

Transcript for The Gifts We Receive (November 2, 2023)

Studio23, Day 2

Speaker: Seanna Takacs

LEVA LEE:

Just a greeting to our online people and to all of you here. This is the second to last session for the day. And of the conference, I hope you all had a good time and learned a lot, but it's not over yet. We have a very special session. I'd like to introduce you all to Dr. Seanna Takacs from Kwantlen Polytechnic... [Audience cheers] Yeah, you can cheer! Kwantlen Polytechnic University. She's a faculty member in accessibility services. I know of her work in Universal Design for Learning. She came to my attention when I looked and I saw that she authored the *UDL Handbook* with Junsong Zhang from JIBC. That was a great student panel today. Seanna also was one of the fabulous facilitators in the Studio20: Engaging Learners Online as well. We've collaborated with her a few times here. Seanna has worked with children, students, and young adults with disabilities her entire career. The heart of her work is in belonging, growth, and being open to surprise. Please give a warm welcome to Dr. Seanna Takacs who will tell us more about the gifts we receive.

SEANNA TAKAS:

Great. Thank you, Leva. Thank you for such a nice introduction. Good afternoon. Thank you everyone for being here. I've had a great two days with all of you. We've had such great sessions. I've learned and grown. I'd actually like to thank a bunch of you who got in touch with me even before we started. And we're like, we're here, you're giving a talk, we're really looking forward to it. It was really lovely for me. Not from an ego standpoint, from a reassurance standpoint [laughs]. I want to thank Leva and Helena. All of your support, all of your cheerleading, you always do such wonderful work. And I know, I appreciate it tremendously. I know our community appreciates it tremendously. This is so well designed. So to my UDL heart, I'm just like, oh my gosh, it's actually welcoming. It's actually transparent. We actually know where we're going to be. And what that does is that relieves us of our need to navigate and allows us to really enjoy each other and really care for each other. Which I've seen for myself and for so many other people. So, thank you. Thank you so, so much. Yes. Yes. And there's more. I want to thank BCcampus for all of your amazing work over the years. And I brag to other provincial partners through caucus. I brag that we have BCcampus and they're all very, very impressed that we have FLO sessions. That you support Indigeneity, support anti-racist work, you support us in everything that we need in such a cool and interesting and creative way on top of it. With any of the work that I've done with you, it's never an obligation. Oh, we have to go to another BCcampus thing. It's always we've got a BCcampus thing! It's really cool. I really appreciate that. Thank you, BCcampus. And thank you for having me. This is a peak experience for me. Yeah. Thank you. Yes. Okay. Let's get to the talk. Any of you who've seen me facilitate know that I don't normally talk to the slides. But today I'm going to do that a little bit. A, because I'm really nervous and I don't like being up front the centre of attention. But some parts are a little technical. I want to make sure that I use the right words, right? I want to be,

I'm finding these days it's really important to be very careful with my words. That's why I'm going to be a little read-y a little bit at some points. Okay, we'll jump in.

This talk was actually conceived over my excitement about the work of Dr. Peter Shabad. I've been studying his writing. I've been to a bunch of talks that he's given. He's a psychotherapist based in the U.S. Leva and I were having a completely unrelated conversation. I just because I'm all enthused, I started talking about Dr. Shabad. Leva said, well this might be neat to talk about a little bit more. And then we came up with the idea for this talk. It was really exciting at first. Really exciting and I had all of these ideas. We could do this, we could talk about that. I haven't talked about Peter Shabad, and my fangirling to anyone. You guys are the first. Yeah, thank you. It's like the maiden voyage today. I'm really eager to try out these ideas. But then as we moved along, I started to get really apprehensive and really scared. Because it seems like everyone has to proclaim whether they're an introvert or an extrovert. I am an extrovert. I love being around people. I love going out for dinner. I love having friends over. We have an open door policy. I'm also the kind of extrovert who fears social judgment. That makes me a shy extrovert. I'm a shy person. So stuff like this, when I first start, is pretty intimidating. So I was building up and building up in my mind. Also because a lot of this work is very private to me. It's very personal. It has been my entire career. I've worked with a lot of little kids and we're going to talk about little kids today. I've also worked with a lot of teenagers. I now have teenagers of my own, which is its own magical journey [laughs]. It is wonderful and terrifying. And I've worked with a lot of young adults. I've worked with people who've come out of the prison system. I've worked with people who are recovering from addiction. It really runs the gamut, and I really have loved that about my work. I continue to love that about my work. For today, I'm going to ask you to think about your gifts and I know that that can be hard. Right? It's like, oh, we're going to talk about our gifts and it's all very lovely, very Oprah, Right? But actually talking about your gifts in a really serious way. In a tactical way can actually be really challenging. It's calling upon us to share our humanity and it's calling upon us to lower our defences. It's asking for humility and it's asking for openness. And that can be really tough stuff for department meetings, right? For budget talks, right? We don't tend to go into budget talks lowering our defences, right? It can be tough stuff for answering emails and really just trying to keep up. So what we're going to do is we're going to lower ourselves in gently. And I just realized that I have to coordinate notes and a mic and a clicker.

Okay, this is one of my favourite pictures ever. I love it because it represents the very best feelings between us. This represents to me that sort of open, comfortable exchange. It represents that sort of groove where you lose track of time. This might be a glow moment, right? This is where we get swept away in the flow. It's a moment where we have this way of becoming each other, right? And sort of lost in the world of one another. I love that moment. I really, really do. I've had many of those moments just in the last two days. Okay. I'm here to start by saying, you've made a difference like this to someone. Your opinions, your knowledge, your enthusiasm, your welcome, your questions, your experience, your heart, and your goals, your shame, and your pride. What you think is your worst work might mean the world to someone else. It might mean so much that you can hardly believe it. And these are your gifts.

These are the things that we're going to talk about today. Why am I talking about gift giving? Well, I'm talking about gift giving for two reasons. The first is that in March of this year, we all lost Arley, Cruthers McNeney. For those of you who knew Arley, you know what a loss it is. We've lost her spirit. We've lost her shine and her dedication. We've lost her relentless creativity, relentless energy. I have no idea where she caught it, honestly. I have a lot of energy. I have no idea where she got it. And when she passed, I had a really hard time in really unexpected ways. We were just talking about grief to distract me from anxiety. [Laughs] Right. Of course, I was sad, but this overwhelming anxiety just rode along with me about Arley's passing for months. It was just really difficult. I couldn't figure out why it was. I'm going to talk a little bit through this talk. This is to honour her. I'm going to talk a little bit about where that might have come from. Arley left with me this idea that we have an educational system that has a great capacity to teach us that we're worth a lot. Education. She had this way of moving us beyond content delivery to teach us that our education system can teach us that we're worthwhile, that we have gifts to give and that there's someone to receive them. Right. That's a really, really key point. In line with the panel that Jun just gave. Arley also had this way of helping students learn by making; it wasn't just enough to respond that you can create something, you can show me this concrete representation of your thought and your care. And she was so dedicated to that and I just marveled at that. And I think that's probably where the anxiety came from. It's just such a loss of such a tremendous educator who just believed so much in her students. Not that they could do it, but they could just be amazing. And she brought that out over and over and over. Okay. The second reason that I'm giving this talk is because we talk a lot about different gifts. And again, in that kind of Oprah sort of fashion, gift talk is often framed transactionally, right? We talk about students giving us gifts, and we give students gifts, and it's very transactional. It's sort of like presence at the holidays, delivering content in a classroom as a gift. And what happens with that kind of transactional gift giving is we end up expecting something back, right? And we've all had that experience where we enumerate, right? We say, well, I gave him this and I gave her that, and I did this, and I did that. And I'm feeling very underappreciated. Right. Okay [laughs]. And what happens is that when we get into our darker places. And we've heard this from Carrie today. Thank you very much. You know, going through COVID and sort of feeling lost and not feeling very glowy, right? That can make, it can get us to a point where we get really, really vindictive almost about our gift giving. It's like, well, I've given all this and now I want something back. And in some ways that obscures the receiving, right? It obscures the whole gift-giving enterprise. So that's why I wanted to talk about this a little bit more. Because the question that we have is to think about gifts a little bit differently. What if giving and receiving of gifts forms the basis of human learning and development for the entire lifespan? How can that make us think differently about our classrooms? How can it make us think differently about our design and for the support of students? And very importantly, how can it make us think differently about how we support each other.

Okay, I'm doing very well, coordinating myself here. Okay. At KPU we have a wonderful Elder in Residence from the Kwantlen First Nation. This is Lekeyton. He recently gave a talk at our Student Services fall celebration about our connectedness. And he did this neat activity with us,

so play along with me. How many people here have parents? Okay. How many people here have aunts and uncles? Okay. How many people here have grandparents? Yeah. I don't have grandparents anymore. Yeah. Ever have had grandparents? Yeah. Okay. So what I want you to do is I want you to just take a few moments, and I want you to think really carefully about them, okay? Summon them to mind. I want you to think about the questions to ask them. Think about what you wanted to know about them. The things you wanted to know about your family, things that happened. What stories did you like to hear over and over? I always remember that I wanted to hear the story of my dad's German Shepherd. He had this German Shepherd called Chummy, and this dog was the dog of all dogs. My dad grew up on a farm very isolated in Uxbridge, Ontario. He just had him and his cousins and his dog Chummy would follow him around the farm and make sure that he was safe at all times like a George Tackes patrol dog. Another story I like to hear which explains some of my feelings today is my dad grew up only speaking Hungarian until he was about seven or eight years old. Because they had immigrated from Hungary and were on the farm alone, very isolated, a sort of, you know, cultural island. My dad hated going to school. My grandma would take him to school every day. And then she would and then she would come home and do the things she did. And then she would often find him standing in the kitchen when she got back. And then she'd take him back to school and then he'd come back home again. Right. My dad just, you know, this is kind of his school career until he was about in Grade 10. And for some reason, I just loved hearing the story. Another story I loved hearing was about myself, about how I learned to swim at our cottage when I was four. I learned to swim. I learned to swim in a river in Marmora, Ontario, And it was quite a big river. And my parents were just kind of fearless in this sort of way. No one would do this right. And I used to love to hear the story about how I hated diving off the dock and feeling the weeds touch my feet. So my dad and my grandfather pulled the weeds out from around our dock so I could practise diving into the water and swimming across the river, accompanied, of course. Okay, so those are some me stories. I'm hoping that you'll have the chance to think about the stories that you've liked to hear and stories of yourself when you were younger. Now, we're going to turn it around a bit. How many people here have children? Okay. How many people here have nieces or nephews? Okay. How many people here have otherwise young children in their community that they talk to and work with? Great, great. A lot of us, I think all of us have responsibility for young people, right. I want you to think about the questions that they've asked you, awkward or otherwise. I think about my daughter, how she loved hearing why blue is my favourite colour. She asked us for six months straight, and I finally drew her a Seanna rainbow full of different shades of blue. I remember feeling very self-centred that I was giving her a Seanna rainbow and she clutched it, and I was like, "Oh, Shego," which is what she calls me. "Oh, it's the most beautiful rainbow I've ever seen." Yeah. In the same way as you've asked parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles, about their lives in the world and their time. In the same way as you've listened to their stories. You've answered these questions from children and nieces and nephews. Everyone who comes after you. Everyone who comes after us, will be talking about our experiences. This is the thread that's going to connect subsequent generations. This is your tradition. This is your legacy. Your life will become their histories. Your life will guide their lives. I want you to just take a moment, look around at each other. You don't have to gaze into anyone's eyes or anything, but look around at each other. In

Lekeyten's, words, "Our hearts were born together" in this place, in this humanity. Now I'm going to tell you a teaching story. Okay? When I completed my PhD in 2014, I started working in Accessibility Services at Douglas College. And what I got to do as well. Well, I was an avid volunteer. They had a course for students who were just coming out of the mental health system and who were interested in taking post-secondary courses. This course that we could teach, that I volunteered to teach, was with these students. And part of the gig, because it was with Fraser Health and very serious, and we had to be really careful. A lot of it required us to do interviews, get to know the students beforehand, read through their files, which now. I don't know, It's a lot of privacy, right? But hearing their stories, hearing their goals, what would they like? The idea was to support readiness and transition, which it did. And to this day, this is one of my favourite courses that I've ever taught. The course ended up going so well and getting such positive reviews that Fraser Health gave us funding for an additional section. Then the next semester I was two sections of the course. But at the time, I was still on the cruel treadmill of precarious employment. I was working at another post-secondary at the time. And one month into the new course, I got an offer for a full-time position at the new institution. I asked my new director, "Well, can I just do the job part-time until April when the course is over?" No, you're going to have to commit to this and this only. Make a choice. Let me know by tomorrow. Yeah. She played hardball big time. I had two young children. And so I made the tough decision to take the full-time role. And then I had my conscience to face. Now my conscience can be really tough to deal with. It's perfectionistic, it's moralistic. It's bent on integrity. It's a conscience that says, well how would you like it kind of thing. If I decide to be rational as I had to be at that time, it only starts up the chatter in my dreams. I start having these terrible dreams about moving to strange houses and being rejected by people. Growing long hairs out of my nose and out of my ears. It's a real alone-in-the-wilderness sort of conscience. The following week, I was starting to make arrangements for transitioning the course over. And I was shaky and I was teary and it was really unbearable. And then finally, the day came where I had to stand up in front of the class and I had to tell them what the decision was. It was only after a month, and I had to tell them that I was leaving and why. My entire body felt like I was being electrocuted. I apologized copiously. I stood in front of them and apologized and apologized and said I was so sorry and I would support them for as long as they needed. They could contact me at any time. I stammered and I sweated until one student stood up and said, I'm going to read this part because this is what he said. He said, "We appreciate all the apologies, but what you're forgetting is how happy we are for you and that you've already given us so much." My conscience was still very busy telling me I had betrayed my students. I didn't really register what he had said. The kinder part of me that would grow bigger a little bit later, just held onto that curious bit of information. I held onto it like, what did he mean by that? Why would he see such a thing? Right, and then when I began reading Peter Shabad, the light went on.

This is the book. It's an excellent book. Okay, When we start talking about psychoanalytic theory and we get to the idea of a conscience, we usually think of it in terms of these internalized cultural norms from our caregivers. And this will sound very familiar to you, right? We all have this experience. Morality is established and it's predicted by all of the inhibitions

and prohibitions laid down by our caregivers. Be kind to others. Don't lie. Don't ask how much money someone makes. Say thank you, work hard. Don't take the last bit of food on the plate, right? This morality is thought to be upheld by fear of consequence, right? That's why we do what we do, it's thought is because we've got all of these consequences to deal with. Well, what kind of consequences? Again, these are all going to be really familiar. Abandonment, punishment, disapproval, shame, retaliation, threat of failure, right? We all have this experience. In my case, my morality around responsibility has tentacles that reach really far and really deep. Which is why leaving a class after one month of teaching gives me dreams of being lost in the wilderness or being abandoned, right? It was really hard for me, that's where my morality stuff really lies and that's what happened in my conscience, right? How would you like it if someone abandoned you after only a month? I framed it as abandonment right? Now look what you're doing to your poor students. What kind of person would leave? My conscience hammered. All of the shame, all of the disapproval, feeling electrocuted. That sweating and stammering. It makes sense, right? We purport to uphold a morality through the real and imagined matrix of fearful consequences. And it is everywhere. It's in our culture, in our families and in our colleges and universities. What Peter Shabad does is he suggests an alternative. He says that what if we base ethical action on gratitude and generosity? What if we become the good people that we become because of gratitude and generosity from giving and receiving? Does punishment make good people? He says, no. What makes good people is that they know they have a place in the world; they know that they mean something to somebody. Let me share a small example because this is quite a turn. And when he presented this to a whole group of psychoanalysts, they were like, what? All right. I was really surprised. I was kind of the newbie educational psychologist in the room and I was surprised that other psychoanalysts were really kind of taken aback by this. Because it's a real developmental turn, right? It's a real shift. So let me share a little example. A few weeks ago I was taking my son to buy a new raincoat and it was drizzling. And I was just wearing my jean jacket. A. because I love my jean jacket. I haven't worn it at this conference, but I love my jean jacket. And I was also kind of willing the summer weather to stay around. So I thought, well, if I wear a light jacket, it won't keep raining, and then it won't start to snow, right? So as Simon and I were walking towards the store, this little girl was coming towards us with her dad, and I could see her and she said, well, first of all, she was like, well outfitted like she was outfitted. She had a glossy pink raincoat, it had unicorns on it. She had her hood up like she's ready for whatever Mother Nature is going to throw at her. She came towards me and she pointed to my jean jacket, and she said, "You should wear a raincoat so you don't get wet." And I said, "You're right, I should wear a raincoat. I didn't expect it to rain so much today." She smiled, and, you know, this is actually a really, really important piece, right? I mean, it's cute and it's adorable. But it actually, it really symbolizes what Peter Shabad is suggesting, right? It's that her goodness is going to be grounded in the fact that she's given to a total stranger her care and concern. Right? And then there's the other part of it. It's not just that she's given me her care and concern, it's that I've received it. I've taken it right. And I've said, "You're right. Yes, you're absolutely right." And I smiled back at her. And what that means is that we're engaged in this sort of mutuality. That, you know, we're relaxing in our empathy and problem-solving. She learns that she has a place in her community because she's expressed concern about somebody. We both get to feel

valuable. We both get to bask in our mutuality of giving and receiving. And it made me think, I actually feel like Kathi stole my thunder a little when she said, "Remember to tell children that they have a purpose." That's Peter Shabad's point as well. It is critical that we teach people younger than us that they have a purpose, that they have a place. That's where the goodness, that's where the life comes from, that's where the motivation comes from. For those of you who, I've heard lots of questions about motivation, that's the idea. If we return to the idea, my torture around leaving that course after only a month. I realize now that my mistake was not the leaving that had to happen, right? I had to have enough money, I had to support my children. It had to happen. It's that rational piece. But I had made a mistake. My mistake was my inability to receive the good feeling that my student gave to me because I was so wrapped up in my moral torment.

Okay, this is Simon. This is my son. He's 19. If you ever want a guest speaker about intrinsic motivation, Simon is the person you should call. He's 19. He has been interested in planes since he was one. Relentlessly. It's all he cares about, honestly. I used to take him plane spotting down in Coal Harbour. Right near here, we'd come plane spotting. Words about planes are some of his first words. He's a photographer. He takes pictures of planes. He works for Air Canada. Now he wants to be a pilot. He wants to do everything there possibly can do with planes like. That's all it is. He's written about planes, he's made, done projects about planes he knows like. Yeah. Anyway, and what's important, what's important in the sense of intrinsic motivation is really that Simon has had this repetitive receiving, right? It's not that he's off in the wilderness, thinking about planes and ailerons and so on. It's that he's had two parents who have been very keenly interested in supporting him. He has grandparents who are interested in planes and love hearing about planes. He's got friends he goes to the airport with. He's got security people at the airport who are interested in his interest in planes. It is relentless. We have so many pictures of planes in our house. And when Simon was 13, he wrote this to me. This is his Instagram page. And he wrote this to me. All those hours of driving and sitting with me at the airport, all of them. And it's not like I went and read a book or sat on my phone. I was there with him watching the planes, talking about why the A380 is not a superior thing, people might think it is. When he would fly home from England from seeing his grandparents, I would go to the airport and take pictures of his incoming plane because I know how flight radar works. [laughs] Anyway. I just thought that this was a really good example, though it's with my own child. Again, Peter Shabad is arguing that this is actually the rule of development, it's the repetitive receiving. And he goes a step further because he has, you know, real ideas about changing the world and changing the way we are with each other. And he is saying that that is the key to a better world. The key to a better world is learning to give and being a really good receiver, right? And he goes so far as to say we have a moral imperative to receive. It's not just, hey, you be interested in planes, go take pictures of an A380. It's that as Simon's mother, I have a moral imperative to see that and accept it. And I'm going to argue it's the same with teaching. Okay, so what does being received do? Well, being received is what tells us we have something to offer the world. The gifts that we learn, we have to offer enables the morality of goodness and growth. And more importantly, this is how we move our work into the future, right? We have to know that it matters to someone in order to keep doing it, right? We saw that from our

student panel. What makes a difference in motivation? Well, that someone cares that I'm showing up to class and it means something to someone. I also want to say I've talked a lot about little kids, but if you think this is little kids stuff, it really, really isn't. Consider that many of our students are emerging at various stages of development from adolescence, which is one of the most psychically cruel and difficult times that we can experience. In a previous talk that I had attended, Shabad took us on an empathy detour to help us remember that adolescents need to be super tough, right? Because they're trying to individuate, they're trying to assert themselves. They're trying to have a life of their own. They're trying to detach. He called this the underbelly of development. He described teenagers as having a primitive morality of shame. Because they have to grapple with feelings of detachment and am I disappointing my parents? They have to grapple with these feelings of victory and power. It's not until people get a little bit older, when we start seeing them in post-secondary, that they start to say maybe it's okay to be vulnerable. Maybe weakness is all right. This is why I would argue that as post-secondary instructors, post-secondary educators, pardon me, we're holding in our hands the ability to participate in a rebirth of sorts. Yes, we deliver content and we support and we encourage. But underlying it is that moral imperative to create a climate of reciprocity and mutuality. As someone's coming out into that sort of world where it may be okay to be vulnerable, that's a really tender time to hold people and to engage in that repetitive receiving. What's going to keep them going? And say, okay, now you're going to have a life after the underbelly.

Okay, So I want to just pause for a second. I'll talk about these pictures in a bit. I want to pause for a second to say that I want to really acknowledge the work that all of us are doing, the very hard work. I really want to acknowledge how burnt out people feel. Education is changing really quickly. Technology is changing really quickly. And every time I give workshops, I can almost viscerally feel the thrum of fear that I'm going to disapprove. Or I'm going to give you more work. Right. When I talk about UDL, I'm going to give you this whole long list of things that you're going to have to do or else. Right. As I was thinking more and more about this position, I was thinking that if we have ideas of translating Peter Shabad's work into post-secondary, then we actually have to consider two types of gifts. First, this is just from Seanna's brain. Okay. First there, what we call explicit gifts. This is the content development in the delivery, the lectures, the conversations before and after class. The email answering, the deadline extending, working late, the missing vacation, all of that emotional labour that we're all doing. These are gifts that we mostly decide to give. But they're also often characterized as workflow gifts. Right? Like, well that's your job. You should have had a different job if you didn't want to do that kind of thing, right? Because they're perceived as workflow gifts, we can often overlook them. But I really believe that they still deserve a lot of genuine recognition. I want to say now, thank you for making these decisions, for communicating, for listening. Thank you for investing and thinking carefully. Thank you for being here. This is why this work is so important. It's all of that careful planning and thoughtfulness. These are gifts that can be taken for granted and shrugged off. And I think that the self-desertion in the name of adaptation is a workplace hazard that we all run into. I'm not sure if anyone can relate to this, but we do run a very real danger of developing this kind of false self like our beleaguered adolescents do. We have to be tough as

well, because there can be a lot of demands and that can be stressful. That's where a lot of stress comes. Okay, let's talk about something else. Let's talk a little bit about secret gifts. These are the gifts we had no idea that we were even giving. Yesterday someone who shall remain nameless said to me at the after party, "Hey, you can come and stand with us." I don't know if that person knows, but that meant the world to me. As a shy person, as a person who's a little inhibited around stuff like that, being asked to come and stand with them meant everything. These are the secret gifts. They surprise us when they're received. I want you to have a look at the pictures here. These are some examples of secret gifts. In this first picture. This is an image from KP Wild Spaces, which is a place-based experiential education group that I'm part of at KPU. We're on a walk at Cougar Creek in Surrey. We're asked to share a memory from childhood that meant something to us. I said, "Oh, I wrote this poem about the colour green when I was in grade two." They're like, can we hear it. I'm like, of course. My mom has it framed. Of course, I can still reel it off. Talk about being received. So I reeled it off and they were so happy to hear it, and I had people afterwards. This just boggles my mind, clearly. People afterwards said, it is so nice to hear something from seven-year-old Seanna. I don't have no idea why, but they really, really love that. And they were like, and one woman was like, that's so you. Is it? Okay. Sure. These are secret gifts, right? The next is a picture of my daughter. We created a snail habitat. We had three snails and gave them a loving home and gave them apparatus. I don't know if you know, but snails are very curious creatures and they enjoy being in their natural habitat. Otherwise they get bored. So this is Natalie playing with her snail. Then finally... I got permission for these photos, obviously. This is CJ. CJ is a student who's been on my caseload for the whole time I've been at KPU. CJ and I have, this is another example that came to mind, when we talk about reciprocity. When CJ graduated. And again, I'm going to read to get the words right. When he graduated, he told me he wanted "to be like me because I know that people can get better." That's true, You're right. I do believe people can get better. I say that a lot. People get worse and then they get better. I had no idea. Again, that's just, I had no idea that meant that much. Sometimes, and this is a really key point, that secret gifts are often secret because we're not sure that they'll be received.

It's more KPU Wild Spaces people. I truly believe that teaching is the most important activity that we can do for our community. And I do believe that all human action is a form of teaching. We're always engaged in this process of passing along knowledge, passing along interpretation, opportunity, values. It's not something that just happens in the classroom, it happens constantly. It's at the grocery store, it's with the barista, it's swearing at people in traffic. You're always teaching, always, always, always. It's true, right? We guide others so they don't have to reinvent the wheel. And there's a sort of cruel and myopic individualism sometimes that makes us think that we're delivering knowledge to our students, and we get frustrated. It's like, I don't think they're getting it, I don't think they care. I hear that over and over in UDL workshops. How can I motivate them? How can I get them to care? Right? So we have this vocabulary that we've developed around engagement, around maturity, around self-regulation. I found this quote from Bell Hooks, which is helpful. "I'm often struck by the dangerous narcissism fostered by spiritual rhetoric that pays so much attention to individual self-improvement and so little to the practice of love within the context of community. Never forget our hearts were born together.

It's in the repetitive receiving of each other that creates a sense of worth that gives us a sense of direction." Make no mistake, community building is exactly the same. For those instructors, administrators, educators, developers. Even if you never use the word community. Even if you think you're mainly concerned with the cogency of the content. Writing a syllabus with warnings that they have to read, answering all the emails all weekend. You're a community builder. The question is only, what community are you building?

If it's true that reciprocity and mutuality are inscribed in teaching, and I do believe they are, then what steps can you take to create classrooms where gratitude and generosity are the basis? I'm always a practical person, I like to have lists. I'm going to say three different pieces around this. The first, and I cannot emphasize this enough, is you yourself, you must believe that you have gifts to give. You are giving gifts to all of the lucky people around you. In some ways it's a return to our younger days when you had weird ideas, when you did experiments. We've done some of that work in the last two days, right? Where we're drawing, we're bodying our bodies. We're moving around, right? We're doing things that might make us feel a little bit uncomfortable. And these gifts were developed in your families and they live in your relationships. They actually live most colourfully. In your decision to be an educator. So if you make this list if you make this list of what you think your gifts are. Try it, it'll be a really, really long one. You may have had experience with your gifts being belittled or ignored. I have. I'm sure we all have. And that can be a really, really painful place. It can be so painful that we say, I don't have anything to give. Look, I'm just here to teach. Just want to deliver the content. I'm just here to give my message. Take it, leave it. I don't even care anymore. Right? That's what happens when gift giving, you know, goes ignored. Right. For a really, really long time. And it's tempting to conclude that having your gifts not received means that you don't have gifts to give. That's simply not true. I think the most wonderful thing about Peter Shabad's work is that it reminds us that we are born giving and we live out our lives with this infinite stockpile. Somehow, when I started reading this work, I couldn't stop seeing, and I still can't stop seeing, this seamless gift giving and receiving. I just kept recalling this, that's why it was hard to put this talk together. I kept recalling this avalanche of amazing moments. There's one time when my dear friend Si, who lives in Singapore now, told me, he said, I know that you're holding your pee at lunch. It's true. It's called breaking the magic. Right? If we're in a really great conversation, I'm not going to get up to go pee. Right. And he noticed that and that meant a ton to me. Right. You know, part of my regret in working in accessibility services is that I'm bound by all of this confidentiality. There's so much confidentiality after, you know, when the semester ends, it's particularly hard because students come for a meeting, right. And, you know, how did the semester go? And they tell me these amazing things that all of you do for them. And I don't get to say any of it, right? And so I want to tell you that a lot of the feedback that I hear is that you've changed someone's life. They didn't think that they could do anything with their lives until they were in your class, right. You make that much of a difference and it's all very quiet. So that's why we want to be, that's what I want to bring to you today, is to say that whether you know it or not, you have these wonderful gifts to give. Okay. Avalanches everywhere. You'll see it all the time. You won't be able to unsee it.

Let me explain what this is. This is a beech nut, not a piece of poop. [laughs] It was on one of our walks, and it's a neat beech nut. When you smell it, it smells almost like lavender. It's really neat. I thought this would be a neat image. Secondly, what can you do? After you believe that you actually have gifts, explicit and secret. The next thing you can do is you can build educational spaces with giving and reciprocity built in. This is what Arley was so good at in my work on Universal Design for Learning. I get asked a lot about how to support engagement, like I've said. How can an instructor design activities and assessments that students enjoy doing? And I always backed the conversation up to rationale. Well, do students have a sense of purpose? Do they have a sense of why they're here? Do they have a sense of why we're studying what we're studying? Why are we reading? Why are we making? Why are we walking outside? Right. I really advocate a lot of rationale talk, but I was thinking more about that as well. And I keep wondering like why is rationale the magic bullet? And I don't think it has to do with brain networks. I think rationale talk connects us in mutuality. Peter Shabad says that "it underscores the existential motivation to find one's individual place in the collective." What rationale talk says to the learner is welcome to this place of knowledge. Welcome where people share this knowledge and are eager to share it with you. Is anyone of the generation of the school bus trip when you see the truck coming and you start going like this, you do this, and you hear. [Makes horn sound] How many people? And I like that example because it really shows, again, it really shows that idea that we're looking, we're scanning, we're hoping, we're hoping to be received. Right. And it gives us the joy of seeing that someone has seen that we're asking for this. And it gives the truck driver, you know, the opportunity to feel what it was like being a child again. Okay. So this is where we knit together the first point and why believing that you have gifts has primacy. We can start to think of education not as delivering content, but instead welcoming students and their gifts into a warm pool of reciprocity. Where they have the opportunity to share and be received. Where we also have the opportunity to share and be received. Some of the best instructors are always really transparent about why they're doing their work and what they love about their work and why they're happy to work with their students, right. These are the stories, going back to the beginning of the talk. These are the stories we can share, right? What's your community like? What's your boss like? Why are you doing this work? What was your favourite activity? What was your favourite reading? Why do you like your job? What successes and joys do you hope for your students? Coordination problems. Okay.

So this is something that Arley created, okay? I want you to consider the roots of community. I ran this talk by a colleague of mine who was pretty skeptical. She's like, "Well, we don't want to just talk about community. We want to talk about all the gifts, all of the bad behaviour, even. Community has good behaviour and bad behaviour. It has people not being their best. Community is a verb. Community is molded and hewn every day through mutuality and reciprocity. Can we use strategies like ice breakers and group work, team challenges as community builders? Sure. But what if they don't talk? What if there are barriers to accessibility? What if we get tired of the complaining? Do we break down and give up? The truth is that you can break down and you can give up. And it doesn't matter because there will still be gifts and there will still be receptivity, reciprocity, and meaningfulness. Some of the most

powerful education I've seen centre on the knowledge, experiences, opinions, and accomplishments that students bring. It's going to wrap up. Again in closing, I'd like to say thank you so much for the gift of letting me run these ideas past you. Thank you for letting me be here. Thank you for letting me be excited about work, for giving it a first pass. This work has been a real labour of love. As I've worked on this daily, I've been able to remember my collaborators, my students, my family, far flung friends, and of course, Arley. This talk is a call to believe in yourself. It's a call to hope. It's a recognition that education is tough and rewarding and thrilling. It's a call to know that our hearts were born together. As educators, you're in the express lane when it comes to building through being part of something bigger than yourselves. Go forth, build understanding and community. Meet others with curiosity and mutuality. Be sure to take rest and rest together. Remember that hope lies in the gifts you weren't even aware you had given.

LEVA:

Thank you so much, Seanna, What a beautiful talk you've given us.