

Dan Reeve: Hi and welcome to another Applied Learning podcast. I'm your host, Dan Reeve. Today I'm sitting down with Tommy Happynook Junior, who is with Indigenous Education and Community Connections. He teaches in the Indigenous Studies program. He also teaches in the Indigenous College Prep program and the Indigenous Family Support. Thank you, Tommy, for showing up and being here with us today. Maybe you could just talk a little bit about your experience here at Camosun, just a little bit about you. I've given you a very brief intro. Maybe just a bit more about you and your experience here at Camosun.

Tommy Happynook: Yeah. My experience at Camosun began as a student several decades ago and then after I finished my MA at U Vic, I got hired as a community liaison. So, I was working primarily out in community, which was really good in terms of building those relationships for what came later. I've also worked as an Indigenous Advisor and just up until the summer, I was the Elders' coordinator as well at the college and now I'm completely teaching within those programs.

I like to think that my whole time at Camosun has really helped me with my teaching because I've been out in community. I've worked with community. I've worked with students in community and at the college. I feel like all the work that came before the teaching allowed me to have a better understanding of the student experience, particularly the indigenous student experience. I think it's been beneficial for me anyway in terms of how I teach and what I teach.

Dan Reeve: Okay. That's going to lead in very nicely because of course we're going to be talking today about Applied Learning. What are your values around teaching and what inspired you ... Where was the connection between when you transitioned to that teacher role to incorporate Applied Learning ideas?

Tommy Happynook: I stumbled into teaching and it's kind of funny because they needed someone to fill in, to teach the indigenous ways of knowing course within the indigenous studies program and we were having lots of discussions and my name came up and then I ended up teaching three courses that term, which seems to be the way things go... right into the fire... out of the frying pan, into the fire. My teaching philosophies and the values I bring come from my indigenous education more than the Western education that I have. I don't think of myself as an instructor or a professor or any of those titles that go along with post-secondary education. I really think of myself as a teacher and so part of the reason that I think that way is because within an indigenous world view, there's a relationship between a teacher and students, but it's a two-way relationship. For me, I end up learning as much, I think, as the students learn in the whole process.

The way that my classes are structured are slightly more seminar than lecture and so I expect a lot of discussion and participation in the courses and that comes from the cultural education that I received growing up and this idea that students need to be actively involved in the learning process to get the most out of the learning that we're doing and so I guide discussions. I choose topics but I

encourage students to bring in the knowledge that they already carry and the experience that they already carry into the classroom so that we can be having discussions on topics that are actually related to their own experiences and then the learning that they do in the classroom, that they can then take that out and apply it to their own understanding of the world.

Tommy Happynook: If we're talking about indigenous ways of knowing, I will try to encourage the opportunity for actual applied learning in that as well. We'll do a number of classes that lead up to a cedar workshop and then it's that cedar workshop where the elders that I work with come in and they tie everything that the students have been learning into the cedar work that the students are participating in. They do some learning, so the theory bit, and then we take it to an indigenous art form in cedar weaving and we apply it. I've noticed over the years, and so do the elders who I work with, they notice how, through the discussions that the students are having, that they're really almost weaving together all of the theories and the methodologies and the things, the content of the course, into what they end up producing.

I think that for me applied learning has to be a part of everything that I do because I don't adhere to the idea that students need to learn what I think they need to learn. I think students need to be involved in that learning process. When we create opportunities for them to ... The students who have done weaving before, they become teachers in this classroom so they gather small groups of students and they work together and then we see all of these things coming together and it's amazing. The applied pieces of the course that I teach are the most beneficial, I think, to the students.

Dan Reeve: We've heard that time and again with all the instructors. I want to move us now into, for the listeners who have listened to multiple podcasts, we know we're going to work through the eight principles here. Already, Tommy, really you've sort of got to the heart of it already with talking ... It sounds like you're really talking about the intention of where you're coming from and where your students are and where you're hoping that they will lead themselves and you'll be part of that. Intention just means that idea at the beginning, that eureka of what is it at the essence of what you're really hoping to get out of this environment, this educational environment. It sounds like you've already addressed that. When you go about choosing what activities, what is the idea you have in mind in terms of what you hope students will get out of it. You mentioned weaving as one. Why weaving, for example? What is your intention, really, behind weaving?

Tommy Happynook: One, my family has a background in weaving. My great grandmother is a world renowned weaver and so it's something familiar to me that I feel confident enough that I can talk about and I can answer questions with. Because I've been around weaving my whole life, I'm able to incorporate the concepts that we talk about or the questions that students have into a project that's around weaving. I think it could work with any sort of applied learning project, whether it's you're

out walking around campus and talking about biology or what the environmental tech students are doing, out and about actively participating, being a part of the natural world while you're learning.

Tommy Happynook: I think whatever applied tool you choose to use, for me, I guess the intention piece is to take students out of a space in which they either expect to be or are used to and try to have them do learning from a slightly different perspective. Trying to understand that, yes, we're here in a classroom and we're weaving and we're sitting with elders and we're sharing stories and experiences and yet that is no less valuable or important than listening to me lecture for two hours or three hours or whatever. I found that when students are actively engaged in multiple ways, and so not necessarily just listening and participating verbally but engaging their physical, their mental, their emotional and their spiritual being as a whole within a specific type of project ... Yeah, the intention is to get them out of their head and learning by touching and feeling and interacting with others in a way that they normally wouldn't.

Dan Reeve: I think what you just said there is, the way you just described it, Tommy, to me resonates with so many of the other instructors. They may not use exactly the same language but to break with their formalized expectations of what learning looks like, feels like, seems like, who it's with, how is that relationship? I think that's a common thread through many of the different applied learning is to challenge students to rethink what learning really is and in some ways the intention point is to sometimes ... I'm not describing it in a way I think as apt as you but I describe it sometimes is to unlearn high school.

Tommy Happynook: Yes. Yeah.

Dan Reeve: That there are certain standards ... High school of course is changing. We know the curriculum is changing. That we want our students to be able to see learning as a much broader experience than merely "here's a test, here's a mark, here's defines your relationship to learning based on that number."

Tommy Happynook: Yeah. You can engage with a book and the natural world deeply and the learning we get from both, different but equally valuable.

Dan Reeve: Okay. Let's move on now to curriculum preparedness and planning. The way applied learning is described, it's sometimes seen as two circles. In the inner circle is the work of preparation and the second wheel is part of the student experience and the student learning but of course I think of it more as a spiral of one on top of the other, layering. We're going to focus a little bit on your preparation. You said the first time you were kind of thrown into teaching but you had a background. You'd been educated and been an educator through your life pretty much the whole way through. Maybe you can talk about how you ... When you prepare, how do you begin your preparations for something that's going to challenge students about the way they think? We'll call it Applied Learning. How do you begin your preparations for, like, "Okay, four classes in

will hope to get to here or maybe by the end of the semester we'll hope to ... Whatever the project is, we hope to get there." What's your process? How do you prepare yourself and your setup for that?

Tommy Happynook: That's a good question. It will always depend on the group that I'm with. I don't often bring in the explicitly Applied Learning piece, so the project or the workshop or whatever, until I've had a month or so to get to know the students and maybe have a couple of really good critical discussions with them so I can kind of get a sense of where they're at. Because I'm always mindful that I don't want to be passing on knowledge that students aren't ready for. In my preparation, it's really about getting to know the students, where they're at and trying to ensure that I've shared the important information and philosophies so that students can feel comfortable with how we're going to be learning. I'm often... right away I'm preparing students for these concepts. I say, "This isn't going to be a class like you're maybe used to. I don't teach in a way that you may be used to." Sitting in a circle right away, that's a big piece because that changes the classroom almost immediately. You see the people who want to sit outside and ensure that they come in, things like that.

Tommy Happynook: In terms of ...

Dan Reeve: Can I have a follow-up then?

Tommy Happynook: Yeah.

Dan Reeve: I really appreciate your approach of saying, "I have to read the class and see where they're at," because learning, I think transformative learning is a maturation and when you ... In a perfect scenario in the springtime, you don't necessarily ... You may have some ideas formulated in your head about maybe this, maybe this, maybe this but you're not putting anything on paper until you're like, "Okay, let's read the class. Let's get a sense for the class dynamics," and then you're kind of like, "Okay, I had a few ideas in the air," and then let's ...

Tommy Happynook: Yeah.

Dan Reeve: Is that ...?

Tommy Happynook: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. I leave myself options and then I'll also work with the elders who come in. I will often talk with them about... or they'll often, if I don't bring it up, they'll ask me, "Where's the class at? What kind of class is it?" They will also tailor the work that they do to the class based on what I'm able to share with them about it. They will direct the way that they do the workshop. They will share different things based on the class as a whole. If the class as a whole... I've had classes where it's really full of the Indigenous Studies program students and so I'm sort of focusing on my indigenous ways of knowing course because it's the most explicitly applied. I've had that course where it's mostly program students who are mostly very connected and so the depth in which I and the

elders share knowledge is much deeper, much quicker whereas I have classes where half the class may be international students and so there's a lot more foundational work that needs to go in before we can get to something like that.

Tommy Happynook: What I've found interesting about the international students is they often are able to really connect with the applied pieces because we're doing something and so they can watch. They can observe. They can participate more fully than if we're having a discussion in a language that's maybe their second language and they're often able to apply parts of their own culture or where they come from to the work that we're doing. Most recently, some students were talking about how they actually have been weavers most of their lives. They use different materials, though, but they're able to transfer those concepts that they've learned which really helps them in the class because they're making connections with how their own culture can influence the work and learning that they're doing.

Dan Reeve: They're literally weaving those two different cultures together in a way that's not just literal but it's deeply and that's beautiful. That must have been amazing.

Tommy Happynook: Yeah, it is and it brings the class together in a much different way than they sit here, they sit there. Everyone sits in their little pods but the class always changes after the workshop, the relationship the students have with each other and I think the comfort they have to share as well.

Dan Reeve: You've already hit on this but it's such a crucial point of what we ... Almost everyone I've ever talked to at Camosun talks about the authenticity, the sense that what we're doing here, that the learning that hopefully the students are getting is authentic. It's real. It connects to the real world, whatever that is. You kind of talked about where you situate yourself and that's the foundation. You use weaving because it's authentic to your experience, to your grandmother. This is authentic knowledge. When you think about what you want to do in the class, how do you make sure that it starts place in authenticity?

Tommy Happynook: Really explicitly, actually. I'm very clear about what I share comes from... and where it comes from. I'm really clear that the things that I'm talking about, unless I'm specifically saying this is a general idea, I'm talking about knowledge that comes from [cha-cha-tsii-us 00:19:07] which is where my family comes from. It's a very specific small little area, watershed that the knowledge that I carry comes from and the knowledge that I share comes from and so I'm explicit in that way. Can you tell me the question again?

Dan Reeve: The authenticity piece.

Tommy Happynook: Right, yes.

Dan Reeve: When you're thinking, you're formulating these ideas and you're saying, "I want this to ring true," I think in one way you've already said you're demonstrating

your knowledge, your situating your knowledge. This is in some ways, a very graduate-school type of idea of "situate your knowledge" You start from a position of situating your knowledge. Maybe that's as the example. Okay. You have students who aren't Nuuchahnulth so they are seeing someone situate their knowledge and then you're giving them perhaps an example of if you're Cree, situate your knowledge. Where does your knowledge come from?

Tommy Happynook: Yeah. As well, too, if you're not indigenous. I encourage those students to look into their own backgrounds and ancestry as a way of connecting to the concepts that we're talking about. The concepts we talk about, if we're talking about identity, for example, how does a non-indigenous student connect to what we're talking about but situating within themselves, right? If we're talking about colonization, I often ask and then most of the indigenous students can really, yes, this is how colonization has impacted to me and then I turn to the rest of the class and I ask, "How has colonization impacted you?" It's often the first time they've even been asked that question and we talk about that.

In terms of authenticity, I think I try to lead by example, I guess. I'm always careful to situate what I'm saying. I acknowledge and cite where my knowledge is coming from.

Dan Reeve: That's right.

Tommy Happynook: Then I would never ... There's courses where they'd like you to talk about the medicine wheel. I won't. I don't come from that. There are a number of courses in our programs that participate in sweats. I don't do that in my class because I don't carry that knowledge. I think what it comes down to is understanding my knowledge but I also know what I'm allowed to share and what I'm not allowed to share. I understand that a sweat may be really cool but I carry no knowledge of that and so I'm not going to ask students to do something that I'm not going to participate in myself.

Dan Reeve: If you had someone come in who was from ...

Tommy Happynook: Yeah.

Dan Reeve: ... people where this was part of the knowledge ...

Tommy Happynook: Yeah, and we have people in our department who do that and so that happens for them in other ways. I guess for me, in the sense of answering the question of authenticity, I'm always careful to be true to myself and I know if I'm being true to myself, then what I'm sharing has that authenticity with it. Part of the cultural education that I have is understanding what I can share and what I can't and also reading the students as to how much to share and then when to hold stuff back as well and engaging with them in a way that allows students to show me that they understand what we're talking about and then showing that they're ready for more.

Dan Reeve: Right, right. Right from the get-go, it seems like your focus is really so ... I want to use this word in the best possible, like an intimate relationship with your students in terms of them as full human beings in relationship with you. I feel like, at least what I'm seeing here, the authenticity starts with that very real and genuine knowing yourself and then sharing yourself with others in a way that's going to best able those students to grow. Is that ...

Tommy Happynook: Yeah. I share my experience. I share my stories as examples of... and, you know, I use my family or work or research that I'm doing to highlight as a case study for concepts that we're talking about. I think what it does is when students see me sharing as much as I do about myself, it encourages them to share their stories as well and that's where we get a fuller picture of the concepts that we're talking about when other students are saying, "Okay, your experience was that, Tommy, and we've just heard it. My experience as a Cree person or a Heiltsuk person is this," and then that's where we can really start to gain a fuller picture and maybe a slightly more authentic picture of certainly the diversity of indigenous peoples.

Dan Reeve: Right, right.

Tommy Happynook: Rather than this idea of the pan Indian.

Dan Reeve: Yeah, they don't say that about white people, funny enough.

Tommy Happynook: No, no.

Dan Reeve: Okay. We'll move into the fourth piece here, and again, you can see how closely these are all related, the idea of reflection. Obviously there's a place and we'll get to it a little later, the idea of the place for student reflection. Can you talk about when you reflect on your practices as an educator, as a person in relationship with these other students? What is your reflective practice if you wanted to walk through the whole cycle from it's springtime in a mythical place and you have time to think about the next semester to the whole way through that semester? Can you talk a little bit about your process of reflection on everything that's happening in your class?

Tommy Happynook: It's constant. I do...I think...I'm teaching... The course I'm teaching right now, I've started thinking about next year already based on the group that I've got. My courses, I think, are always being redeveloped based on new experiences and new questions and things. Yeah. I do... over the spring summer, that's when I tend to do a lot of the work and thinking about and setting up of things for the fall and winter term. Yeah. I'm constantly reflecting on what's going on and I think it's a necessary piece of how I do or how I teach and that constant reflection is necessary because something may come up and then I'll reflect on that question and whether or not it needs to be built in. "Can I tie in the next weeks to better answer the questions that came up?"

Dan Reeve: I think that answer is very common. Almost everyone I've talked to is that constant state of assessing and reassessing. Do you have a practice? If you notice things... "Oh, that went great" or "That was a really..." Do you write it down in a journal? Are you like, "Hey, I think I would tweak this. The bringing in the elders seemed a little premature, be careful for this for next time." Is there a practice you have just pragmatically or is it you just try to...?

Tommy Happynook: Mostly it's in my head and then there'll be a pocket in my bag that's littered with scrap notes. I'll tend to write things down on the current course outline and then file that away somewhere. Little things like that but typically, yeah, it's just in my head. As I experience things with different classes and different students, then I make slight adjustments but one of the big things I can remember is trying to figure out where the cedar workshop needs to fit into the course and so I've tried different things and it sort of sits in around after the first month now. It gives me enough time to interact with the students, figure out where they are but it also allows me to make sure that they've got a couple of really key pieces of the course content prior to going into that.

It's also the first month can tend to be heavy because that's when a lot of the colonization pieces come up and so the workshop tends to be that break from harder, more emotional discussions that can tend to be more negative and then looking ... You do the workshop... The elders will talk about how the cedar is healing and cleansing and so the students go through that process over a couple weeks and then they move into the more positive aspects of indigenous ways of knowing.

One thing I'll mention, too, is that with the cedar workshops we initially were just going to do one class where the elders would come in and they get to do something but after some discussion we decided that that's not as effective as a learning tool. We actually spend two weeks doing a workshop. The first week is we come in with extremely ... The elders... we've gone through a year of work to get it to this place but then the students have to process it to the cedar, to the place where they can actually weave with it so we spend three hours, one class, doing that and what we realized early on was that going through this process is very similar to the learning process that they're going through. They have to put in the time and the effort to get to the place where they can really start to learn what it is that they wanted to learn or may be coming to learn. Then they get to see what they've created out of that learning process.

Oddly enough, we don't necessarily talk about that other than very subtly and it sort of just kind of hit me that maybe I need to actually be explicitly saying this is why and this is a piece of it. It's that Applied Learning piece that those two weeks really stand for the entirety of the course and can stand for the entirety of this type of education.

Dan Reeve: Yeah and I know that I've talked with other instructors. We've talked about meta-pedagogy, laying out our pedagogy for students. Again, in a way that they

can ... You're not trying to overwhelm a first-year student here. They've got a lot of other things. You don't have to overwhelm them with pedagogy but just kind of say, "Hey, see what we're doing here. This kind of is symbolic or metaphoric or practical or parallels the kind of transition we're going through this whole class." I think that can be very useful to putting students ... Again, as the instructor, you don't own in its entirety the pedagogy. You share the pedagogy.

Tommy Happynook: Yeah.

Dan Reeve: Okay. Let's move on now. We're going to talk a little bit, and again, you can see how these ideas, there's no clear line between instructor and student. They definitely blend together. I wanted to talk a little bit about, and really you have, preparing, training, orientation for your students. You talked about putting off, trying to find the right part to get the students ready for this practice. How do you prepare yourself to guide an activity, experience a learning activity like you described? How do you ready yourself for it?

Tommy Happynook: A lot of that comes from my culture. There's a lot of cultural pieces that I will rely on and won't necessarily share but... yeah. Those pieces that I have from my cultural education are really important to this particular cedar workshop, which tends to be really more of an indigenous kind of Applied Learning but ... I try to prepare myself by ... That's a really great question because with the cedar, which is often the piece that I use, I've grown up with it my entire life so it's almost become that ... It's just that... [inaudible 00:33:37]. "Yeah, I just do that". I haven't been asked to think about this before.

Dan Reeve: It's the ball-glove you've had your whole life.

Tommy Happynook: Yeah. Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. Yeah. I have that privilege and I sit in there so I don't necessarily see it very well.

Dan Reeve: Okay. While you're thinking, pondering that one, you work with community partners. You've already described them in what you've done before you formally came to teaching here. What's your preparation like in terms of orienting the students and the elders, for example? What's your process there? Is it any different than your own preparation or how do you work with community to get to that right learning?

Tommy Happynook: No, I wouldn't say it's different. I would say that ... The way that I was raised and the cultural education that I have, the teachings that have been shared with me are a part of who I am. They're a part of how I go about my life. They guide how I do things every day. I think that might be the difficulty in trying to explain my practice from the earlier question, is that it's practice that is daily. It's a constant thing in my life and so the teachings are what guide the way that I try to behave. They guide me in the choices that I make on a daily basis. We try to embody the teachings as much as we can.

Tommy Happynook: When I'm engaging with community or with students... my wife doesn't say this to me so much... It was early on when I began teaching and whenever I go to do speaking that's not necessarily a normal part of my life or week, she reminds me, "Don't shame the family." We laugh about that because it is funny, right? "Don't shame the family" but that's her humorous and not so subtle reminder to me that I'm a representation of my family and my community and my nation and so when I engage with students, I keep that in mind. One of those students may one day end up in my community and if our interaction and our learning together as teacher and student is positive, that's going to be good. If it's negative, it has consequences.

I try to keep that in mind all the time, this idea that ... It's not even an idea. It's after ... How old am I? 38 now. It's 38 years of learning to embody the teachings and live the teachings that have been shared with me. Those are expressed every day in how I interact with and build relationships with people. In community, it's particularly important because community members know who I am. They know who my family is so within the community setting, that's where cultural teachings and protocols can take place as well. We have cultural ways of dealing with that poor behavior and I would certainly not want to ...

Dan Reeve: Shame your family.

Tommy Happynook: ... shame my family in that way because I was disrespectful or something. Really it's about learning to walk in a good way, in a careful way, in a respectful way and it's okay not to know what to do necessarily but part of the relationship-building process is learning who to ask. There are now people in community I can go to and I can ask questions that may be completely obvious or I can stumble through because I don't know how to ask. That comes with spending time and building relationships and so I think that's an important piece of the implied learning that I do... is ensuring that my relationships are strong enough with community members, with elders, so that they have faith in me that if something does come up, it's not a reflection of them. I can act as that middle piece between ... I can address things that an elder may not, for various number of reasons, want to or be able to.

Dan Reeve: Right. Okay. We're going to turn now ... Thank you. That was an amazing answer. The language here is "monitoring, reflection and continuous improvement" Again, it's so built in to everything you've already talked about but recognizing that sometimes activities don't always go as planned, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse and that's the way it goes, how do you assess the students' experience in light of your goals? What were you hoping for the ...?

Tommy Happynook: Yeah, yeah. I had one of those. I had a real bomber of a class and, again, it was just a number of things but I'm honest about those things. If I can see that students aren't getting it or I'm clearly not explaining the concept in a way that people are understanding it, I'm honest about it and we'll have a discussion

maybe around so I'll turn a bomber into a learning opportunity where we can discuss what might be a better way to approach this. How can I adjust the way that I teach to better present this information to people who maybe aren't in line with what I'm thinking or doing? I try and take those opportunities and shift them into a place where we can have a discussion or we can create some kind of dialog on things.

Partly what it does, I think, is it shows students that I think a lot of times there's this power dynamic that people think exists, or that probably does exist, and so it shows students that I screw up, I can acknowledge it. I can be humble about that and I'm willing to work on, as a group, we can work through a concept even if I'm having difficulty trying to explain it or people aren't understanding the way that I'm trying to teach it. I think that comes from this idea that I don't see myself as an instructor but as a teacher, right? This idea, too, that the students are there ... We're all engaging ourselves as learners and teachers at all times and so yeah.

Dan Reeve: Okay. That answer has echoed many different times the simple idea of humility, of... you're modeling good... This is, I would say, personal behavior but also academic behavior. When you screw up, just say, "Yeah, it didn't go the way I hoped it would go here. It's not. Let's figure it out." To me, that feels like that's good practice as a human being, as an academic. "I thought this was it and it isn't."

Tommy Happynook: I think it's good for students who go on to be leaders, too, to see someone who sits maybe in a place of power within this institution be able to say, "That was a mess. Sorry. Let's try and back it up and we'll see if we can pick out the pieces that are still useful from this."

Dan Reeve: I think that in the experiences I've heard from other instructors and some of my own experience, when you have that rapport with students that you've built some trust with them, when you do screw up and say, "This isn't working, folks. I don't see it here. I don't think you're feeling it. Am I right about that?" I think that there's a sense of relief and then students are like, "Oh, good. Good. Tommy sees this. It wasn't just me seeing this." Then you're like, "Let's reset and how do we take this on?" I always feel like you can turn what was not going well and you can turn it around and all of the sudden people come out at the end of class and like, "Oh, hey. That was fabulous," and completely going back to our original conversation about un-high-schooling this. Not a position you'd often hear in that context but here you can show that full stock.

Tommy Happynook: Yeah. I think, too, part of it is part of my philosophy from my cultural education is this idea that we're always striving to be human beings and so human being is something that we're always working to do and part of that is understanding your place, understanding being humble or having humility and things like that, right?

Dan Reeve: Right.

Tommy Happynook: Sometimes, as you pointed out, the class that is not going well, when you back it up, you acknowledge it's not going well and then you ask students for their input into things and involve them in making the experience a better one. I think it's almost as valuable if not more valuable than running a good class because it engages students in the learning again and then they're actively involved in the creation of something good from something that was maybe a mess.

Dan Reeve: Yeah and there's a sense of ownership, that it's not just, "Hey, Tommy screwed up," or, "Dan screwed up." It's like, "This isn't working for us," and when we collectively say, "Yeah, yeah, it's not working." We can laugh about because that's a good way to approach it sometimes and then, "Okay, how do we address it?" It's that we, that sense of community. Yeah, there's always instructor and teacher and student. You can show that humility.

Tommy Happynook: We can all have our roles but it can be our classroom. It can be our course.

Dan Reeve: Okay. Let's move on. We're going to talk a little bit about assessment and evaluation. I'm interested to have your thoughts on how do you ... Given your emphasis, how do you assess? What is your process for assessment when you're looking at applied learning and experiential learning?

Tommy Happynook: I often ask for a critical reflection on the applied learning pieces because I don't want to have an applied learning and then have a test because I feel that the test takes away or causes anxiety, right?

Dan Reeve: Right.

Tommy Happynook: I often ask for students to write a critical reflection. Over the years, a couple sentences has grown into several paragraphs on what I actually mean. I find critical reflections to be really useful because it allows the students to have a really wide field of what they can talk about. The beauty of an applied learning piece is that every student is going to take something different away from that learning. Through a critical reflection... and I'm really explicit that it's not a summary.... "I was there.... I've done this a bunch of times. I don't need you to remind me what it is that we did" The strongest ones are always the ones who are taking the Applied Learning as a point of departure for how they experience their life, how they're understanding education now, how they're understanding the knowledge that they carry. That's what I ask of them is mostly in terms of an evaluation or assessment after an applied learning piece is to talk about how they relate to what it is. It'll be very, very different because of everyone's different experience.

Dan Reeve: How do you assess them at a critical review?

Tommy Happynook: I look for ... I'm really, really explicit in what students should be looking for or writing about so if you've summarized, it's not going to go well.

Dan Reeve: Right. Right.

Tommy Happynook: If you are able to ... People who will get top marks for critical reflection will be the ones who can connect the applied learning to the content that we've discussed in class, any of the materials that I've had them read, any of the films or guests who maybe have come in as well as connected to their own cultural experience or educational experience or experience more generally. Often how I'll see that happening is the student will make connections to when we were weaving, "it reminded me of a time when I was learning dot, dot, dot from my grandparents."

Dan Reeve: "That reminded me of the reading we did in the third week that reminded me of the elder who talked about this, just drawing that web."

Tommy Happynook: Yeah or when we talked about world view, we maybe watched this film and there was a piece of that film that I connect with now. If they're able to pull all of the pieces that we're learning and using into their reflection in a very explicit way as well because sometimes they're doing it in a really inexplicit way and I can see it because I've spent the time to understand who they are but, yeah. The ones who are-

Dan Reeve: It's that meta, again, self-awareness.

Tommy Happynook: Yes and being able to draw those pieces together and do it well and concisely and in three pages.

Dan Reeve: No problem.

Tommy Happynook: Yeah. Right?

Dan Reeve: Okay. That sounds very interesting. I know that for a lot of instructors, we're more and more focusing on seeing the courses as holistic pieces, not merely little tiny fragments of knowledge that somehow got poured into your head and you spit out at the end of the semester.

Tommy Happynook: Yeah, not little units.

Dan Reeve: Yeah but actually connecting webs of understanding that hopefully help you grow a sense of critical view or a paradigm or whatever the language is you want to use.

Dan Reeve: Okay. Let's go on to the last piece. Acknowledgement. If learning is transformative, and I think most people who teach here would say it is, how do you celebrate student transformation?

Tommy Happynook: I am a firm believer in constant acknowledgement and validation of learning and so I ask for several critical reflections in most of my classes throughout the year. Then I also, for most of my classes, I don't do a final paper anymore. I do a presentation. I found that the presentation... it's much harder to hide. You can hide in a paper if you don't understand things because writing and that, right?

I find that I can see what students have learned much more clearly in a presentation. In some ways, the presentation, as scary as they are, are an acknowledgement of the student's learning because that's when they're sharing and they're often sharing something more personal, their own story or their own understanding. You see the class engage. I'm always really careful, too, to ask questions that will lead to more of a positive experience. In reflections I tend to write just all over so I'm always careful to remind students, too, that just because I'm writing a lot doesn't mean that it's bad. In there, I encourage students. Most of my comments, a lot of the time it'll be work on editing. I think that's the standard thing we all have to write.

Dan Reeve: That's universal.

Tommy Happynook: Please work on your editing and things like that but I always try to comment in a way that builds students up. I'll say something like, "Okay, you need to work here but you did a really good job here," or, "This paragraph is really excellent," or things like that. In the classroom itself, I try to validate the questions, even if I'm like, "Where did that question come from," right? I want to encourage students to be comfortable... ask the questions in whatever way they have to, ask them and if we need to work on a better way to ask that question, we talk about that.

Within the programs that I teach, most of the indigenous students who are program students, they have a lot of support throughout the program. For IFS, I think there's three of us that teach in that program now that are within our indigenous department, so we meet and we make sure that the students have the support they need. Again, I think this comes down to embodying the teachings that I have and wanting to show support and encouragement for students at all times. Even if it's recognizing that a student who's very quiet asks a question, right? I don't draw attention to the fact but I'll send them an email later saying, "That was a really great question. I'm really happy that you shared it," and things like that. It kind of depends on the student, too.

Sometimes we've had questions that cause a lot of, "What did he just say?" Right?

Dan Reeve: Right.

Tommy Happynook: Trying to not necessarily encourage that question again if it's really a misguided sort of understanding but to address it in a way that the student asking doesn't

feel like, "Oh my god, I can never ask a question again. That was so awful."  
Right?

Dan Reeve: Maybe get to the intention of the question as opposed to like, "Okay, the assumptions under the question might not be really great ... "

Tommy Happynook: Yeah, or-

Dan Reeve: ... but your intention might have been you were earnest in this question.

Tommy Happynook: I'll comment that, "Oh yeah, okay. This is a question that comes up a lot but we don't often understand that asking it in this way is ... there's better ways to ask," and things like that.

I also try to ensure that all of the students, and it takes probably way more work, but I try to ensure that I'm meeting every single student where they're at. Sometimes I'll get students who come in with very little knowledge and so in terms of a chart, they're off the chart with what they've learned and then you have students who come in who are deeply cultural and connected and so their learning, if it was charted, it would look minimal. I try to meet students where they're at. A student who does this, yes, they've done a ton of learning but the student who went this far, based on what they already know, maybe did a huge amount of learning, too. Working really hard not to ... "Okay, here's the top student" but going, "Okay." Part of that is through the assessments and the assignments that I use.

Dan Reeve: Yeah. I think that's one of the challenges. We do want to celebrate excellence when we see it because it's that hard work and that devotion and everything but I think there's also just the human element of, especially I teach in UT, university transfer, and I always say, "This is the beginning. It's all about trajectory." Same metaphor basically. If you're starting at zero or you're starting at the 50-meter line for a 100-meter race, which the class inevitably will, it doesn't matter if it's first year. It's your trajectory. What's your direction? Celebrate your direction. If your direction's heading the right way, we have a long way to get there.

Tommy Happynook: Yeah and I feel, because I'm teaching in college prep and then I teach a certificate program and then I'm teaching the Indigenous Studies program with the expectations that they have up to university, I feel that I have more of a responsibility to support and encourage students to continue going than I do to ... Occasionally you get the one where it's like, "Why are you here?"

Dan Reeve: Right.

Tommy Happynook: Right?

Dan Reeve: You need to think more seriously about why you're here.

Tommy Happynook: Yes.

Dan Reeve: Yeah.

Tommy Happynook: I tend not to focus ... I focus on the people who show up and the people who are in the room with me. I feel like because they've shown up, they want to be there. Yeah. Yeah.

Dan Reeve: Okay.

Tommy Happynook: Yeah. That's a good question. I don't really know ... I want students to leave my class feeling like education is something that's good and not scary and something that if they wanted to pursue, they can. In some ways, that's the acknowledgement piece... is letting them know that ... For the indigenous family support, the last thing I always talk to the students about as they head on to the next thing is that... is a reminder that despite all of the impacts that our people have had, we're the strongest people because we're the descendants of the people who survived the disease, the genocides, the residential schools, the [inaudible 00:57:44]. We're descendants of the strongest of our people and so that's what I want them to remember as they go off into other things or where they venture out into things that are not within our program. I try to leave students with that kind of encouragement.

Dan Reeve: A sense of confidence.

Tommy Happynook: Yeah, a sense of confidence that what they know and who they are is a key piece of the education that they can have.

Dan Reeve: I think that's amazing. Any final thoughts that have percolated through the interview? Any final ideas or ...

Tommy Happynook: No but Applied Learning, yay. I love the idea of experiential or Applied Learning. The more that the college gets behind and supports those things, I think the stronger student base we'll be sending out into the working world or onto universities.

Dan Reeve: Okay. With that, thanks very much, Tommy. I really appreciate your time and your amazing insights.

Tommy Happynook: You're welcome. Thank you.