

# **Liberating Structures in B.C. Post-Secondary Education: How are They Spreading?**

February 2018

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## Background

Liberating Structures are facilitation techniques that boost engagement and inclusion in group gatherings of any size and purpose (e.g., meetings, workshops, classrooms, etc.). Developed by Keith McCandless and Henri Lipmanowicz, Liberating Structures are grounded in complexity science, positive deviance, and their years' experience in process facilitation, business strategy, and organizational development in various settings including Education, Healthcare, and Business.

Liberating Structures were first introduced to the B.C. post-secondary education (PSE) community by Nancy White at a BCcampus/ETUG event in 2013. In 2016 and 2017, BCcampus hosted two large immersion workshops with Keith McCandless, Fisher Qua, and Nancy White leading and mentoring local teams of facilitators, including staff from BCcampus and participants from the B.C. post-secondary community. Then, BCcampus worked in partnership with keen B.C. post-secondary institutions to host smaller workshops and sessions at their home campuses, and to support the launch and growth of two user groups (Vancouver and Victoria).



## Purpose of this Report

After organizing and supporting a number of Liberating Structures initiatives for the past two years, we were curious:

- How (and where) are people using Liberating Structures? How are they spreading?
- Are people finding Liberating Structures to be useful in their practice?
- What does the B.C. PSE community want next? If we (BCcampus) continue to support Liberating Structures in B.C. PSE, what kind of supports are needed?



## Methodology

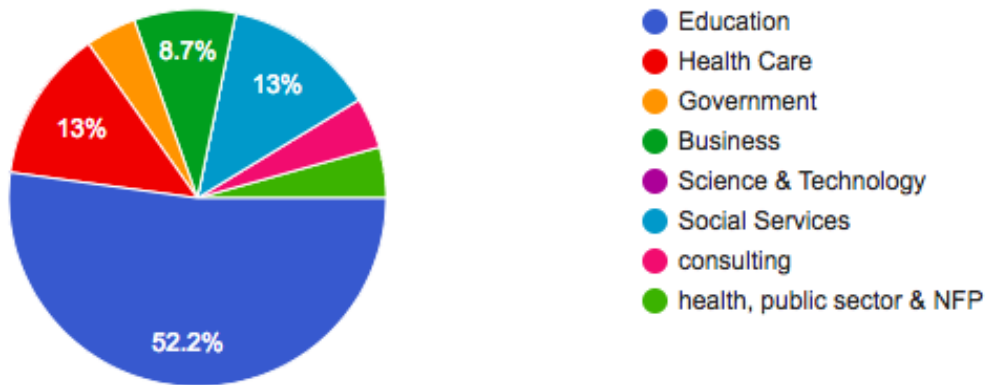
A survey was sent to all participants who registered in BCcampus Liberating Structures immersion workshops in 2016 and 2017. Survey questions focussed on how Liberating Structures are being used, and on perceptions of their impact. The survey was sent to 160 individuals and 23 responded (return rate: 14.4 %).



## Summary

### Who is using Liberating Structures in B.C.?

Our respondents came mostly from Education, Health Care, and Social Services.



### Leaders in Liberating Learning

A few B.C. post-secondary institutions have noticeably higher participation in Liberating Structures in both provincial events and local activities at their home institutions (workshops, User Groups, etc.), including:

- Royal Roads University
- Simon Fraser University
- Thompson Rivers University
- British Columbia Institute of Technology
- Camosun College
- University of British Columbia
- Selkirk College


### Industry/Sector

There is opportunity to reach out more broadly to academic disciplines as most respondents were identified as: Training & Facilitation (**45%**); Faculty and Instructional Support (**30%**); Education (**25%**); and Health Sciences (**10%**).

Most survey respondents are new to Liberating Structures, with **43%** starting to use Liberating Structures in the past year. In total, more than **80 %** have been using Liberating Structures in their practice for three years or less.

## How are people using Liberating Structures?

Respondents use Liberating Structures in a variety of settings including workshops (**95.5%**), meetings (**86.4%**) and in classrooms (**13.6%**).




**Most Frequently-Used Liberating Structures:**

- 1-2-4 All
- Triz
- Troika Consulting
- Impromptu Networking
- 25/10 Crowdsourcing
- What? So What? Now What?

## What is the impact of Liberating Structures on our work?

Respondents describe Liberating Structures as **easy-to-use, practical, effective tools** that have a **transformative effect** on their facilitation practice, making things more **fun, interactive, and efficient**. Some commented how using Liberating Structures supports **greater participation from people who are less likely to participate** in unstructured discussions.

They were also described as techniques that “shone a new light” on work with faculty, “revolutionized my thinking about effective organizational change and action” and is a “significant expansion of inclusive, participatory designs.” One respondent said it “totally reframed” their facilitation practice.



Over **65%** of respondents said that they get better results with Liberating Structures than with other methods

## **What is the impact of using Liberating Structures in Classrooms?**

Most respondents told us that using Liberating Structures in their classrooms was supporting **increased participation, engagement and inclusivity**. A few responded that Liberating Structures had little or no measured impact on student learning. Here are a few representative comments:

- *More engagement, excitement over getting work done that they weren't necessarily long forward to before.*
- *Opened up new areas to explore; heightened participants awareness of what each of the others had to contribute.*
- *Provided opportunities to understand other points of view and how to get perspectives from people outside of our small network.*



## Recommendations

### More Workshops

Participants told us that one- or two-day immersion workshops are very helpful and that, “seeing [the structures] in action” and “feeling them out” while “being able to debrief each structure” are the most valuable aspects of these workshops. One respondent noted: *I love(d) having a cohesive “package” of facilitation strategies for a wide variety of situations right at my fingertips – as a relatively new facilitator, this was hugely beneficial!*

For future Liberating Structures workshops, respondents told us they want:

- **Advanced workshops** on lesser-used Liberating Structures (**59.1%**)
- **Customized workshops**, focussing on a particular challenge (**45.5%**)
- **Focused workshops** on post-secondary teaching and learning (**36.4%**)
- General Liberating Structures **immersion workshops** (**36.4%**)

And we are also advised to also consider:

- **Partnering with B.C. post-secondary institutions** to bring immersion workshops to their local campuses and help build local capacity on specific themes (e.g., teaching and learning, academic disciplines, change management, etc.)
- **Offering** Liberating Structures Immersion workshops or mini-workshops on a regular (biannual) basis.

### Support beyond Workshops

Direct suggestions from respondents and our own reflections are combined in this list of ideas for supporting and advancing LS practice beyond workshops:

- Offering **mentoring** or **consulting** on Liberating Structures to participants of past workshops to assist them to use them meaningfully in their work. (e.g., we have worked with Douglas College on their “Emotional Safety in the Learning Environments” session for instructors, and with the SFU Library for a team workshop in support of their strategic plan). This is a generous practice of Keith McCandless and Henri Lipmanowicz offered to the global LS community: <http://www.liberatingstructures.com/schedule-time/>
- **Supporting Liberating Structures User Groups.** Currently, BCcampus serves in an organizing/leadership capacity with both the Vancouver and Victoria Liberating Structures User Groups. We aim to find space at a variety of PSE locations to increase accessibility and ease for participants to drop in.

- **Supporting Liberating Structures online.** Work is underway by local user group members. We help by participating in experiments, amplifying these and other local field stories, and sharing “up” with the global Liberating Structures group.
- **Exploring** and sharing about the underlying theories that inform and support Liberating Structures design and practice.
- **Creating invitations for others to participate in design challenges.** One idea we liked was organizing a user group driven **design sprint** for the purpose of generating a variety of scenarios/challenges/applications of Liberating Structures for teaching and learning. It is recommended that this be a one day event, targeted for individuals with some experience of Liberating Structures and scheduled for Summer or Fall 2018 or Spring 2019.

### Continue to Build Awareness

Respondents recommended a number of strategies to increase awareness and depth of understanding of Liberating Structures

- **Uncovering and promoting stories** and case studies of successful use of Liberating Structures in post-secondary/higher education through web publication and other outreach opportunities
- **Participating in global LS groups** such as the Liberating Structures Community of Practice (facilitated by Keith McCandless) and their activities to support the spread of Liberating Structures.
- **Highlighting** the work of **scholars** and faculty, such as [Dr. Arvind Singhal](#), and sharing information about the origins and roots of Liberating Structures (e.g., complexity science, Positive Deviance, change management, other facilitation practices and activities).
- **Going Beyond Liberating Structures - exploring learning** about a **range of evidence-based facilitation** approaches (instead of focusing on Liberating Structures) and the work of B.C.-based work in organizational theory by local scholars and practitioners.



### More Information

- [Liberating Structures](#)
- [Link to the Survey & Responses](#)
- [Map of Liberating Structures in B.C. PSE](#)
- [Vancouver User Group](#)
- [Victoria User Group](#)



### Acknowledgements

Graphic of [Key](#) by Alina Oleynik from the Noun Project