

Learning to be Human Together



# Learning to be Human Together

*Humanizing Learning*

*CO-DESIGNED BY STUDENTS, FACULTY AND STAFF AT OCAD UNIVERSITY, MOHAWK COLLEGE, BROCK UNIVERSITY, TRENT UNIVERSITY, NIPISSING UNIVERSITY, UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO-MISSISSAUGA*

*TERRY GREENE; PAT MAHER; NICK BAKER; KRISTEN MOMMERTZ; JUTTA TREVIRANUS; JENNIFER CURRY JAHNKE; JESS MITCHELL; JAIME HILDITCH; HEATHER CARROLL; HARSH BHAVSAR; GIULIA FORSYTHE; FIONA RAWLE; DAVE CORMIER; AND BONNIE STEWART*

OCAD UNIVERSITY, LEARNING TO BE HUMAN TOGETHER TEAM  
TORONTO



*Learning to be Human Together by Co-designed by Students, Faculty and Staff at OCAD University, Mohawk College, Brock University, Trent University, Nipissing University, University of Windsor, University of Toronto-Mississauga is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.*

# Contents

Introducing Learning to Be Human Together	1
Part I. Come On In	
Where Are You?	5
How Things Started	13
Who Are We Writing To?	16
What Is a Deliverable? What Have We Delivered?	20
Super Themes	26
Who the Heck Are We?	38
Part II. The Modules (1-4)	
Module 1: Unlearning and Unsettling: Questioning and Reflecting	41
Module 2: Students as Agents of Their Own Diverse Destiny: Vulnerability and Failure	53
Module 3: Creating an Inclusive Community of Learners: Trust and Context	62
Module 4: Sustaining Change: Critique and Care	73
Part III. Outro	
Administrative Harms	83
Not Going Back	84
Part IV. Some Things We Picked Up & Take Everything	
Take the Stuff	89
Project Playlist	92
Jutta's Unlearning and Questioning Course	93
Inclusive Facilitation Guide	95
Credits	103
Accessibility	105



# Introducing Learning to Be Human Together



## Project Trailer Video



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:  
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onhumanlearn/?p=4>

[Click here for a version with ASL](#)

[Click here for a version with LSQ \(coming soon!\)](#)

This resource explores what *humanizing* teaching and learning means: to acknowledge that our relationships are foundational to the work that we do. It means to make learning inclusive with connection, access, and meaning-making at its core.

When you have something to say that you hope can empower people and encourage inclusion you yell it from the rooftops and in as many formats as possible. To that end, you will find the materials of this project in a number of formats – to meet you where you are and how YOU choose to interact with it. This is just the beginning of what we hope will be a deeply humanized experience. This material is not a book, nor a guide, nor a checklist—it’s an engagement with complex issues, with social entanglements, and with ways of doing (and not doing) things. This work also foregrounds the importance of twelve core super themes, such as trust, vulnerability, re-framing failure, and friction. These super themes are not discrete units or siloed entities, rather they are multi-layered ideas that intersect and weave together across the humanizing learning spectrum.

**Module 1: Unlearning & Unsettling.** How do we know what we know and what is our educational value system? To move forward, we must interrogate our teaching and learning practices – the work of unlearning and unsettling. This module explores how the process is more important than the outcome, and highlights the importance of moving slowly, giving ourselves time to think, process, and reflect.

**Module 2: Students as Agents of the own Diverse Destiny.** This module explores the importance and role of vulnerability and failure in humanizing learning. It emphasizes that we are all learning and explores how, since education is relational, power is especially present.

**Module 3: Co-Creating Inclusive Communities.** This module acknowledges that diversity is our greatest asset, with inclusion being our most important challenge. It explores community guidelines, participation standards, ethics, social justice, co-design and co-creation, and highlights how these concepts can fundamentally challenge and disrupt power.

**Module 4: Sustaining Change.** This module acknowledges that change is hard. How can we sustain change, complexity, and care in a system that was not designed for what our society demands of it? How do we foreground care and frame it as a reciprocal process? This module explores this apparent friction and highlights steps we can take to make this work both foundational and sustainable.

This resource also includes an exploration of the co-design experience – the process of creating and nurturing a community that collectively did this work. Coming out the other side of this work are a group of people who came

together to share our love for learning and our passion for education. We hope you find something here that changes even one small aspect of how you move through the world.

*This project is made possible with funding by the Government of Ontario and through eCampusOntario's support of the Virtual Learning Strategy. To learn more about the Virtual Learning Strategy visit:<https://vls.ecampusontario.ca>*

PART I  
COME ON IN



# Where Are You?



## Speaking to You from Where You Are

If you are here, then you are at least curious about what Humanizing Education could mean. Maybe that curiosity stems from skepticism, perhaps well-meaning curiosity, or maybe you are fully invested in the concept already. Regardless, we welcome you and ask you to take this journey with us to learn more about what Education can be and what role you have in making it more. In all your activities within the University or College, you are making decisions that have cascading impacts on others – and that is true for all of us: administrators, instructors, students, staff, etc. Would you like to know how you can help “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all?” Let’s begin.

We, and many others, believe that access to education (materials, experiences, and interactions) is fundamental to achieving inclusive and equitable quality education for all. We are involved in efforts to improve all three, but for the purposes of the work we have undertaken here, we want to focus on the interactional: on humanizing the endeavor altogether. At its least, “humanizing education” means recognizing that we are all human. So, we start with an awareness of what it means to be human *together*, namely: where there are people there are also power dynamics, systemic and historical cycles of exclusion, privilege, and inequitable access.

Education (both teaching and learning) must be understood as relational, situated, and embedded in socio-economic cultural phenomena. And this is not just a situatedness that represents where the instructors and students are – administrators and decision-makers within the University or College should also explore their own situatedness. It is in the *relational* moments that education transcends mere content, rote memorization, and standardized assessments and moves to the realm of sustainable learning outcomes, application of concepts, great personal growth, and yes, equitable access.

In some cases, technologists have tried to solve this by building in surveillance mechanisms to flag students falling behind. They have built in ways for instructors to connect with students other than just in classes or during office hours. Each of those attempts creates the context where the relational can happen, but they do not in and of themselves create relational connections. Those connections happen in the details of how we treat each other.

We need to do the following, and not as a task or a checklist, but as a foundational value:

- Ask “Education for whom?” in every decision we make and every plan we scale
- Establish meaningful ways to talk with and listen to each other
- Build in mechanisms for change and flexibility
- Build in opportunities for reflection
- Build in Codes of Conduct and ask what else needs to be done to make a space inclusive and challenging
- Explore how pedagogies of care, trauma, and kindness impact outcomes like innovation, success, retention, motivation, meaning-making etc.

At this time, many academic institutions are using some variation on many of the words above: wellness, care, trauma, inclusion, critical pedagogy, humanizing, and more. What the institutions do about those words makes all the difference. Whether we or our institutions are up front about where we are on this journey, it is detectable in the ways we handle communications, activities, and controversies. The era of “thoughts and prayers” and “wellness theatre” cutting through the real experiences of individuals in times of crisis or unrest has come to an end. We can do better; we must do better.

In other words, neither the existence of a statement, policy, or standard without follow through or the absence of a statement, policy, or standard can absolve us of having to address what is currently impacting education:

- Student and instructor well-being
- Inequities that have a disproportionate impact on some

So, the question we pose to you, good reader, colleague, and collaborator in Education is: Where are you? Below are three possible (yes, overly simplified) states you find yourself in as you engage with these modules:

## 1. Framework

In this first scenario, when we are confronted by a situation that is particularly messy, we turn to a framework for understanding it and for dealing with it. We might look to the following for guidance on how to proceed:

- The rule of law
- The rules of the game
- The mores of the culture
- The mores of the institution

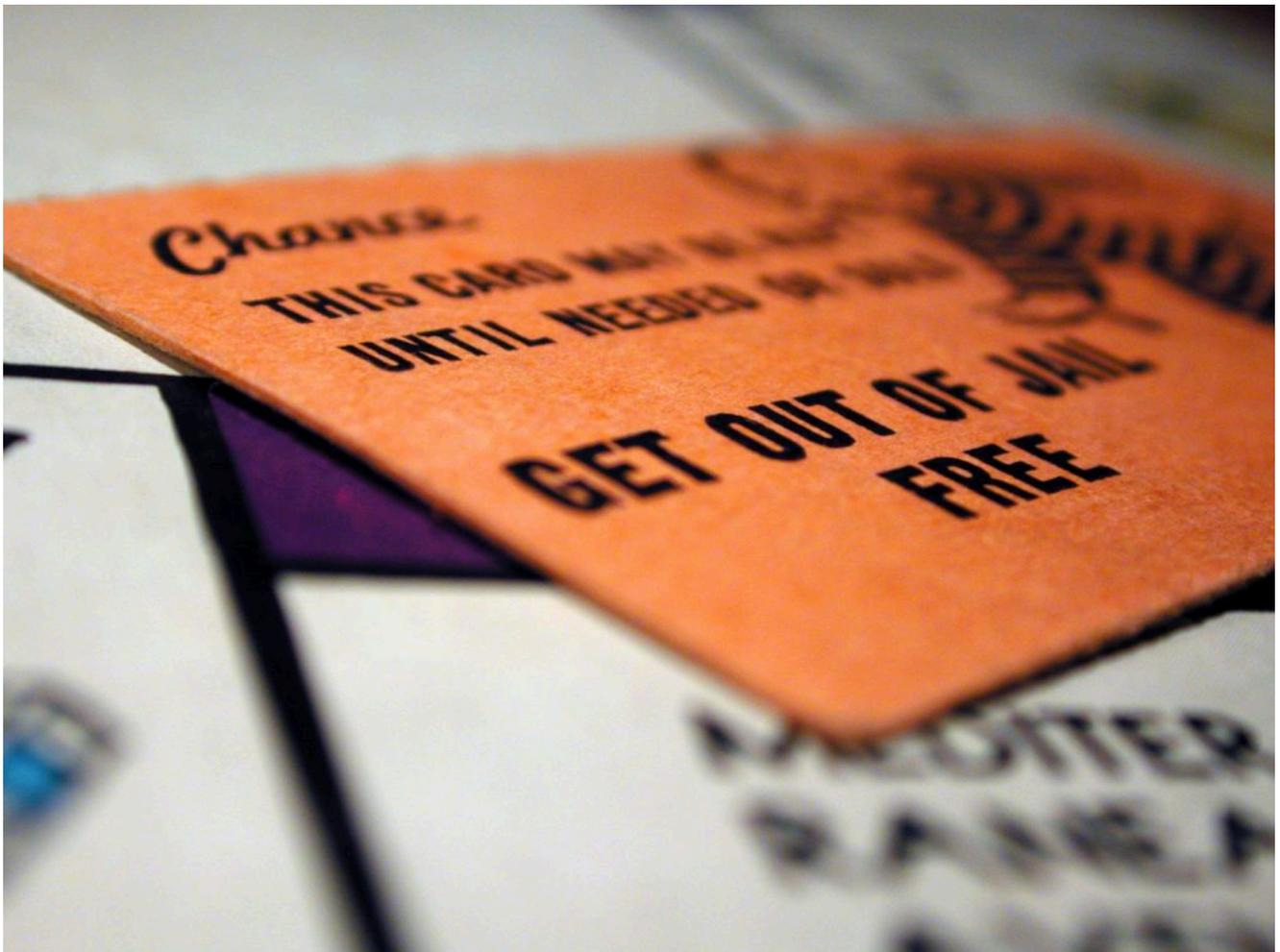


Figure 1: Get Out of Jail Free card from Monopoly By Mark Strozier—[1], CC BY 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=55376860>

This is the easy way to know what to do – a disembodied source tells us what to do, we go straight to action, and we do what has been dictated, what has been done before, what is tried and true, and what has, presumably, been checked for legality/propriety/cover your \*ssness. We follow instructions. This is not a humanized approach, but rather one that relies on well-formed policies determined with a process that is often not transparent, clear, or know-able.

Examples of this approach can sound like any of the following:

- That's the way we have always done it
- We have a policy that states we can/can't do that
- That would upset <insert stakeholder here> and we can't do that
- 'NMP' principle – not my problem – above my pay grade, out of my hands, etc.
- HR or legal has a policy that tells us what we should do – this is their domain and we'll defer to them

The “framework” approach is not often associated with innovation or culture change or humanizing. This approach tends to double-down on the litigious, immediately escalating many issues that point to failures or points of conflict in the institution that could and should be addressed. And policies that attend to human interactions tend to establish the very minimum; they are not often forward thinking or innovative.

## 2. Token

When we don't have a framework, we might look for a way to SOLVE the problem – if there isn't a woman in a senior leadership role, we bring in a woman. If there isn't a person of colour or an Indigenous person, we bring one in. We're always one step behind, but we're responsive! And we are still under the illusion that these sorts of representational issues can be solved or fixed, that it will be completed, checked off a to-do list if we simply substitute in what has been identified as missing. The problem is that both the context and the people will change and then there will be another “missing” person. Another problem is the disproportionate weight put on a “representative” individual to speak not for themselves, but for an entire identity group while the other members of the group are “just themselves.”

This approach has no awareness of the dynamism of people, communities, and individuals: we cannot be simplified to checklists or boxes; there is no completion. So, we have a student-centred event or week; we praise the sessional instructors publicly; we applaud the flexibility of those who have embraced care, kindness, and humanizing in their teaching; and we ultimately change nothing – worse, we double down on policies and practices that reinforce inequities.

In this quick recovery scenario, we run the risk of

- Tokenism
- Superficially dealing with a complex issue (and ultimately changing nothing for the future)
- Not being respectful to nuance
- Marginalizing – exactly what we are aiming to avoid
- Unintended consequences (slippery slope arguments like “if I make an exception for you ...”)
- Establishing a culture of haves and have-nots, creating (arguably unnecessary and counterproductive) competition



Figure 2: Image of all white people with one person of colour in the middle, circled “Here I am again!”  
<https://www.congressheightsontherise.com/blog//2011/08/minority-report-white-is-new-black-in.html>

When we immediately try to solve, we miss opportunities for deeper and broader engagement and understanding. This often means we do not address the root causes and get stalled out at a potentially superficial level.

Examples where this approach can be detected are:

- We have a **person of colour on our board** now
- We have a **diversity day/month/T-shirt/sticker**
- We have a diversity **checklist** we go through on all projects and this is how we show our commitment
- We did an afternoon of **training around biases, we’re good**
- We have a **fact sheet** for different disabilities that all are required to read

From the perspective of the marginalized person in an environment like this, the question becomes: **Am I a token or do they respect my mind/ideas/work/perspective?**

The “token” approach is not often associated with innovation or culture change or humanizing. This is also often easily sniffed out and is transparent to outsiders. It tends to stick out like a sore thumb.

### 3. Depth/Breadth

When we don’t stop at the answers/rules/laws (framework) and we acknowledge the superficiality of subbing in the missing puzzle piece (token), then we have an opportunity to create dialogue/respectful disagreement/sharing of diverse ideas, to change culture and be innovative, to lead and show others how it can be done productively, meaningfully, and sustainably. We can do the hard work to change culture, build communities, and have practices that reflect the words we write.

In this scenario, it is important to remember that

- How things begin matters (look through history to understand where you are now)
- Representation matters – striving for co-design *with* rather than *for* should be a minimum
- Language matters
- Framing the issue matters (vulnerability, truth-telling, honesty, apology)
- Setting the expectations for outcomes/timelines matters (goals, success, failures). Whose notion of success? Who defined the goals and are they singular? What do we do with failures?
- Participation matters
- It is unlikely that everyone will be happy – conflict can be productive

# WE WELCOME

ALL RACES AND ETHNICITIES  
ALL RELIGIONS  
ALL COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN  
ALL GENDER IDENTITIES  
ALL SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS  
ALL ABILITIES AND DISABILITIES  
ALL SPOKEN LANGUAGES  
ALL AGES  
EVERYONE.

**WE STAND HERE WITH YOU**  
**YOU ARE SAFE HERE**

\* Content adapted from the original "We Welcome" sign created by IPRC members Lisa Mangum and Jason Levián.

Figure 3: Burns, Brittani. "We Welcome" *Unsplash*. August 11, 2018, <https://unsplash.com/@brittaniburns>.

If you're looking for these examples, you're also often looking for moments of failure, of discomfort, of uncertainty. These examples extend beyond that initial point of failure, discomfort, or uncertainty, to where we can see those in power or those responsible go into action that can then result in real change. This is not accomplished through one-off events or statements or press conferences or moments that make the uncomfortable individual feel better, but rather are characterized by at least the following:

- Apologizing authentically
- Focusing on and acknowledging the injustice done
- Addressing those who were hurt by the misstep
- Actual and sustainable action to remedy the misstep that makes it unlikely to occur again.

I started writing *In The Heights* because I didn't feel seen.  
And over the past 20 years all I wanted was for us-  
ALL of us- to feel seen.  
I'm seeing the discussion around Afro-Latino representation  
in our film this weekend and it is clear that many in our  
dark-skinned Afro-Latino community don't feel sufficiently  
represented within it, particularly among the leading roles.  
I can hear the hurt and frustration over colorism, of  
feeling still unseen in the feedback.  
I hear that without sufficient dark-skinned Afro-Latino  
representation, the work feels extractive of the community  
we wanted so much to represent with pride and joy.  
In trying to paint a mosaic of this community, we fell  
short.  
I'm truly sorry.  
I'm learning from the feedback, I thank you for  
raising it, and I'm listening.  
I'm trying to hold space for both the incredible  
pride in the movie we made and be accountable  
for our shortcomings.  
Thanks for your honest feedback. I promise to do  
better in my future projects, and I'm dedicated to the  
learning and evolving we all have to do to make sure  
we are honoring our diverse and vibrant community.  
Siempre, LMM

Figure 4: Lin Manuel Miranda apologizing on Twitter

There are those in Education who understand that change requires an intersectional approach bridging technology, humanity, and their interplay therein. Christine Ortiz, former Dean of Graduate Education, Professor of Material Science took leave several years ago to "imagine a university without classrooms, lectures, disciplinary departments, or majors." Ortiz imagined a university focused on:

- The transdisciplinary interface between technology and humanity
- Emphasizing personalized, holistic, and research-based pedagogy
- Employing dynamic organizational structures and a high quality, low cost, scalable financial model to serve more underserved and underprivileged students

Activities like Ortiz's imagined Institution should push us to interrogate just how far we are pushing ourselves and others around us to unlearn and unsettle, just how much we are empowering students to be agents of their own diverse destinies, just how much effort and time we are putting into creating and maintaining inclusive communities, and how we are working to sustain a practice of critique and questioning.

An apt metaphor to demonstrate this meaningful depth and breadth is to imagine a diverse group of people coming together to co-create a table. Rather than assume common mores and practices, rather than inviting "others" to take a seat at a table already constructed and codified with institutional norms and histories that form the basis of "ways of doing things," co-creating the table means authentically bringing people together to build a table with each other. Rather than adding additional seats at the table, those invested in depth and breadth work to tear down existing table structures and co-create spaces and tables with everyone<sup>1</sup>. In order to do this, we need to ask questions such as "What should the table be made from and what direction will it be oriented toward?" and "How do we ensure both flexibility and structures are in place that allow for continued co-construction of the table?" By exploring these questions, we can ensure that tables are built that move from inclusion to true belonging, wherein folks at the table are truly heard.

## Continuum

The above three scenarios do not convey a linear progression of discrete states – some institutions or individuals start at depth/breadth and remain there through hard work, actively nurturing a healthy culture while making clear their ongoing commitment to a humanized approach. Some merely start there. Each of these scenarios show some level of awareness of the problem and a different approach to the opportunity. What we are hoping to show here is that **openness and inclusion are not immeasurable**. They can be sniffed, seen, documented, practiced, lost, and gained. In the context of education, these approaches can break down barriers to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goal #4: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." If we do not heed the opportunities as institutions, then not only will we not achieve Goal #4, we will be complicit in perpetuating a system or process that reaches only some while actively harming others.

This is our call-to-action: Are we satisfied with reaching only some or do we see ourselves as committed to optimizing education for all? Are we part of rethinking education, or will we maintain the status quo?

## Where Are You?

Skeptics, well-meaning allies, and fully invested champions, we are all a part of this aspect of education: the relational. So, join us in exploring ways you can continue to humanize your own practice.

1. <https://jesshmittchell.medium.com/open-and-inclusive-how-we-get-both-wrong-1f908a9517c7>

# How Things Started



The ways things begin matters, so in the spirit of transparency, storytelling, and provenance, here is how things started and progressed:

Jess Mitchell and Jutta Treviranus were eager to bring together a group of Ontarians who care deeply about education and about humanizing the experience for everyone. Both began conversations that spread like a rhizome and included people who had worked together, people who knew of each other, people who hadn't worked together at all, and an otherwise motley bunch of people with passion, interest, and willingness to charge into the uncharted together.

The meetings began at the start of the project and were planned for one hour weekly. There was some skepticism about meeting weekly, but that was quickly overcome by an eagerness to spend the time together — to play, to talk about the things we so desperately wanted to discuss, to have a community. So, we built a community around our different perspectives, experiences, backgrounds, and our shared passion for teaching and learning.

There is a kind of natural progression that groups move through as they progress from a mere collection of people to a community of practice. This team was no different in going through an organic, natural progression. Early meetings were less conversational. More time was spent coming together on the same page about what we thought we were going to do and how we thought we might do it. Those conversations felt much more like individual team members tossing ideas into a collective circle while feeling out how and how much we each would contribute to the “product.” We were gently negotiating how much structure (or how little) and how much storytelling this project would focus on. We were sorting out what we promised, how we'd make sure we delivered, and how we each could come together around a common goal. That common goal was stated by one of the team members early on as, “I think we all want to do something we are proud of.” We needed a plan, or did we?

These are the things we thought we were doing (as stated in the grant):

The multi-institutional team will co-design four “living modules” that consider the many nested and entangled functions of the academic ecosystem. Each module will provide learning experiences and supports intended for relevant roles and functions in the academic structure — from students, to educators, services, administration, funders, policymakers, and the larger community.

At the beginning of the engagement, when we weren't familiar with each other or acclimated to spending time together weekly, our meetings were focused and “professional.” Thanks to the pandemic our meetings quickly and necessarily took on a humanized tone with children, pets, construction, deliveries, and more adding to the atmosphere. We were coming together online, weekly, within a pandemic for a little less than a year from our homes. We were inextricable from our home contexts — we were professionally situated in fundamentally personal spaces. And we were sharing those personal spaces with each other; we began to develop a rhythm.

Was it the topics we discussed, the context within which we discussed them, or the relationships that we were building that felt magical? Probably all of the above, but especially the relational — our interactions. We arrived at this through what felt like magic or at least a combination of: letting things happen organically rather than on a fixed timeline; leaving space for exploration, reflection, and reflexivity by avoiding strict agendas; establishing a way to behave together rather than leaving ambiguous what kinds of collective values we had. One part accidental, one part quite intentional, our own collective experiences in communities had proven to us the best inclusive communities were often flat in structure or avoided structure and were creative and safe. With each week we were building something, and it wasn't content — it was trust, relationships ... it was a community. It emerged organically and naturally and at its own pace and through a series of open conversations about families, health, education, and what was happening in our lives.

Part of our collective experience that proved so valuable was the way in which we all gently, intentionally, respectfully, humanely found ways to keep the group within a set of guard rails when they were needed. This happened in multiple ways and at multiple times: sometimes it was when a joke went too far and the joker was gently made aware that the

joke had unintended consequences; at others it was an activity that some didn't see a potential reaction to (because it was not part of their lived experience); and at others it was a need for someone to take charge temporarily to redirect us all in a particular direction, to course-correct or define the next little step of the course. With each week we were not only building trust and relationships (building a community), we were also working out diverse ways we could all respectfully and equitably keep each other in the loose boundaries we needed, without being constricting or damaging. These moments were made possible by trust and openness, but they are also an opportunity for any group of people to explore together.



Figure 1: Photo by Holly Mandarich on Unsplash

We were, after all, colleagues coming together over the course of a year of our lives. We knew early on that we were all open and committed to experiencing “this” as we created it (whatever “it” would become). We were asking, how could we all come together in a radically (yes, very) humanized way. We wanted to subvert the typical – this was not going to be a static project; we were not going to run off into separate corners to write didactic materials only to glue them awkwardly together in the end. We were committed to doing this together.

So, as we dive into our subversive ways, please understand that what we did, the community we created was specific to a time and a place and the people present. And we were living lives within that time and place. As a deeply personal and entirely humanized (and arguably subversive) act, we present the following list of real human events that happened alongside this work. How do you measure a year (obvious reference to RENT)?

How we were human (acknowledging our humanity):

- Fiona’s meniscus tear
- Terry’s Olympic Level, Globally Elite Sleep apnea (78X per hour – beat that!)
- Jutta’s brain surgery
- Jess’s Citizenship!

- Nick's Citizenship!
- Three stage plays from the Stewart/Cormier family
- Jonah's HR moments: "Don't take your diaper off!"
- Pat's kids and independent school realities (good and bad)
- Dave's dad's funeral
- Fiona and students in accident on way to funeral (and subsequent concussion)
- Global pandemic
- Quarantine
- Online school for kids
- Potty training kids (during co-design sessions, and pretty much failing)
- Heather moved
- Jaime moved
- Nick moved
- Pat moved
- Kristen's screaming cat
- Terry's girls at home from school
- Jennifer and Kristen suffering from poor internet when visiting family

And our context was complex and changing all the time – many times with no notice. These are a few of the context changes that everyone in Ontario had to adjust to:

- Announcements of online learning, back-to-school, varying COVID screenings CTV Ontario Students Return to the Classroom
- *The Star* "Students Need to Get Back in the Classroom"
- Announcements of daycares remaining open while public schools switched to online
- Dividing families with kids in both
- Daycare and school staff vaccination delays
- When the vaccines became available, who could get them first? (*The Star* Covid-19 Vaccine Policies)
- Provincial announcements from the Ministry of Colleges and Universities on Fridays that impacted Colleges and Universities on Monday (and no forewarning)
- Laurentian insolvency crisis and subsequent tear-apart (read more here)
- CTV Laurentian Insolvency Crisis
- Higher Education Strategy Associates blog posts about Laurentian
- Ken Steele's blog post with many links to external resources

# Who Are We Writing To?



We expect the topics and experiences and discussions you find here will be applicable and relevant to anyone working within education but especially to administrators, instructional designers, instructors (tenure track, adjunct, sessional), graduate students, postdocs, teaching and learning researchers, learners, and more.

This work is especially relevant for both those who have power to make changes and those who do not have power yet and are excited about trying something that could improve outcomes. Both will find an invitation to thinking through tough problems authentically and from many angles. To those with power, we hope you engage with some materials that compel you to use your power to make changes. To those without, we'd like to support and encourage you.

## Humanizing for Whom?

For our purposes, we focused first on who is precarious in the various contexts where decisions or policy about education are happening and where education itself is happening. Asking “Who is precarious here?” can help us see the perspective of a newly appointed Dean in a faculty struggling with controversy and social issues, a university or college adjusting to a new government with new priorities (and therefore uncertain funding for ongoing work), early academic colleagues (graduate students and postdocs) who have tremendous responsibilities (e.g., in teaching) and little power, students who are working multiple jobs to afford their education, racialized individuals in general and those otherwise marginalized or excluded from having a voice and choice in education. It is important to differentiate between an individual and a position: the Dean traditionally has power, and the student does not. And not all learners are created equal: international students sometimes carry a heavier burden, first generation students, those who grew up in generational poverty, and every other reality of individual lives and barriers to equity and access.

The work of humanizing and understanding the contexts within which education happens cannot be a luxury. It must be a requirement for a standard of education that all are entitled to. These aren't necessarily the easily measured values, and few institutions have genuinely committed to this hard work. There is an enormous risk when this is partially committed to or when it is a precarious commitment itself. Further, when an institution embraces this work in an “off the corner of the desk” approach without structural supports, the precarious usually shoulder the burden, further adding to their precarity and likelihood for burnout. We hope to give voice to the precarious and to the individual. We see you and we want to support you, for you are the reason there will be change in the systems that leave some with scars and wounds. You are the source of change in the cycles of exclusion and the parts of education that are meant for only some. Together we can support each other and fundamentally change the system.

## What Does Humanizing Learning Mean?



Figure 1: Photo by Jan Canty on Unsplash

There are words and phrases that we use as shorthand for gnarly problems in society, culture, and our planet. Sometimes those words and phrases come under fire and are critiqued merely because of the burden they carry representing complex problems. Examples of this are “climate crisis,” “humanized learning,” “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion,” “decolonization,” and many more. It is a shame that these heavy global issues can be reduced to a phrase that can then become politicized and wielded by those with power or attention to either vilify or lionize. Our hope in this work is to steadfastly remain undistracted by the popularity or lack thereof of a phrase in favour of focusing in on a need; namely, the United Nations Social Development Goal #4 “to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

To that end, this work would be incomplete if it did not directly address the question, “Humanizing education for whom?” We begin from a point that recognizes that power is everywhere: wherever there are people, there is power. This theme is critical to understanding humanizing — you must be able to recognize and be conscious of the power you hold as an individual. Whether you choose to enforce it or not in your own pedagogical or professional practice, it exists and impacts outcomes. Humanizing learning requires us to rethink traditional power dynamics and actively work to redistribute power. And that is what makes this work so difficult, because simply stating that we must be aware of and redistribute power disrupts the ways we have collectively designed education to this point:

- Strong identities and expectations of how individuals (faculty, student, sessional, administrator, staff, etc.) should

behave based on survivorship bias

- Hierarchies of power
- Matrix of domination and dominant cultures
- People, planet, and profit (3Ps that all organizations must grapple with)
- Ethics
- Stakeholders
- Stated goals (usually measurable using quantitative data; things like retention, matriculation, and enrollment)
- Assessments
- Completion

Indeed, each of these topics requires interrogation and disruption itself. This work will, for some, be a starting point to dig deeper into many of the assumptions we live with. Our hope is that each of us is able to find something in these materials that gives us pause and asks of us to spend time considering and redesigning the areas of education where we exercise some control or influence. We maintain that access to and success in education is inextricable from issues of justice, equity, diversity, and systemic bias.

## What Is “Fairness”?

Still, we would like to be as clear as possible in stating who this work is meant for and who we are hoping to humanize education for. We can blithely and meaninglessly say “everyone,” but we would prefer to be explicit about who we want to humanize education for.

Our approach now in education is to standardize everything we do to be “fair.” We codify this “sameness” in our syllabi, our university and college policies and practices. But treating everyone the same does not indeed achieve fairness — it merely codifies the status quo, perpetuating cycles of inclusion and exclusion and creating further gulfs between the two. When we are confronted with complexity and uncertainty (herein how to make education equitable), we lean back on simplicity and completeness and sameness. In this case, we settle for equality at the expense of equity without interrogating either.



Figure 2: Photo by John Mark Arnold on Unsplash

Dangerously, we codify equality in structure. And those structures are how we measure success. We will measure you all by exactly the same criteria because that makes us feel fair; a rule of “no exceptions” makes us *feel* fair. But we know it isn’t fair at all. In lieu of an alternative, we snuggle up to sameness and its oversimplified illusion of fairness, objectivity, validation, rigour, and other crimes. It should leave a pit in all our stomachs because we know this does damage. Flattening out the field at the point of validation and assessment does not fundamentally change the fact that the field is not level anywhere else. Choosing sameness (because fairness is hard to do) is *not* a neutral act.

The way things start matters. Those entering educational institutions from a history of generational poverty will not have the same experience as peers who did not grow up in poverty. The work of exploring how to make education more equitable, we argue, begins with making education more humanized. Much more collaborative work and co-design thinking must be done to begin to address equity in education (in fact, it is one of the topics we revisit in Module 4). We would like to declare that this work is a journey, never a task. And we need those involved in education to be committed to this journey as a value that we bring into everything we do evermore.

To the naysayers who proclaim that exceptions are fundamentally unfair, we ask that you genuinely struggle with the above truth: that we do not all come to the experience of education with the same or even a similar slate (and make no mistake, there is no blank state).

# What Is a Deliverable? What Have We Delivered?



This is a project, generously funded by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities of Ontario and carried out through eCampusOntario's Virtual Learning Strategies grant program.

In the grant we stated:

The multi-institutional team will co-design four “living modules” that consider the many nested and entangled functions of the academic ecosystem. Each module will provide learning experiences and supports intended for relevant roles and functions in the academic structure – from students, to educators, services, administration, funders, policymakers, and the larger community.

Below you will find the four “living modules” and rich references, further reading, and more. You will also find artifacts that were created over the past year on the project. And you will also find musings about the process of creating a community that collectively did this work. In many ways, the team working on this project feels that the process was the deliverable. Time and again we marveled at how deeply the process had impacted us all. We want to capture some of that here, but please know that you cannot bottle this work up and reproduce it entirely. It does not scale – nor should it. What we can share are suggestions, stories, and experiences for how to do this work. We will also pepper the modules with what we learned along the way and areas we know need more work by us all. This is the journey that defies “completion.”

One team member asked, “Do we actually think that humanizing education will happen with four modules?” No, humanizing education will not be accomplished with four modules; the ways that humanizing education will happen is up to each of us and our interactions. Humanizing is fundamentally about relationships, interactions, and experiences with others. Humanizing education is fundamentally relational.

A word of warning: we built a community of practice supporting each other in doing this work. We are connected deeply and expect to remain connected beyond the timeline of this work. Humanizing work has this tendency; it brings people together to support, encourage, and challenge each other.

One last word of warning: this group has one hell of a sense of humour – perhaps it's also an essential ingredient to this work. Surround yourself with real people who can laugh at themselves, and then extend that to everyone else.

## 4 Modules (that will not, in and of themselves, humanize learning)

### Module 1: Unlearning and Unsettling

#### *Questioning and Reflecting*



Figure 1: Photo by Lukas Juhas on Unsplash

Among the domains to be examined are research, evidence, metrics, innovation, ways of knowing and expressing knowledge, value systems, work, intelligence, economics, decision-making, notions of quality, rigour, integrity, efficiency, winning, and trust as they relate to learning. To move forward we must interrogate how we practice now and why. Some of this is the uncomfortable work of unlearning and unsettling. We do this work by embracing questioning and reflecting as we explore the way education is designed (from the physical environment, the virtual environment, the interactional environment, and more). Among the lessons we learn in unlearning and unsettling are the following:

- Unbottle-able: we cannot package this work up and make it “scale.” Scale is a word that harkens to the economics of the enterprise, not to the learning outcomes or cultural impacts. We cannot copy and paste modules into different contexts and expect the same results. In fact, we should pause and consider the impact of expecting results at all. Many times, the process is more important than the outcome or any single outcome.
- Time to think, time to reflect, slow learning, importance of pauses: when do you take time to explore, wonder, critique, interrogate, question yourself and your own practices, as well as those of others and of institutions? Time and attention are perhaps our most valuable commodity, and it is in short supply. What is lost when we schedule

meetings back-to-back and never have a moment to think, digest, let our minds wander to make connections? This is the sawdust of our work. As we cut clean, exact lines we create “waste” in the dust. But what if the dust is the good stuff? What if we accidentally leave something behind in the dust? What if the voices and the people we hope to reach the most with this work fall into the dust? We have to be aware and wary of every cut we make.

- Structured structurelessness: in doing this work we acknowledge the need for structure while simultaneously warning that too much structure can curtail curiosity and exploration. So, we advocate for only as much structure as is absolutely necessary for people to have clarity of purpose, but no more. And in that space that is created, we can all consider how things might be. We put education in a straitjacket and then we’re surprised when it isn’t whimsical, innovative, creative, and free. How do we interrogate the usefulness and uselessness of the structure in rubrics, checklists, gatekeeping, rigour, and prerequisites?

## Module 2: Students as Agents of Their Own Diverse Destiny

### *Vulnerability and Failure*

Diversity is our society’s most valuable asset. To address current and emerging demands, students must differentiate themselves and continue learning throughout life. This implies rethinking notions of student conformance to singular standards, biased exclusionary recruitment, systems of preferential academic ranking and promotion, reductionist assessment techniques, student surveillance and policing, and winner-takes-all competition, among other academic conventions. How do we equip students to value, develop, and apply their own unique contributions throughout life?

- Idolatry – ways to avoid prof-worship: one barrier to student agency is the traditional classroom model, which features the “sage on a stage,” bestowing knowledge on students who are often referred to “bums in seats.” This common understanding removes student agency and knowledge and inflates the status of the professor. Understanding the rigid hierarchical structures of higher education that we are situated within, how do we resist idolatry of those who occupy seats of power? In order to democratize learning and ensure that learners (who on aggregate have a greater range of lived experiences than the professoriate) have agency, we must make conscious effort to avoid worshiping, or contributing to the cult of personality, which oftentimes surrounds professors.
- Power is everywhere: make no mistake, where there are people, there is power. And whether or not those with power acknowledge their power, it is there. Human interactions within the realm of all that happens in education is no exception. Policies, practices, conversations, assessments, the ways the classroom are setup ... everything can subtly or not so subtly convey power; saying, you belong here, or you do not belong.

## Module 3: Co-Creating Inclusive Communities

### *Trust and Context*

While diversity is our greatest asset, inclusion is our most important challenge. The academic mission of advancing learning and discovery, while doing no harm, is best served by an orchestration of diverse perspectives. Current academic processes pit students against students, faculty against faculty, and faculty against students; they create monocultures and biased, exclusionary hierarchies. The academic journey is often a lonely one, especially during the pandemic. How do we create a cohesive learning community out of dissonant and divergent perspectives, deal with

conflict, listen to quieter minority voices, give and receive constructive critique, and share knowledge generously for collective benefit?

- Community guidelines and participation standards: some groups are publishing participation guidelines or codes of conduct. These can be helpful starting places for a group of people to agree on some standards, but these documents will only be strong if they are visited and revisited and critiqued and modified regularly. You can show your mettle by ensuring this is never a “one-and-done” activity, but rather a value that is embedded in everything you do and how each community member treats each other.
- Ethics and social justice: even when you dabble shallowly into humanizing learning, you are confronted almost immediately with issues of social justice and ethics. We argue that this is actually desirable and that change (cultural and therefore educational) will come from communities of practice, practicing this work together and striving to get better and better.
- Co-design and co-creation: first, we must start from a point where we acknowledge that power is everywhere. Co-design and co-creation fundamentally challenge and disrupt power. This topic requires much more interrogation and discussion to achieve flattened, co-created works. See more here: Creating Brave Spaces video and “What Is Co-Design?”
- Inclusive facilitation



Figure 2: Tweet from Ashley Yates regarding facilitation, May 18, 2021, <https://twitter.com/brownblaze/status/1394748079090200577>



Figure 3: Tweet from Viji Sathy regarding facilitation, October 1, 2021, <https://twitter.com/vijisathy/status/1443958751883636736>

## Module 4: Sustaining Change

### *Critique and Care*



Figure 4: Photo by Noah Buscher on Unsplash

Objective: To spark and sustain equitable system-wide change and adaptation in higher education.

Change is hard. Academia, as an institution, was built to resist change and uphold established practices. The flaws in the system – false scarcity, exclusion, rigid hierarchy – are not new, but have been exacerbated throughout the pandemic and demand address. Numerous innovative experiments in more inclusive, future-friendly learning have met insurmountable barriers and failed to thrive. How do we sustain change, complexity, and care in a system that was not designed for what our society currently demands of it?

How can we foreground care, hold the gains of learning that we may have made during the strange years of the pandemic, and sustain change? How can we learn the arts of care, critique, and apology in ways that enable us to contribute to the big picture of systemic change without getting derailed by ego? In this module, we'll return to the liberating structure of what/so what/now what to explore practices of critical inquiry and change-making cycles, even in the face of weariness. We will also frame care as a more reciprocal process than the atomized versions of self-care packaged by our pandemic-era institutional Wellness emails and Wellness Theatre.

- Find/address friction points in complex systems
- Moving beyond optimizing the past, examining what is evidence, how we interpret rigour and quality, supporting culture change

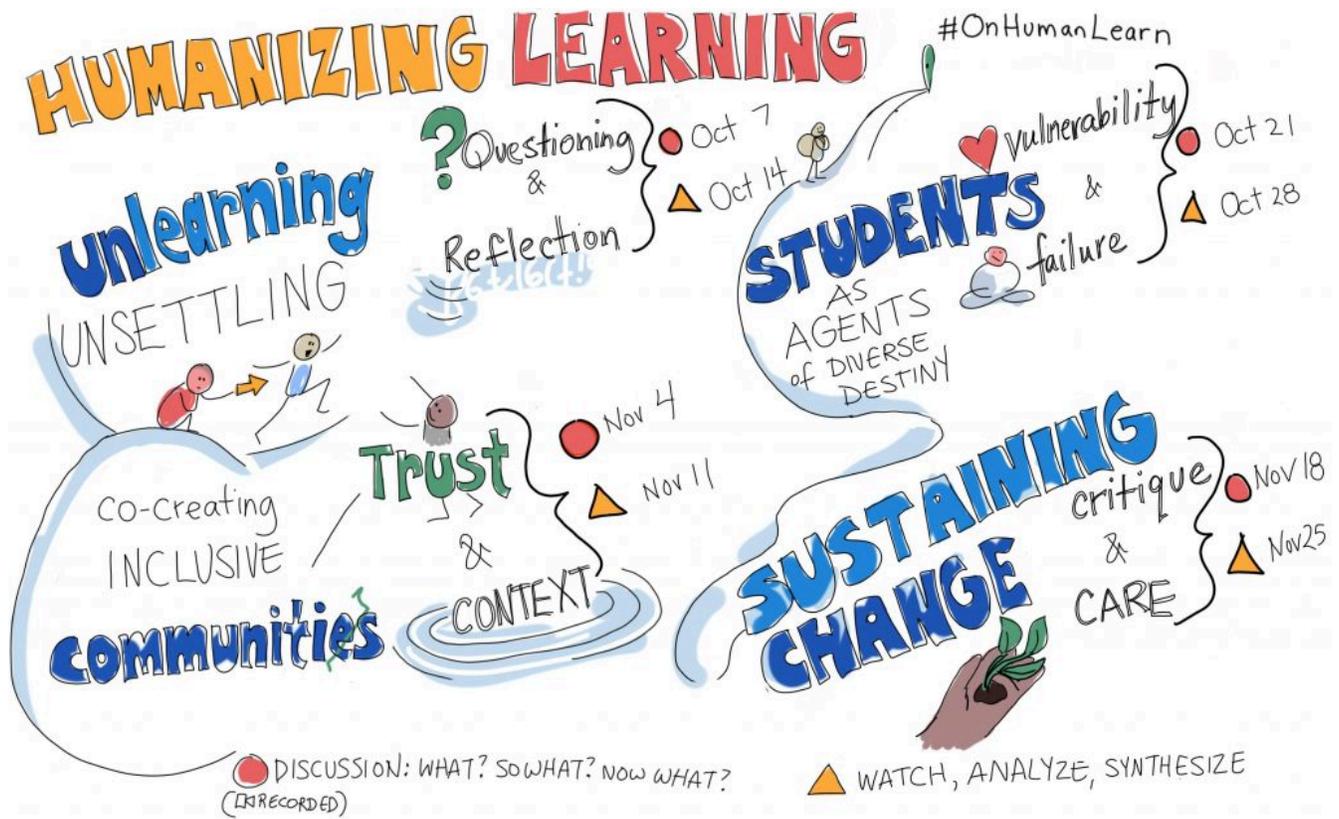


Figure 5: A visualization of the Humanizing Learning co-design schedule from Fall 2021. Drawing by Giulia Forsythe. CCO

# Super Themes



Though we have partitioned this work into four modules, the team is aware of the downside of taxonomies, siloes, or categories that artificially tie things together or separate them apart as though they do not intersect and influence each other. On the contrary, this work is deeply intersectional, deeply interdisciplinary, and deeply impacts individuals on all levels of education, having an impact on institutions, culture, and society. To capture some of the threads that are stitched throughout this work, we have identified twelve “super themes.” These are core concepts and themes that are woven throughout our exploration. They are not all encompassing nor exhaustive and will not ever be “complete” or “solved.” They are themes that are interconnected and multi-layered, and not a stand-alone list of siloed concepts. We’ve noted below how these themes weave across and through the four modules of this work.

## **Questioning and Uncertainty**

**Mismatch, Misfits, and the Average**

**Reflection**

**Representation/Co-Creation/Design**

**Trust**

**Vulnerability and Re-Framing Failure**

**Context**

**Critique: The Art of Critique**

**Wellness, Time, Support: In an Age of Overwhelm**

**Soft, Opposite of Rigorous**

**Relational**

**Friction and Tension**

## Questioning and Uncertainty



Figure 1: Photo by Randy ORourke on Unsplash

When we let go of our notion of clarity, completeness, and correctness, we see (and think) differently. What questions should we be asking about education and learning? Why is there a capacity limit for classrooms? Why are textbooks and learning materials so costly? Why are prerequisites often rigid and inflexible? Why must students defer to professors? Why are classrooms still designed in a theatre-like structure with an audience and a stage? Why aren't all educators taught how to teach? All educators and those being educated should question and explore the history that helped get education to where it is. When we explore the history, we can unveil how decisions were made: by whom and for whom, what biases were at play, and whether the decisions are still relevant now.

When we neglect to question, interrogate, and critique the past, we stay stagnant and can give assent through silence. Stability is not stagnancy; and educating is not stagnancy. When we don't teach instructors how to teach or give them tools to pause and be reflective, many may follow the ways they were taught, and change won't occur. How can we support meaningful change? How can we "innovate" and explore new ways of doing things? How can we experiment pedagogically, sometimes failing and sometimes succeeding but always reflecting? How can we build flexibility into our teaching practice so that we can adjust and adapt when things succeed or fail?

What works in one situation or for one class might not work in another situation or context. We need to acknowledge the value of building in flexibility and agency into the process of teaching, considering its impacts for everyone involved. This reflective flexibility invites us to continue to question the decisions we make and can be done in different ways. Our colleague in the Open movement, Jesse Stommel, tells a story about interrogating his own syllabus by appending

“because I said so” to the end of every sentence in his editing. This simple technique, of adding a patronizing phrase, helps Jesse sniff out those mandates in the syllabus that are arbitrary acts of power over another and not necessary. For example, write a four-page essay about your experience “because I said so.” Must it be four pages? Must it be a written essay? Who did we limit? Whose creativity did we constrain?

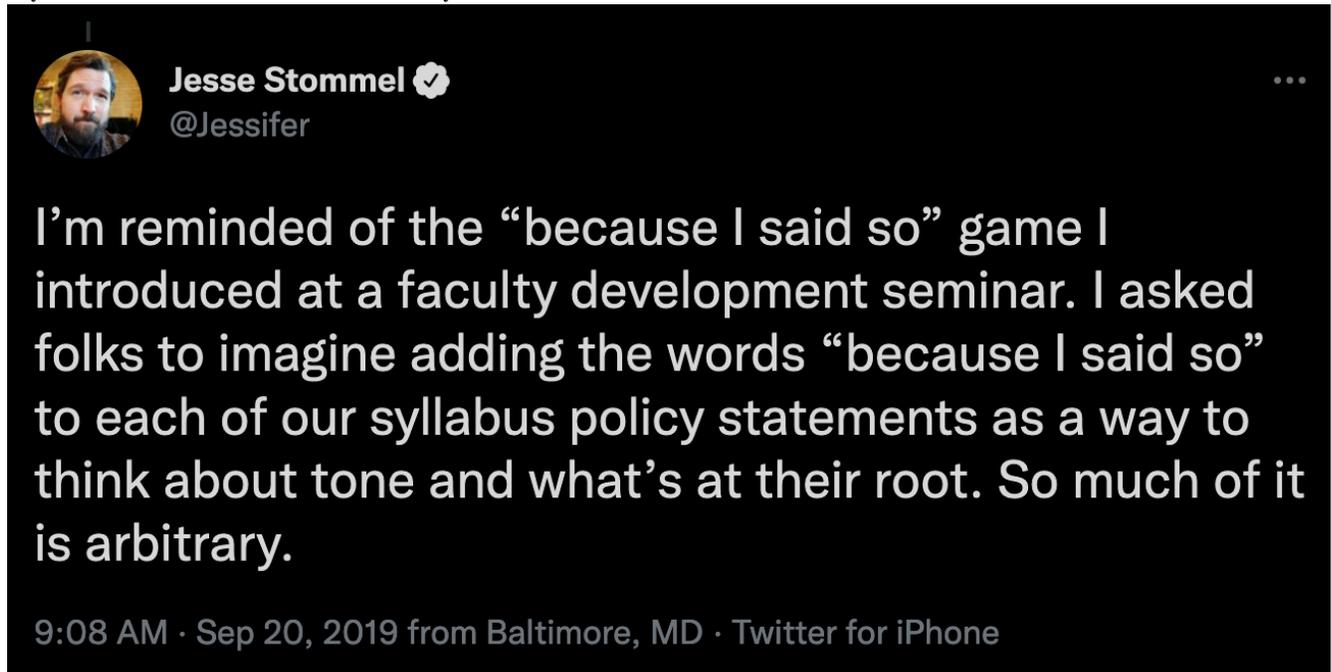


Figure 2: Tweet by Jesse Stommel, September 20, 2019, <https://twitter.com/Jessifer/status/1175033971572432896>

Regardless of discipline, regardless of level of education, questioning must be a central act. In questioning, we can further understand why some are excluded unfairly and why we say that “nothing is neutral.” Upon this understanding, we can then begin to design an educational environment that supports all learners — by recognizing humanity in education.

Genuine questioning requires that we be comfortable with uncertainty. We don’t know what the answers or outcomes will be. Throughout the co-design sessions of this work, the theme of uncertainty was raised across various tenets of teaching and learning, especially with respect to not knowing what challenges or barriers may arise and not knowing what the outcomes will be. Part of uncertainty rests in knowing there isn’t just one right answer or one right path in teaching and learning, and that the answers will be context and people dependent.

## Mismatch, Misfits, and the Average (unpacking the “best” winning, etc.)

The idea of “right” and “best” is pervasive throughout education. Answers are either right or wrong, and rubrics are checked off or not. In order to humanize learning, it’s important that we reconsider definitions of “right” and “best.” How often has a change in perspective resulted in a shift in what is considered correct? Part of this also involves the shift to appreciation of, and emphasis on, process rather than product — the process of learning and exploring vs. the product of showing what you know on a test or the final product of an essay. Should we abandon the currently popular label of “best practices”? Whenever we hear this phrase, perhaps we should be asking, “Best for whom?”

One outcome of the focus on “right” and “best” can be that of “othering.” When something is right, then something else is not right, and this can extend to people when they get categorized. When we talk about education, it is easy to lump people into discrete groups: instructor, student, administrator. But fundamentally we are the people who, together, make learning both possible and meaningful. Together, we give context to education and determine its process and

method. When we talk about each other in the abstract and as a role rather than a person, we lose the opportunity to learn from each other, to explore our differences, and appreciate our diverse experiences and perspectives. This is a great loss socially, culturally, institutionally, and yes, individually. So much of what this co-design team is emphasizing is that we should understand the individual as embedded in all this complexity: within the systems that make up the spaces where educating and education happen.

In education the current equation of process and success could be written something like this:

We design success by showing achievement over time through ASSESSMENT. And in most cases, this means outputs, scores, and grades – we quantify (ASSESSMENT), track it over time and label it (ACHIEVEMENT), and reward it (OPPORTUNITIES). But what if some part of our neat and tidy equation is wrong? Is it possible that the assessment is mistaken? And then the opportunity was given to the falsely deserving? So, we build in tricks, watchdogs, surveillance, and anything that can give us a sense of SAMENESS and RIGOUR, not fairness nor equity. Instead of focusing on the student with integrity and building relationships of trust, communities of practice, and an ethos of care, we have created an “us” and a “them” in competition with each other. This equation underpins something fundamentally flawed in the ways we currently treat people in education.<sup>1</sup>

What if instead of focusing on rule-followers or imagined rule-breakers, we focus on students as people with pasts, constraints, advantages, and disadvantages, and emphasize the process of coming together to form a diverse, mixed community? Then we can begin to interrogate what “equity in education” can look like. Then we can begin to question and reflect on our assessment and an opportunity to track and find ways to redesign it to, in fact, disrupt it.

One of the co-design fellows stated that “Choosing sameness is *not* a neutral act.” We each want to be seen and heard. What does an educational system that does that look like?

## Reflection

In our rush to the quickest solution, we miss opportunities to interrogate how we do the teaching and learning about content – we wind up only teaching and learning the content itself. When we do this, we miss opportunities for thinking about how our current practice of racing to the solution/finish has an impact on outcomes: on sustainability, on longevity, on society, on individual well-being, and more. We have found that building in time for reflection can have an enormous impact on how you understand things around you, how you understand yourself within the context, how you interact with the content, and how your own ideas change over time. If part of the goal of education is to help people learn and grow personally, then how better to authentically measure that than through reflection?

How can we ensure that our reflection is meaningful? How can we ensure that our reflection helps us to enact change? Reflections are personal and can follow diverse processes, but one thing they have in common is pacing. Slow reflections that aren’t rushed tend to be richer in terms of what they reveal. In our current societal structure, we seem to be in a state of perpetual overwhelm; it feels like we are running from thing to thing – from one to-do list item to the next. The collaborators on this project listed “lack of time” and “lack of uninterrupted time” as major barriers to a consistent reflective practice. We need time to process properly, and this means we need to press pause on our to-do list march.

1. <https://medium.com/age-of-awareness/the-damage-we-do-assessment-ff7c1e3fae88>

## Representation/Co-Creation/Design (“co-creating the table” rather than “seat at the table”)

Consider the following scenarios: you apply to attend, I invite you to attend, I engage with you from the beginning to determine what and how we will all participate. Regardless of what the engagement is, each of these scenarios result in different communications about your value in participating.

**You apply to attend:** You must prove to *me*, or some group of people like me (the ones in charge), that you deserve to attend. You start at a position of “less-than” and must climb up from there. This is often where systemic biases or generational starting places influence how far you can climb or if you get the chance to climb at all.

**I invite you to attend:** Now I have blessed you with my picking. You attend because of my extending an opportunity to you. I am still in the position of deciding, and you are now in the position of feeling “special” or “suspicious” about having been invited. Special if it matches your own story about who you are and where you should be; suspicious if you are at risk of being there for tokenistic reasons.

**I engage with you from the beginning to determine what and how we will all participate:** Finally, here we are co-creating a space (we can’t even use the word attending anymore). Interestingly, we have to define it as a collaborative space because it is co-created from the beginning. This is the scenario where a diverse group of people come together to co-create a table or a circle (as is paramount in many Indigenous cultures) or a meeting space. This co-created space sits as much as possible on neutral territory so we can begin anew. Rather than assume common mores and practices, rather than inviting “others” to a table already constructed and codified with “ways of doing things” and “histories,” this approach authentically brings people together to build something together.

However, this is not the approach that is routinely in practice in education. The phrase “a seat at the table” is often used to mean that there is representation — that folks from diverse backgrounds are present, with the assumption that sitting at the table also means they will be listened to and will have a voice. But we need to note here that many different types of tables exist, constructed by different people for different purposes. Which table are you sitting at, who built it, and does it need to change? The answer to the question, “Does it need to change?” is often yes if it was built by those in positions of power and privilege<sup>2</sup>. Sandy Hudson, co-founder of Black Lives Matter Toronto, stated that “sometimes we need to destroy the table and create a whole brand new one,” and Robyn Maynard, author of *Policing Black Lives*, stated, “It is really important that we ask ‘What is that table oriented toward?’”

2. Nixon, S. A. (2019). The coin model of privilege and critical allyship: implications for health. *BMC Public Health*, 19(1), 1-13.

"Sometimes we need to destroy the table and create a whole brand new one."

*Sandy Hudson, co-founder of Black Lives Matter Toronto*



Courtesy of Sandy Hudson

Figure 3: CBC Podcasts. "What a 'Seat at the Table' Means in the Black Lives Matter Era." CBC, October 14, 2020, <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/podcastnews/what-a-seat-at-the-table-means-in-the-black-lives-matter-era-1.5761670>

"It's really important that we ask, 'What is that table oriented toward?'"

*Robyn Maynard, author of Policing Black Lives*



Stacy Lee Photography

Figure 4: CBC Podcasts. "What a 'Seat at the Table' Means in the Black Lives Matter Era." CBC, October 14, 2020, <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/podcastnews/what-a-seat-at-the-table-means-in-the-black-lives-matter-era-1.5761670>

To move to a learning environment wherein it is possible to co-create tables, it means that we have to be willing

to breakdown some existing structures and processes. Maybe we are making the table bigger and adding more chairs; maybe we are changing the shape of the table; or maybe we change the materials that the table is made of. The key aspect here is that all people need to have space and support to contribute input on what the table should be and how it should function.

## Trust

We see here another aspect that appeared above: that of time and slowness. Trust is built over time and can't be rushed. To trust we need to see words *and* actions over time with some consistency and authenticity. In education, building trust cannot be a checklist, an add-on, or a scripted activity – it cannot be planned for a particular place and time or with a one-size-fits-all approach, and it cannot be hierarchical.

Students report that a climate of genuine trust and transparency affects their motivation for learning. Some of the collaborators on this work echoed the importance of having safe havens for learning that are centred on trust. Other collaborators spoke of how they felt like they were “tight-rope walking” and unsure of behavioural norms when there wasn't an atmosphere and expectation of trust. Since trust is established over time and with each interaction, every moment counts. The way the syllabus is written can build trust or otherwise reinforce power and punitive dynamics. The way the instructor walks into the room and begins the interaction with students can also have a deep impact on establishing the foundation for building trust. Team member Jess Mitchell has written about the importance of those first few moments in disrupting and rebuilding the classroom dynamics: *An Attempt to Disrupt Education*.

## Vulnerability and Re-Framing Failure

Trust has a close relationship with vulnerability and re-framing failure (additional super themes in *Humanizing Education*). Although it can be difficult to know how or when or how much to make ourselves vulnerable, it is one of the ways we show our humanity and our flaws. Failure and struggle are normal parts of the human experience. In fact, failure is critically important to the process of learning. However, it is not something that we deliberately teach students in our courses. In academia, failure is often interpreted as *academic failure*, referring to failing a test or failing a course. However, failure in the role of learning is more aligned with struggle and resistance. In the context of higher education, we need to ask how we are framing failure: Do we talk openly about learning from mistakes? Do we encourage our students to embrace and learn from failure? Do we have structural supports in place to help students reflect on, and bounce back from, failures? How do we understand the notion of “completion” in activities that do not have a distinct start and end point – the human, social activities? What do we do with discomfort? Do we avoid uncertainty? All of our responses to these questions speak to our comfort with vulnerability. And our vulnerability speaks to our ability to be transferable and open – to make connections with others.

Re-framing failure starts by normalizing the existence of failure. If we can model the process of learning from failures and mistakes to our students, then we can help to decrease the stigma students feel about failure.<sup>3</sup> We can highlight that failure is both a normal and critically important part of the learning process by including flexibility in our syllabi that allows for revision assignments or exam wrappers. We can be transparent with our students about our histories as instructors and mistakes that we have made. We need to pause here, however, to highlight how the words that were just written above can seem vapid and hollow if not accompanied by structural supports. It's easy to take risks and

3. Nunes, K., Du, S., Philip, R., Mourad, M. M., Mansoor, Z., Laliberté, N., & Rawle, F. (2022). Science students' perspectives on how to decrease the stigma of failure. *FEBS Open bio*, 12(1), 24-37.

failure if you know you have a safety net — if you know you’ll be getting second, third, or even fourth chances. It can be insincere to tell students to embrace failure when the institution penalizes academic failure with permanent transcripts and inflexible course drop deadlines and structures. Is there space within the institution where we can create a safe haven for risk-taking and failure? Instructors in a position of precarity may not feel that the classroom is a safe haven wherein they can discuss their failures if they do not know how that will impact subsequent student evaluations of teaching and, potentially, subsequent employment. A lot of the discussion around “who is allowed to fail” also aligned with the discussion around “who is allowed to be vulnerable.”

## Context



Figure 5: Photo by Raphael Wild on Unsplash

One lesson from the last few years is that we can adapt and change (and quite quickly when we want to) and we cannot predict the future. No one in education guessed we would all be switching to online teaching because of a global pandemic. No one knew how we’d return and no really knows still. There are some that are embracing what we gained by permanently embedding flexible course supports into their courses or shifting their courses to online formats (synchronous or asynchronous).

Something that works in one context may not work in another. It’s important to remember that we all have our own context and look through problems and opportunities through our own lenses that are informed by our contexts. The same is true of students and how they engage with our course material.

Context, as we are exploring it in this discussion, underpins the fact that there is no one approach that will fit all learners and instructors. This is core to the concept of humanizing — the process and approach we take needs to be context dependent.

## Critique: The Art of Critique

We are not formally taught to critique. And often students – and colleagues, even those trying to build better systems – associate critique with criticism. Critique is a bit of an art: done well, it is something that can help build relationships and help people move forward collaboratively. But when we talk about how to critique and not eviscerate, we need to be clear about the differences between critiquing a thing and critiquing a person. And if we critique without building a relationship, we will often be heard as critiquing the person even if we are aiming to critique the thing. So, relationships are at the core of successful critique in the service of change-making. This has important implications for education and the cycle of summative and formative feedback between instructors and students. How can we frame our feedback so it doesn't critique the person? How can we help students interpret, reflect on, and respond to feedback?

## Care, Wellness, Time, Faculty Support: In an Age of Overwhelm (how do we do this in the context of lack of meaningful institutional support and complete lack of time in an age of overwhelm?)

Cultivating meaningful connection with students, and doing other acts towards humanizing courses, takes time and effort, requiring both cognitive and social presence. This cannot be done in an impactful and sustainable way without structural support and resources, especially time and a space of safety. It's also important to recognize that there are historical inequities in who has been expected to do this work and who gets support in doing so. What does structural support for a pedagogy of care and kindness look like? How do we support both instructors and faculty in fostering meaningful connections?

Specific structural support could be provided in a multi-tiered structure. For example, institutional supports could include expectations around spending time on meaningful connection, culturally responsive practices from leadership, coordination, and collaboration across historical institutional silos, and faculty development teams dedicated to inclusive learning and meaningful connection. Course-level supports could look like formative feedback on courses in progress and customized and flexible supports for both faculty and instructors, as well as deliberate collaborative structures for students to engage in collaborative-based learning. None of the above supports adequately address the one resource we are all in short supply of at the moment: time. Relational work takes time, and in order for instructors to have time dedicated to it, it needs to be valued and recognized by the institution in terms of workload assignments.

Another theme that emerged across our discussion was that of wellness. We can't engage meaningfully with the work of humanizing learning if we don't have space and support for our own wellness. Often, the advice to "take care of yourself" is at the bottom of a longer list, and we need to instead make it foundational and build it into our teaching practice. We also need to recognize that we have a collective responsibility for care.<sup>4</sup> Institutions have recently upped the rhetoric on this, with wellness emails, monthly wellness meetings, and committees dedicated to workplace wellness. Here is an opportunity to critique this approach and try to identify it as either meaningful or unimpactful theatre. One of our Team Members wrote a critique of wellness theatre: Beware the Futility of Higher Education's Wellness Theatre.

4. Bali, M. (2021, April 10). Pedagogy of Care – Caring for Teachers. Reflecting Allowed. <https://blog.mahabali.me/pedagogy/critical-pedagogy/pedagogy-of-care-caring-for-teachers/>.

## Soft, Opposite of Rigorous

We behave as though, with enough data, all is knowable, measurable, and predictable. Any structure made of that material for its foundation will begin to crack. These foundation cracks can be seen in every domain and discipline, especially, perhaps, in education. When information is more important than knowledge, and certainty and measurability are more important than thoughtfulness, risk, wonder, exploration, and discovery, what do we lose? What are we relinquishing? If in order to value something it has to be measured, what are we overlooking and missing? What is the by-product, the sawdust or waste that is created by our need to have neat, simple, exact corners (in education, in business, and beyond)?

When measurability is success, it becomes an end in itself. We begin asking questions that lead us to measurable answers. We begin measuring those things that are easily measured. And those are not neutral acts. We act on our measurements – data becomes the tea leaves for decision-making, the map for change, the path toward advancement (see more here on data-driven decision-making in Education). We can even feel a sense of comfort having followed the directions given to us from the disembodied data.

The key here is that it “feels” less random; the reality is that it often isn’t. But this absolves us of the feeling that we are making decisions that aren’t justified, validated, or warranted by some higher power – in this case the power of data collection and its revelations.<sup>5</sup> This can sometimes be seen in the emphasis on quantitative data and metrics, maybe at the expense of qualitative data and narrative.

This super theme is titled “soft” as soft can feel like the opposite of rigorous, and lack of rigour is often derided as “being soft.” By using the word “soft” here, we are invoking the concept of flexibility and fluidness. This isn’t an insipid and easy route to learning, but rather grounded in connection and student-centred learning. Flexible and fluid connections can foster creativity. In the institution’s search for excellence, this narrative can often be lost.

## Relational

Never underestimate the power of play, humour, a well-placed malapropism, or doing the unexpected: they are all ways to engage and connect. Ultimately, the work of humanizing education will happen in the connections. Content will not humanize us; the ways we talk to each other, listen to each other, celebrate, and understand each other will get us there. We use the word ‘relational’ to cover this vast space of human connection, teams, groups, communities—essentially all of the ways we exist within a social world. There will never be one way to make connections. Delightfully, it will depend on the context, the people, and everything in between. This is the richness of human interaction: we can feel it when we’ve said something that connects, lands, impacts another and we can feel it when it happens to us. Those are the moments of being human, together.

5. <https://medium.com/age-of-awareness/the-tyranny-of-clear-thinking-580a94b9fcfc>



*Just found out my students favorite Kay-ism is “Date that idea, don’t marry it yet...” My players’ favorite Coach Kay-ism “If you ain’t having fun, you doing it wrong.” What are your classroom you-isms?* Figure 6: Tweet by Matthew R. Kay, January 31, 2022

## Friction and Tension

The final super theme we want to highlight here is one that kept coming to the surface whenever the collaborators talked about barriers, new avenues, and “what ifs.” We encounter friction and tension whenever we engage in something that is uncomfortable or something that is unknown. There is value in discomfort, and we need to be able to sit with it and not race through it. Friction and tension help us to do this as the forces at play slow us down. We’ve talked above about the importance of moving slowly – be it with reflection, with connection, or with learning in general. How can we nurture friction and tension and use those forces to help us enact change? How can we help our student navigation friction and tension? Is all friction and tension helpful, or should some be avoided and minimized? Is some friction, in fact, destructive? One of the co-design fellows of this work noted that friction and tension will highlight to us what stands in the way of this work and shine a light on potential barriers and learning opportunities.

## How the Super Themes Come Together

These super themes are not discrete units or siloed entities. Rather they are multi-layered ideas that intersect and weave together across the humanizing learning spectrum. They are touchpoints that we want to keep aware of due to their wide-reaching influence on teaching and learning. All of these themes are context dependent and influenced by the positionality of the people involved. Because of this, it’s important that these twelve themes are not interpreted as a list to remember, but rather as layers or lenses that remind us about the core tenets of humanizing learning, which can shift and fold as context changes.

These themes also come together in their emphasis on questioning and action, reminding us that the work herein needs to move forward with action if it is to be meaningful. Reading and engaging with this work is the first step in a longer process. Just as the Global Climate Strike in the Fall of 2019 was in itself not action but was rather a call to action,

so too is this work here a call to action. That call consists of an emphasis on process rather than product, with inclusive and sustainable change at its core.

# Who the Heck Are We?



With funding from eCampusOntario the following individuals and institutions were involved in creating these modules:

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Brock University</b>	<b>Mohawk College</b>	<b>Nipissing University</b>	<b>Trent University</b>	<b>University of Toronto, Mississauga</b>	<b>University of Windsor</b>	<b>OCAD University</b>
<b>Team Member</b>	Giulia Forsythe	Jennifer Jahnke	Patrick Maher	Terry Greene	Fiona Rawle	Bonnie Stewart	Jutta Treviranus
		Kristen Mommertz	Heather Carroll		Laura Crupi	Dave Cormier	Jess Mitchell
		Kevin Woo				Nick Baker	Jaime Hilditch
						Harsh Bhavsar	
						Trevor Winchester	

PART II  
THE MODULES (I-4)



# Module 1: Unlearning and Unsettling: Questioning and Reflecting



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onhumanlearn/?p=236>

Figure 1: Unlearning and Unsettling Trailer

Alternative versions:

[Click here for a version with ASL](#)

[Click here for a version with LSQ \(coming soon!\)](#)

## Story

**Objective:** To examine and unlearn individual, institutional, and societal maladaptive assumptions and conventions that block designing learning for human diversity, variability, and equity and global complexity.

Our education system has been designed to treat everyone the same: equality over equity, often under the guise of fairness. It serves, often overtly, as a gatekeeping system that ensures that the students who graduate out of the system have the same core set of skills, knowledge, aptitudes and practices. We have a system that is often designed to ensure sameness within a student body that is unique and for a world that is complex and messy.

Using a liberating structure, post-secondary educators reflected on what it means to unlearn and unsettle our current education model.

## Origins in Years of Unlearning (Jutta's story)

The following is a telling from two decades of experiments with unlearning in the university classroom. The area of study is inclusive design, but the assumptions that are tackled go beyond the area of study. This experience, and the community that supported it, motivated this project for me.

The field and practice focused on inclusion and equity (that I grew with my team and community), holds two things to be true: we need diversity to survive and thrive and the world and our lives are increasingly complex, entangled, and changing. What follows from these truths is that learning must be lifelong and adaptive, learner difference is a strength and should be nourished, and an important skill is collaboration across difference. The formalized education system we were part of seemed to explicitly and implicitly deny and/or reduce these truths. Signs of this denial could be found in the conventional vocabulary of the academy, which included “terminal” degree completion, disciplinary domains and rigour, standards compliance, and student ranking. Proof of independent production was mandatory, and collaboration was suspected as cheating. This was asserted despite the assignment of redundantly performed exercises

that had no value beyond the classroom, within a cohort and across years of cohorts. Disciplines were explicitly and implicitly defended through insider language, insider rituals, and tacit hierarchies, thereby discouraging collaboration across disciplines or incursions by peerless upstarts. The practice in the academy seemed to be to make it harder for students to be admitted, participate, and learn, so only those who could conform would survive. The challenge for students seemed to be to compete to climb an ever-steeper hierarchy. The research pinnacle to be attained depended on statistical significance, isolated conditions, and replication across contexts, assuming homogeneity that could only be achieved by the majority. The people within our community, who tended to be outliers and small minorities, were consistently marginalized or excluded. Yet, we knew they sparked the greatest innovation and offered the greatest essential diversity.

Moving my team to a university that was more welcoming of alternative education design, I started a graduate program in inclusive design. The program engages students in inclusively co-designing their education while learning about the emergent field of inclusive design. I knew that before students could engage and learn in the program, they needed to unlearn and question many of the socialized assumptions and conventions inherent in formal education. The introduction to the program is a two-week in-person intensive called Unlearning and Questioning, until the pandemic when it moved online over the period of a term. Consistent with inclusive design, a cohort is chosen that includes the greatest diversity of perspectives, including many students with lived experience of barriers. The ultimate goal of the course is to create a cohesive learning community across difference: “finding a deeper commonality by making room for difference.” The formal academic objectives are:

- To learn to give and receive constructive critique (marks come from self-assessment, peer assessment, and consultation with the instructor; grades are arrived by evaluating personal learning not cohort ranking),
- To question entrenched assumptions that are antithetical to diversity and equity and that ignore complexity, and
- To create a personal and community learning plan as a living plan to evolve as the context changes and new insights emerge.

While the class is prepared that “we will all offend, we will all be offended, it is how we respond that is important,” the class begins with activities that establish kindness, generosity, and trust as the practice, before delving deeper into difficult topics that might be divisive. Many of the class activities are social to encourage social cohesion. The class reflects on shame, blame, polarization, winner/loser mentality, the inequity of influence, and the diverse forms of power. The class creates strategies for moving from personal achievement to include collective achievement. We practice hearing from unheard voices, entering difficult conversations, and listening. We question our reactions and judgments. We discuss the misguided stigma associated with failure and mistakes. We work to value struggle and changing or expanding our views. I try to model caring self-critique and making room for a spectrum of stances, rather than two sides.

The actual course content or syllabus is tailored to the students that participate and the topics that are top of mind at the time. Guests are invited that challenge and stretch perceptions and presumptions. These have included guests with lived experience of homelessness, prostitution, slavery, extreme poverty, war, and terrorism. Guests and students share experiences through dance, humour, cooking, play, and conversation.

Over the years, consistent themes have emerged covering assumptions that require unlearning. We address these through current examples, or examples from the student’s lived experience. These are:

- The false notion of an average human and how this undergirds favoured research practices, AI, markets, etc.; the importance of attending to the margins and outliers and the entire spectrum of perspectives
- The misguided notion of survival of the fittest – both to unlearn what is thought of as fitness and the mistaken understanding of advances in evolution through the elimination of the weak, rather than the flourishing of diversity
- The idea of efficiency and productivity and to increase the understanding of the ultimate costs of things like the 80/20 principle, to discuss the need for a circular economy both in terms of environmental and social

sustainability (disparity, social cohesion, etc.)

- The costs and damage done by categorizing/classifying/labelling
- The devaluing of fragility and vulnerability; the value of mistakes and failure
- The problem with best, perfect, and utopia (hierarchies, class); the value of change
- The problem with completeness, arrival, certification in an entangled changing world (complex adaptive systems)

In every case we ask: Who benefits (through gains such as popularity, wealth, or power), who is left out, what is the ultimate impact on our world or the common good?

We continue with the topics that are top of mind for the students, and I share what I'm struggling with as a class participant. The task for the remaining time is to weave these alternative perspectives together into an evolving mindset that can be continuously tested, enhanced, and matured.

I purposely and carefully hand over the leadership of the class to the students, intervening with a light hand when needed, and assume the role of fellow learner. I have witnessed again and again that a powerful key to student engagement is to put students in the role of teacher/learner. I firmly believe that I have learned the most from these classes.

## Why This Topic? Unlearning and Unsettling

### *Questioning and Reflecting*

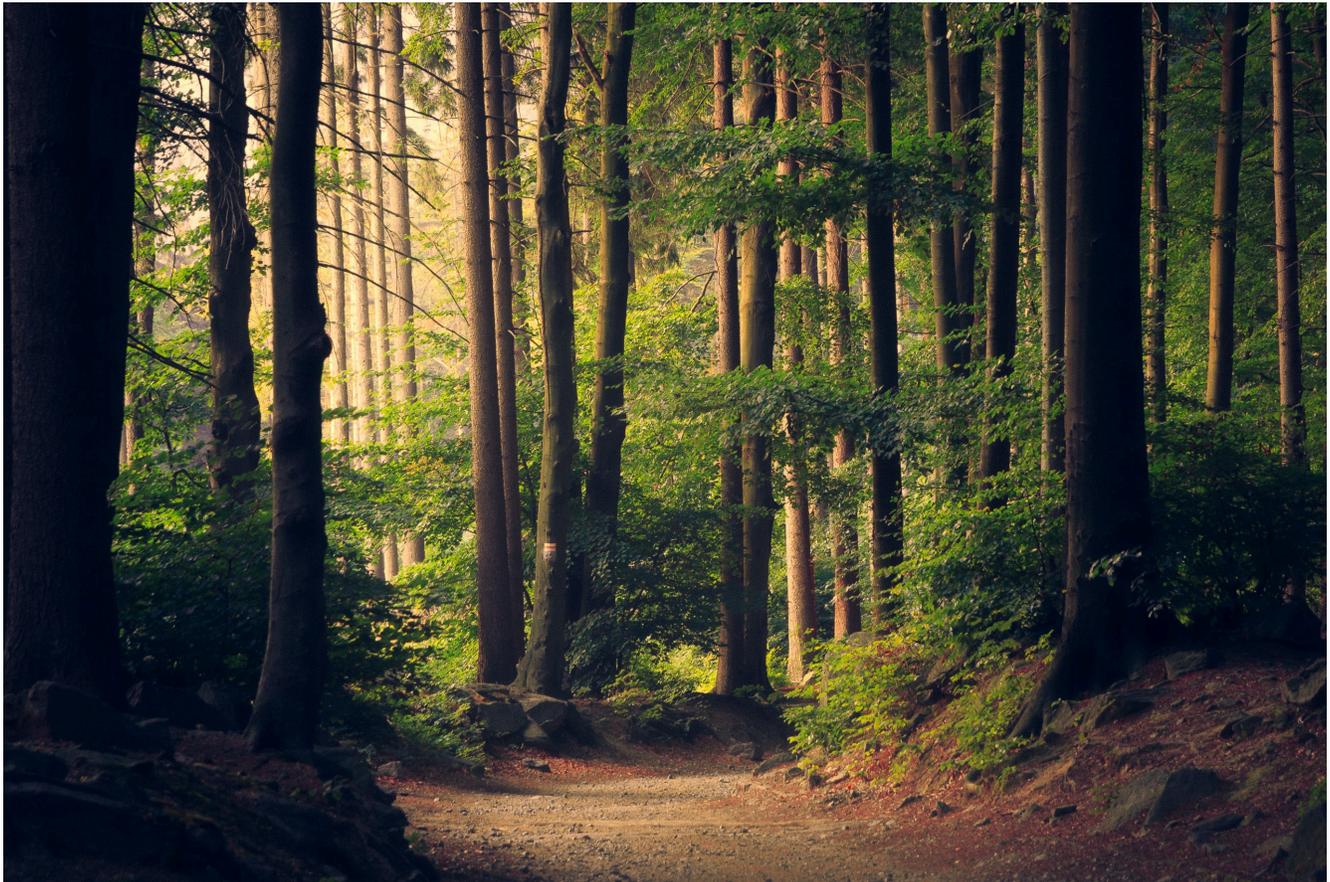


Figure 2: Photo by Lukasz Szmigiel on Unsplash

Among the domains to be examined are research, evidence, metrics, innovation, ways of knowing and expressing knowledge, value systems, work, intelligence, economics, decision-making, notions of quality, rigour, integrity, efficiency, winning, and trust as they relate to learning. To move forward we have to interrogate how we practice now and why. Some of this is the uncomfortable work of unlearning and unsettling. We do this work by embracing questioning and reflecting as we explore the way education is designed (from the physical environment, the virtual environment, the interactional environment, and more). Among the lessons we learn in unlearning and unsettling are the following:

- **Unbottle-able:** we cannot package this work up and make it “scale.” Scale is a word that harkens to the economics of the enterprise, not to the learning outcomes or cultural impacts. We cannot copy and paste modules into different contexts and expect the same results. In fact, we should pause and consider the impact of expecting results at all. Many times, the process is more important than the outcome or any single outcome.
- **Time to think, time to reflect, slow learning, importance of pauses:** when do you take time to explore, wonder, critique, interrogate, question yourself and your own practices as well as those of others and of institutions? Time and attention are perhaps our most valuable commodity, and it is in short supply. What is lost when we schedule meetings back-to-back and never have a moment to think, digest, let our minds wander to make connections? This is the sawdust of our work. As we cut clean, exact lines we create “waste” in the dust. But what if the dust is the good stuff? What if we accidentally leave something behind in the dust? What if the voices and the people we hope to reach the most with this work fall into the dust? We have to be aware and wary of every cut we make.
- **Structured structurelessness:** in doing this work we acknowledge the need for structure while simultaneously warning that too much structure can curtail curiosity and exploration. So, we advocate for only as much structure as is absolutely necessary for people to have clarity of purpose, but no more. And in that space that is created, we can all consider how things might be. We put education in a straitjacket and then we’re surprised when it isn’t whimsical, innovative, creative, and free. How do we interrogate the usefulness and uselessness of the structure in rubrics, checklists, gatekeeping, rigour, prerequisites?

## Co-design Session Topic Introduction: Humanizing Learning: Unlearning and Unsettling

### How to Create Brave Spaces

This co-design topic had the burden of being the first that we undertook. We wanted participants to feel brave and welcome and to have a sense of how inclusive, brave spaces work: how co-design happens. So, we created an introductory video to help participants calibrate their expectations and show up ready to share! The video can be accessed here: [Creating Brave Spaces video](#); [Creating Brave Spaces ASL](#).



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:  
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onhumanlearn/?p=236>

Figure 3: “#OnHumanLearn – Creating a Brave Space”

[Click here for a version with ASL](#)

[Click here for a version with LSQ \(coming soon!\)](#)

## How to Set the Stage

Once participants joined the co-design session, Dave Cormier and Jess Mitchell used inclusive facilitation practices to explain the topic and intentions and then to let go. A 9:40 capture of the introduction to the topic and the co-design sessions can be seen here:

Dave Cormier and Jess Mitchell Discuss How to Humanize What We Do ...

Dave and Jess with ASL



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:  
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onhumanlearn/?p=236>

Figure 4: Dave Cormier and Jess Mitchell discuss how to humanize what we do.

[Click here for a version with ASL](#)

[Click here for a version with LSQ \(coming soon!\)](#)

## Introductory Reading and Framing

To successfully humanize learning in postsecondary education requires a fundamental, system-wide change in mindsets and practices. Checklists of criteria, institutional statements and guidelines, and token add-ons to educational offerings will not suffice. This change in mindsets and practices is urgent. The pandemic has shown that we must address escalating inequities, prevent divisiveness, and build a more inclusive society in Ontario so we can weather the crisis to come.

And we know many of our practices within the larger, complex system of Education are not designed to be humane. We need to unlearn many of those systems, both as learners and teachers, in order to make our learning spaces brave and healthy for everyone. This topic is the beginning of an eight-week #OnHumanLearn conversation on humanizing online learning funded by the eCampus Ontario Virtual Learning Strategy grants.

We have, most of us, been deeply unsettled in our personal, social, and professional lives over the past few years. Many of us continue to grapple with being settlers on stolen land (where, in some cases, there has only recently been a “racial awakening”): land where some in our broader communities have never been safe or supported or treated fairly. Our project is, hopefully, about addressing this moment in time by reflecting on where we are and how we can do better ... through learning and unlearning.



Figure 5: Photo by Tomas Eidsvold on Unsplash

It is with this call to action, then, that we want to talk about how we can bring more humanity to the part of the world that we can impact or influence, to classrooms, homes, and all the places where teaching and learning happen. Each of us will have different things to unlearn, different places where we unsettle and are unsettled. We want to come together and hear from all of you; to learn from you and have us all unlearn together. The links within this document are included to provide attribution to the exemplary work that precedes and informs this project. We do not expect you to review all these resources in order to participate in the conversation.

Some questions that have informed the project facilitators to date:

- What do we need to “unlearn” in order to move forward with equitable, humanized teaching and learning?
- What of our past has led us to thinking and doing in ways that limit us?
- When have our different privileges and our “settled states” interfered with being human in the context of teaching and learning spaces?
- What existing systems within education encourage or influence our decisions away from the humane?
- How do we rebuild spaces to stretch and embrace TRC, #BlackLivesMatter, and others who have been and are marginalized and oppressed in our learning communities?
- How do we ask the right questions about our need to unlearn and unsettle?

### *Learning and Unlearning in the Pandemic*

Throughout the pandemic, a popular narrative of online learning as “less human” has gotten a lot of media airplay, from both a faculty and a student perspective. From faculty we’ve heard stories of staring at empty video windows and

students using online websites to cheat on their exams. From students' stories of being forced to watch three hour audio lectures and falsely being accused of cheating by test surveillance software, we have cause to wonder what we should be doing with our classrooms in an online world. But is the pandemic really to blame? Is online learning to blame?

Building on the work of educators such as Whitney Kilgore in the US, Maha Bali in Egypt, and the works of many others, we hope to have a conversation about what we can do to make learning experiences more humane. In "Learning to Unlearn, and then Relearn: Thinking about Teacher Education within the COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis" Fernandes and Gottolin invite us to look "at the metaphoric invitation this COVID-19 pandemic has sent us to revisit our praxis." They suggest educators should take this opportunity to take stock of what we need to unlearn to make our classrooms and educational systems different.

The first dimension of #OnHumanLearn teammate Jutta Treviranus's framework for inclusive design is to recognize human uniqueness. Our education system, however, has been designed to treat everyone the same: equality over equity, often under the guise of fairness. It serves, often overtly, as a gatekeeping system that ensures that the students who graduate out of the system have the same core set of skills, knowledge, aptitudes, and practices. Interestingly, we have doubled-down on this even in light of it not preparing people for an uncertain and complex future.

*We have a system that is often designed to ensure sameness with a student body that is unique and for a world that is complex and messy.*

In her post on Hybrid Pedagogy, Jessica Zellner wonders, given the current state of the world, how we can consider ourselves students-centred when

Our syllabi are a bloated ten pages long and thick with policy statements, as too many in education have come to believe that good teaching and rigid rule enforcement are one and the same: no late work accepted; grade deductions for late arrivals; required use of surveillance software; "fairness" as represented by uniform punishments regardless of personal circumstance or hardship.

"Where," Jessica asks, "is our humanity?"

Erica McWilliams, in her Unlearning Pedagogy, tells us that habits "are useful when the conditions in which they work are predictable and stable." She wonders, in 2005, if the world that our students are going out to is predictable or stable. She talks about the seven deadly habits that we have taken on as teachers; "deadly habits" that need to be unlearned:

- The more learning the better.
- Teachers should know more than students.
- Teachers lead, students follow.
- Teachers assess, students are assessed.
- Curriculum must be set in advance.
- The more we know our students, the better.
- Our disciplines can save the world.

Jennifer Hardwick of KPU tells how she has had to learn to "let go of my ego and embrace discomfort by learning and unlearning, decentring myself, and re-thinking and re-designing when something isn't working. It means committing to inclusion and justice in my classes and preparing myself so that I can ethically and knowledgeably talk to my students about difficult topics as they arise: climate grief, genocide, racism."

Different voices from across the field. We'd like to hear your voice and add to the discussion.

- What are we unlearning? What do we need to unlearn? What is unlearning?
- Why do we need to unlearn? Why is unlearning important? For whom? For what outcome?

## Findings from the Co-Design Participants

### Week 1: “What?” and “So What?”

- How do I reflect on and identify what I need to be changing?
- Owning your truth can be uncomfortable and unsettling but it is courageous and vulnerable
- Notice the outcomes you’re asking for; consider process outcomes
- We tend to privilege production over process
- Students are not a product! Get rid of productivity-focus
- We can change our classrooms, but we will still be faced with constraints
- There are tensions between hierarchies that serve us and that don’t
- Challenge the norms set by administrative bodies, such that the learning is relevant to students
- We try to protect ourselves from being uncomfortable, but discomfort and vulnerability are essential to consider what another person might be experiencing
- **Unlearning is harder to do than learning**
- Virtual learning eliminates informal conversations before class – “How are you?”

### Week 2: “Now What?”

- Students feel free to interact with staff when there are no grades being assigned to a lesson
- Students worry there is trickery (when process is privileged over product)
- Assessment and grades don’t help with intrinsic motivation – “What do I need to do to get an A?”
- Conduct open book exams – we live in a world where people can look things up online

What?	So What?
Focus on process > product	Small classes 10–20 (optimal and raise the issue of scale as an economic, not pedagogical rationale) Build rapport by sharing experiences Pass/fail classes Self-assessments

## Link to Session Materials

Humanizing Deck



 An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:  
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onhumanlearn/?p=236#h5p-1>

Figure 5: Humanizing Deck slides

**Slide 4: Unlearning 4**

We were building trust without any expected outcome. We weren't "on task" – we were building something together. We've been adjacent, but we haven't been together.

**Slide 5: Unlearning and Unsettling in Teaching and Learning**

We're here to talk about unlearning; we're not looking for a definition, we're hoping to do things differently today, and that might feel awkward ...

Don't solve or try to solve things today. Explore what you're thinking openly, and be open to what others are saying. Think about edge cases.

We want you to wonder, explore, and share ideas about unlearning that might come from your own experience or influences. We all come from different spaces, have different histories, different experiences ... and we bring those with us into every interaction. I think of it as the backpack we all carry on our backs.

**Slide 6: What? So What? Now What?**

Jess's Unlearning: Efficiency – which ones are good and which ones do harm?

Economics of Education: I'm not naive enough to be totally tuned out to the economics, but I'm disappointed that it isn't transparent and we don't talk about the decisions that are made in the design of education that have everything to do with economics and nothing to do with teaching or learning.

**Slide 7: Moving to Break-Out Groups**

Notice who is volunteering to take notes. Notice who, historically, usually takes notes (young, junior women). Think for a moment about how the rest of the group (you) can support whomever is taking notes so that they can actively participate and not just be the scribe with no brain or opinions. After a shared experience, ask, "What? What happened? What did you notice, what facts or observations stood out?" Then, after all the salient observations have been collected, ask, "So what? Why is that important? What patterns or conclusions are emerging? What hypotheses can you make?" Then, after the sense-making is over, ask, "Now what? What actions make sense?"<sup>1</sup>

This is all in an effort to *humanize learning*.

1. What: What are we unlearning? What do we need to unlearn? What is unlearning? The unsettling can be at least two things: you can feel queasy from the unlearning, and that can be unsettling; you can also fundamentally interrogate the provenance of the structures you're unsettling and that can have a cascading impact on yourself *and* others – think about that, together ...
2. So what: Why do we need to unlearn that? Why is unlearning important? For whom? For what outcome? How can we do unsettling productively? Is that an oxymoron?

**Slide 9: Reflecting**

What it means to be inclusive – some weren't here last week. How can we be welcoming, aware of that feeling when you're new and feel you've missed something, or worse, been left out. What is holding us back? Why aren't we breaking through the structures that are holding us back? In many cases we have real, good, solid reasons. In others, we might

1. Liberating Structures, "What, So What, Now What? W<sup>3</sup>," <https://www.liberatingstructures.com/9-what-so-what-now-what-w/>.

still have some room to disrupt (ourselves, others, and the systems around us). Remember: where possible, be brave, not unsafe. What's preventing you from doing this now? Now what? What do you need? Where can you get it?

**Slide 10: Rigour**

ASSUMPTION: No one (including you) can tell if you've learned anything without a grade.

Aren't we just falling into relativism — we need not fall into that pit of despair!

**Slide 11: We All Want to Be Seen or Heard**

Anytime we use a term like “administrators,” “professors/instructors,” “students,” we should ask, “Always? Sometimes? Never?”

So often we do this in conversation ... students ...

And we do another thing: we bifurcate the world into heroes and straw people (or even bad apples).

Hit man, straw man — cis, white, heterosexual man ... (but what if you're a very shy, first generation university student who grew up in generational poverty?) and yes, you're cis, white, and straight?

Or the reminder we got last week: not everyone on the land that isn't Indigenous is a settler — some were plucked from the land or placed on the land against their will, enslaved on the land ...

**Slide 12: Finding Your Own Voice**

How do we balance SELF within INCLUSION? Who gets to have a voice and when? And whose voice gets protected or heard or defended? Do you whisper or do you shout? When some of us shout we command attention; others are written off as angry and not worth listening to. So, folks, don't you underestimate just how hard it is to find your own voice.

**Slide 13: Scope vs. Scale**

If we want Education to be humanized, we have to deal with individuals whenever possible. Then we have to do the work to think about how to scope our work — not scale!

**Slide 15: This Is What**

This can be and will be a dynamic “what.” You'll be influenced and inspired by good and bad examples; you might find someone to support you in your own personal journey through this. You might have an administrator initiate a change; you might have a department lead upend power with a student group. “Clear eyes, full hearts can't lose” — Coach Taylor from *Friday Night Lights*.

## Liberating Structure Used and Why

(This little origin story is by Terry Greene)

This team met a number of times in the lead up the eight-week co-design extravaganza. In those meetings the term “structured-structurelessness” was bandied about a few times. It sounded great to me. Sounded like my kind of place to hang out and talk. But what does it mean? I thought about it, likely in an ill-structured way. I thought maybe it meant loosely structured, sure. Maybe also loosely goaled too? If that makes sense. I also kept thinking, like way back there in my brain where the thoughts are mumbled quietly, “Hey, this sounds like those Liberating Structures that I love so much.” They are just basic facilitation steps that, when put in place, give things a structure that is open enough to really let things fly.

After the back of my head mumbled that thought a few times, I actually heard it. I suggested it to the team. “Hey, we should use a Liberating Structure like ‘What, So What, Now What’ as a basis for our sessions!” And, what with all these humans working to humanize things, they heard me out. What if we spent the first week of a module as a group identifying and dissecting the “what” of it? What is “unlearning and unsettling”? What is “vulnerability and failure”? And what if that's all we meant to cover in that first week? We would be so limited in our focus. But we'd also be so free to go deep with it. And to follow that up with a second weekly meeting to say So What and Now What? Why is this important to us? What action steps can we take?

This Liberating Structure felt just right. It gave us not much to do (we only had to answer three questions over two weeks!) while at the same time it gave us a lot to work with (we had time to go deep and come up with the best plan of

action together!). And it allowed a dozen or so separate co-designers to each bring their own diverse approaches in a consistent way. If that's not structured-structurelessness, I don't know what is! (Seriously, if it's not, I don't know what it is.)

## Reflections

*Below is a reflection written by Heather Carroll from Nipissing University after Session 1 of Unlearning and Unsettling Co-Design:*

Just as learning is a communal process, today I experienced first-hand that unlearning is also best done in community. In the first breakout session of #OnHumanLearn, I was introduced to a group of colleagues who were all, serendipitously, in transition. From PhD to professor, from student to staff, from practitioner to lecturer: we had all recently had a professional shift and confronted deeply ingrained norms about what and who we should be in our new role. Where did these ideas come from? And who do they benefit? Not us. At least, for the most part.

We immediately shared with one another exactly what we needed to unlearn. We shared elements of our identities that we wanted to showcase professionally. Stepping into roles as women, for example, we asked ourselves to unlearn assumptions and untruths about our suitability for roles. Sometimes, we shared feelings of imposter syndrome. Sometimes, we feel as if we are playing the role of a professional. We were all drawn to this larger humanizing group because we felt that it was missing in our current contexts. We all want to humanize education.

We shared examples of toxic behaviours, practices, and policies, both in academia and our professional/disciplinary spheres, and how we could be agents in disruption. "Empathy" and "compassion" were seen as salves we could apply to our lives, and our students, in order to help address toxic elements of higher education. But are those traits enough? And are they inherently good? Flexibility in the age of COVID is necessary ... but is it only setting students up for failure in their inflexible future professional lives? We grappled with how we can enact our unlearning within our own loci of control, recognizing that we are located in nebulous systems where change can feel impossible. Can institutions unlearn efficiency and scarcity mindsets? Why does the institution constrain unlearning when it needs to happen at all levels?

Afterwards, I remembered a distinction explained to me in a book talk with Dr. Savannah Shange, whether schools (even progressive ones!) are an "institution" or an "organization." Put simply, institutions exist to exist. They are self-serving, where organizations exist to get work done and to achieve a desired end. So while we are institutionally constrained in our roles, during today's session, and the following seven weeks, we are an organization. Our unlearning depends on it. Our humanity depends on it.

Upon further reflection, I am reminded of Dr. Barbara J. Love's framework for developing a liberatory consciousness, which requires awareness, analysis, action, and accountability. I think, today, we achieved awareness and analysis. I am hopeful, with this critical mass of humanizing educators, we can move towards collective action and accountability.

Reflecting inward, I think about the bravery and vulnerability required to unlearn. In July, Jess asked me to reflect on the process of the experience so far. I used the word "unlearn" once, and it was when I said, "I'm new [here] and I was often criticized for speaking at meetings in a former role, so I am trying to unlearn that. I am grateful for this community <3"

My active unlearning is an ongoing process, and probably why I feel at ease sharing this reflection in writing and not in a large group. My sentiment stays the same: I am grateful for this community.

*Linked here is a reflection written by Laura Killam from Queens University after Session 1 of Unlearning and Unsettling Co-Design:*

<http://insights.nursekillam.com/reflect/now-what-unlearning/>

## Questions for Future Conversations

1. Can we productively unlearn and unsettle while still having clear progress, milestones, and structured learning?
2. How can we build in unlearning and unsettling to all aspects of education?
3. What can you unlearn today?

## Additional Materials

### Link to Twitter Conversations

The team created a hashtag that was used to continue conversations on Twitter: #OnHumanLearn  
[https://twitter.com/search?q=%23OnHumanLearn&src=typed\\_query](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23OnHumanLearn&src=typed_query)

## Works Cited

Resources that are especially relevant to the topic.

Fernandes, Alessandra Coutinho, and Sandra Regina Buttros Gattolin. "Learning to Unlearn, and Then Relearn: Thinking about Teacher Education within the COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis." *Revista Brasileira De Linguística Aplicada*, SciELO, 19 May 2021, <https://www.scielo.br/j/rbla/a/PZnXf4cFWTH8LrgpFP5WVdy/>.

Gordon, Mordechai. "Welcoming Confusion, Embracing Uncertainty: Educating Teacher Candidates in an Age of Certitude." *Paideusis*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2006, p. 15-25. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1072677ar>.

Hardwick, Jennifer. "Now Is the Time to Be Brave: Pedagogy for a World in Transition." *Teaching Learning Commons*, KPU, 25 Aug. 2021, <https://wordpress.kpu.ca/tlcommons/now-is-the-time-to-be-brave-pedagogy-for-a-world-in-transition/>.

Humanizing Learning. [https://www.zotero.org/groups/3361442/humanizing\\_learning](https://www.zotero.org/groups/3361442/humanizing_learning).

McWilliam, Erica. "Unlearning Pedagogy." *Journal of Learning Design*, 2005, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1066452.pdf>.

Wheatley, Margaret. "Partnering with Confusion and Uncertainty." *Margaret J. Wheatley*, Shambhala Sun, Nov. 2001, <https://margaretwheatley.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Partnering-with-Confusion-and-Uncertainty.pdf>.

# Module 2: Students as Agents of Their Own Diverse Destiny: Vulnerability and Failure



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:  
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onhumanlearn/?p=244>

Figure 1: Students as Agents of Diverse Destiny Trailer

[Click here for a version with ASL](#)

[Click here for a version with LSQ \(coming soon!\)](#)

## Story

Objective: To help all members of an institution support students in becoming self-guided experts in their own diverse, life-long learning path. To address current and emerging demands, students must differentiate themselves and continue learning throughout life, all while acknowledging that diversity is our society's most valuable asset. This implies rethinking notions of student conformance to singular institutional standards, biased exclusionary recruitment, systems of preferential academic ranking and promotion, reductionist assessment techniques, student surveillance and policing, and winner-takes-all competition, among other academic conventions. How do we equip students to value, develop, and apply their own unique contributions throughout life?



Figure 2: Alice Donovan Rouse on Unsplash

Students have ownership over their own path and how they get there. To humanize this path, we need to release the hold that traditional academia has on learning, shift responsibility and power back to the student, and give them true ownership over their decisions and metrics for “success.” Here, we use “power” to mean having the capacity and ability to cause change in behaviours/systems/lives of people. Shifting the balance of power in educational relationships is at the core of humanizing learning.

As instructors, we need to ask ourselves: How do we interact with students? Are students given choice and agency in showing their learning? How can we give students more control in their learning? How do we humanize our practice to ultimately serve students better? How can we model the importance of vulnerability and trust to our students?

There is great value and meaning in genuine displays of vulnerability. From true vulnerability, we can grow trust and personal connections with our students. We can open up perspectives and dialogues that lead to meaning-making. How as instructors can we do this? How can we model vulnerability when we ourselves might be in a position of precarity?

To get at the roots of these issues, several framing questions were asked of the co-design participants in this module:

- How do you see the relationship between vulnerability, failure, and student agency?
- Where has failure been an important learning opportunity for you and/or your students?
- What does vulnerability mean in a teaching and learning setting?
- What scares you most about the vulnerability/failure/student agency trinity?

## Session Topic Introduction: Students as Agents of Their Own Diverse Destiny



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onhumanlearn/?p=244>

Figure 3: Terry Greene's Gettin' Air OnHumanLearn Podcast

## Week 3: Students as Agents of Diverse Destiny

Keywords for the week: Vulnerability and Failure

In preparation for this week:

- Listen to this seventeen-minute podcast to hear the facilitators' intro for this topic: <https://www.spreaker.com/user/voicedradio/onhumanlearn>
- Greene, Terry, host. "The #OnHumanLearn Module Two Team." *Gettin' Air*, 2021, <https://www.spreaker.com/user/voicedradio/onhumanlearn>.

Optionally, skim these articles for extra context:

- Train Wrecks: 3M National Teaching Fellows Explore Creating Learning and Generative Responses from Colossal Failures
- Strean, William Ben, et al. "Train Wrecks: 3M National Teaching Fellows Explore Creating Learning and Generative Responses from Colossal Failures." *Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching*, 2019, <https://celt.uwindsor.ca/index.php/CELT/article/view/5295>.
- Learner Agency and the Learner-Centred Theories for Online Networked Learning and Learning Ecologies
- Blaschke, Lisa Marie, et al. "Learner Agency and the Learner-Centred Theories for Online Networked Learning and Learning Ecologies." *Unleashing the Power of Learner Agency*, EdTech Books, 1 Jan. 1970, <https://edtechbooks.org/up/ecol>.

### Findings from Week 1: "What?" and "So What?"

*How do you see the relationship between vulnerability, failure, and student agency?*

- Failure and reflection can deepen both learning and engagement.
- Typically, control rests with the teacher, and only the teacher gets to set the classroom tone and make decisions.
- This relationship may vary by discipline, e.g., science (learning from experimental failure), engineering (learning from structural failure), business (fail fast, fail often), pharmacy (learning from prescription errors).
- Who is allowed to actually be vulnerable? Precarity and background and associated measures of privilege, or lack there of, can make vulnerability more risky. Folks from under-represented groups may face more consequences for vulnerability.
- Failure is a core component of the learning process, and yet we don't teach students how to embrace and learn

from failure. In fact, we don't even provide structurally safe spaces for this to happen in.

*Where has failure been an important learning opportunity for you and/or your students?*

- Demonstrating that experts can and do fail can relieve pressures on students.
- Modelling errors as instructors, and showing how we learn from them, can help reduce the stigma of errors to our students.
- Modelling responses to failure can help students see how to have grace, accept critique and feedback, and accept fallibility.
- Humanizing the relationship to students through being vulnerable.
- Failure reveals what we don't know, informs the learning journey, and shows that not knowing is normal — we need to figure out what we don't know so we can focus our learning at the edges of knowing and not knowing.
- Discomfort and learning go hand-in-hand. We learn most when we are uncomfortable, and we need to normalize the feeling of not knowing something, which is inherently uncomfortable.

*What does vulnerability mean in a teaching and learning setting?*

- Being willing to share your humanity.
- Normalize not knowing. It is easier to model genuine curiosity if vulnerability is accepted.
- Normalizing the struggle ... we're all works in progress.
- Modelling of vulnerability and productive failure is critical.
- Students may be more likely to question and challenge if they know you're fallible.
- Failure is “baked into” teaching, but we don't often name it or model it.

*What scares you most about the vulnerability/failure/student agency trinity?*

- Students may see vulnerability as weakness. Will this cause the teacher to “lose control” of the class? (And isn't “losing control” part of the process of giving students more agency in their learning journey?)
- Vulnerability comes with risks: e.g., emotional, reputational, and career progression.
- Forgetting what it was like to be a novice; we need to hold space for this as educators
- Imposter syndrome!
- How do we acknowledge existing power and privilege within this discussion on vulnerability and failure? Does everyone actually have access to the same safe spaces for vulnerability?

## Findings from Week 2: “Now What?”

### *The Importance of Embracing Discomfort and Learning from Failure*

Learning from failure is a core component of the process of learning, however, it isn't always actively taught in higher education. It is, in fact, a core component of reflective living, and given that we want our students to have meaningful experiences beyond higher education, modelling learning from failure is crucially important. Learning from failure takes time — it isn't something that can be rushed — and it is more meaningful when it is accompanied by connection and

support. Science of learning tells us that our brains remember things better when we feel a bit uncomfortable, so this discomfort actually helps us learn. There is a valuable place for friction and discomfort alongside our courses, but again only when connections and structural support are in place so that students can have an equitable experience of moving through and beyond failure.

### *Structural Support for the Vulnerability/Failure/Student Agency Trinity*

There is an urgent need to build safe havens for failure. Giving advice to students to “embrace and learn from failure” is hollow if it isn’t accompanied with a safe space to do so. These safe havens would need to have structural support in terms of institutional norms, course policies, tangible instructor support, and shifts in course culture/environment. Examples of institutional changes and structural support could include modifying rigid institutional grading policies or entrance criteria; modification of registrar course re-take policies; increasing TA support to allow for more formative feedback and moments of genuine connection; incorporation of more reflective learning activities into class; and reconsideration of student evaluations of teaching, especially for instructors in a position of precarity.

### *Emphasizing Connection and Relationships*

For this work to occur, there is a need to prioritize relationships and feedback for growth and reflection through failure. Learning is a relational act, and it is through emphasizing student-instructor and student-student relationships that we can start to engage in perspective-taking and acknowledge that we are all works in progress. By centring formative feedback and modelling how to move forward through feedback, instructors can foster a dialogue of feedback and change with students. Another aspect to consider is that of time. This work needs to be done slowly and can’t be rushed according to institutional time scales. Students and instructors alike need the time to dedicate to relationship building and cultures of dialogue and feedback.

### *The Importance of Modelling the Process and Avoiding Professor Worship*

- Building capacity is different from building capability. We as instructors can lay the foundations for encouraging students to learn through failure. We can do this by modelling the process of embracing and learning from our mistakes.
- Keep in mind to “coach people to hold their ideas lightly” and “failed ideas make great compost” (McKercher 2020).
- A common phrase from childhood memories might be that of “practice makes perfect.” We want to propose to replace this with the phrase “practice makes progress.” We need to highlight that we are all working in progress, that we all have flaws, and that these flaws can be celebrated. A sometimes common view of the professor or instructor as a “finished work” or “expert” or “genius” works against idea of works in progress. Hero worship of “genius professors” and the idolatry that comes with this is harmful and needs to be named and avoided. “Cults of professor worship” reinforce the mistaken notion that there are those who are geniuses and those who are not; it reinforces a binary of excellent or not. We can move past this as instructors by modelling learning from errors and sharing narratives of personal reflection and growth. We recognize, however, that this modelling takes place in the broader context of an academic institution with existing norms around definitions of excellence, which reinforces the need for structural changes accompanying this work.

## *The Power and Privilege of Vulnerability and Failure*

- We need to start by acknowledging that power and privilege are everywhere, ever present, and ever changing.
- We need to examine power within these contexts, and specifically ask ourselves questions about power and failure. What power do we have and where did we get it from? How can we use our power to make others feel safe and dismantle power structures themselves? Do all students have equal access to second chances? Do all students have safety nets that allow them to take more risks? Our advice to students to take risks and embrace failure will feel disingenuous if it isn't accompanied by an acknowledgement of power structures inherent in these spaces.
- Don't mistake silence for progress or for agreement. How will we recognize when our students are meaningfully engaging with failure? We need to be careful about misinterpreting silences adjacent to vulnerability and failure.
- There is well-documented inequity in who "gets" to fail. Folks from underrepresented groups are often held to higher standards than folks from the dominant group, and there is bias in how society interprets failures by different people. We need to acknowledge this in any discussion of failure and its role in the process of learning.

## Links to Session Materials

### *Plenary Video*



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:  
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onhumanlearn/?p=244>

Figure 4: Module 2 Plenary: Students as Agents of Diverse Destiny

[Click here for a version with ASL](#)

[Click here for a version with LSQ \(coming soon!\)](#)

### *Humanizing Deck*



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:  
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onhumanlearn/?p=244#h5p-2>

#### **Slide 1: Students as Agents of Diverse Destiny**

Diverse destiny – students have ownership over their own path and how they get there. Releasing the hold that traditional academia has on learning – shifting the responsibility and power back to the student and give them ownership. Reflect on your practice: How often do you interact with students? Within that, are they given choice and agency in showing their learning? How do we humanize our practice to ultimately serve them better? In the academy

there is survivorship bias that allows us to favour traditional pathways to success; how do we release these notions of “what works” and shift power and responsibility back to the students?

**Slide 2: Vulnerability and Failure**

So how does vulnerability and failure foster student agency in an online learning environment?

From vulnerability we grow trust and personal connections with our students. According to Yair, it is these personal connections that lead to “transformational learning moments” (2019). Allowing ourselves to be vulnerable and creating opportunities for students to be vulnerable fosters a growth mindset. Dweck (2016) states that a willingness to accept failure and mistakes as part of the learning process results in overall greater success. So, there is value in attempting new teaching and learning methods; so much so that it outweighs the risk of making mistakes.

One of my favourite quotes in the Train Wreck article, co-authored by our own Pat Maher, is the Failing Well Certificate of Failure from Smith College by Bennett (2017). It reads, “You are hereby authorized to screw up, bomb or fail at one or more relationships, hookups, friendships, texts, exams, extracurriculars or any other choices associated with college ... and still be a totally worthy, utterly excellent human.” What if academics and students were given a permission slip to fail? Pat talks about taking that experience and learning from it, rather than turning “it failed” to “I am a failure,” we say it is simply something that didn’t work, I learned from it, and it is going to propel me forward. David Kelly, the CEO of IDEO, states fail faster to succeed sooner.

So, as you go into your breakout rooms consider these questions:

- How do you see the relationship between vulnerability, failure, and student agency?
- Where has failure been an important learning opportunity for you and/or your students?
- What does vulnerability mean in a teaching and learning setting?
- What scares you most about the vulnerability/failure/student agency trinity?

Note about the images below: The image below of the SpaceX shuttle was used in our live session to be deliberately provocative and to encourage community participants to think about:

- Who can (are allowed to/have permission to) fail and whose failure can be glorified?
- Who can fail without consequence?
- When those who have “made it” in the academy preach about the importance of failure in the learning process, are they just showing their own privilege but branding it as resilience?

# Students as Agents of Diverse Destiny



The explosion was also meant to be provocative. Later, through open conversations with a diverse group of co-design participants, we realized that an exploding rocket may carry very different meanings. For some, this is simply a “failure” image, but for others it led to the recalling of the historic and horrific Challenger disaster, which some co-design participants witnessed as children from the apparent safe-space of their classrooms. This image curation serves to highlight earlier points: nothing is, or can be, neutral to a diverse audience. And if you create a space for people to share their diverse responses and reactions, we can all learn from each other — these are our diverse experiences, these reactions and associations are our humanity.

# Vulnerability & Failure



## Questions for Future Conversations

- What does the language around failure look like? If we use different language, then will there be less stigma associated with these discussions?
- What do structural supports around learning from failure look like? How can these be implemented in a sustainable manner?
- How can we encourage our students to embrace and learn from failure when we are teaching within the constraints of an institutional system that documents and punishes failures?
- How can we acknowledge that not everyone has the same “permission to fail” and that those with more resources are more able to engage with failure because they have a safety net and a plethora of second/third/fourth chances?

## Additional Materials

### Link to Twitter Conversations

The team created a hashtag that was used to continue conversations on Twitter: #OnHumanLearn  
[https://twitter.com/search?q=%23OnHumanLearn&src=typed\\_query](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23OnHumanLearn&src=typed_query)

## Works Cited

Resources that are especially relevant to the topic.

Blaschke, Lisa Marie, et al. “Learner Agency and the Learner-Centred Theories for Online Networked Learning and Learning Ecologies.” *Unleashing the Power of Learner Agency*, EdTech Books, 1 Jan. 1970, <https://edtechbooks.org/up/ecol>.

Bloom, Timothy J. “The Importance of Vulnerability in Pharmacy Educators.” *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education, Jul. 2020, <https://www.ajpe.org/content/84/7/ajpe7939>.

Humanizing Learning. [https://www.zotero.org/groups/3361442/humanizing\\_learning](https://www.zotero.org/groups/3361442/humanizing_learning).

Lowrie, LynnAnne. “Vulnerability in the Classroom.” *Faculty Focus*, Faculty Focus, 21 Oct. 2019, <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/vulnerability-in-the-classroom/>.

McKercher, Kelly Ann. “Beyond sticky notes.” *Doing co-design for Real: Mindsets, Methods, and Movements*, 1st Edn. Sydney, NSW: *Beyond Sticky Notes* (2020).

Morgan, Sandie, and Bonni Stachowiak. “Vulnerability in Our Teaching.” *Teaching in Higher Ed*, 4 Jun. 2015, <https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast/vulnerability-in-our-teaching/>.

Prinsloo, Paul, and Sharon Slade. “Student Vulnerability, Agency, and Learning Analytics: An Exploration.” *Journal of Learning Analytics*, Society for Learning Analytics and Research, 2016, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1126808.pdf>.

Rosen, Jody R, and Maura A Smale. “Open Digital Pedagogy = Critical Pedagogy.” *Hybrid Pedagogy*, Hybrid Pedagogy, 6 Jan. 2015, <https://hybridpedagogy.org/open-digital-pedagogy-critical-pedagogy/>.

Strean, William Ben, et al. “Train Wrecks.” *Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching*, CELT, 2019, <https://celt.uwindsor.ca/index.php/CELT/article/view/5295>.

# Module 3: Creating an Inclusive Community of Learners: Trust and Context



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onhumanlearn/?p=245>

Figure 1: Module 3: Creating an Inclusive Community of Learners

[Click here for a version with ASL](#)

[Click here for a version with LSQ \(coming soon!\)](#)

## Story

Objective: To foster inclusive learning communities of diverse collaborative members. While diversity is our greatest asset, inclusion is our most important challenge. The academic mission of advancing learning and discovery, while doing no harm, is best served by an orchestration of diverse perspectives. Current academic processes pit students against students, faculty against faculty, and faculty against students, create monocultures, and exclusionary hierarchies filled with bias. The academic journey is often a lonely one, especially during the pandemic. Learning communities are not inherently inclusive – we have to deliberately create them to be and work to maintain this inclusion. How do we create a cohesive learning community out of dissonant and divergent perspectives, deal with conflict, listen to quieter underrepresented voices, give and receive constructive critique, and share knowledge generously for collective benefit?

At this point in our workshop series, we had created a community. We were in the perfect place to question and reflect upon our own practices. We asked: Who in our community is getting comfortable with these weekly meetings? Who still thinks they shouldn't be there? Are we building trust? In essence, what was being done well and what needed to be better?

We used the liberating structure TRIZ to list all the worst possible results, because sometimes it's easier to reflect on what we shouldn't do. Then we asked, "Is there anything on this list that resembles what we're currently doing?"

## Administratively Supporting a Humanized Learning Community

*(Having been in the role of student, instructor, and administrator, and having attempted culture change in each of these roles, I wish to share the insights I have gained and the lessons I have learned from failure, mistakes, and unexpected progress. This culture change isn't easy. Some of these recommendations may be obvious and rudimentary to most administrators. These recommendations are mine alone and have not been processed by the team, as I was recovering from brain surgery during the co-design sessions. – Jutta)*



Figure 2: Photo by Omer Salom on Unsplash

Administration is part of the larger community. Education is a complex adaptive system. Learning and teaching is nested in layers of administration and oversight. Any culture change must take into account these layers and each of the nested layers must change as well. At any point, where change does not permeate the layers, there will be a friction point that can undermine the culture change. The individuals at the boundary between change and stasis will feel the friction the most.

## Humanizing the Administrative Experience

To humanize the administrative experience, ask the humans that have the greatest difficulty or feel the greatest impact to help reshape the process. The coin model of privilege speaks to how those above the coin hold the power for change, yet those below the coin hold the experience of what needs to change (Nixon 2019). In terms of who should give input, this could be the individuals that experience time famine the most because of other demands; those who have the greatest difficulty navigating through the process because of a variety of language, cultural, or other barriers; or those who feel the greatest anxiety about administration and authority because of past experiences. The people who are unlike the conception of the typical student or instructor, for whom the process is a misfit can provide great insight. Rather than separate fragmented domains of administrative responsibility, look at the overall experience for the student and the instructor. If you reshape the experience to address these outlying needs, the process will be more humane for everyone in the interaction.

## Cost Benefit Analysis

For each administrative step that is required, ask, Why is this necessary? Is the effort required by the applicant, student, or instructor worth the administrative benefit derived? Is there another way to derive this benefit that doesn't put the same demands on the student/instructor? Is the same information already gathered by someone else in the administration? Can collaborative information sharing reduce the effort overall? Is the rationale for the effort clear to those expending the effort? Does the timing of the effort take into account the other demands put upon those that must expend the effort? Are the instructions clear enough not to add to the cognitive load and anxiety of those that must expend the effort? Are the instructions written from the perspective of those who must expend the effort? Are they clear to the individuals who are unlike the typical profile? Is it clear where help can be found to clarify what is demanded?

## Communication That Respects and Expects Humanized Exchanges

There is often a tendency to speak down to students or to use punitive or threatening language when administrative steps are not followed. This is more likely to elicit a defensive response, and communicates an expectation of wrongdoing or non-compliance. It also sets up a power imbalance that places the student in a passive role and discourages a sense of mutual responsibility or allegiance to the collective effort.

Alternatively, students are treated as customers to be appeased and served. This also results in the abdication of responsibility and discourages allegiance to the collective effort. Higher education is far more than selling a service.

Setting up a respectful adult-to-adult conversation that encourages reciprocal understanding of both positions is

more likely to achieve the desired response. After all, education is a collective responsibility, not a luxury that a society can forego.

## Beware of Delegating Decisions and Processes to “Smart” Machines

With the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) – the promise of efficient, accurate decisions and the ability to detect patterns far better than humans – academia has resorted to the use of AI to speed up administrative processes and make or assist with administrative decisions. AI is being used in academic admissions, grading, to detect students who are not keeping up or not doing the work, to proctor exams during the pandemic, and to provide personalized instructional support to students who are struggling.

It is crucially important to acknowledge that there is bias pervasive and inherent in AI. AI decisions are based on data analytics that optimizes using data about past successes. This favours the average or majority and is biased against outliers and small minorities. The data regarding these students is often not present or is overwhelmed by the data of the majority. This means that they are far less likely to be chosen for admission, will be graded less fairly, will be identified as non-conformant, will be falsely accused of cheating, and will find that the “personalized” instruction is not a good fit.

The same applies to AI tools used to make hiring or promotion decisions. Current AI systems will amplify, automate, and accelerate discrimination of the past, discouraging diversity and leading to monocultures.

When using AI it is important to understand the limits of the intelligence and to understand who and what the AI systems are ignorant of and biased against. Anomalous decisions, exceptions, and scenarios that are not usual are better addressed by human judgment. There should always be a human guiding the process. AI is a power tool that can do great harm if used irresponsibly.

## The Many Guises of and Excuses for Surveillance

A sense of mutual trust is a precarious and precious thing. It is essential to creating an inclusive learning community. Respecting privacy is a powerful way to communicate trust. That respect for privacy is eroded and breached with the pernicious employment of surveillance systems. Learning management systems embed surveillance systems that monitor instructors and students under the guise of identifying struggling students and assisting instructors. These do not communicate trust, but they do motivate actions to fool the system.

## Winners and Losers

Challenging and rewarding excellence through academic awards is a powerful motivator. When singular standards such as grades are used to judge excellence, it can also be a means of winnowing diversity and setting up competition that fragments a community. Diversification, novel excellence, and personal advances should also be encouraged and recognized.

## Arbiters of Certification

Academia is not impervious to the disparity that has led to polarization and strife in the larger context. Meritocracies and our systems of academic merit may be contributing to new class divides. With academic institutions redefining their purpose as the certification of learning in the context of globally available educational resources, we can help to recognize a diversity of achievements. We can play a role in reducing hierarchies, class divides, and disparities, bringing dignity to the variety of essential work that our society's survival depends upon.

## Session Topic Introduction: Creating an Inclusive Community of Learners



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onhumanlearn/?p=245>

Figure 3: Module 3: Plenary Creating an Inclusive Community of Learners

[Click here for a version with ASL](#)

[Click here for a version with LSQ \(coming soon!\)](#)

@Terry: Instead of easing our way into the third module and building on the work that had been done already, we came in like a wrecking ball (thank you, Miley) with an act of creative destruction. In the previous two modules, we had set the precedent of using a Liberating Structure (What? So What? Now What?) as the overarching way to proceed. Investigating just WHAT we are talking about, analyzing what is important to note about it (SO WHAT), and creating a list of actions to take in light of that analysis (NOW WHAT).

As we imagined what might be a good way to not only introduce the topic of creating an inclusive community, but also continue to create an inclusive community of learners (so meta!), we thought a switch of Liberating Structure might be just the right amount of destructive yet constructive fun to do just that.

Enter the TRIZ Liberating Structure. If we had kept to the script and continued on with the original liberating structure, we would have begun with an analysis of an inclusive learning community. What makes a brave space? What are its defining features and characteristics? What rules do they follow? What makes them inclusive? I am positive we would have come up with a fantastic list of key features and ways to foster brave, inclusive spaces.

But with TRIZ, we took a roundabout approach. We spent the first week of module 3 trading off ideas of how to do just the opposite. How could we make an *unbrave* space? How could a space be as exclusive as possible? In other words, how to reach the exact opposite goal than the one we are working towards. And this may just be the most liberating of Liberating Structures. You are now free to identify all the things you're afraid of happening. Bringing them out into the open for all to see; to call out as undesirable. And the community grows as we together come up with more and more (bad) ideas that we know we will be together in fighting to remove from the spaces that we work in.

And, likely before we even get to the next step of the structure, we see ways to counteract the things we have identified; to fight them. And as we continue through the TRIZ structure, we look at that list honestly to see what we recognize as things that do exist in our environments (much like the SO WHAT step). And finally, we create a list of actions to take to remove or flip the things on the original list (Much like the NOW WHAT step). If you think about it, the two Liberating Structures are kind of the same thing, with different twists.

The keywords for Module 3: Co-Creating Inclusive Communities were *trust* and *context*. We hoped that by taking this “destructive” approach for module 3, we were leveraging the context that had been built in the first two modules and that we showed our trust in the community by mixing things up.

## Week 5: Co-Creating Inclusive Communities — What? So What?

Keywords: trust and context

This week we're going to shift to using a different "liberating structure." We're going to spend Thursday breaking things down so that we can build them back up together. It's called Making Space with TRIZ and it's a flip. Instead of solutioning or fixing, we start by breaking!

Non-trigger, trigger warning: this week we'll be focusing on the negative things we can do to break communities. How can you do a terrible job of creating a community of practice? Remember: be brave, not unsafe. And if you need anything in particular from us for that to happen, let us know!

Questions we will consider:

- How can we make a community as exclusive, uninviting, and unwelcoming as possible?
- How can we make it difficult to participate in the community?
- What level of structure would make this an absolutely awful community?
- How can we make sure others feel othered inside and outside of our community?
- How can we make sure that trust is nowhere to be seen in this community? How can distrust take centre stage?
- How can we make sure people outside our community do not trust it?
- How can we set the worst possible context for our ongoing community practices and participation in the community?
- How can we encourage people to leave the community early and often?
- How can we make sure no one understands what the community is for or about? Or who is it for?
- How can we make sure people think "no" when considering "Is this community for me"?

After the session:

Laura Killam

- How to Design the Worst Course Ever

## Week 6: Co-Creating Inclusive Communities — Now What?

After the session:

- Laura Killam, Building Inclusivity from the Rubble
- Lilian Bahgat, Creating by Deconstructing

## Findings from Week 1

### *Ways to Create Unbrave Spaces*

- Tell everyone their ideas won't work. This can look like "not thinking big" or "not holding space for hope."
- Correct people's sharing of their own experiences.
- Assume everyone learns the same way.

- Make everyone show up on camera and speak.
- Change fees for access.
- Put a time limit on sharing.
- Put people down and tell them they're wrong.
- Presume privilege does not exist.
- Shut down other people if they disagree with you.
- Model something different than what you expect.

## Findings from Week 2

How can we construct what we deconstructed last week?

Deconstruct	Do We Do This	Construct
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell everyone their ideas won't work.</li> <li>• Correct people's sharing of their own experiences.</li> <li>• Assume everyone learns the same way.</li> <li>• Make everyone show up on camera and speak.</li> <li>• Charge fees for access.</li> <li>• Put a time limit on sharing.</li> <li>• Put people down and tell them they're wrong.</li> <li>• Presume privilege does not exist.</li> <li>• Shut down other people if they disagree with you.</li> <li>• Model something different than what you expect.</li> </ul>	<p>[Space to reflect as a group]</p>	

## *The Construction Phase*

### Genuinely Listening to Ideas from All

- What not to do: Tell everyone their ideas won't work. This can look like "not thinking big" or "not holding space for hope."
- What to do: We need to recognize that big problems are going to require big solutions, and at the start of any process it's important to keep the big picture in mind. Just because we don't know how to get somewhere doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to figure out a way. This ties back to one of the central themes, which is the value and importance of diversity. We know that diverse groups approach solving problems in different ways and come up with diverse solutions. In order to ensure we save space for these diverse solutions, we need to ensure we don't dismiss ideas at the outset.

### Valuing Personal Experiences and Narratives

- What not to do: Correct people's sharing of their own experiences.
- What to do: A diverse group will have diverse experiences and perspectives, and all of these need to be valued. Studies have shown that experiences and perspectives from underrepresented groups are more likely to be dismissed or ignored from the dominant group. In order to be inclusive we need to ensure that value is attached to personal stories and narratives. We signal this value through respect and meaningful listening.

## Acknowledge and Respect Individual Differences

- What not to do: Assume everyone learns the same way.
- What to do: At the core of inclusive communities is an appreciation of diversity. Within this appreciation we need to acknowledge differences in engaging with material. People will come with different motivations, different degrees of engagement, and different background exposure and preparation. We need to acknowledge this difference and ensure supports are in place to welcome and foster learning for all.



Figure 4: Photo by Erik Karits on Unsplash

## Flexibility and Inclusion for Meaningful Participation

- What not to do: Make everyone show up on camera and speak.
- What to do: Ensure there are multiple pathways for people to participate and feel included. Universal design for learning along with accessibility principles highlight the need to multi-modal learning environments. This might take the form of encouraging learners to choose between participating in the chat versus turning on their camera and speaking.

## Consider Equity through Access

- What not to do: Charge fees for access.
- What to do: Ensure all components of the course are open access and do not require a fee for entry/access. Some

education tech tools might start out on a free trial but turn to a fee for service in the middle of the course. We need to be aware of this and actively select tools that are truly open access for all learners.

### Respect a Slow Share

- What not to do: Put a time limit on sharing.
- What to do: Recognize that important exchanges can't be rushed and highlight the importance of a "slow share." Teaching and learning is relational work, and this cannot happen meaningfully when consistently rushed. It also cannot happen meaningfully if over-scheduled, wherein there are only minimal opportunities for perspective sharing in-between pure content exchange.

### Lift Others Up

- What not to do: Put people down or tell them they're wrong.
- What to do: By respecting and valuing others' perspectives and positionality, we can lift them up and validate their experiences. By moving away from the "right vs. wrong" dichotomy, we can hold space for diverse ideas and thoughts. This also emphasizes the "practice makes progress" narrative from module 2, where we highlight that we are all works in progress, with things to learn and flaws that can be celebrated.

### Acknowledge the Existence of Privilege and Power

- What not to do: Presume privilege and power don't exist.
- What to do: We can acknowledge that privilege and power exist in teaching and learning contexts. Importantly, we need to move beyond simple acknowledgement to dismantling hierarchies that reinforce this power and privilege. By giving students more control and ownership over their learning process, we can help them to find agency and make decisions about their own learning journeys. Sometimes the best thing we can do as instructors is give up our space at the front of the room – this can help to remove power hierarchies inherent in classroom structures.

### Value Points of Disagreement and Departure

- What not to do: Shut down other people if they disagree with you.
- What to do: We can find value in points of disagreement and departure and actively acknowledging or even celebrating how this strengthens our learning experience. By highlighting difference, disagreement, and departure, we can use the friction of these moments to teach about patience, perspective-taking, "norms of correctness," and meaning-making.

### Start as You Plan to Continue

- What not to do: Model something different than what you expect.
- What to do: We can act in a way that aligns with our plan to continue, meaning that if we are aiming to cultivate an inclusive community, then every act that we do in building that community needs to be inclusive. This can be reflected in the words we choose to use, the people we bring in to our community, how we share space for leading, and how we reflect on what we can improve.

## A Note about Othering

Any inclusive community, no matter how inclusive it is, will inherently exclude others. There will be people “in” and people “out.” Group-based differences will emerge between those “in the group” and “outside of the group.” By highlighting the value of diversity and naming it, aren’t we also creating “otherness?” These are very important questions that need to be openly interrogated along the lifespan of an inclusive community. We need to ensure that these things are transparently discussed and reflected upon and are re-discussed to keep them at the fore. There isn’t an easy answer to these questions, but by being open and acknowledging that this tension exists, we can continually reflect on it and strive to hold on to it so as not to forget the tenuous balance between inclusion and exclusion.

## Link to Session Materials

Humanizing Deck



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:  
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onhumanlearn/?p=245#h5p-3>

### **Slide 2: Co-Creating Inclusive Communities**

And talking about them in the abstract makes it hard to see how anything will really, noticeably, substantially change.

### **Slide 3: Trust and Context**

So, how do we understand building trust and being a part of our surrounding context?

### **Slide 4: Trust and Context**

If someone joined us today as a first time participant, what would you tell them about *how* we do things? About *what* we do? And about *why* we do them that way? Also, what about the *who* of it? Who is in charge here?

### **Slide 10: Last Week, This Week**

Last week we broke out into groups and began listing all the things you can do to get the worst possible result when forming a community. Our conversations were guided by nine questions:

1. How can we make it difficult to participate in the community?
2. What level of structure would make this an absolutely awful community?
3. How can we make sure others feel othered inside and outside of our community?
4. How can we make sure that trust is nowhere to be seen in this community? How can distrust take centre stage?
5. How can we make sure people outside our community do not trust it?
6. How can we set the worst possible context for our ongoing community practices and participation in the community?
7. How can we encourage people to leave the community early and often?
8. How can we make sure no one understands what the community is for or about? Or who is it for?
9. How can we make sure that when people consider “Is this community for me?” their answer is a resounding “no”?

### **Slide 11: Which Community? Whose Community?**

Take a moment to reflect on the experience last week. We broke away from the format we started with in our first two

weeks. We did that for a few reasons: we want to be reflective and consider how it feels to be new to this community, to miss one session and come in for another, to join late, to feel like you're late even when you're on time.

Belonging: Who here is feeling comfy and who here is not? What do you say when you introduce yourself?

We often bias toward the positive – vulnerability and failure, succeeding and solutioning, trust and context ... What is a community?

In a community how do you grow, adapt, change, and welcome:

1. How do you handle us vs. them?
2. How do you protect against othering within the community?

What are some of the challenges in creating an inclusive community.

Us/Them: When we create a community of “us” we automatically create a group of “others.”

## Additional Materials

### Link to Twitter Conversations

The team created a hashtag that was used to continue conversations on Twitter: #OnHumanLearn

[https://twitter.com/search?q=%23OnHumanLearn&src=typed\\_query](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23OnHumanLearn&src=typed_query)

## Works Cited

Bring in resources that are especially relevant to the topic.

Brown, Dr. LaKimbire. “The Importance of Trust.” *Teach For All*, 28 Feb. 2014, <https://teachforall.org/news/importance-trust>.

Corieri, Megan. “Covid-19 Reflections from a Community College Student.” *California Virtual Campus Online Network of Educators*, 30 Jul. 2020, <https://onlinenetworkofeducators.org/2020/07/30/covid-19-reflections-from-a-community-college-student/>.

Cormier, Dave. *Making the Community the Curriculum*, Pressbooks, <https://davecormier.pressbooks.com/>.

Humanizing Learning. [https://www.zotero.org/groups/3361442/humanizing\\_learning](https://www.zotero.org/groups/3361442/humanizing_learning).

Lipmanowicz, Henri, and Keith McCandless. “User Experience Fishbowl.” *Liberating Structures*, <https://www.liberatingstructures.com/18-users-experience-fishbowl/>.

Maher, Pat, and Emily Root. “Learning to Learn: Creating Community Before Cramming in Content.” *Proceedings of the Atlantic Universities’ Teaching Showcase*, 2014, <https://ojs.library.dal.ca/auts/article/view/6715>.

Pyrko, Igor, et al. “Thinking Together: What Makes Communities of Practice Work?” *Human Relations*, vol. 70, no. 4, Apr. 2017, pp. 389–409, doi:10.1177/0018726716661040.

Western University. “Building Community.” *Centre for Teaching and Learning*, 2022, <https://teaching.uwo.ca/teaching/engaging/building-community.html>.

# Module 4: Sustaining Change: Critique and Care



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:  
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onhumanlearn/?p=269>

Figure 1: Sustaining Change Trailer

Alternative versions:

[Click here for a version with ASL](#)

[Click here for a version with LSQ \(coming soon!\)](#)

## Story

Objective: To spark and sustain equitable system-wide change and adaptation in higher education.

Change is hard. Academia, as an institution, was built to resist change and uphold established practices. The flaws in the system — false scarcity, exclusion, rigid hierarchy — are not new, but they have been exacerbated throughout the pandemic and demand address. Numerous innovative experiments in more inclusive, future-friendly learning have met insurmountable barriers and failed to thrive. How do we sustain change, complexity, and care in a system that was not designed for what our society currently demands of it?

How can we foreground care, hold the gains of learning that we may have made during the strange years of the pandemic, and sustain change? In this module, we'll return to the liberating structure of what/so what/now what to review:

- Reflect on changes you've made during the past twenty months that focus on care (for students and self)
- Reflect on changes you're working toward or want to see (particularly in higher education systems)

## Session Topic Introduction: Sustaining Change, Care, and Critique

In previous modules, we've looked at a convening topic through the lens of two key provocations or ideas. In this module, we will look at the question of sustaining change through the lenses of *care* and *critique*. In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, bell hooks explores how fundamentally classroom practices need to be rethought in order to build people's capacity to be **free in a democratic society** and to contribute where they are coming from. Hooks's pedagogy is focused on care and on the development of practices of critique, and has informed this module.



Figure 2: Photo by Andrik Langfield on Unsplash

We wanted to think about this project **not just as something that happens and then ends**, but rather something that educators who've engaged in our sessions — and those who will only encounter the sessions through the modules later — can use to build on, to inform their own practices. And so, this final module will draw on something called an **Open Space Technology Facilitation** format. A core principle of **Open Space Technology** is that the **right people are always in the room**. So, we will close out the project by spending time together aiming to connect and maybe share some ideas for sustaining change together through co-design, collaboration, or even potentially another grant project.

Critique and care are both part of change. Critique and critical inquiry into the way things are enables people to see **possibilities for change**, and caring, connected relationships support us in taking the hard and risky steps to try things differently. But it's particularly when we've made that first step that care and critique come into play in making change systemic. **Sustaining change is hard and seldom a straight line**. Changes shape ecosystems and require other changes. Change destabilizes, and that demands care for people impacted by the shifts occurring. Care work in education can involve active support, but it can also involve shaping power relations and offering new principles for seeing the world and for engaging in interpersonal relations that don't foster toxic hierarchies. This is long-term work, aligned with the metaphor of planting trees under whose shade we do not expect to sit. It is also care as reciprocal, community work: care as mutual aid rather than the atomized self-care sometimes promoted to us in pandemic-era university wellness emails.

The model below comes from digital strategy-type change work: it frames **change as a continuing circular process**, always bringing people into new conversations. It's a reflective process with co-design as one of the core steps in its change work. But it also reflects that long-term nature of change work and the centrality of care and constructive critique to the process.

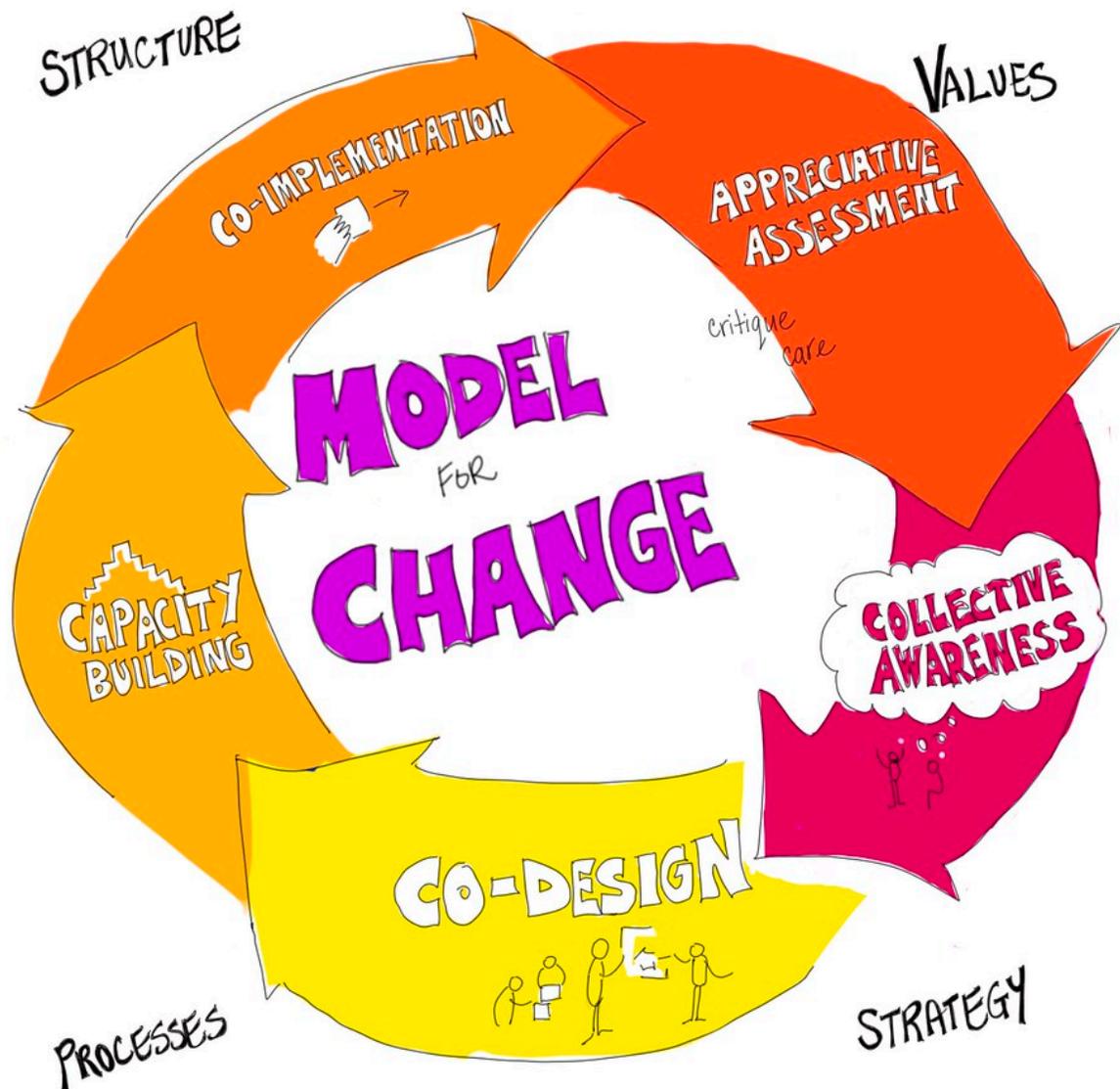


Figure 3: Forsythe, Giulia. "Model for Change." 2022.

So that's the *What* for considering care and critique in the context of change.

The *So What* is a recognition that most of us are profoundly weary at this point in this pandemic crisis. More weary, maybe, than we would have imagined we could be. And we seem to institutionally be hitting the point where decision-makers are saying, "Got to get back to it, folks, we're going to go forward as if things were returning to normal." But they aren't, in most places, and even where they may be, educators and students actually haven't had time to even process all that has happened to us. We haven't had any respite or recovery. We've all been living in crisis, even those of us who've been privileged enough to be well and safe and housed and employed; we have all been living in a level of uncertainty that none of us had been conditioned to. And that is a difficult space to find the energy to make change from.

So, we want to honour that, through a lens of care, and not suggest that any of us pick up a whole new project on our shoulders and go forward as if nothing has happened. We would like to set a provocation, essentially, that some of what we may want to look at is how we deal with our institutions as we consider creating and sustaining change. And we'd like to suggest that *care* and *critique* are two keywords that are really important in that process.

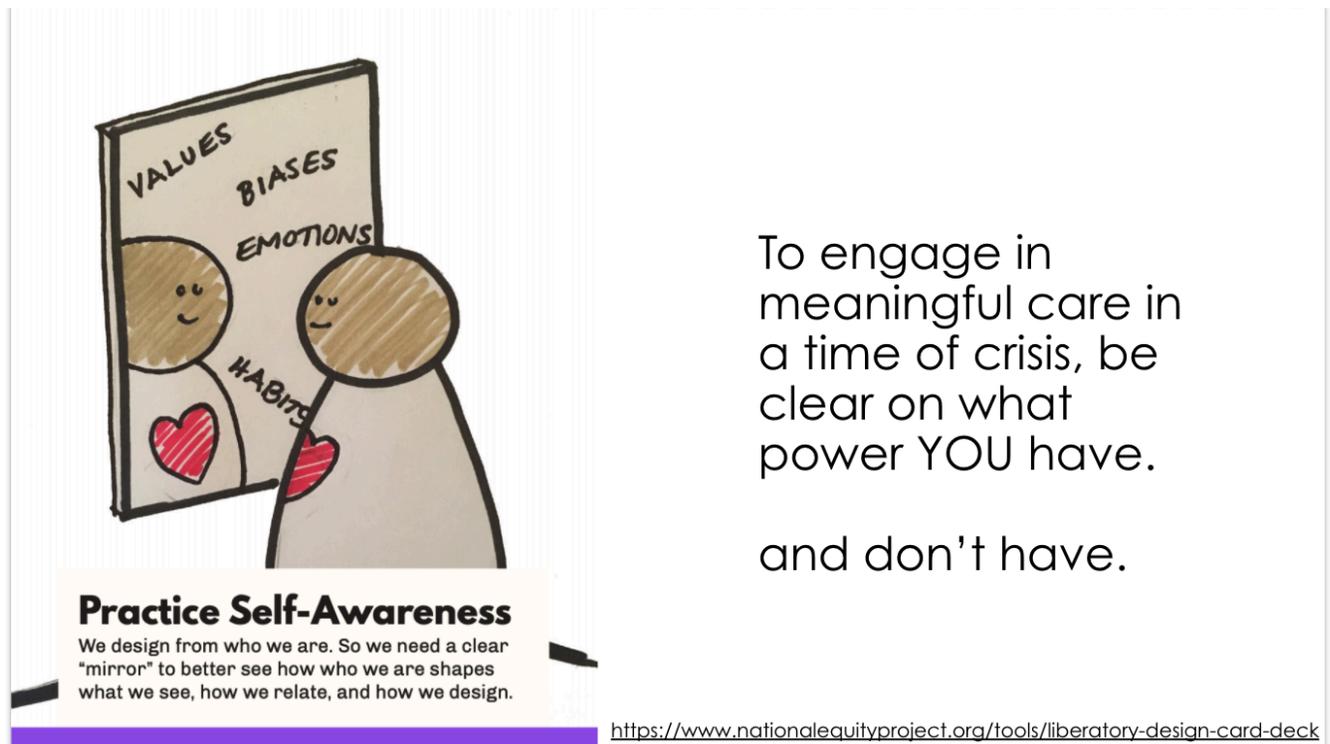


Figure 4: National Equity Project. “Liberatory Design Card Deck.” National Equity Project, <https://www.nationalequityproject.org/tools/liberatory-design-card-deck>

This image, like the What? So What? Now What? model and the TRIZ model that our modules have drawn on, is part of the Liberated Structures facilitation collection, and there are little cards that illustrate them. This one reminds us that anytime we engage in any form of co-design, we are wise to do so from a sense of our own positionality and strengths. For example, I may want to see all kinds of changes in my institution, but I don’t have the power to execute or even influence them. They’re not in my wheelhouse. They’re not in my lane.

This module challenges us instead to think about changes that we have been making through this pandemic or through our engagement with this project. And to think about things that we want, but within the scope of what we can do, because it is not on any individual set of shoulders to change the world. When we’re talking about change, some levels we can direct and sustain more easily. So, we think of scope in terms of a nested model of change. At the personal level in the centre, we have a fair amount of control over the things that we can change or do in our classrooms or direct roles. Now, sometimes these changes still feel very vulnerable. We still risk failing. It’s not that change is easy, at this personal level, but it is actually within our purview.

As we recognize the limits of our individual abilities to create change, it can be helpful to prioritize. In Rawle’s article, she notes amidst her list of care practices one that reads “**say no to theatre.**” Now, this doesn’t mean theatre as tragedy and comedy but rather the pandemic theatre of, for instance, sending out wellness emails while engaging institutionally in practices that make staff and students feel, at best, deeply uncared for.

And that does start with us in our own pedagogical practices. Learning the skill of critique on an individual level allows us to scaffold towards institutional and societal change.

Often we aren’t formally taught to critique. Often students associate critique with criticism. Critique is a bit of an art. And it’s something that can help build relationships and actually help you move forward together in a really wonderful way. So, we talk about how to critique and non-eviscerate, we talk about the differences between critiquing a thing and critiquing a person, and we talk about apology and how apology needs to be the sort of thing that is part of critique. How to give a good apology: “I’m sorry that you felt that way” is not an apology, but for example, “I’m sorry, I” is an apology. And we talk about these examples. And students have some really interesting reflections on it. They talk about how their relationships with their roommates have changed because they’ve been able to understand the difference between critique and criticism and apology. So, these are life skills. And I feel like there’s an art to them. That’s something that we

can practice – I think Coronavirus showed us that, especially in the digital domain, there are things that we can do here that make it more equitable and inclusive. So, I hope we don't lose those. And I think the ability to approach that in a way that recognizes that there are humans at the other end of your critique is really valuable in this time when everything seems to be so polarized.



Figure 5: Photo by Tomas Sobek on Unsplash

How we can humanize learning is a really important possible step that we could start for building those connections, either between you or having conversations about possible new pathways.

One of the things that we were talking about in this module:

- What are the next steps? First, reflect on changes you've worked toward during the past twenty months (or seven weeks) that have focused on *care*, for students and self: **What do you need or need to put in place to sustain those?**
- Then, reflect on changes you're working toward or want to see that focus on *critique*, particularly in our higher ed systems: **What changes do you want to see made or sustained post-pandemic?**
- Based on your care/critique answers, **what co-design topics would you propose we build capacity toward going forward?**

## Findings Week 1: "What?"

Reflect on changes you've made during the past twenty months that focus on care (for students and self):

- Take breaks from screens
- Accept that you and your course cannot be all things to all students
- Revisit assignments and look at their flexibility
- Listen without judgment when told workload is heavy

- Reflect on student perspective
- Responding to student anxiety
- Checking in with students at the beginning of class (about things outside of the course)

Reflect on changes you're working toward or want to see (particularly in higher ed systems):

- Understand students have requirements outside of the classroom
- Meaningful feedback
- Recognition of sessional labour and the level of sector/systemic risk
- Demarking work/home spaces
- Processing time — time between meetings to process and reflect
- Ways to make change come from students

## Findings Week 2: “Now What?”

Future co-design topics:

- Virtual experiential learning
- Understanding data structures behind classroom tools
- Advocacy for B.Ed student paid placements
- Concrete action on DE&I
- Build trust to liberate critical thinking among students
- Grade curving and trusting criteria
- How do we bring these conversations/concepts to larger class sizes?
- How do we work with admin instead of against?
- How can we work with students to co-create sustainable things?

## Link to Session Materials

### Humanizing Deck



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:  
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onhumanlearn/?p=269#h5p-4>

#### **Slide 4: Care**

As we design our courses, we need to think about what our cornerstone will be. What theme should run through every aspect of our course? What core tenet should guide our course design decisions? If increased learning and wellness is our goal, we need to build from a foundation of kindness.

#### **Slide 6: Critique**



## Works Cited

Resources that are especially relevant to the topic.

Hooks, Bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Routledge, 1994.

Humanizing Learning. [https://www.zotero.org/groups/3361442/humanizing\\_learning](https://www.zotero.org/groups/3361442/humanizing_learning).

Popova, Maria. "How to Criticize with Kindness: Philosopher Daniel Dennett on the Four Steps to Arguing Intelligently." *The Marginalian*, 28 Mar. 2014, <https://www.brainpickings.org/2014/03/28/daniel-dennett-rapoport-rules-criticism/>.

Rawle, Fiona. "A Pedagogy of Kindness: The Cornerstone for Student Learning and Wellness." *The Campus*, 20 Aug. 2021, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/pedagogy-kindness-cornerstone-student-learning-and-wellness>.

PART III  
OUTRO



# Administrative Harms



The approaches to teaching and learning explored in these modules are being undertaken with a broader institutional system — the academic behemoth, if you will. This behemoth has layers of administration wherein policies are developed and enacted, and institutional norms are curated and cemented. We need to acknowledge the friction that can exist here due to the divergence of common goals and core ethos between instructor, student, and administration. Power differentials exist, and this can lead to different lenses being used when evaluating teaching and learning initiatives, or when deciding where budget increases and decreases will have an impact. There are several areas where we want to be explicitly aware of potential administrative harms due to this disconnect:

- Timelines and the rationale for deadlines can be very different between instructors and the administration. When settling deadlines we need to ask ourselves what the rationale is for a given timeframe and inquire as to whether this timeframe will have different impacts on different groups.
- Checklists and task organizers: the administration might be more likely to adopt checklists and “one and done” approaches.
- Emphasis on metrics and counting: the administration might have an increased emphasis on metric and counting — sometimes even counting people, such as with representation audits. The administration might also have an increased interest and valuation of quantitative data over qualitative data. We as instructors must remember the value of narrative, context, and personal lived experience.
- The existence of a policy/statement/standard is meaningless unless there is action to bring it to life.
- Enforcement of policies needs to be equitable. If a policy is allowed to have exceptions, but those exceptions are not uniformly applied or if only those from the dominant group know to request an exception, then the implementation of the policy has laid the foundation for bias and inequitable treatment of students.
- Defending “fairness”: the administration will sometimes state, “If we allow it for this student, it isn’t fair to other students as we didn’t allow it for them.” In this context the administration, and sometimes the instructor, is confusing equity for equality. We need to interrogate this label of “fairness” and recognize that fairness isn’t a one-size-fits-all solution.
- The administration tends to push the “education as competition” narrative. We can help to shift attention to the notion of education as diversification and collaboration.
- We as instructors can remind the administration that “leading is learning” and that a core part of learning is listening followed by action.
- We need to be cognizant of the fact that the administration often has a dependence on solutionism — the idea that the issue can be fixed or solved and checked off a list permanently, rather than understanding it is something that needs to be vigilantly attended to. The process of attention and action will need to change and evolve along with changing contexts and the involvement of different people.

# Not Going Back



Thank you for coming on this journey with us, friends. As you have gleaned from all the materials, this journey never ends and it will be different for each of us. One experience we will all have in common, though, is that along the way you can't help but be changed. Maybe you consider something differently – you spend more time worrying about the unintended consequences of your design decision, your policies, your words, your critiques. Or maybe you spend more time with your family, asking them about humanizing learning. In both cases, you're doing the “work” of being tuned in and being aware of everything around you. And so, changed people – we are never going back to the ways things used to be – we can't unsee the opportunities for us all when we embrace our common humanity and lead with compassion, wonder, and curiosity.

***We are all a part of this journey, and no, we will not go back to the way things used to be. We can't. We've changed and we vow to continue to do so.***

## The Things We Found Poignant

Community, community, community. Find support, find common ground, and then also find the tough aspects of communities: How do they grow? How do they remain inclusive? How do they remain democratic? Community for whom? How can we disagree productively? How can we nurture a culture where we can disagree and be respectful?

A core part of humanizing learning is a mindset (or mindsets). There are foundations and there are methods, but mindset is core. Part of that mindset is being open to learning something new, to unlearning something old, and to embracing uncertainty.

Importance of Meaningful listening. Listening to those with lived experience, listening to those with different opinions, listening to the quiet voices, listening so we hear the voices that usually don't say a word – this is humanizing learning.

Moving beyond a “seat at the table” to “co-creating the table” – it might be the only way we impact and change systemic barriers in Education.

Going through this process – meaningful humanizing – changes people. We all will need time to process and absorb and practice these new revelations we have about ourselves and others.

## Reflection Opportunity: What Did We Learn? How Can We Prepare for Change?

There is no simple “how-to” list and there never will be. There is no end, no completion, no final\_final\_final\_exam/paper/assessment.doc

Importance of slowing down. And by slowing down we don't mean do less with more time; quite the opposite, we mean make time for reflection, thinking, pondering, making interesting connections – doing more with time.

Importance of relationships – relationships that are non-hierarchical and genuine, that carry a foundation of curiosity and learning.

Importance of connections. Importance of breaking down silos (all silos).

Returning to “normal” – we should ask, “Normal for whom?” and “Who benefited from that ‘normal’?” Please do not uncritically go back to “normal.”

## Did COVID Kill the Traditional Lecture, or Was It Already Endangered and COVID Just Accelerated the Process?

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare many of the significant issues that exist in higher education today: inequality, inaccessibility, poor pedagogical practices, lack of disaster preparedness, and in many ways, a lack of imagination and willingness to iterate. Many of the practices that persist in higher education, such as large passive lectures and one-way transmission models of teaching, do so despite a century of evidence that these approaches are not effective. In institutions that are meant to be hubs of innovation, creativity, knowledge creation, and evidence-based practice, we find that all too often we default to tradition and mythology, rather than confronting some of the complex challenges we face as twenty-first-century institutions. Some may point to the lack of significant systemic change in higher education for centuries as evidence of remarkable resilience of these ancient structures. Another way to view it is as a tendency towards incredible inertia, afforded by massive privilege held by a few that has remained largely unchallenged until recently. The reality is, of course, more complex than either of these views, but we are starting to see challenges to the role of traditional higher education that institutions should take note of, before they go the way of Blockbuster and Blackberry, with little understanding of how they ended up there.

To some extent, these issues stem from an obsession with the cult of academic freedom, which was and is necessary to ensure that controversial research could be conducted without fear of reprisal or interference. Unfortunately, it has been weaponized to support hyper-individualization, where the primacy of individual preference can override the collective good, which is a critical challenge to the work of humanizing education. The difficult work of designing humanized learning experiences is only possible when educators work together at broader levels (program, faculty, institution) and commit to shared values and goals. This is not to say that individual educators and their courses can't make a difference to the lives of learners if they are designed humanely, but we need to recognize the limits of this influence, that while individuals may be a shining light in a learner's experience, the overarching experience may be poor in programs that are not designed with a coherent set of values that support a transformational experience.

Equally as important as individual commitment to these goals is the visible commitment from leaders to challenge the status quo and to take on issues that may be unpopular or controversial if they will ultimately lead to better outcomes for everyone. Higher education leaders trying to effect significant change will inevitably be met with resistance and criticism that can be incredibly tiring and disheartening. Navigating the politics of change in a large and complex organization requires a vision of a future state that is made better by the necessary changes, but equally it requires adept storytelling – the ability to share that vision in a way that is compelling and opens space for all stakeholders to see themselves in this new and better place.

As higher education institutions begin to emerge from the disruption of pandemic restrictions, they have some difficult decisions to make. Do they prioritize returning everything to exactly as it was before and ignore all the learning and innovation that came out of the emergency, or do they do the hard work of self-examination and critical reflection to imagine a new state that attempts to address issues of inequality and access for learners and higher education workers alike?

Unfortunately, many institutions seem to be rushing headlong into a return to exactly how they were before, upending the playing field that had been temporarily levelled, and removing temporarily humanized policies that were arguably better for all. There are some signs that not all parts of the world are treating this moment that way though, which gives us hope that a more human, diverse, and inclusive approach to higher education globally is possible.

For example, the Australian and UK higher education sectors have long had a significant focus on evidence-based, transformative, and quality teaching practices, putting in place structures that normalize, incentivize, and reward a culture of excellence and continuous reflective improvement. There has been a strong focus from leadership in both these jurisdictions on not simply returning to the status quo (despite strong pressure from their governments to the contrary), but learning from the pandemic and making permanent changes to benefit learners and the learning environment. One significant change that many universities in Australia and the UK are planning post-COVID is to not return to large on-campus lectures. This is a trend that had started pre-pandemic, with some, such as the University

of Technology, Sydney (UTS), starting to remove large lecture theatres and replace them with active and collaborative learning spaces as far back as 2014, while others, such as Victoria University in Melbourne had already moved away from a traditional semester-based model to block teaching with no lectures and small cohorts.

The pandemic has accelerated the process of re-examining pedagogies, and a white paper from the Australasian Council on Distance and eLearning in 2021 noted that in a survey of universities in Australia and New Zealand, only 23 percent were planning to return to any on-campus lectures, while over 30 percent said they would definitely or probably not be returning to on-campus lectures. Probing the reasons for this, almost one quarter of institutions recognized that the primary reason for the shift was to improve pedagogy and learning for students, while others noted a variety of social, pedagogical, logistical, and economic reasons to reduce or remove lecture-based learning as we know it.

While a handful of institutions are removing lectures altogether, most are retaining them as an option in some form, but they are also having critical conversations about the diversity of teaching designs and thoughtful reasoning for using them. Most are re-examining the flexibility of their pedagogical designs and timetabling, breaking classes up into small cohorts of learners and focusing on designing physical and digital spaces to facilitate active, collaborative and informal learning. This is a recognition that the claimed transformational element of the “university experience” is rarely time spent sitting in a lecture with five hundred other students, but is in the meeting of minds that occurs in small groups who are actively engaged in the process — a process that is less place-dependent and more dependent on the pedagogical design used to spark the learning. It is also not an oversimplified question of choosing “online vs. on-campus,” but rather recognizing that learning is a complex, wonderful process that can start with a spark in a class, but that the majority of learning happens in the messy interstitial space outside our classrooms (in whatever way we have defined a classroom) where students’ lives intersect with the new knowledge they are gaining and new connections are hopefully made.

The notion of the “traditional student” who is focused solely on their studies and is able to attend class forty hours a week is no longer realistic. More students than ever before have disabilities, health issues, caring responsibilities, full-time work, and other restrictions on their time that make the traditional approach to higher education untenable for them. Pandemic changes to policies that temporarily allowed for flexibility in attendance, new and creative assessment strategies, and compassionate policy made space for so many learners who would traditionally have been excluded from our one-size-fits-all approach. Students have complex lives and are demanding both flexibility and choice in their education, which requires a shift in power dynamics to recognize students as equal partners in the enterprise of learning.

Crucially, these conversations are happening across the sector and across all levels of institutions in those places that choose to engage, rather than being led by handfuls of committed faculty swimming against the tide of tradition, constantly being buffeted by artifacts of a bygone era. That is not to say that our individual voices don’t count; quite the opposite in fact, as it is important that the voices of those who seek change are heard at all levels. The hard work of making our universities and colleges more human, and more fit for purpose in the twenty-first century, requires expanding our notion of who our stakeholders are, and having those stakeholders treated as equal partners. We must engage in a sustained conversation about the kind of inclusive community we want to be, then translate that conversation into action. Not engaging meaningfully in this conversation now will further erode the privileged position of traditional higher education providers and push our would-be students to seek learning that fits their needs elsewhere. We have a moment in time where we have a choice to rebuild better versions of our universities and colleges as critical societal institutions, or to attempt to prop up the crumbling walls of the ivory towers that will not protect us from necessary change forever. Perhaps we should see our institutions less as stone buildings to be built once and left alone and more as community gardens that need to be actively tended, watered, and evolved over time through the touch and influence of many diverse hands.

PART IV

SOME THINGS WE PICKED UP & TAKE  
EVERYTHING



# Take the Stuff



When you have something to say that you hope can empower people, encourage inclusion, and otherwise have a positive impact, you yell it from the rooftops and in as many formats as possible. To that end, you will find the materials of this project in a number of formats – to meet you where you are and how YOU choose to consume content.

Our videos have

- English captions
- Sous-titres français *found a bug – fixing très bientôt*
- American Sign Language (ASL)
- Langue des signes du Québec (LSQ) *coming early March!*

We have produced a number of videos centred around the 4 module topics. Below you will find a breakdown of those videos and their content. All project videos (and their alternative formats) can be accessed and downloaded from: University of Windsor Yuja server.

The Yuja video player will allow users to choose captions, interact with transcripts, download transcripts, download the original video, and change the speed.

## TRAILER:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:  
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onhumanlearn/?p=577>

The partners on the project spoke with our families about education, about humanizing education, and about what the perfect educational context would be. These are the people we love and the topic we feel passionate about. How much more humanizing can you get?

Project Trailer ASL

Project Trailer LSQ

## MODULE TRAILERS:



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:  
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onhumanlearn/?p=577>

Module 1 Trailer

Module 1 ASL

Module 1 LSQ  
Module 2 ASL



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:  
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onhumanlearn/?p=577>

Module 2 Trailer  
Module 2 LSQ



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:  
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onhumanlearn/?p=577>

Module 3 Trailer  
Module 3 ASL  
Module 3 LSQ



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:  
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onhumanlearn/?p=577>

Module 4 Trailer  
Module 4 ASL  
Module 4 LSQ

## **MODULE PLENARY VIDEOS plus creating Brave Space:**

Brave Space  
Brave Space ASL  
Brave Space LSQ (when we have it)  
Module 1 plenary  
Module 1 plenary ASL  
Module 1 plenary LSQ  
Module plenary 2  
Module plenary 2 ASL  
Module plenary 2 LSQ

Module plenary 3  
Module plenary 3 ASL  
Module plenary 3 LSQ  
Module plenary 4  
Module plenary 4 ASL  
Module plenary 4 LSQ

## Additional Project media:

Getting Air with Terry Greene: OnHumanLearn podcast

Zotero library that is open (just join!) and has links to more materials for any and all topics discussed here. Please join and add to the collection:

[https://www.zotero.org/groups/3361442/humanizing\\_learning](https://www.zotero.org/groups/3361442/humanizing_learning)

#ONHumanLearn is our project hashtag. You will find lots of voices engaging with topics around humanizing learning if you type it into Twitter:

[https://twitter.com/search?q=%23onhumanlearn&src=typed\\_query](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23onhumanlearn&src=typed_query)

Laura Killam, a prolific blogger posted reflections each week of the co-design sessions:

<http://insights.nursekillam.com/innovation/co-creation/building-inclusivity-from-the-rubble-onhumanlearn/>

University of Windsor created a blog for the fellows who participated in the co-design sessions from that institution:

<https://uwinopenlearn.ca/blog/category/onhumanlearn/>

Trent University created a blog for the fellows who participated in the co-design sessions from that institution:

[https://trentonlineblog.ca/onhumanlearn/the-oldff-series/?subscribe=success#subscribe-blog-blog\\_subscription-2](https://trentonlineblog.ca/onhumanlearn/the-oldff-series/?subscribe=success#subscribe-blog-blog_subscription-2)

Stephen Hurley voicEd Radio: Hurley in the Morning podcast with team members Terry Greene and Jess Mitchell:

<https://t.co/b5A7WKTNA>

Because of the formidable project team we assembled, this project benefited from and can be seen as continuing the great work of two other projects, namely:

Liberated Learner

(ENTER LINK to UT-M project) not yet available

Both of these projects showcased and led from learner perspectives, exploring the most human of stories.

# Project Playlist



What songs come to mind when you hear “humanizing learning?” Below you will find the song titles that the fellows and project team brought together for an #ONHumanLearn playlist created by project participants:

What song would you add to our #ONHumanLearn playlist?

Massive Attack, Three

Joel Plaskett, Wishful thinking

Pink Floyd, Another Brick in the Wall part 2

Indigo Girls, Closer to Fine

Beyonce, Formation

Sesame Street Theme

Mad World, Michael Andrews

Flowers are Red, Harry Chapin

Barenaked Ladies, Eraser

Anything by RATM (Rage Against the Machine) – Killing in the name NSFW

Can I Kick It? Tribe Called Quest

Paul Kelly, From Little Things, Big Things Grow

Try Everything, Shakira (Zootopia)

Fight the Power, Public Enemy

In My Life, Beatles

Twinkle Song, Miley Cyrus

Kodachrome, Paul Simon

The Good in Everyone, Sloan (best band ever)

Wrecking Ball, Miley Cyrus

The Climb, Miley Cyrus

The Trews, I Wanna Play

# Jutta's Unlearning and Questioning Course



The official description of the Unlearning and Questioning Course is as follows:

This course will orient incoming students to the intellectual framing and approach to be employed in the Inclusive Design program. Students will: engage in critical analysis of prior learning and established assumptions regarding foundational knowledge and skills in design, development, policy, education, assessment, research and evaluation; critically examine explicit and implicit values and assumptions; practice educational engagement that encourages divergent thinking, constructive critique and attention to the full range of human diversity through a variety of learning experiences; engage in collaborative projects that develop inclusive practices and provide opportunities to reflect on common conventions that support or undermine inclusion and inclusive design; and meet mentors within a number of stakeholder groups.

During the Unlearning and Questioning course, students will critically examine conventions and assumptions that are counter to diversity and inclusion; the Foundations course will explore inclusive design alternatives. The primary goal of Unlearning and Questioning is to establish a cohesive learning community that can support the diverse cohort of peers through the two years of the program. Part of the peer support is to master giving and receiving constructive and supportive critique.

Students are encouraged to diversify rather than standardize their learning. One of the primary assignments will be to develop a Personal Learning Plan. This will be a “living document” to chart and navigate personal learning goals throughout the program.

For grading I’m using a lot of peer and self assessment and also using the credit system I have used for a few years where the students can assign 10 10 point credits across a number of assignments. We use a co-op model, you pass by contributing to the work of the learning community, where the goals are both your growth or learning and the growth and learning of the other members.

Below is the message sent to students at the conclusion of the course:

“Dear Inclusive Designers to be,

It has been a great pleasure to get to know you and to help launch you on this journey.

I’m hoping that you are well on your way to forming a supportive learning community that understands the importance of collective success, rather than competition with your peers; that you trust each other enough to be able to give and receive constructive feedback and advice. These are difficult goals and most of your prior experiences have likely socialized you against these goals, so be patient with yourself.

I also hope that you know that you are responsible and in charge of your own learning journey; that it is up to you to determine where you want to go, how you will get there, what help you need to get there, and to monitor your own progress.

One notion I’m confident that you have picked up is the understanding that the best way to learn something is to teach it. The quality, depth, and breadth of your instruction in this class has been phenomenal. You have stretched the boundaries of the field in your exploration. You have demonstrated and experienced how you can be catalysts that spark collective creativity. I’m hoping this has fueled your curiosity regarding where you can take this scholarship.

Some of you are concerned about your grades. One of my goals was also to start to wean you from reliance on grades as motivators and guides. Inclusive design requires life-long learning. Often it requires going against existing measures of success and existing rewards. At the core it is about changing culture. Once you graduate you cannot rely on grades. Grade equivalents during your career will often push you away from inclusive design goals.

I know that academic opportunities are still referencing grades. Rest assured that if you participated, the grades you receive will not risk your grade-based opportunities. However, I will not compare you or rank you against your peers in

choosing the mark. Do not look at grades to see yourself as less than or better than your peers. What I'm looking at is how much you individually have learned and grown, including what you have learned from failure and mistakes. I will be generous in this assessment, because I'm not the best person to determine this, you are.

Most of all, I want to thank you for this opportunity to learn with you. It has been an honour. I can't wait to see what you accomplish.

All my best,

Jutta“

# Inclusive Facilitation Guide



## What is facilitation:

You might answer this questions with some of the following:

- You've got an idea of what will happen
- You're leading a group – you're the authority... there's a reason you're leading
- You're a context expert. You're an expert of something...

That is the starting point for inclusive facilitation. Instead, facilitation starts from the following assumptions:

- The participants are the EXPERTS
- Facilitators should not be hearing much of their own voice at all.
- “It's not about me at all” – facilitator
- “I'm going to help everyone else share their experiences and their voices.” – facilitator

## Behaviours of a facilitator (the flip)

“Lead from behind,” but how the heck do you do that? You focus on not leaving anyone behind. You should be the one in the group speaking the least, and at the same time you should gently draw others into the conversation who are not engaging. A few ways to accomplish this are:

- Listen and guide, don't lead
- Sit and notice a lot
- Who is talking?
- Who isn't talking?
- Notice how one voice is dampening others...
- Who is taking up all the space; the way someone is talking – absolutist or negative tones or messages?
- How can you make the participants be generative, not just reflective – WHAT, SO WHAT, NOW WHAT
- Be the “sweeper” (like on group bicycle rides)
- Dragoman- bring people together by helping to bridge their cultures and perspectives–<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragoman>
- Co-design and be aware of the many, many questions that will remain when you do practice co-design: <https://jesshmitchell.medium.com/what-is-co-design-851d731286ec>



Figure 1: Photo by Jouwen Wang on Unsplash

Be aware of group dynamics. Introverts/extroverts; confident/reserved; etc. Who speaks first? Who speaks most? Who speaks with authority or certainty? And beware of those ice breaker questions—without structure to these questions, this is a quick way to reify power dynamics that you might otherwise want to overcome in the group.

Who are you? Is a loaded question – some will answer with credentials and/or status markers... what are we really asking here? You, facilitator, will set the tone in how you announce yourself, carry yourself, express yourself. Similarly ‘where are you from’ is often a loaded and revealing question. Again, the way the facilitator situates these questions can determine the tone of an engagement. “Introduce yourself” is another loaded question.

In setting the tone, the facilitator should aim to land between morose on one end and being a clown. There is a space where people can be serious together, talk about difficulty topics, and still have a sense of humour. The facilitator should aim to also keep away from introducing enough uncertainty of context that participants can brag or be insensitive to each other.

Know your own situatedness – e.g. are you, the facilitator, the youngest in the group, are you able-bodied, are you aware of how you show up?

Listen for people to go outside of the task and gently bring back; aim for being as unobtrusive as possible when doing this – though it can feel quite prescriptive, the facilitator can redirect the conversation if it wanders.

Create a brave space – you can’t guarantee a safe space. As much as possible create a space where people can show up, be seen, and be heard. And in doing this, do not make yourself unsafe – don’t break through personal boundaries that are good ones. Be brave and vulnerable only as much as you feel comfortable with:



— One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:  
<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/onhumanlearn/?p=583>

Figure 2: Brave Spaces Video

[Click here for ASL](#)

[Click here for LSQ \(coming soon\)](#)

Help build curiosity, don't have answers, take feedback with grace and let it sit for a bit if it causes a feeling or reaction inside of you. Don't force completion; and be aware you might have to help people be comfortable with that. These aren't always easy conversations, so be cognizant that the 'exiting' is often just as, if not more, important than the entering.

- One way is to have time after the event to wind down
- Another is to reserve 10 minutes at the end for something else... something human
- Be clear about feedforward – what will participants see in the future for their efforts??

Help draw people in but read their comfort level with that.

Use language that is both self-effacing and gentle and wondering. Imagine and show great interests – that will show authentically if it is.

Facilitators should be learning during this session!!!!

Don't systematize or formalize!

Don't standardize!

Fundamentally it's human and we strip the humanized elements out when we make it a process.

## Different ways to share:

Share in a different format altogether.

Communication can take many forms, including facial expressions, posture, and gestures. The lack of engagement can be a significant cue as well. Being aware of these cues can help a facilitator understand who may be waiting for an opportunity to express themselves, or maybe they have something to share but are intentionally (or unintentionally) being held back. Finding gentlest way to bring out these ideas is a challenge, and it may require providing different opportunities or methods for people to share ideas.

For example, if the primary mode of communication is through speaking / audio, then a person may be reluctant to share because they prefer not to speak. The facilitator should try to be aware of those not speaking, and provide alternative ways for engagement. Perhaps messages in a chat, private messages to the facilitator, through some other medium or platform, or at a later time in a more quiet / private space.

## Support

- Consider having someone there to help take notes, monitor chat, make sure captions work, etc.

Multiple facilitators can split up responsibilities to ease the burden. For example, one facilitator who may be a natural conversationalist, can be responsible for guiding, encouraging, and asking questions. Another facilitator can seek out those in the group who are getting lost or left behind, and find suitable ways to make sure their ideas aren't left behind.

**Change over time (an early version of this work appeared at <https://jesshmitchell.medium.com/what-does-it-look-like-and-feel-like-to-do-inclusive-design-thinking-and-practice-1ac489d58c8b>)**

## Session 1S:

1st encounter: uncertainty & unlearning and building trust

The first encounter is one that is filled with uncertainty. This is the stage of setting expectations and this is the moment when trust has to begin to be built. From this point too, the facilitator can begin to ascertain fundamentally 'where' participant/experts are and 'how far' everyone is willing to go.

This first introduction to any group is packed with a lot of personal uncertainty. Our goal in a first session is to create a brave space for people to share their own individual experiences AND to begin connecting with each other. This cannot be mandated and can only be accomplished with a responsiveness to the situation, the group, and the interactions.

Soft measures of success:

- Do participants talk to each other or just to the facilitator?
- Do participants build on what each other says?
- Do participants refer to each other by name?
- Do participants show a generosity to each other? Are they building trust as a collective? Or are they protecting themselves and holding everything close to themselves?

## Feeling

This can be a range of comfort with your own voice and also feeling as though you should sit in the back and watch. Be aware of both feelings and work to stay in the "middle."

## Thinking

What is appropriate to say here? How can I feel I am helping create a brave space? Content? Convincing people they don't need to fix or solve things is tough. Leaving so much space for open sharing can feel weird especially stories that seem outside of the scope. And I hate awkward silences. Am I filling them with chatter out of my own anxiety?

## Doing

Figuring out how to get your voice and your ideas heard and seen – that’s what the experts/participants are likely working out. What can facilitators do to enable that? Make clear you’re hearing and seeing them. Repeat their ideas and reference them throughout the conversation. Keep all the threads alive at this point.

### **Session 2s:**

Participants often come into a session two with some energy! The worry of being seen and heard has been somewhat alleviated and the energy of ‘knowing’ who will be there this time and ‘how’ things will go can be reassuring, even empowering. The swing from a shyness and uncertainty in Session 1 to a confident owner of their own story, voice and presence can be heavy. It can sometimes feel out of control.

## 2nd wave: change

This is the session where we’re asking people who have not been asked to be at the table to come to the table and participate in improving things. The group will have more comfort with each other, will show some comfort and confidence in knowing what is meant to happen in the session. Usually this is the session when experts share most. Great depth is achievable – and it might come within a time that feels as though it has shaky boundaries (what is relevant? appropriate?).

## Feeling

Listen to me! This being seen and heard is awesome. I have so much to say, I have all these thoughts saved up from last time that I didn’t get to share. I need some space and time to share them. Facilitators can loosen the space so this can happen, but will need to also keep the group level and moving together.

## Thinking

Are we sticking close enough to the scope? Am I losing our path? Am I totally ineffective at facilitating?

## Doing

This is a pivotal moment when a wellspring of ideas almost seems to force participants into doing something. The thinking turns to action and documents start getting created and shared, ideas shift to how to change existing structures or cycles or communication styles. This is the moment when folks feel inclined to build a guide or a framework or a how-to or a handbook in what is an earnest effort to share what happened and what they’re thinking and doing differently. This is a moment when participants begin integrating what they are seeing and thinking into what

they are doing. Do not fall into ruts of doing things – let folks share – ask deeper questions. Tie the stories together and start to gently form what you're hearing into recommendations. This shouldn't be an end-point.

Techniques – structured structurelessness; grandparent grandchild game; TRIZ;

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Tyranny\\_of\\_Structurelessness](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Tyranny_of_Structurelessness)

<https://guide.inclusivedesign.ca/activities/the-toddler-grandparent-conversation/>

<https://www.liberatingstructures.com/6-making-space-with-triz/>

<https://www.liberatingstructures.com/1-1-2-4-all/>

## Session 3s:

### 3rd wave: bridge

Rebuild the connection between the facilitators and the experts – now together the cause is to parlay individual experiences into something that can be put into a shared, actionable something. The facilitators will need to work to keep the session focused on creating something, so the scoping will need to be tighter.

Ultimately, I think it's to be expected that some ground might be lost from the 'over-swing' of the 2nd stage to this stage. This is the settling back into something that will stick. This is the moment when all the structures come back in (power, culture of the organization, willing to change, leadership styles, agency of staff). As was discussed in Module 4, what can we actually change? What are you going to do differently on Monday? How much are you willing to change?

## Risk

At this point the risk is how much backsliding will happen? How can you mitigate or stop it? How can you make sure folks get to something actionable and don't slip into despair? Start small and build!

## Feeling

This wave can be characterized by feelings of uncertainty, hopefulness, increasing confidence.

## Outcomes

These practices (and the waves above) are not linear, they are cyclical and iterative. The feelings and descriptions are not categorically distinct. This is merely meant to clarify what is happening in this work.

The point of facilitating has never been an endpoint – the product or outcomes are:

- self-reflection: how might this practice change you?
- awareness-building
- practising a way of being; noticing the impact; noticing the feelings

- it isn't a skill you come away with and put on your linkedin profile
- try on some other ways of being
- becomes part of you over time
- being transparent
- being authentic
- get at something before the numbers/ before the crisis point? – what does that look like?
- show larger pathways
- show the impact farther down the line
- what are the roadblocks – chip away versus burn them down
- where is the not open coming from?
- feeling attacked, cultural, situational, – hitting a wall with people
- showing what collaboration can look like



# Credits



Cover image: “Candy Rainbow” flickr photo by terren in Virginia, <https://flickr.com/photos/8136496@N05/5401940705> shared under a Creative Commons (BY) license

## Authors:

Co-Designed by Students, Faculty, and Staff at  
OCAD University  
Mohawk College  
Brock University  
Trent University  
Nipissing University  
University of Windsor  
University of Toronto-Mississauga

## Contributors:

Giulia Forsythe  
Harsh Bhavsar  
Heather Carroll  
Jess Mitchell  
Jaime Hilditch  
Jutta Treviranus  
Kristen Mommertz  
Nick Baker  
Pat Maher  
Dave Cormier  
Terry Greene  
Jennifer Curry Jahnke  
Fiona Rawle  
Bonnie Stewart  
Trevor Winchester  
Arjun Sawhney  
and with much love and gratitude:  
Jennifer’s daughters, Olivia and Gillian  
Jess’s wife Lara and their son Jonah  
Pat and his son Fraser  
Jaime’s brother Jack and father Tom  
Terry’s kids Lucy and Alice  
Giulia’s kids, Aedan and Hannah

Bonnie and Dave's kids Wren and Josephine

**Editors:**

Rachel Spence  
Fiona Rawle  
Jaime Hilditch

**Illustrators:**

Giulia Forsythe  
Terry Greene

**Videos Produced By:**

Kristen Mommertz  
Kevin Woo  
Devan Cruickshanks  
Jennifer Curry Jahnke

# Accessibility



## Accessibility Statement

This is an accessibility statement from Learning to be Human Together.

## Conformance Status

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) defines requirements for designers and developers to improve accessibility for people with disabilities. It defines three levels of conformance: Level A, Level AA, and Level AAA.

ON Human Learn is fully conformant with WCAG 2.0 level AA. Fully conformant means that the content fully conforms to the accessibility standard without any exceptions.

That is for the content of the project. All videos have English and French captions, are available in ASL, LSQ, and can be downloaded. The video player used in Pressbooks is not fully WCAG compliant, in particular in the side panel. Any changes in the accessibility of that player will be reflected here in future versions.

## *Additional Accessibility Considerations*

Team members include the co-authors of the current AODA standards and the current AODA refresh.<sup>20</sup> The modules are exemplars of the commitment to accessibility and inclusion. All modules will be translated into English and French. Videos will have ASL and LSQ overlay options and media will be captioned (English and French) and described.

## Feedback

We welcome your feedback on the accessibility of ON Human Learn. Please let us know if you encounter accessibility barriers on ON Human Learn:

- E-mail:  
jmittchell@ocadu.ca

We try to respond to feedback within 2 business days.

## Date

This statement was created on 28 February 2022 using the W3C Accessibility Statement Generator Tool and an accessibility specialist from the Inclusive Design Research Centre at OCAD University.