

Transcript for (FUN) FLO Friday: Enhance Course Communication and Collaboration with Liberating Structures (June 23, 2023)
BCcampus session hosted on June 23, 2023
Facilitators: Helena Prins and Gwen Nguyen

GWEN NYGREN:

Welcome, everyone. We are at 11, so while we're waiting for others to come in one or two minutes then I will start the session. Good morning. Good morning and welcome. Welcome to our FUN FLO Friday on Enhanced Course Communication and Collaboration with Liberating Structures. It's a very beautiful day in Vancouver Island, and it's Friday too. I'm very happy and thankful that you chose to be with us today. My name is Gwen. I'm a learning and teaching advisor with BCcampus. I'm very excited to facilitate this session today with my BCcampus partner in crime, Helena Prins, who's also an advisor in the teaching and learning team. Before we dive into the Liberating Structures activities, I'd like to start with territorial acknowledgment.

The Indigenous educator Cajete has shared three questions that we should always ask ourselves as educators. Number one is, how do we solve the environmental problem? And number two, how do we learn to get along with each other? And number three, how do we care about ourselves? Those are all questions that have been my daily focus in the journey as an educator. I came to Vancouver Island in 2015 and I fell in love with this beautiful and serene place right at first sight. Coming from a very big and bustling city in Vietnam where it's very hard to see a green tree and blue sky, I deeply appreciate the nature here in Victoria. This is a photo of some plants and flowers in the summer in my front yard. I don't have a big garden, actually but watering those flowers every day and writing short poems that I call semi haiku have been my quiet thriving and expression of my love for the land. This is one. "Watering the plants and making double rainbows for a new day." Today I'm joining you from my home office located in the traditional territories of the lək'wəŋən (Lekwungen) speaking people, including the Songhees Nations, Esquimalt People, and Saanich People, whose historical relations with the land continue to this day. You're invited to share your introductions in the chat if you wish.

Those are some of the housekeeping items that I would also like to go over before the session. This session will be recorded, not the breakout room activity though. But you're welcome to keep your camera off and feel free to rename yourself to "participant." Live captioning has also been enabled. At the end of this session, we would like to invite you to participate in a short anonymous survey. I will pop the link in the chat, and your feedback will help us to plan more fruitful events in the future. So I also would like to acknowledge the special presence and support from my co-worker Kelsey from the BCcampus team in the backend who'll soon join us in the new role starting next week. Our session today is about promoting communication and collaboration in online courses through Liberating Structures. We will experience different Liberating Structures activities and discuss how this helps enhance communication and collaboration online. I'm quite new in this Liberating Structures work honestly, but don't worry, you're in really good hands. My partner, Helena, and our teaching and learning team have been

integrating Liberating Structures into our daily interactions and teaching practice. I have learned a lot since I came to BCcampus. Now I would like to pass over to Helena to start us with the first Liberating Structure activity.

HELENA PRINS:

Thanks, Gwen. And what a beautiful semi haiku that you shared with us today. Thank you for that and welcome everyone. Fun FLO Friday, it's going to be a busy one. We're going to start immediately by giving you a choice. I do believe that to understand the power of Liberating Structures, you have to experience them. We also want to model giving choice to learners because that gives them some agency and ownership, so we thought let's start off with a bang. You can choose our kickoff today. You can choose between Impromptu Networking. And the purpose of Impromptu Networking is to rapidly share challenges and expectations. And it's perfect for building new connections. It is actually a great ice breaker. If you choose this option, Impromptu Networking, what will happen is you will be in breakout rooms in pairs where you will discuss a big challenge that you bring to this gathering. Ideally, it's related to communication and collaboration in your course, and then also what you hope to get and give to this session. You'll be in a pair three times for three minutes, so it will be short and fast. If you want to choose 1-2-4-All, the purpose of this one is to engage everyone simultaneously in generating questions, ideas, and suggestions. And what you will discuss if you choose 1-2-4-All is what do you do to enhance course communication and collaboration in your classroom or online course? And if you choose this, how we will do it is you'll have one minute for reflection, then you'll be in pairs. Those pairs will then discuss the same question, turning them into four, where you'll bring out the best ideas between the four of you. And we'll debrief in the big room here. And just know that whatever you choose, we will also share the slide in the breakout room so that you can keep track of the instructions. Okay, so let's vote. The activity with the most votes is the one we'll choose. You should see a poll appear. It's neck in neck so far. Really even. Oh my goodness, we did not discuss what we'll do in case of a tie. I see one leading the way here. We have a few more people to vote, okay. And it looks like Impromptu Networking for the wind. That is definitely easier on making breakout rooms, Kelsey, so a good one for us to do. So here's the slide that will go with you in the room. You're going to go into three different pairs. You discuss the same challenge each time and what you hope to get and give. And please start with the introduction of yourself. Okay, have fun meeting new people.

Welcome back. That was probably your fastest nine minutes meeting three new people. Full disclosure, today we are teasing you with fast and short Liberating Structures. If you did this in the proper structure, you would put aside 20 minutes and each person would have two minutes in the breakout or in the small group to share. So you usually make it about four to five minutes. When you go online though, you have to account for sending people into breakout rooms, sending, bringing them back. So you do have to think about time very carefully when you offer this. But give me an emoticon or something in the chat to let me know if you enjoyed that experience. The excitement of meeting people. One thing that happens for me when I do this, it feels like each time I share my challenge, it becomes more clear and concise. Thank you. Said it was good. There's a lovely butterfly. I'm going to assume that's positive too. Okay, well,

now that you've experienced your first Liberating Structure with us, maybe some of you've experienced many times before, let's look at the principles. And for that I'm handing over to my wonderful colleague Gwen.

GWEN:

Well, thank you very much, Helena, for leading us with the first Liberating Structures activity. As in one of the articles that you can find here from Barry, the co-founder of Liberating Structures. He mentioned that impromptu networking was actually one of the trickiest activities to do online, because usually with the in person you carry on for three minutes. Then online usually you need at least five minutes. And it's also tricky when we shuffle and reshuffle the groups as well. But yeah, glad that everybody enjoyed the vibrant atmosphere of Liberating Structures. And Liberating Structures actually are tools for engaging and including the groups working and learning together. So imagine it's like a library of more than 33 powerful activities that could help us to increase engagement and inclusiveness. Inclusiveness while building the course collaboration and community. Those activities, most of them, can be used face to face, synchronously, or asynchronously online. Even though some activities can require more preparedness as well as planning in doing it online, Barry Overeem said that "Liberating Structures help you to get the most out of online interactions, and they make the collaboration much more effective and joyful." And that aligns with the first activities and the feedback that you provide us, so thank you for that. And I would like to continue with the 10 principles of Liberating Structures.

Those 10 principles actually show what becomes alive and possible when Liberating Structures are integrated into our interactions. And by interaction, it can be any conversation, group work that we prepare in our coursework. It can also be like the meeting settings that you want to include everyone. And those rules can be, it can be considered as the rules for the liberators to choose to relate to others. And it can be the statement beliefs that help to create a great team. The very first thing is to include and unleash everyone. Everybody is invited to the conversation and to share their ideas as well as creativity. Number two is practise deep respect for people and local solutions, which means that we let go of the control and we trust and unleash everybody's expertise. And number three is build trust as you go. We can be the leader as well as the follower. And number four means learn by failing forward. We need to include the debrief or reflection in action in every step. And we need to create an environment for people to feel safe to speak up, and we encourage all the risk taking in our work. Number five is to practise self-discovery within the group. We encourage all kinds of experiences and also discovering the solution on their own. Number six is amplify freedom and responsibility. Freedom usually should go along with the responsibility. Number seven is emphasize the possibilities. Believe before we see. And number... that is number seven. And number eight is we invite the creative destruction to enable innovation. Number nine and the last one, Number nine is about. Sorry, number nine is engage in serious playful curiosity, which is about. We need to stir things up. We need to make working together both rewarding, challenging, and inviting to everybody. The last principle is we shouldn't start without clear purpose, which means that we need to, deep work is what is really important and meaningful for us all, for you and also all

the participants in the group. You can follow the link that Kelsey will help me put in the chat to go to the Liberating Structures for more resources about this tool and this community of practice. As well as the other link is about, will take you to the *Virtual Liberating Structures Handbook*, where you learn more about the Liberating Structure online. You can read and contribute to the resources together with the community. And here you go, Helena, for another Liberating Structure activity.

HELENA:

Thank you, Gwen. And I wish I could memorize all 10 principles because then I'll try to bring them back as we do the activities. I think one of them is speaking about tapping into the local solutions. When we had real difficulty choosing only three to do in one hour And I did ask my director, Tracey, she's really familiar with Liberating Structures and offers in workshops often. I asked for her input and she just said, what's the purpose? And every time, that's where we have to start. What is the purpose of the activities? When you go to the website or there's even an app for Liberating Structures, it's very clear. The one we picked for now Wise Crowds. You can see there the purpose is involved. It's to tap the wisdom of the whole group in rapid cycles. Again, we are going to do this one a little bit differently from how you should do it. But I do believe many of the Liberating Structures lend themselves to just giving us some ideas and then we tweak it as our time and course allows us to do it. So what better opportunity than bringing people from across the province, and we even have Kate from Fredericton on the other side of Canada. We have a group of people here that we can really tap into your expertise and facilitation. That's what we're going to do with this activity, tap into your wisdom. When you go into your break out room, you'll be in groups of five. We ask that one of you volunteer to be the client. The client will present a challenge. I know someone in the registration form said they struggle with a person's engagement. Perhaps that's the one you bring forward today. So think of a challenge. The client will have about two minutes to really explain the context and give as much detail about your challenge as you can. Then the other four people in the group, they are called the consultants. They have an opportunity to just ask clarifying questions so that they know as much as they can about this challenge that you're experiencing. Then because we're online, the client will turn off their camera and put themselves on mute because you're going into listening mode. If you were in person, you would actually turn your chair to the group, so you just listen with your back turned to them, but online, turn off your camera, put yourself on mute. The next five minutes the consultants really unpack this challenge. You talk about potential questions that you think the client should consider further. Advise, suggestions how to address this problem. And then in the final two minutes, the client turns on the camera. Again, you unmute yourself and you can share with the consultants what was useful and perhaps some takeaways from that session. I hope that's clear. If you were to do this in the full way, the structure is intended, because we want everyone to equally participate, each person will have the opportunity to be a client, and usually that's for 15 minutes. If you had three students in a group, it would be 45 minutes. You can see that time isn't on our side today. We are just doing one round of a client, one round of consultations just for 10 minutes. You only do this activity once. The slide will again go with you into your room. Any questions before we send you off? So let's go. Thank you.

Welcome back. Welcome back again. I wish we had more time that you could dive in deeper into your challenge, but we just want you to experience the power of sharing and consulting. If you were a consultant, let us know in the chat how was that experience for you. If you were a client, maybe you want to share in the chat how that was for you as well. And I would welcome someone to unmute themselves if they just want to share verbally. Okay.

PARTICIPANT:
I'll share something.

HELENA:
Yes. Go ahead.

PARTICIPANT: So I was the client and normally I'm someone who likes to talk a lot, so it was a good exercise for me to turn off my microphone and just listen. I think what I was unsure about is how much I would be taking notes or understanding the bigger picture and how much I was. It was saying here that I would provide feedback to consultants. So what was useful in the takeaways, and I think it was able to do that. It was a really interesting exercise. Definitely good for me, being someone who's more willing to do group work in chat and all of that. It's good to sit back.

HELENA:
Thank you, Bonita. Yes. Now it would have been great to see how you would then have experienced a consultant role too. Unfortunately, we didn't have that round today. Is there anyone else that wants to share something about their experience as client or consultant? See some in the chat. Looks like you shared some great ideas with each other. More time would have been great. Yes. You would usually give 15 minutes per client, right? And I think that is the beauty. If you do have time, you can go quite deep. And one of those principles of building trust, right? When you share and people give them your input, I think it builds trust.

Okay, let's move on to our final one. And this one is one of my favourites, and Andre and I've done this one together for a career development conference. This one is called the Triz. Again, if you did the structure, it could take up to about 35 minutes. So I've adapted this one quite a bit to do it in the main group with all my students, I do career development. One way you could do this one would be, for example, the purpose is to find what are the counterproductive behaviours and activities we want to stop to make space for innovation? So in career development, one of the things students struggle with often is interviews. So you could ask what other things we can do to ensure we fail the interview and then brainstorm a list of ideas. Again, you don't even need to go into a breakout for that. We do it in the main classroom. And then the second step is some self-assessment or group assessment. Is there anything from that list that we brainstormed that we are currently doing that in any way, shape, or form resembles those items that we've listed? Maybe students recognize, yeah, we don't always do our research before an interview or I don't always set my alarm, I've been late a few times, things

like that. Then the third step is to move forward. What first steps will help us stop what we know creates undesirable results. What should we start doing? This could be fun and light. It is a bit of hyperbole, right? What's the worst thing we can do to make sure there is no course collaboration and communication. That's an undesirable result today. What is the worst thing we can do as instructors? And then we're going to self-reflect without judgment to see if there's something in there that we are guilty of. And then the final step for us will be to come up with some positive strategies. What should we start doing? Okay, I hope that's clear. We're just staying in the main room. No more breakouts. On the next slide, we are doing the invitation using the annotation tool. And if you have difficulties with that, please put it in the chat and someone can just put it for us on the slide.

Here's your invitation and I'm going to give you three minutes of silence for this. Let's make a list of all we can do as instructors that will hinder or prevent collaboration and positive communication in your course. How can you make sure it's miserable? Okay, you have three minutes to unpack this one.

That's our time for brainstorming all the worst things we can do to ensure our class is miserable and there's no positive communication and collaboration. So let's look at that and wow, I am glad I have glasses. It's a little bit hard to read all of that, but thank you for all those contributions. So I'll read a few. While I do it, this is also time now for self-assessment and I see some people have chosen the stamp. This is anonymous. Just don't choose the arrow because the arrow has a name with it. Let's read through this again. If you see any behaviours that present as something that you may sometimes be guilty of, let's stamp it. Let's be honest with ourselves and our group here and it is anonymous. Which of these behaviours do you recognize in yourself? And now I need to speak. We'll just be quiet for two minutes, stamping the ones we sometimes are guilty of.

Okay. Well, thank you everyone. All right. It's humbling to read through that and to recognize some of those behaviours that we're guilty of and our next step. So this is really when we looked at that one principle about destruction, right? This is a little bit destructive. Like what are the things that we do that's not great? Let's put that out there. And now we're going to leave the destruction behind to make space for innovation. When I look at this list, a few themes, and Gwen you can jump in, but I do see quite a bit on instructions. That our instructions are not clear, maybe confusing, maybe too wordy. I think that's probably the biggest one that I see here. Is there any other theme that jumps up? Shall we go with "Instructions are not clear"?

GWEN:

I think besides the instructions, the other things that come up a few times as well is the feedback. So the time and the continuous feedback.

HELENA:

Yes, I did see a few there around feedback, right? "Not enough feedback." "Not enough time." Okay, so let's take those two. So let's hold them in your head right now. Think about "We are not clear on instructions," and "we don't always provide timely and constructive feedback." Kelsey, before we move, let's make sure we save this slide because there's lots of information on this slide. But then we'll clear the annotation and move to the next slide where I'll invite you for the last part of this activity.

Now think about confusing or wordy instructions or unclear instructions as one. And two, let's think about feedback and what are the first steps that we can do from this day forward as facilitators to stop giving unclear instructions and to stop neglecting feedback? We think positive, proactive steps. What should we start doing? And I'm going to give us two minutes for this one to put your thoughts on this slide. There you go. I see some excellent suggestions here on the whiteboard. "Therefore lesson planning with extra time, built in." "Instructions, always share the first draft." "Give clear learning objectives before giving instructions so students know why they're doing something." Really important. I won't have time to read all of these, but I commit to you that you will find the slide in the recording that we will share here afterwards so that you can take some of these instructions. That brings us to the end of the Triz. I just want to say, I don't know about you, but I felt the momentum of destruction and then innovation like the positive energy here towards the end. I'm curious if you have any thoughts on the experience of Triz. And keep in mind this was really adapted. Maybe more an inspired Triz than the real deal. While you give that feedback, I'm wondering, Gwen, what do you think about these strategies? And perhaps you want to share something broader and further?

GWEN:

Thanks, Helena. I just shared such a very great list. And thank you for being so honest and open to this activity. I see a lot of good things here that align with some of the ways to promote online collaboration that I would like to share from an article that I read.

Those are some of the strategies that you see aligned with the list that you provided us with. Number one, the very first one is to develop the measurable learning objectives for the activities that we chose. Ask the question like, what should learners be able to do by the end of this learning experience? is very simple, but I think it's very critical in all group activities that we try to create and some Liberating Structures activities that we might think of using is, for example, like Nine Whys or Purpose to Practice. Those will help. We look at the meaningful objectives that we want to target in our activities. And the second one is to establish the net ticket guidelines so that we can promote safe and respectful and inclusive interactions with each other. And some activities that we can think of using is the Heard, Seen, Respected or Conversation Café, where we can invite a lot of the students' creations in this one, in this list with us. And number three is to keep offering time and support for collaboration. And we need to plan to provide the learners with tutorials. And guides when they learn to collaborate and communicate with each other. For example, the WINFY, which is What I Need from You, so that the participants can have a chance to share what they really need, support from their partners as well as the teacher. Number four is we need to give frequent feedback, which is like most of

us understand that sometimes we have struggled with time and also with the energy that we put towards this, but some of the Liberating Structures that we can think of is Triz that we just do. Or maybe What? So what? Now what? The activities that we can continue to ask for feedback. And number five is to promote a sense of course community, like the Impromptu Network activity that we did at the beginning. The last one is create real-world collaborative experiences. Some Liberating Structures, and one of the ones that we use today, is the Wise Crowd. Or we can do the Shift and Share or the 15% Solutions, where we can invite the ideas from others, as well as we try to find the solutions from generating others' brilliant ideas. I think that we are almost time, but we will stay here like up to 12 a little bit. But I want to share the survey link in the chat where you can help us with some feedback for future events, like I said at the beginning, Some of the links for our FLO events in the future. One is the FLO Friday next month you have a chance to come back and to learn with me again in how to rock your presentation—your presentation Zen. The other activity is the FLO Lab and FLO MicroCourse related to AI in September. If you are still very interested in Liberating Structures, here's the link towards the community of practice with us on the BCcampus site. Now we will stay in the room for a couple of more minutes in case you have any questions. Other than that, I really hope that you have a great rest of your day and fabulous weekend. Thank you very much for being with us till now.

HELENA:

I see some people say they want to join a community of practice for the Liberating Structures and there are actually two groups, one on the island, one on the Mainland. And you can find the information. They do meet virtually most of the time. You can find the information in one of the links that we shared there, the topics of practice. I'm glad, Gwen, it sounds like people had fun and we did say it's going to be a fun FLO Friday. Just ask us. I see someone ask where to find it, just let us know if you don't find the link. And how to join a COP for Liberating Structures.

GWEN:

If you also follow the Liberating Structure original site at the beginning that Kelsey shared, you will find the resources as well as upcoming workshops, mostly in person, like intensive two-day workshops and those seats filled very quickly. So if you are interested, please go ahead, and we are very glad that this little teaser workshop actually helps motivate you to participating in bigger community of practice.