

"Go Big or Go Home"

-Sheldon Levy

Some very interesting speakers have come to Fleming recently. Sheldon Levy admonished us to "Go big or go home."



Big can be good. It can be great.

But what's wrong with home?

We are, after all, a community college.

There's no shame in focusing on our community.

It was heartening to see robust community connections as one of the strong recommendations in Maureen's strategic planning sessions.

Let's address and celebrate the spectrum of our unique community, our home.

In a world bolstered and disappointed by bigly promise, perfecting the small can be the new big.

Experiential Learning PD Day: A Humbling Experience

By Nancy Rishor

On a wild and windy Monday during Reading Week, the GAS faculty were invited to participate in an experiential learning day. Liz Stone and Kate Brennan led us through a poignant and powerful blanket exercise that brought to light the historical, social and political contexts of Indigenous culture.



Throughout the exercise, we took on the role of Indigenous people and walked on blankets that represented our land. We read, in turn, excerpts from over 500 years of Indigenous history and listened to Liz and Kate as they revealed the harsh truths about first peoples.

During the debrief, in a talking circle, we reflected on our emotions during the exercise which ranged from overwhelming and sad to guilt and shame. It was clearly evident that this exercise had moved us. It fostered a heightened understanding of and increased sensitivity towards our shared history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

If you have the opportunity to take part in the blanket exercise, I highly recommend it. Your heart will thank you.

General Membership Meeting

March-12th, 2019 2:00 PM-4:00 PM

BR3347 and FR252

Your local needs your input and guidance.

The agenda includes an education presentation, elections for Region 3 (meeting in Toronto May 4th) and elections for OPSEU Convention (May 23-25th).

If you have items, please submit them to Liz.mathewson@flemingcollege.ca



Avoiding the Free Speech Trap

Extremist groups have been very clever at laying traps for schools by organizing events on campus that feature controversial speakers to provoke a strong response. Protesters show up and the image of chanting and angry “snowflake” liberals wanting to shut down “free speech” flourishes on social media.

When a white nationalist was scheduled to speak at the University of Waterloo, faculty were alarmed but wary. Shannon Dea, the Vice President of the Faculty Association, explains:

For many of us, the news set off alarm bells. In the last year or two, white nationalist groups have made well-coordinated efforts to organize events on university campuses in both Canada and the US. It’s a win-win situation for them. When their events happen, their organizations gain the respectability conveyed by association with a university. When their events are refused, canceled, or protested and shut down, it provides fodder for the groups to whip up public sentiment against universities for being “politically correct” (all while garnering more publicity for themselves).

By contrast, it is a lose-lose situation for universities. Either they play host to white nationalists—thereby creating a toxic climate for the Indigenous and racialized members of their campus communities—or they refuse them and get attacked by the media, the public, and donors for not supporting free speech ([Free Speech and the Battle for the University](#), 2018).

The Faculty Association did not want to give extra publicity to white nationalists, and they did not want to shut them down and create the sense of victimization such groups thrive on. However, ignoring them was not an option.

They created a crowd-funding campaign.

Those opposing the event could leave supportive messages and the funds would be donated to Indigenous, racialized and international student groups.

They quickly raised over ten thousand dollars.

National media focused on the fantastic support the university community gave non-white members of the university. The white nationalist message was minimized; free speech was affirmed; there were no YouTube videos of “snowflake” students shutting down speakers.

(In the end, organizers of the event canceled the talk because of high security costs)

“Campus free speech legislation is less a defense of free speech than an attack on three core tenets of the modern university: institutional autonomy, collegial governance, and academic freedom” (Dea)

Finding My Edge

Nancy Rishor

Last week while skiing at Brimacombe, I caught an edge, found my balance and averted a fall. This semester, I've taken more risks with my teaching, moving to the edge of fear, falling sometimes and finding my balance. Let me begin at the beginning ...

Thirty years ago, I walked into my first classroom. That's roughly 10,000 students I've had the incredible opportunity to teach, engage, motivate and (hopefully) inspire. Fast forward to December 2018.

I cannot remember the exact day last year, but suddenly I'd hit a wall, an impasse. I felt as though all my teaching ideas had been siphoned from my brain. It struck me like a ton of bricks, and I tried to make sense of it all. Two opposing thoughts quickly came to me: grab my pension and run for the door OR start taking more risks.

Perhaps the warmth and comfort of Christmas performed its holiday magic because I'm happy to report, I listened to my second thought. What started as one small glimmer of an idea began to percolate and grow stronger towards a tunnel of possibilities.

Now, I know you might be thinking – what new teaching gem did I dream up? The short answer is this: none, nothing, not a one.

What changed is my perspective. I quickly realized I needed to look, really "look" at my content with fresh eyes. As an educator, I share the same goals as you: I strive to deliver curriculum in meaningful and relevant ways, have fun while in the classroom, and create a safe and inclusive environment for all my students to shine.

So what *exactly* changed, you ask? Two things: one, I now switch up my teaching style every 10-15 minutes and two, my lessons are predominantly student-centered.

Here's a glimpse: I begin every class with a warm-up activity: a short game, ball toss, quote – something related to the day's content to, well, get warmed up. Then, I deliver some content (10 min. max). Next, I'll organize small teams with a specific task. Then, something different, and so on.

Sound familiar? This information is not new to any of us. We've done all this before.

The outcome, however, for me has been overwhelmingly positive. Students approach me after class and thank me for incorporating a ball toss game into the curriculum. Who knew tossing a ball could help teach my students how to write?

The way I see it, it's a win-win for the students and me. I'm energized; they're energized. And, at the end of each week, instead of feeling depleted, I think – what will my next lesson look like? What new angle will I find to engage my students?

It turns out that some of the best teaching practices to foster community building in the classroom – group work, think-pair-share, jigsaw, skits, role play, movement – are at our disposal. For me, the biggest change has been how to use these tools in different and fresh ways.

I'm still catching my edge in the classroom, but I'm quickly learning that the risk of falling is an opportunity to begin again.

More Than Meets the Eye

Ever have somebody glance at your teaching schedule, look at the hours you lecture, and conclude you don't work too much at all ?

Faculty reading this know the immense amount of work that it takes to create, update and tweak those classes, to say nothing of the hours it takes to refine material, respond to students, connect with colleagues and evaluate student work in a meaningful way.

To others, this work is hidden.

It is the same thing with your local.

Out of strike, out of mind: if everything is good, you may have no connection with your local. But behind the scenes, we are busy responding to members' issues, policing the collective agreement, improving labour relations and advocating for an ethical and safe workplace and for quality education.

We collaborate with our Brothers and Sisters in the support staff union to make sure work is assigned in a fair and equitable manner that follows our collective agreements.

We stand up for academic freedom.

We (all too often) address how systems drive pedagogy. It is absurd that a session code drives access to D2L: students need access to D2L at the start of a course, and faculty should drive this. It's an ongoing struggle. One of many. Testing Center, anyone?

At different times in our history, the relationship between the local and management has been more (and less) collegial... more (and less) confrontational. Nevertheless, at all times, we have been able to find ways to work with management to put out brush fires or avert big problems while they are still small.

And when that does not work, there are grievances. Mediation. Arbitration. Lawyers. A process where your local has your back.

We have entered a new labour relations chapter at Fleming. So far, it is promising. We have been heard and respected. It's good.

But we can only act on what we know.

Your input, participation and solidarity are at the heart of this crucial (but often invisible) work.

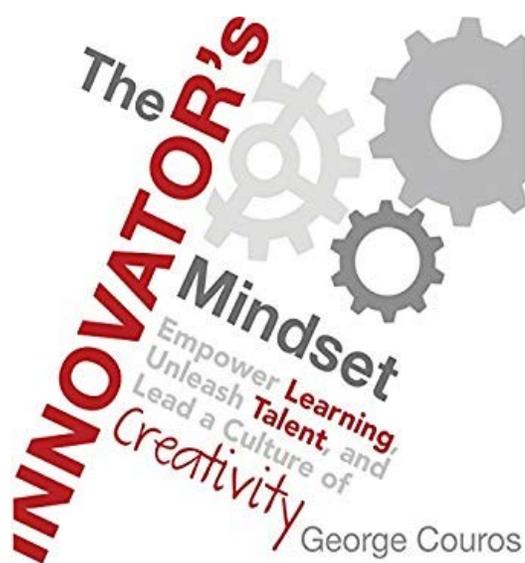
Talk to a steward. Talk to each other. Send an article to the newsletter. And know, that like a professor's work, your local's work is never done.

Creating a Mindset for Success: Celebrating Our Strengths

Marikka Williams

"It is not about skillset; It is about mindset" – George Couros

I recently participated in an online book study for a book called 'The Innovator's Mindset'. It is comprised of three main parts which are focused on: Innovation in Education, Laying the Groundwork and Unleashing Talent. The author, George Couros, discusses what innovation is, what it means for schools and how educators can actively implement it into their practice.



He challenges educators and administrators to shift from a 'culture of compliance' to a 'culture of innovation' that will empower students and educators to co-create a more effective learning experience. He emphasizes the importance of evolving into a more fluid way of teaching that harnesses the power of technology and is adaptable to the dynamics of the learner.

We know that our students and faculty are incredibly talented and highly capable to create success. Faculty are highly skilled but often feel undervalued due to the tendency to focus on the negative feedback received in evaluations, KPI surveys, full-time faculty/student ratios and hours that are allocated to SWFs. This impacts our mindset which ultimately impacts our environment. How can faculty create the conditions to improve morale and unleash our collective talent?

"As a leader, you can create those conditions by taking a strengths-based approach for learning and leadership and unleashing talent in your organization" – George Couros

Many satisfaction surveys (i.e. KPI, Course Evaluations) result in a tendency to focus on the negatives rather than the positives. Our OPSEU Academic Local 352 Union President, Liz Mathewson, commented "It is interesting when the KPI's are low we automatically look at what 'we' did wrong rather than look at what are we doing well and how do we invest in those things."

According to Dr. Wayne Dyer, "What might be judged as errors or mistakes are the very stuff of growth." He encourages us to think about Thomas Edison's response to a reporter who asked him how it felt to have failed twenty-five thousand times in his efforts to invent a battery. "Failed," replied Edison, "I haven't failed. Today I know twenty-five thousand ways not to make a battery!"

If faculty and students are paralyzed by 'fear of failure' then growth becomes virtually impossible. We cannot grow in an environment that does not provide the conditions that are necessary for growth to occur which involves encouraging a combination of: risk of failure, resources that nurture success and trust in the growth process. *Continued on next page*

Continued: Creating a Mindset for Success: Celebrating Our Strengths

George Couros points out, "an environment where the messages always 'we are not good enough' can be demoralizing and counterproductive for all stakeholders." He says, "we cannot forgo a focus on our strengths for the sake of only emphasizing the areas where we struggle. But that's what happens time and again. The deficit model compels administrators and educators to overcompensate in the areas that need to be 'fixed'. When that occurs, all the great things that are already happening are quickly forgotten."

"Keep in mind that nature never forces anything to grow but is silently and invisibly ever present" – Dr. Wayne Dyer

There are so many amazing things that faculty are doing that are aligned with their strengths that create a positive learning experience for students. How can we discover those strengths, build upon them and unleash the talent of faculty and students rather than get stuck in negative feedback loops?

While this is something that the course evaluation and faculty development committees can contribute to, both faculty and administrators have a part in creating conditions for success. There are things that we can do to facilitate a more positively oriented feedback environment that focuses on strengths-based development to benefit faculty and students.

I was thinking about how things naturally grow and about the process of planting a garden. In order to grow a garden that thrives it is necessary to understand the specific needs of the plants in the garden. Different plants need different dimensions of space to grow within. Some plants need full sun-light and others need partial shade. Plants need varying amounts of water, nutrients, protection and attention. In a tended garden, weeds are pulled early, invasive insects are mitigated before they create irreversible damage and in general problems are detected before they get out of hand.



We can learn from gardens how to create environments that nurture growth in faculty and in the classroom. This analogy reinforces what George Couros was sharing in his book that culminates in a call to action that challenges educators and administrators to define where we are (understand the environment, as is, the dynamics of the classroom), where we need to go (visualize how the environment will need to be strategically organized in order to grow and thrive) and how to get there (create a well defined plan of action to follow through).

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Continued: Creating a Mindset for Success: Celebrating Our Strengths

We do not pull on the leaves of the plants in the garden or declare harsh criticisms to help them to grow, so why should we do so in our own life or in the lives of others? We have the power to learn how to create the conditions for the gardens in our lives to thrive. With the academic freedom that is granted in the Collective Agreement, faculty are empowered to create these conditions in the classroom in a variety of ways. It will require a proactive approach and active participation by faculty to achieve this on the scale necessary to be reflected in the metrics that measure the overall performance of Fleming College. With time, reflection and a strengths-based approach, greater success will be incrementally realized.

"Leaders of the most innovative organizations in the world know there is no end to growth and learning. Schools, more than any other organization, need to embrace a commitment to continuous learning" – George Couros

Regardless of the efforts that we make to create conditions for success, we must be prepared for unknowns, patient with the natural processes which take time and flexible enough to implement necessary change. Even then, we are 'not there yet', we never will arrive. The garden is sown and harvested and each year the weather ebbs and flows. Conditions change, as the world changes, as demographics change, which requires a willingness to embrace change. In order to meet with continued success, it is a necessity to be prepared for these possibilities: we need to be willing to invest the time necessary to accommodate this continuous growth curve.



It is a journey and not a destination. To move forward in a more positive way, we must take the necessary steps to improve the learning environment for faculty and students. I recognize that there are a lot of opportunities that are already in place through professional development, but I feel that there is a necessity to create more opportunities for faculty to have dynamic discussions and develop strengths-based innovative strategies that can be implemented as a collective effort to prompt positive change across the college.

Ultimately, I would like to see more focus on continually celebrating the strengths of faculty and creating an environment where those strengths can be recognized, shared and ultimately combined.