

Dan Reeve: Hi and welcome to another Applied Learning podcast. I'm your host, Dan Reeve. This time I sit down with Cath Mack of Marketing to talk about how Cath is using amazing things in her classes that really bring out the best of Applied Learning principles. I hope you listen in and enjoy.

Cath Mack: I teach in the school of business, and my area that I have taught the most in, although I've sort of taught all sorts of different things, is entrepreneurship, new venture development, and a vast array of marketing courses from market research to consumer behavior to services marketing, just all different aspects of marketing. But my focus and my interest has been in the new venture development for my whole career.

Dan Reeve: Okay. Awesome. What are your values of teaching and learning that inspired you to kind of get started with Applied Learning? It sounds like you've been doing this for a while. So, what was that inkling that sort of sent you that way?

Cath Mack: I discovered early on that the learning seemed to be more meaningful for students if they were actually doing something rather than being the recipient of information. Because of the very applied nature of the programs, I mean, I teach in the BBA in marketing, the marketing diploma, the post degree diploma. I teach students. I've taught engineering students and sports management students that my courses are the piece to help them make the connection from their theory and knowledge into the workplace. So, I have always wanted to give them the opportunity to have the skills and knowledge that they were ready and able to sort of hit the ground running in a career and "by doing" seemed to work a lot better than listening or reading.

Dan Reeve: Okay. Can you briefly, just sort of an overview, provide a description of the Applied Learning you use in this particular class?

Cath Mack: Okay. If we look at my "Entrepreneurship", the "Business Planning class", although I use Applied Learning in all my classes, but if we look at that one, I have had students work in teams with people who want to be self-employed, and I have focused on refugees that have arrived, or new immigrants, people who would not have the opportunity to go out to a business consultant and actually pay for the services. Or there have been students who have wanted themselves to pursue self-employment after graduation, or perhaps they have a friend or relative who has started some very, very micro business that's never actually had a formal plan.

So, I tie them to real situations so that they can apply the theory to that. And then it grew from that into activities in the class that are applied to better learn the theories that they then need to take and apply to the large project. So, I use them in both the project and the in-class activities.

Dan Reeve: Okay. There's a lot to unpack here. Let's take a step back, and let's talk a little bit about intention. This sort of idea about your hopes and your aspirations for

using Applied Learning. How do you decide that an experience or an application like an Applied Learning experience is the best way for students to learn a particular concept or theory or an idea? Where's that start?

Cath Mack: It starts with the learning outcomes where I have a look at what do these students need to know how to do, and what would be the most effective way for every student in the class to succeed in achieving that learning outcome? So, I think review of learning outcomes on a regular basis when you do program reviews is critical and in my case tied to industry and careers, and then what is the best way to achieve the learning outcome?

Dan Reeve: Okay. Now, when you're planning your class or your classroom, what do you hope students will get out of an activity or a series of activities? You've kind of touched on it here, but what is your hope for the activity to fulfill? I think you've touched on it. You've said something about real engagement, sort of authentic learning. Is that kind of where you [inaudible 00:05:40].

Cath Mack: Yeah, absolutely. I don't want them to memorize something and then be able to produce that on an exam and then forget it when they leave the room. I mean, the very best thing that happens to me is to run into students years later who are still applying the same skills they learned in the applied project in class. I'm trying to give them the opportunity to have a template of some sort to engage in whatever they're doing in their career and be able to reach back to their learning in the classroom and use it to apply over and over again.

Dan Reeve: Yeah. That's golden.

Cath Mack: Yeah. Yeah.

Dan Reeve: Okay. So, we're going to talk a little bit about your preparation and planning when it comes to starting an Applied Learning activity. Maybe this is a loaded question, but how do you know you're ready to try an AL activity, and maybe you're not, but what pushes you over the ledge to sort of start the process?

Cath Mack: Probably comes from my background of teaching Market Research that I do a lot of research, and I attend conferences where I have the opportunity to listen to others who talk about successes and failures, and talk about research they've done, and I try to be prepared as much as I can myself on the topic at hand, and also on the aspects of the actual applied project I'm planning.

I've got to really understand. So, for example, long before I connected students up with new immigrants, I volunteered as a mentor with the intercultural association. So, I worked with numerous new immigrants. I volunteered to be a community volunteer with refugees, and so I learned what I could about culture and communication and goals and aspirations of various different people. So, I try to be very prepared myself before I put my students in situations.

Cath Mack: I've used Applied Learning to indigenize my course, and so I have attended TTW. I've attended conferences. I've worked with various nations to assist them in putting short programs together. I've done my homework.

Dan Reeve: Right.

Cath Mack: Yeah.

Dan Reeve: That seems obvious. Now, let's get a little more specific. How do you plan out an AL, Applied Learning, activity? So, what's your thought process when you consider equipment, logistics, learning materials? Your first step seems to be you immerse yourself in the experience yourself, so that you've learned, and you've done your homework. You've done your research. Now, what about the logistics of "okay, now how do I get my students to immerse themselves in this experience?"

Cath Mack: I usually try to create as many templates, shall we say. Really, really almost, I mean, they're not a fill in the blank kind of thing, but they're very much a walk ... the students can walk through a very, very clear instruction, and then if I find they aren't needed in that depth, then for the second time, I'll back up.

The next part would be to see what resources might be available, certainly from our DE. Support has been fabulous. There have been opportunities where actual little cash was needed, and that sometimes there. I kind of go in it with the expectation there's no, nothing, and I will put it together, and then we'll add and augment as I find ... The library employees have been so supportive of Applied Learning, as have senior management. Yeah. It's been just incredible to find the support that there is within the organization.

Dan Reeve: Okay. All right. So, we're going to talk a little bit, and we kind of when we talk about intention, we get very close to this, but the idea of authenticity. This is the real world context that connects students in whatever discipline they're in to be prepared for when they go out and pursue a career. What is it you feel about your student activity that ties it to some foundational element in your field? So, in this program you have, are you mirroring the processes that the students would find in the outside world? What is your kind of work through there?

Cath Mack: Yeah. I mean, when I look at my assignment that the students actually put together a business plan that they could walk into a bank with. I talk about the fact that even if they never end up being self-employed, it's not something they want. If they are in a career where their manager says "Do you think this is a good idea?" Then they can go back to that Applied Learning project template, go through the process, and come out with a really well analyzed "yes" or "no" because, and show the reasons, because they have gone through the thought process that the Applied Learning project allowed them to have.

Cath Mack: I mean, an activity that is much, much smaller, I mean, that's a 10-week project. A much smaller one class I want my students to have a better understanding of different cultures and different backgrounds and the influence that has on people's decision making in organizations. So, I give them an example of a very, very short case study that a person has three choices of what they're going to do, and typically half the class will choose the choice where the person makes the most money, because they're programmed that way. Then I talk about how culture can have a huge impact, and I tell them that I am not going to use my own culture as an example, because my own culture is Western European background, and my grandparents and parents would probably have chosen the idea with the most money, but I have been privileged to work with people from other cultures where I know that that isn't true.

Then I show them two very short five-minute videos. One of them came from TTW, a chief in Alaska. The other one is a beautiful five-minute video about restoring the Atleo River on Vancouver Island, and the employees that are interviewed are from the [Ahousaht inaudible 00:13:48] Nation, and when they talk about why they're doing what they're doing, it matches the Alaska chief.

So, then I say to the students "Okay, so get into a little group. Assume that this entrepreneur shares the same values as the people you've just seen. What decision would she make, and how would she operate her business?" They completely get it, and they make an absolute switch in their decisions, and then we talk about "Perhaps some of you in the room have come from backgrounds that have influenced them" Then we have our international students who speak up and talk about their culture, and that then gives the students the knowledge that when they go out into the workforce, everybody might not be the same as them.

Cath Mack: So, very very short simple hour and a half, but I've had students say that it was really quite profound, what they learned.

Dan Reeve: Yeah, and that making them aware that their own biases and then seeing others is an eye opening experience, and an authentic experience.

Cath Mack: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dan Reeve: So, we're now going to move on, and we'll hit on this theme a couple of times. We're going to talk about reflection, and there's a lot to talk about when we think about the reflective or iterative nature of the kind of teaching work we all do. So, we have a number of questions here, and some themes may, again, return to us. So, what would you say ... what reflective questions or practices do you have students consider once they've completed part or a cycle of an activity, an Applied Learning activity?

Cath Mack: I put in reflective pieces throughout an activity that is more than one class. I set them up in the quiz function in D2L, because that's the easiest thing to do where

I will ask them three or four questions about what they learned from this, what they contributed to it, what difference it would make in the future. Then I always ask them suggestions as to how it would have been a better experience for them. So, I force them to stop and think about what they're doing on a regular basis throughout, and then depending on the activity at the end, there is a much more formal paper that is a reflection.

Dan Reeve: All right. When an activity is live, can you pinpoint times or breaks when student reflection is especially critical? Like you have it peppered throughout a longer assignment, but is there points where you're like, I think we need to reflect on this?

Cath Mack: I guess sort of two issues. I have found certainly over the last five, six years, students don't embrace the opportunity to work on a project for 10 weeks and then hand it in. They're much more short term learners. So, my 10-week applied project comes in, in four pieces throughout the 10 weeks, and then I provide feedback, and then they build on it for the next one. So, every time something is submitted, that needs to stop and reflect on what's happened so far, but also I try to be aware that if I have a student come to my office and ask a question, or if I have a sense in the classroom, I try to set up formal team meetings in the class.

Formal meaning there has to be an agenda. There has to be minutes. They have to be posted on a private discussion board. I tell the students it's so that in case anyone is away or not really sure what decisions have been made, but in actual fact it's for me to track that they're actually on top of things.

So, if anything comes out of the weekly meetings or a question or something that I'm feeling that we need to stop, then I just stop and insert a reflective piece at that point.

Dan Reeve: Right. Now, let's go to turning it a little bit more to you. When and how do you reflect on an AL activity? I mean, obviously as you're reviewing the students' feedback, but are there other points? Are there other formal and informal processes that spark your reflection on an activity or series of activities?

Cath Mack: Every class, after every class. When things went absolutely amazingly well, and I had a hard time getting out of the classroom, because so many students stayed after to continue, then I'll go to my office and bold highlight the file or something so I know that it works really well. If it doesn't work as well as I'd anticipated, or I didn't get the same reaction that I thought might be, then I make notes, and at the end of the term, I sit down and it's like "Okay, how am I going to change this so it works better?" It's a bit of a challenge, because of course it's like moving goal posts. You have different students and different dynamics in the class. So, what works amazingly well one term, or even in one section if you've got multiple sections... "Why did this do so well Tuesday afternoon, and Wednesday morning, I bombed?"

Cath Mack: So, it's just that constant, constant reflection. Also, having cups of coffee with my colleagues who also are very interested in Applied Learning, because we absolutely gain ongoing knowledge from each other.

Dan Reeve: Okay. Now, the last part of this first part of the reflective piece is "how does the students' reflection impact future Applied Learning projects?" So, you've run a process through. You have a series of steps. The 10-week project is over. You've got all this student feedback. You've reflected, seems like, almost daily. Now there's this point where you need to make sense of all that student feedback.

Cath Mack: Absolutely, and that's where you gather all your own notes, you gather the students' feedback throughout, and you look at your project, and you think, "Okay how can I improve this?" It can be improved every single time, and sometimes part way through, but sometimes it's an obvious easy fix that something can be adjusted. Sometimes it's a lot more of a challenge, and sometimes it's even "Wow, maybe this was just a one-time thing. Maybe I need to try this again and see if it really is needing to be changed"

So, yeah. You make the easy fixes you can. You think about what difference there can be, and sometimes there are changes within the organization in rules and regulations that cause you to kind of step back and think, okay, then let's try something slightly different until I better understand the change in the organization.

Dan Reeve: Okay. Let's turn our attention now to the sort of training and engagement. How do you prepare yourself to lead or guide an experiential learning activity?

Cath Mack: I think my most important piece is not to present myself as being the expert. I am very, very happy to share with students where and why the idea came from, and who I turned to for expertise, or even bring expertise into the room even though I know word for word everything they're going to say, and it would be exactly what I would say, but I'm happy to share.

So, I mean after I do my homework, I get all ready. I explain to the students why it makes sense and what I hope they will get out of it. I use the past. Past comments of and feedback from students, and what past students have said to encourage them that I'm not just thinking this up, that this has actually been really useful to other students. Then try to ... if it is a team project, I try to have a few weeks ahead where there are many opportunities in the class for students to interact with each other in small groups to be comfortable with each other before I attempt an Applied Learning project where they are working together.

Most of my applied projects do involve a small group interaction, and that's mostly just because of the time constraints that... these Applied Learning projects are so time consuming. One person doing it by themselves would not fit into a course.

Dan Reeve: So, we've touched on this for sure, and I just want to make it a little explicit. There's a real connection in what you've described as they why are we doing this, with the how we are doing this. Do you want to expand? Sometimes we call this meta teaching where you're explaining to the students your thought process as a teacher. We're learning this, this way, because of X.

Cath Mack: Absolutely.

Dan Reeve: And when we go through this process, it will look like "one, two, three" Here's, by the way, what students have said as they've gone through the process, and when they've completed the process. So, you've really made your pedagogy explicit to your students in a way that hopefully purchases. Is that right?

Cath Mack: Absolutely. And an additional thing that I have added based on feedback from students who were really nervous, really scared, because particularly students who have come from an education where it's been memorize, test, and they are really nervous. So, I reassure them that my goal is for them to gain these learning outcomes, but also have the skills and knowledge or the template to take forward into other courses or a career. The way I set up my Applied Learning activities, the larger ones, is students can resubmit if it turns out that they didn't connect with the instructions, and they haven't done it right. They can resubmit, and I explain to them that Camosun College doesn't have any rules about my grading, and that if the students keep trying until they individually show me that they have it, then the class can walk out with A's. The whole class can walk out with A's.

I find that is a big relief for the students who grades are the most important thing to them, and this is something completely new for them, and they're really nervous.

So, yeah, I added that little piece about "I am here to facilitate your learning, but this will, if you are new at it, this will not cause you a lower grade"

Dan Reeve: Okay. Now, it sounds like you work a lot with community partners, so this may be integrated into your whole process, but when you do a project, does your preparation differ when you work with a community partner, First Nations, immigrant and refugees society? Maybe you can just talk a little bit about that.

Cath Mack: Absolutely. If I'm just working on my own, then it doesn't require anywhere near the preparation. I mean, I need to make sure that the community partner clearly understands what the outcome is going to be, and what the expectations of their involvement is going to be, because if they aren't benefiting in a way that they think is valuable, then it's completely unfair of me to expect them to be generous with their time and information for my students.

So, working with a community partner is critical to making sure my relationship with the partner also is a fit. It's easier when it's a community partner that I

have the relationship with. When it's a student wanting to do a project for a soccer league that they belong to, for example, then the student becomes the liaison with the community partner. So, then I need to provide a lot more written material that they can provide to the community partner just to, again, make sure that being generous with their time and even if it's no cost, or it is likely to benefit them. I have to make sure.

Cath Mack: Also, my preparation with the community partner, and I've learned this even more recently, is there are rules and regulations within the Camosun College organization that some of us didn't know about, or perhaps they're new, that I have to make sure I find out, and this involves criminal record checks and other such things, so that I can't just skip along and think everything is fine without making sure all those requirements are also met. That is a big added piece with my preparation with the community partner.

Dan Reeve: Okay. Lots of radiance at there. We're going to turn our attention now to this sort of iterative notion we talked a bit about in the reflective piece. Iterative meaning just something that we continue to work on and improve as we go through, whether it's one part of a cycle of Applied Learning cycle, or the whole project, or as you do one project and then you repeat it the next semester, or maybe with a different class, or maybe the following year. There's always this process of how do we make it better? What was working? What needs improvement? So, recognizing ... so, the first part is, recognizing that within an Applied Learning activity, sometimes things don't go as planned. Sometimes that turns out for the better, and sometimes for the worse. How do you assess the students' experience in light of your ... you've said that learning goals or learning outcomes are very important to you. How can you know that, oh, this isn't where I expected it to go, and then how do you sort of try to calculate well, does it still fit?

Cath Mack: I think the first thing I do when it's the worse is own it, and the next class I walk in, and I own it. I own the fact that the previous class didn't go according to what I thought it would, and I take responsibility for that. So then, I mean, and before I walk in, I then look at "Okay, do I need to augment what we're doing to get it back on track? Or can we have a discussion in class about how this still is meaningful with the project that it is?" But I think owning that it didn't work is the best way for students to still have buy in, because if I recognize it didn't work, there's a really good chance some of them have at least thought, "What was the point of this?" or "What were we doing?" or "I don't get the benefit of this" So, that for them to find out that, no, it was clearly I have to take some responsibility. I am taking responsibility here.

In one instance, an activity didn't go as well, because I didn't do as much background prep in the class, because I assumed the students would have done all the reading that I had asked them to do before the class, which if they had done it, then they would have, and it was really clear to me halfway through the activity that the questions that were being asked shouldn't have been asked if



they had done the reading. So, then I put in some little pop quizzes based on reading before we start the class that students earn marks on, and so then from that point on, everybody did the readings, and then the activities that I didn't have to take half an hour or an hour to talk about the reading, worked well.

So, I mean, and it certainly isn't always the student's fault. That was just the one time, but yeah, I think owning that you're not perfect works well.

Dan Reeve: Do you have any ... now, you've talked about owning it. Are there any other reset tools you have to get things back on track? Maybe pop quizzes if the students are keeping up with readings.

Cath Mack: Yeah. Absolutely. But also it's a case of just every evening just thinking about, "Okay, what interesting aspect or what additional thing can be slipped into a class so that it doesn't look like you're adding?" It just looks like you planned for the course, and I have to admit that some terms, my photocopying usage is probably a lot higher than it should be, because when I do have to reset, or I do think I can augment, there's no time to have the print shop do things for me. So, having support from the college that Applied Learning project and activities sometimes require that. Twelve hours before the class, you're coming up with some interesting thing, but you want them to have something to hold onto, particularly if you're not in a computer lab, then it's going to require resources such as 82 pages on a photocopier.

Dan Reeve: Okay. So, we're going to ... I think we're going to move on now to assessment and evaluation. So, this is sort of from your view when it comes to grading and assessing the work that your students are doing. So, how do you structure your formative and summative assessments of the students during an Applied Learning?

Cath Mack: Well, because what I teach is so specifically career oriented, many of the assessments are actual ... like a business plan or a marketing plan or a market research report that's used specific sources and websites and theories and things. So, it's very easy for me to have the project part. The exams, there are exams in my business planning course. There are two exams in the course, and as well as quizzes throughout, and that is because business students are very organized, and if they have a team project, they will divide it, and you run the risk with an applied project that someone near the end of it will be the expert on 20%. So that there has to be exams to ensure that they are expert on the other 80%.

I also, in that particular course, the end of the activity is I put them in a situation where they are sitting at a table with a small group, and they are pitching their team's project, and they have to pitch the whole project. They don't just pitch the part they did, and then there is a reflective piece on them pitching, and there is a piece that each of the others has to do to demonstrate they can assess somebody else's complete pitch.

Cath Mack: So, it's a combination of quizzes, exams, projects, and reflection on any parts of the project.

Dan Reeve: Have you ... and this is kind of the last of the evaluative questions. You talked at the beginning about this kind of authentic learning, this real world learning that really connects, that's really you feel like the importance of Applied Learning. So, what evidence do you see that Applied Learning creates and deepens student understanding? So, it's not merely memorization or what we sometimes call learn and purge, where you memorize a bunch of things, you purge it on the exam, and then you come away with an empty head.

Cath Mack: Yeah.

Dan Reeve: What evidence shows you that your students, past and present, are using this way of learning and really making deeper kind of connections?

Cath Mack: Because they have to explain why their decisions are what they are. So, when they're, going back to the business planning course, they have to decide what the legal structure is in their business plan. Then they have to explain why. Well, to explain why, they have to understand the difference between a sole proprietorship or a partnership or a limited company or the new social entrepreneurship corporation that we have in B.C.

So, they show me that they have this deep understanding of the theory of the course by explaining the decisions that they make in their applied project. And I mean, that's just one paragraph in the whole project where everything they do has to tie to each other, and it has to be reasonable, and it has to make sense, and so that's all tied to the theory of the course.

Dan Reeve: Okay. Lastly, the acknowledgment piece, which is important, I think, and we all do it in different ways. As you see your students, especially as you see them for sometimes four years, how do you celebrate at either certain points or end of course or what have you... the student transformation?

Cath Mack: We don't do enough of that. We don't do enough celebration. I mean, certainly at the end of any course, there's a celebration to see them even if it's only in the hallway, because you aren't teaching courses. It's just that constant trying to ask them how things are going, and how, and what are they doing in their class, or outside the class, and having those casual conversations until, of course, near grad, but grad is simply a stand in the room and shake their hand as they walk by, and perhaps have a five-minute chat. There isn't, unless you get to teach them repeatedly, so you actually can see them pulling the learning from previous courses into the next one. There isn't enough celebration.

Dan Reeve: Okay. That's an excellent answer, and I think it's one for all of us to wrestle with. Are there any final ideas or thoughts? It seems to me that a lot of the way you teach is from a lot of self-reflection, courage, hard work, preparation. The work

you put in, the time you put in, the energy you put in. It seems to me like you're not just teaching us about Applied Learning, while that is really valuable. What I see is someone who's just profoundly dedicated to their craft, and maybe you could just talk a little bit about that. What do you think it is that makes a great teacher?

Cath Mack:

Courage, having the courage. I think that partly comes with age and time. I didn't start teaching until I was 40, which is common in business, because you go out and you do it, and then you teach it. Having the courage to try these things, and I think the support of the organization is critical for newer instructors to know that it's okay to have a class that doesn't go according to plan, and walk in the next class, and say "Wow, I didn't do that right, did I?" It's okay, and it's taken me time to learn that. Yes, absolutely love teaching, love running into the student at the beer garden who tells me that I'm not going to believe this, but he's actually using all the stuff from my course. I mean, that's what makes it all worthwhile.

Dan Reeve:

All right. On that note, we'll end it there. Thank you very much, Cath. That was amazing. Very informative, very passionate. Thank you for your time.