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# FLO Friday – Openness, Flexibility, and Kindness in the Classroom

Facilitated by Tanya Pawliuk

Host: Helena Prins

BCcampus

[hprins@bccampus.ca](mailto:hprins@bccampus.ca)

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Openness, flexibility and kindness in the Classroom  
Tanya Pawliuk, Associate Teaching Professor

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*I humbly acknowledge that I live, learn, and work on the traditional lands of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc within Secwépemc'ulucw, the traditional and unceded territory of the Secwépemc peoples.*

# Objectives

- Introduction to my teaching practice and context
- Consider how positioning openness, flexibility and kindness for self and others—as learners and educators—is foundational to interpersonal communication within a classroom setting.
- Explore your own opportunities to nurture authentic relationships for the potential of transformative learning experiences.
- Identify opportunities within your own education practice to create the conditions necessary for transformative learning environments.
- Reflect and share



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# Question

**What brought you to a discussion on  
openness, flexibility and kindness in the  
classroom?**

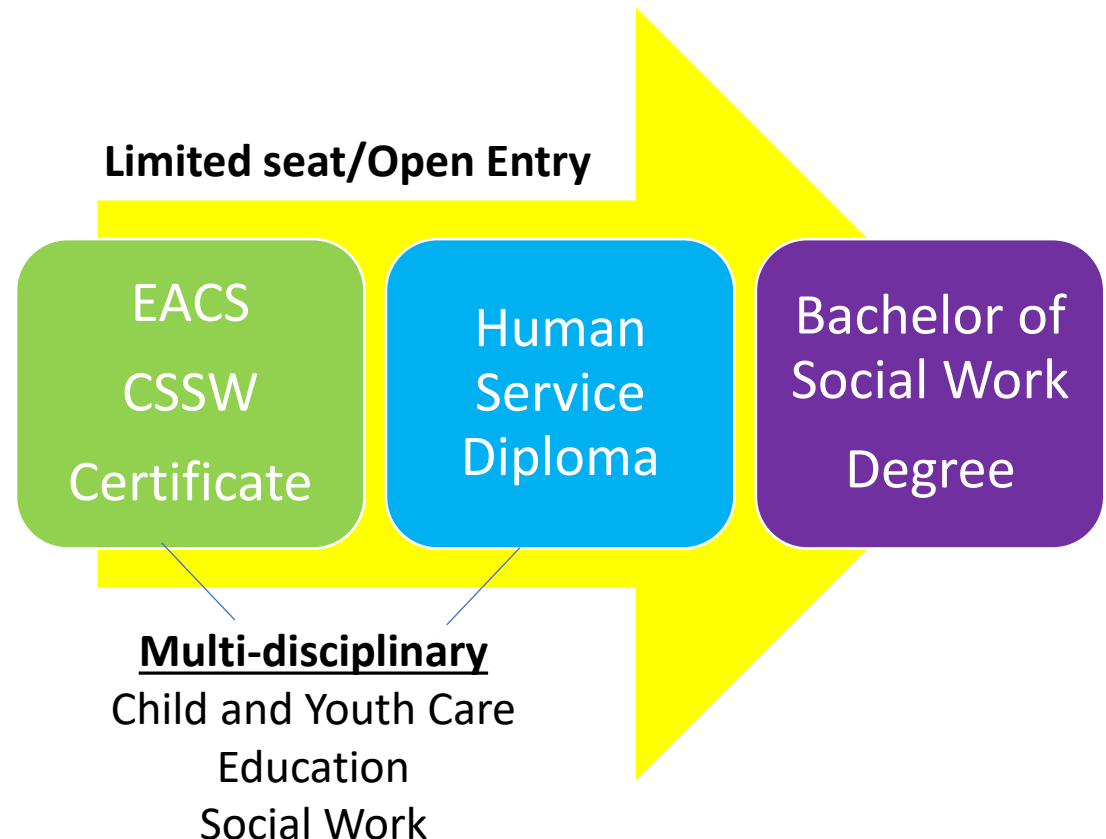


# My Context at TRU

## Human Service Program

- Prepares for a helping career with agencies that provide support and assistance to individuals coping with economic disadvantage, mental health issues, developmental, gender and diversity issues, substance use and other challenges.
- Admission
  - Two letters of reference
  - English 12/English 12 First Peoples with a minimum of 73% (or equivalent)

## School of Social Work and Human Service *at a glance*



# My Professional *and* Personal Context

- Associate teaching professor
- First and second year courses
- Nearly all core courses
- Bipartite (typically 4/4)
  - 4 Teaching
  - 4 Coordination Release
- Researcher and program developer
- Parent
- EdD student



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# University Student Stress Statistics in Canada

Abdi, 2023, November 09

## Overview of Student Stress

- **89%** of surveyed students report feeling overwhelmed by their responsibilities
- **67%** reported experiencing overwhelming anxiety
- **46%** report feeling depression levels that make it difficult to function
- **53%** report feeling overwhelming stress within past year
- **64%** report feeling financial stress

## How University is Contributing to Stress

- Academic demands
- Financial challenges
- Social and peer pressure
- Lack of support and resources
  
- *Work/childcare*
- *Lived experiences*

Covid+ has been challenging



# Openness, Flexibility, and Kindness

- “The three qualities of an effective interpersonal communicator are openness, flexibility, and kindness” (Fujishin, 2024, p. 17)
- “can be offered to others during any conversation by providing a safe harbor within which individuals feel free to express their opinions, feelings, and beliefs in a safe environment.” (Fujishin, 2024, p. 19).



# Three Qualities of an Effective Interpersonal Communicator

(Fujishin, 2024, p. 17)

- **Openness**
  - Displaying a willingness be accepting, welcoming, and encouraging of a person or idea
- **Flexibility**
  - Ability to adjust to people, situations and environments
- **Kindness**
  - Includes acts of sincerity, thoughtfulness, compassion, and helpfulness.
  - Fujishin reminds us that foundation of kindness is *love*



# How Adult learning Theories Support the Incorporation of Openness, Flexibility and Kindness

- **Andragogy:** the art and science of helping adults to learning (Knowles, 1984).
  - **Instructor role:** facilitation, encourage collaboration, mutual respect, and openness with and amongst learners
- **Experiential learning:** learners directly experience a theory, concept, fact or practice they are also learning (Kolb, 1984 )
  - **Instructor role:** to practice engagement with learners in identifying, creating and valuing learning beyond formal, classroom-based cognitive activities (Kawalilak & Groen, )
- **Integrated learning:** all aspects of self are engaged in the learning process including emotions, spirituality, values and physical self (Taylor & Marineau; 2016; Boucouvlas & Lisbon Lawrence, 2010; Dirkx, 2008 )
  - **Instructor role:** establish and maintain a responsive, predictable, and regulated learning environment
- **Transformative Learning:** learning can move beyond knowledge acquisition and lead to a fundamental shift in how one views and experiences the world (Mezirow, 1991; Taylor & Cranton 2012; Hoggan 2015; Illeris, 2014)
  - **Instructor role:** establish a courageous learner-centred environment where students feel empowered to engage authentically in learning relationships with faculty and students

# Openness, Flexibility, and Kindness in the Classroom. A social justice commitment

## **Pedagogical**

- Although kindness is commonplace in pedagogical encounters, easily recognizable by its presence or absence, attending to it can be subversive of neoliberal assumptions that place value on utility and cost of other human values ( Clegg & Rowland, 2010; p. 720)
- The nature of connection between kindness and teaching rests in the fact that both kindly acts and pedagogical acts require the actor to identify with the other ( Clegg & Rowland, 2010; p. 724)

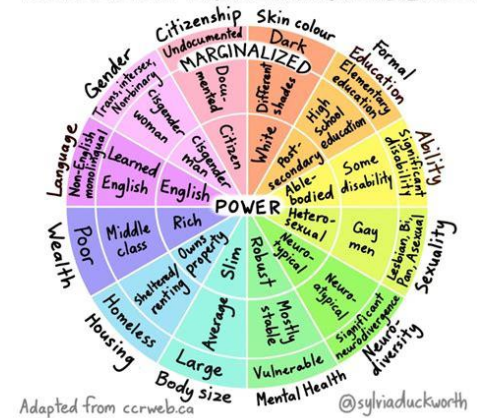
## **Practice**

- Acts of personal solidarity and kindness disrupt prevailing “neoliberal orthodoxy” contributing to more dynamic and sustainable practice emphasizing relational practice and social solidarity (Hill & Laredo, 2020)
- Are personal acts of kindness simply kindness or rather acts of political resistance and commitments to solidarity
- “the ethical foundations of social work can be read as a complex mix of social justice, kindness and solidarity (Hill & Laredo, 2020, p. 976)

# Positionality...*it matters*

- Positionality refers to where one is located in relation to their various social identities (gender, race, class, ethnicity, ability, geographical location etc.); the combination of these identities and their intersections shape how we understand and engage with the world, including our knowledges, perspectives, and teaching practices.
- As individuals and as instructors, we occupy multiple identities that are fluid and dialogical in nature, contextually situated, and continuously amended and reproduced (Alcoff, 1988 ).

**WHEEL OF POWER/PRIVILEGE**



# Speaking Up Without Tearing Down

## Ross, 2019

### Calling Out

- “Calling out happens when we point out a mistake, not to address or rectify the damage, but instead to publicly shame the offender”
- Common response
- Sometimes necessary
- May not allow parties to move forward
- Rely on shame, humiliation, scapegoating and *GOSSIP*

### Calling In

- “A concept created by human-rights practitioners to challenge the toxicity of call-out culture. Calling in is speaking up without tearing down”
- Less common response
- Supports growth, understanding, connection and accountability
- Allows parties to move forward
- Can happen publicly or privately

# Speaking Up Without Tearing Down

## Ross, 2019

### **Caution**

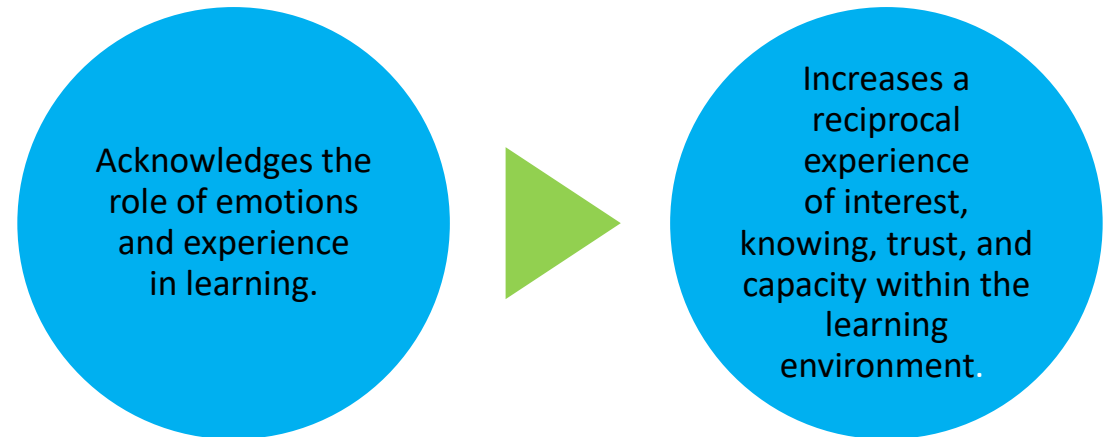
- “Calling in not for everyone or every circumstance. It is not fair, for example, to insist that people hurt by cruel or careless language or actions be responsible for the personal growth of those who have injured them; calling in should not demand involuntary emotional labour”

### **Opportunity**

- “Calling in is not a guarantee that everyone will joyfully work together. It is simply the extension of grace, the opportunity to grow and to share learning and responsibility for each other”
- Has the potential to increase the quality of our learning environment

# Relational Pedagogy

- Relational pedagogy puts relationships at the heart of teaching and emphasizes that a meaningful connection needs to be established between teacher and students as well as students and their peers if effective learning is to take place. (Bovill, 2020; p. 3)





# How am I establishing openness, flexibility and kindness in the classroom *specifically*

- Reflection
  - What is my role?
  - What is important to my discipline/profession vs. what is important to me
    - attendance
- Course outline
  - Please note that changes to the schedule may occur in response to questions, conversations, and/or to meet the emerging needs of students in the course
  - This class involves significant group engagements, in class activities/ assessments to support learning.
- Time, Availability, and Support
  - Flexible office hours
  - Awareness of campus supports for students
- Assignments and opportunities
  - Formative/in class exercises
  - PLAR
  - Transfer credit



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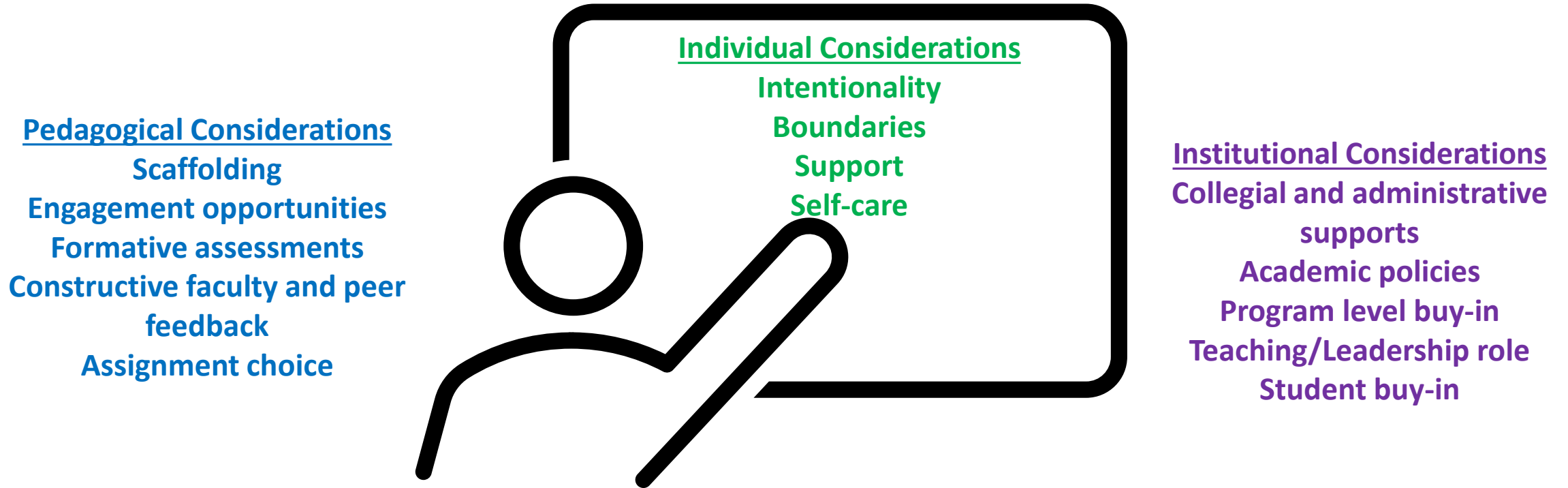
# Openness, Flexibility, and Kindness in Classrooms

- Centre the learning *and* learner
- Engage trauma aware or trauma informed practice principles in course design/delivery
- Create in class experiences and assignments that build capacity for openness, flexibility and kindness
- Incorporate development of self-awareness and understanding of one's own positionality and intersectional experiences
- Value formal and non-formal learning
- Call in vs. Call out method (Ross, 2019)



**Self *then* others vs. self *and* others**

# Openness, flexibility and kindness considerations?



**Limitations:** class size, collegial support, time, institutional support; limited opportunities for interaction

# Openness, flexibility and kindness in the classroom

## Your turn

- Let's reflect on how you have established (or could establish) these qualities within your own teaching practice.

### Reminder

- Reflection
  - What is my role?
  - What is important to my discipline/profession vs. what is important to me
    - attendance
- Course outline, first class and last class
  - Setting the stage
  - Roles and responsibilities; boundary setting
- Time, Availability, and Support
  - Flexible office hours
  - Awareness of campus supports for students
- Assignments and opportunities
  - Formative/in class exercises
  - PLAR
  - Transfer credit



Photo by [CX Insight](#) on [Unsplash](#)

# Openness, Flexibility, and Kindness in Hope/Outcomes

## Practitioner

- The three qualities of an effective interpersonal communicator “openness, flexibility, and kindness” (Fujishin, 2019, p. 17) will be adopted and integrated into practice.
- Sustainable, affirming and ethical practice

## Learner

- Feel valued and empowered within the classroom
- Develop trust within the learning process
- Openness to engaging within the process
- Transformative learning experience
  - Learner to practitioner

**Experience openness, flexibility and kindness within our individual and collective academic relationship**



# Evidence it is making a difference

- Anecdotally, these themes are showing up in class
- Students are reaching out for support earlier
- Increase in retention
- Increase in laddering pathways
- Increased attendance
- Increased classroom engagement
- Increased employment satisfaction



# Questions and Contact

***Tanya Pawliuk*** (*she/her/hers*)  
**Human Service Programs Coordinator**  
**Associate Teaching Professor**  
School of Social Work & Human Service  
Faculty of Education and Social Work  
Thompson Rivers University  
250-377-6086  
[tpawliuk@tru.ca](mailto:tpawliuk@tru.ca)

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*Regional  
Roadshow*



Driving Learning & Connection



Kelowna  
June 10-11



Kamloops  
June 13-14



Castlegar  
June 17-18

**Register at: [roadshow.bccampus.ca](https://roadshow.bccampus.ca)**

# Upcoming FLO Events

- FLO MicroCourse starting on Monday! Boundaries...
- FLO Panel on June 4: Accessibility in Post-Secondary Education
- Next FLO Friday on June 21<sup>st</sup> – Enhancing the Human Aspects in Designing Learning with GenAI

