

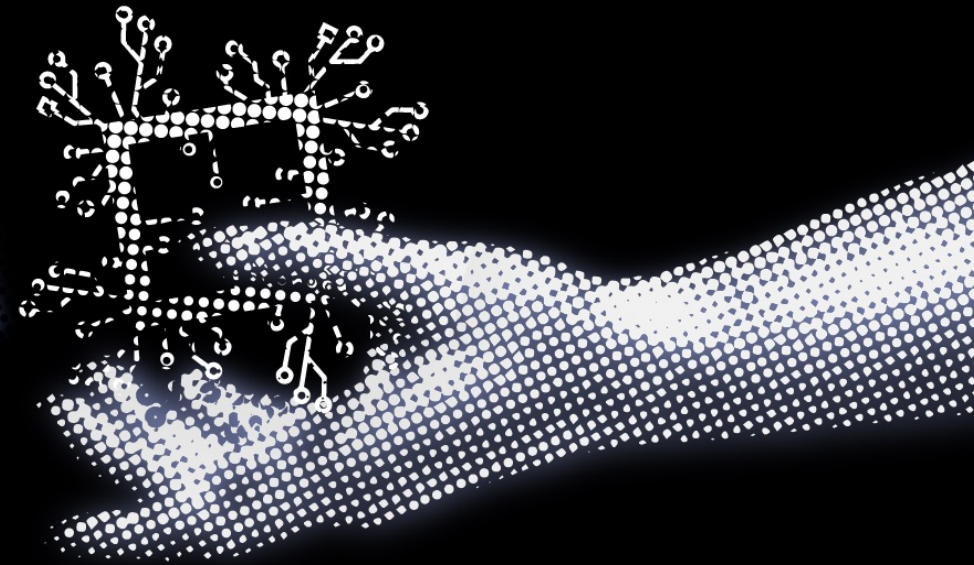
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evolvED

CATALYSTS CREATIVITY CONNECTION

GBC'S Annual
Teaching & Learning Conference



Trust Students: a simple but radical rule for educators

griffin epstein (they/them) & kate klein (they/them)





Land Acknowledgment

George Brown College is located on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and other Indigenous peoples who have lived here over time.

We are grateful to share this land as treaty people who learn, work and live in the community with each other.

[Learn more about our land acknowledgement](#)

Rights and responsibilities

[In our words: Dish with One Spoon by First Nation Metis Inuit Education Association of Ontario \(youtube video\)](#)

As we move forward, ask yourself...

- What responsibilities do educators have in the classroom?
- What responsibilities do students have?
- How can we move towards what Bomgiizhik (Isaac Murdoch) calls a “responsibility-based” model of teaching and learning?

Agenda

- Opening reflection questions (10 mins).
- What does it mean to trust students? (10 mins).
- Four propositions for why we should trust students (30 mins).
- Concluding reflection prompts (10 mins).

Opening reflection questions

- What is your favourite thing about teaching? What are the parts of your job that you love?
- What are the tasks of teaching that bore, frustrate, or burden you?

‘Trust students’?

- Today’s workshop is based on three premises:
 - 1) People’s behaviour is a response to their conditions.
 - 2) Students learn better when they are trusted.
 - 3) Trusting students will allow you to do more of what you love at work and less of what you struggle with.

What is 'trust'?

- Trust as in...
 - Trusting that students have a reason for what they do that makes sense to them.
 - Trusting that students want to learn and grow.
 - Trusting that students are facing a difficult world.
 - Trusting that students are willing and able to be active participants in the learning process, under the right conditions.
 - Trusting that students usually know themselves better than we do.
 - Trusting that students will be able to understand and respect meaningful boundaries and expectations when they have been treated with dignity.

What does it mean to ‘trust students’?

- This does mean giving up / amending:
 - Punitive, arbitrary grade deductions.
 - Restrictive extension policies.
 - Requiring doctor’s notes/ “legitimate explanations” or other proof justifying students’ reasonable requests.
 - Requiring attendance in classes where this is not connected to the learning outcomes.
 - Monitoring your perception of somebody’s attention in class.
 - Banning phones and other perceived “personal distractions”.
 - Instituting “professionalism” standards in the classroom (e.g. a dress code exclusively focused on appearance).
 - Requiring cameras on in Zoom classrooms, when being seen is not connected to the learning outcomes.

What *doesn't* it mean to 'trust students'?

- Trust is *not*:
 - Setting zero expectations.
 - Letting anyone do anything, any time.
 - Believing every word a student says.
 - Compromising the learning objectives or your own working conditions.

Why trust students (1)?

Proposition #1:

Trusting people tends to
make them more trustworthy.

Do you agree or disagree? Type a number in the chat!

5 = This strongly resonates.

1 = I strongly disagree.

Or you can answer somewhere in between!

Proposition 1

Trusting people tends to make them more trustworthy.

- When 1) treated with dignity and respect, and 2) offered autonomy around their own learning process, **students tend to rise to the expectations set for them.**
 - When they are expected to lie, cheat, fail, etc... are we setting the conditions for them to do just that?
- This adjustment can take time because...
 - Students need time to trust that a teacher is trusting them.
 - You need time to notice all the ways you've internalized "punishment culture".

Un/trustworthiness

Trusting people tends to make them more trustworthy.

- Our internalized ideas of who is “trustworthy” and who is “untrustworthy” can be unintentionally oppressive.
 - Presuming trustworthiness can be a way to do “damage control” around this.
- This is not actually about making students themselves trustworthy – it’s about making “the version of the student in your mind” more trustworthy!

Why trust students (2)?

Proposition #2:

In our assumptions about students,
we perceive what we look for and
miss what we don't.

Proposition 2

In our assumptions about students, we perceive what we look for and miss what we don't.

- The truth is, we just often don't know what's going on.
 - Monitoring, controlling, and punishing are solutions to an assumed problem. What if your assumption is wrong and your “solution” or “intervention” is backfiring?
- The truth is, our biases play into our decision-making more than we'd like to think.

Scenarios

In our assumptions about students, we perceive what we look for and miss what we don't.

Student A comes to your 9am class on time for the first 10 weeks, and sits near the front. They stay in class the whole time, and don't have their phone out on their desk. In week 11, they tell you they need a long extension for the final assignment.

Student B only comes to your class occasionally and when they do, they're half an hour late. They sit near the back and have their phone out on their desk. Sometimes they duck out of the classroom to answer a phone call. In week 11, they tell you they need a long extension for the final assignment.

Where is your line?

In our assumptions about students, we perceive what we look for and miss what we don't.

**Where is your line in the sand?
What does it mean that each of ours
is likely different?**

Should we be running a school system this way, where important academic decisions are made based on individual teachers' morality?

Is this necessary?

*In our assumptions about students, we perceive what we look for
and miss what we don't.*

Also... don't you find this exhausting??

Why trust students (3)?

Proposition #3:

Surveilling, controlling, and punishing students makes unnecessary work for you & creates an antagonistic classroom dynamic that hurts the learning process.

Do you agree or disagree? Type a number in the chat!

5 = This strongly resonates.

1 = I strongly disagree.

Or you can answer somewhere in between!

Proposition 3

Surveilling, controlling, and punishing students sucks for us AND them.

**Does it have to be this way?
What IS our job, anyway?**

Consequences and outcomes

Surveilling, controlling, and punishing students sucks for us AND them.

Are the consequences we enact actually about students meeting the learning outcomes?

Or are they about prescribing our own idea of the “best way” to reach those outcomes?

Or our own personal idea of what it means to succeed in the “real world”?

ALS framework

Surveilling, controlling, and punishing students sucks for us AND them.

- Here is the framework that Accessible Learning Services uses to align a student's need for flexibility with the course outcomes:
 - Is the requirement [to do things in a certain way] established in good faith?
 - Is it rationally connected to the job or purpose it is intended for?
 - Is there evidence that it is demonstrably relevant/necessary?
 - Is the requirement socially constructed such that it excludes specific groups, for a reason that is irrelevant, based on assumptions about function or the group?*

* Etobicoke, Meiorin and Granovsky (case law)

Who does this serve?

Surveilling, controlling, and punishing students sucks for us AND them.

- Punitive practices establish **antagonism** as the baseline of the teacher/student relationship. This isn't a nice feeling, and it also actively hurts the learning process.

Have we learned to kind of... hate our students?

Have we been taught that our success as teachers is dependent on students doing things in the exact way we want them to?

Where did we learn this tendency? And who does it serve?

Trust is key

Surveilling, controlling, and punishing students sucks for us AND them.

We want students to *love* learning.

What are the interpersonal conditions needed to support that?

We are arguing that trust is key.

Why trust students (4)?

Proposition #4:

We can't *force* people to learn.

Proposition 4

We can't force people to learn.

Our job is not to make people learn.

It's to create *conditions* for learning, which students will engage with in their own way, on their own terms.

Taking the risk

We can't force people to learn.

We have to see trusting students as worth it, even if it doesn't always work out as we'd like.

We can't know what might change unless we take the risk to change and see what unfolds.

...if they can

“Kids do well if they can.”

- Ross Greene

Sometimes it isn't us

“Learners do well if they can.”

If we believe this, then our responsibility becomes clear:
Our job is simply to do our best to ensure that the reason students aren't learning isn't *us*, or the conditions of our classroom.

Conclusion

- Some questions for your ongoing reflection:
 - 1) Could it sometimes be that students' untrustworthy behaviour is a response to the conditions of not being trusted?
 - 2) How do we show ourselves to be worthy of *students'* trust?
 - 3) Is it possible that our untrusting behaviour towards students is a response to the conditions of our workplaces?

Conference Schedule

Description	Time
Registration/Coffee/Breakfast	8:00 am - 9:00 am
Opening Remarks	9:00 am - 9:20 am
Keynote 1 - Dr. Rhonda McEwen	9:20 am - 10:30 am
Session Block 1	10:40 am - 11:40 am
Session Block 2 - 20 min	11:50 am - 12:10 pm
Lunch	12:10 pm - 1:00 pm
Keynote 2 - Dr. Ioana Literat	1:00 pm - 2:00 pm
Session Block 3	2:10 pm - 3:10 pm
Concluding Ceremonies	3:10pm - 4:00 pm