tendency, then you can be proactive in trying to mitigate that.

RAMON DELGADO: Absolutely.

PATRICIA ROBINSON: Yeah. That's a great strategy. I have another question. So what have been some of the other challenges that you or faculty have experienced with transitioning to fully online teaching?

RAMON DELGADO: It kind of relates to what I've been saying before. We have had these tools for a long time. And I know that sometimes, again, it's -- and I start with myself. It's that attitude that we have of immediately rejecting something new. And I'm not saying that everybody does that. I have done that. So, I got to look at it from my own perspective. And suddenly, we have these anomalies, a pandemic hitting us. So, it has been very good, very positive to work with faculty to try to go and revisit some of these tools that we have. And I have only -- I've also seen examples where resisting that have led to just painful experiences, you know. So, again, in the end, nobody wanted to be in the situation. But those that embrace technology from the beginning had an easier time. But that did not. And that -- I'm sorry -- I believe that's a fact. The more we learn from those mistakes, the easier it will be in the future because I don't think this is the last challenge we're going to face. I think we're -- this is only -- and I'm not being pessimistic. To me, it's just reality. This is part of our new reality. And the more we realize and try to learn from those experiences, the easier it will be moving forward. So, to me, it's -- the biggest challenge is don't resist technology. Embrace what we have. Learn to love it. Yes, there are things that could be better, for there is a lot of positive, too. And the more we embrace that, the better it will be. And the better we will be at dealing with those challenges.

PATRICIA ROBINSON: And like a big part of it is that it's here to help us, right? These tools are here to support us in teaching our students and

reaching them. And, you know, it's like, as teachers or instructors, we're developing another skill ourselves, right? It's our own professional development by going through and learning these tools and figuring out what works and doesn't work. And, you know, once we get a bit of practice, then we can figure out, you know, what are -- what tools are actually supporting the students' learning? And what is there just because, you know, it's technology? Like, is it actually supporting the students' learning? Do I need to use this one little thing or not? And I think that's part of our professional growth that we're -- you know, we have been forced to that. But yeah, I think, you know, that's a good point that we should be embracing it. So, I have a question, another question. What are some of the highlights or joys that you have been experiencing?

RAMON DELGADO: To me, this is the greatest one. I believe that every educator feels at his best when student feedback support the effort that we have put into what we do. Nothing is more satisfying than a student saying, "Thank you. This is a very difficult time. But you know what? I appreciate the effort placed in here." Was everything perfect? No. But the effort that some of these faculty have put have been amazing. And the students, you know, reflected that. I like to believe that the vast majority of students did. There were some negative feedback. Absolutely. Some people did not do really well learning online, 100%. But what I'm happy to see is that the majority of the feedback that at least I have gotten from most of the students is the professor's did a really good job. They really came up with ways of being engaging. Some professors went above and beyond. And yes, some feedback was that some professors did not. And that is expected. Do I think that that means that those professors are bad? No. To me, it's -- to me, it's still a positive, you know, still very joyful to see that if we embrace what some of these professors that did it, [inaudible], you know, sharing those lessons. For example, because I don't -- I don't want to be cryptic here. There was -- the storytelling professors that we have, the sound professors that we have, the directing professors, they really came up with extremely creative ways to get the students engaged. And they were being very fun and very communicative. Right? You know, that communication aspect is very critical when you're not in the classroom. And that really paid dividends. So, to me, it was a reaffirmation that, yes, we can do this. And we can do it online. We're never going to be 100% as effective as if we weren't in the classroom. But the opposite is also true. There were some classes that we actually have students saying, actually, that particular class work better online than it did in person. That was very good to hear. It means that there are lessons there that we're still studying, that we're still learning. And I know we're going to come up with, you know, best practices on how to do this online. And they're not necessarily your traditional best practices. They'll be a little goofy. You know what? The students appreciate

that, you know, that, you know, eyes. And you made me feel comfortable because you were not afraid to say silly things and to really show that human side of you. I think that was very positive, very, very joyful for me.

PATRICIA ROBINSON: That -- you know, that whole human connection, I mean, it can be so hard to replicate through this online learning way. But again, like, even literature that I've been reading, students are really responding and are a lot more engaged when they can make those connections with their instructors and other students in the class. And that's what people are really missing right now, too, in this pandemic is that human connection. So being able to find that in their classes online is really amazing.

RAMON DELGADO: Yep. If you can do it in person, you really have to go a little bit extra to do it online. But [inaudible]. It is possible.

PATRICIA ROBINSON: Yeah, the payback is worth it, I think, getting that student -- positive student feedback. So, it sounds like you and your faculty have been experiencing a lot of success in your department in spite of many challenges. And then there's a lot of things that are going right. So I'm glad that you were able to join me today. And thank you so much for sharing your insights and your experiences. And hopefully, we can reconnect again to learn some more.

RAMON DELGADO: Absolutely. And again, just, you know, there have been some negative, too. But I don't want to concentrate on those. I prefer to spend the time on what we did right, because I think that by doing this better -- and I will be more than happy to share more with you, because there are there are things that we're still learning. We're evaluating what we did still. We're trying to figure out ways to, you know, like, what work really well? What didn't work so well? Where did the students have issues? Because those are important lessons. And I think, again, you know, thank you for this opportunity to share this. Hopefully, it will help somebody else. And, you know, I'll be more than happy as we get more and more information to share that because I think by all of us doing this, we're going to figure out the best formulas. They're not going to be perfect. There's still going to be mistakes, you know. But it's okay. It's okay.

PATRICIA ROBINSON: And I appreciate that. And I agree because, again, you know, we're forced into the situation. But, you know, look at it positively because we are learning all these lessons. And focussing on the positive, I think, is really important, right? We can really get caught up in that negative, what's not working. But if we want to move forward and grow

professionally and grow as a college, it is really important to focus on those positives and what is working here, what is working there. And then what can we try to continue doing even after this pandemic?

RAMON DELGADO: Absolutely.

PATRICIA ROBINSON: So, thank you so much, Ramon. And I'll definitely contact you again, maybe this summer.

[ Music ]