

Dan Reeve: Hi and welcome to another Applied Learning podcast. I'm your host, Dan Reeve. This time I sit down with Diane Gilliland of the School of Access. Diane talks about the steps in which Applied Learning places an important role in the program she teaches. I hope you listen and enjoy.

Diane Gilliland: So, in the School of Access, in Academic and Career Foundations Department I teach "Building Employment Success for Tomorrow". It's a career exploration program with five courses in it, and it runs in cohort structure for eight weeks, four times a year. So I have a cohort of students that I work through the career exploration program with for eight weeks.

Dan Reeve: Great.

Diane Gilliland: And from September to the end of April I have four different cohorts.

Dan Reeve: Okay. So, every two months, more or less. What are the values of teaching that inspire you to start, just in a general sense, doing that little bit of applied learning, that learning by doing?

Diane Gilliland: Yes, I think it's respecting differences in the classroom, different ways of learning that the students bring to their education, their learning experience: hands-on, musical, you know. Some people like to read, some people like to speak, exchange ideas, learn through social engagement with other people... all the different learning styles that come into the classroom.... learning with images and pictures and that.

Dan Reeve: Okay.

Diane Gilliland: I really have social justice values too, so, you know... the old structure of standing up in the front of the classroom and passing along information does not work. I really want to respect the diverse knowledge that students bring to the classroom. They have life experiences. I work with three generations in my classroom so I really believe, I value, the instruction of the whole group. Like, the whole group teaches all of us. We work to teach each other.

Dan Reeve: You've talked a little bit about the program. Can you talk about some of the ways in the program, just broadly now, that you use a hands-on approach. Like a technique, a tactic, a thing in that eight weeks that makes you think of applied learning.

Diane Gilliland: So we work in a - I'm not sure I'll answer this directly but, we work in a circle format, so all the students see each other. In the classroom we do, from the very beginning, we are wanting the students to get to know each other. So, they interview each other on the very first day with some fun questions like "What's your culture or heritage", "What's your favorite meal", all of those things. And then in the second day another kind of hands-on activity. So, getting to know each other is ...We do a campus scavenger hunt tour where we have the students work in small groups, and they have a map of places to go and explore the college, and they take pictures of each other in their small groups in

the different locations. Every day we work with presenting a topic, having brainstorming their ideas about the topic.

Diane Gilliland: So, for example, transferrable skills and strengths. We talk about... we work a lot with their stories about... what life experience, like if you play video games... "Tell us a little bit about the games you're involved in and who else plays videos". We just collect stories about their engagement of video gaming. Then we look at it and say what skills and strengths were in that story. We bring out those skills and strengths. What other career areas could you transfer these skills and strengths to?

Dan Reeve: So there's definitely a strength-based approach.

Diane Gilliland: It's definitely a strength-based, hugely, yeah, strength-based approach. A circle approach anchored in stories, anchored in sharing knowledge, working to talk with other people in that social engagement way in either pairs or triads or fours, and then sometimes I do all voices activity. I mix it up with all voices. Everyone has the right to pass. I willed that in the very beginning because I have students who really struggle with social anxiety, depression, manic depression. I just had a young man struggling with schizophrenia. Lots of different ... I also have folks who are reasonably well and just in a normal career transition.

Diane Gilliland: I'm not sure I'm answering your question about hands-on learning [crosstalk 00:05:27]

Dan Reeve: You're drawing a picture of the whole of the learning.

Diane Gilliland: A whole of the learning.

Dan Reeve: I'm sure there will be spaces to connect because there's a multitude of approaches in any situation and it seems like you're more than... you've built in all of these ideas into the way you teach.

Diane Gilliland: Every day is a mixture because they're in the classroom five hours a day, so I don't want them sitting too long. I want them up and out of their desks and moving around the room and, yeah, we'll get them posting their ideas on different flip charts around the room. We'll go out for a walk to talk about wellness and self-care during that stressful time of career change. We'll talk about, we'll do mindfulness exercises. We'll talk about the fixed versus growth mindset. Not sitting for too long is important and not listening to just one voice for too long is important.

Dan Reeve: Right. So, you've sort of led us into nicely a discussion a bit about intention. As you've built and worked with this program, how do you decide what activities are just the best way for students to learn a particular, whatever it is you're trying to learn? Maybe it's recognizing their strengths or maybe it's working towards putting those down on a CV or a resume. What's your intention to take a concept like... -?

Diane Gilliland: listening

Dan Reeve: Yeah, and then build it into your course.

Diane Gilliland: So, let's take the example, the communication skill of listening, because that's a key point for..., a key employability skill that we teach in the classroom. So, and listening begins from day one, because we work in a cohort and that's a big part of team building so they're interrelated. So, to teach the skill of listening I will introduce a topic.

We will role model good listening versus bad listening and ask the students to be concrete and specific observers. Drawing a distinction between making assumptions about what's going on versus really observing my tone, my body language, and making those concrete observations and then we brainstorm those on the board and then we'll watch a fun instructive video.

Candice ... I forget her name ... it's a TED talk. We'll watch a TED talk and then ask them to talk about what they agreed or disagreed with in pairs and then I'll have them identify what are their listening strengths? And then what's one area, what's one barrier for listening that they can identify in themselves. So it's a self-reflection. So they watch, they observe, they listen, they talk about it, then they go into that inner reflective exercise. What are my listening strengths? What's one barrier or bad habit that I have that I can work on reducing.

Then I send them out into the field. I give them a field assignment where, "go into your world after you've identified what your strong points are and one are you want to improve, go practice those strengths more". Augment them and practice reducing the [crosstalk 00:09:00] barrier habit and then come back and report. I gather those reports, those field assignments, and I collate them, and I then give them a summary of all that data that they gave me as field agents. They can hear how their colleagues put this into action and what the results were.

That's an example of how I go through a concept.

Dan Reeve: So this talks a lot, then, to our second idea of preparation and planning, which it seems like you do, you're deeply ready for. How do you know when you're ready to try a new applied learning, hands-on type of learning activity?

Diane Gilliland: How do I know when I'm ready?

Dan Reeve: Yeah.

Diane Gilliland: Well...

Dan Reeve: Or do you know?

Diane Gilliland: Well, it's always a risk. It's always a risk. You know... my stomach, I get nervous. Recently I just, I've been teaching a conflict resolution workshop and also having guests come in, in the past five years to teach it, like a leader in the city.

Diane Gilliland: I've had our ombudsman work on this conflict resolution and it's been five years of honing this lesson plan, and I think it's just recently that I thought: "okay, this is it". For now, anyway. It really worked well. The students had positive feedback about it. You know, I hone it, hone it, hone it. Some lessons are easier than others.

And then, I'm working with [Zack 00:05:02] [inaudible 00:10:42] He brings his learning skills expertise to anything we do. We continue to modify, you know, adjust and modify.

Dan Reeve: How do you begin... like if you're thinking about... you said this is a five-year process...

Diane Gilliland: One, one...

Dan Reeve: One lesson plan. Yeah.

Diane Gilliland: As an example... [crosstalk 00:11:07] Other ones are way less time than that, cause I've inherited also a rich curriculum from a previous instructor who worked before me for 20 years.

Dan Reeve: How do you consider... think about when you're talking about... and it seems like your course is always very active, so I'm not just thinking about applied learning but all the methods you've talked about. How do you think about and consider logistics?

Diane Gilliland: Logistics like -

Dan Reeve: Like equipment, materials, and then just people, places, times... What's your thought process for that?

Diane Gilliland: I think I'm fortunate, similar to Jody Isaac, in that I have a designated classroom, so I have a classroom computer that I can access different talks, I can show websites. So the classroom computer and overhead projector are key...key...

I think because it's a designated classroom I can work in the circle. The students can leave their work there overnight because they're in the classroom 18 hours a week at minimum. Plus we have lab hours where they can come in other times of the week, so they can leave their materials there, their binders.

We do vision boards, we do big maps. And what else? In terms of materials, yeah, flip chart paper, pens. I have an instructional assistant who works in the classroom, how many hours? Two, seven, eight, nine, twelve hours a week.

Dan Reeve: That's gotta be a help. And there must be some thought in planning in terms of how you make the most of that person's...

Diane Gilliland: Yeah. And she's worked in the program way longer than me. So, she's ...

Dan Reeve: There must be a lot of coordination there.

Diane Gilliland: There's a ton of coordination there in terms of if we need to move the tables around. Like, we'll change the circle into pods. We'll do, like the multiple intelligences workshop, or the, yeah. So we'll change the configuration of the room sometimes.

Dan Reeve: So that's another, taking the space you have and making the most of it, it sounds like a...

Diane Gilliland: Yeah, it's wonderful. It's an amazing space. I think applied, you know, it's Applied Learning when you have a big workshop space where the students come and they experiment.

Dan Reeve: Okay. Let's talk, then, about something that resonates and makes perfect sense in the program that you're running, about the idea of authenticity. Connecting their experiences and what they're doing with the real world. In your case there's a real target. It's developing a career idea and then a plan to maybe achieve that. To go after that. To start that career idea.

Maybe you can talk a little bit, cause your student, their discoveries are basically the foundation for the goal, right? So maybe authenticity is in terms of when you're thinking of tweaking your plan, tweaking your program. How do you think about making sure that it's real to the students?

Diane Gilliland: We're teaching them about the importance of self-knowledge in making their decision-making. The strength-based importance of knowing what their skills and strengths are. Being able to speak those out loud to somebody else. The oracy that our guest speaker talked about on Friday at Conversations Day.

We're also talking about, like, what's the labor market like for certain career areas that they're interested in. We're kind of getting into the realm, we're asking them to vision what they want their future to be but also develop a realistic plan to realize that vision.

And we're talking about the education they need and things like the next steps in the education, so it's like, I use a lot of quotations. I use a lot of quotations in the class. Every day I have a quote in the classroom that relates to the topic at hand.

Diane Gilliland: The other thing that makes it authentic is the guest speakers we bring in from the community. Because, often times the students are like, you know they are critical thinkers. They're saying, "Is what you're teaching us part of the real world?" You know, that's often a question they'll challenge me with. The guest speakers really speak, because we have guest speakers who are in business. Recently we had the DJ Jeff [Lingwood 00:16:33] from Party People Sound Solutions. We've had another guest speaker [inaudible 00:16:36] from, she's a dog trainer from "BabyDog" And then we have instructors from the college come in and describe the different programs... and graduate students are best. What these guest speakers do that I'm so grateful for that I don't have any plans about is that they speak to exactly what we're talking about in the class, about the importance of building relationships to run your business. About always working to expand your skill set. About sometimes you can't get the job that is your direct passion so you work peripherally in that area.

Diane Gilliland: When you meet people you don't tell them "I want a job," you find out about them. You ask questions and show your interest in them, right? And then they always talk about teamwork skills. The guest speakers who are out there in the community are coming in and speaking to that authenticity.

Dan Reeve: Right. Okay. Let's change gears a little bit. Lots of instructors have various points, and it sounds like you do to, of reflection. Various points of reflection. So, what reflective questions or practices do you have students consider once they've completed part of the program or even the whole program and got their points, there are types of questions that you get them to see the change?

Diane Gilliland: We're asking questions that tap into their stories throughout the whole program, but there are particular types of stories that we're asking questions about. Like, tell us about a time you accomplished something for which you felt proud. Tell me about a time you solved a problem. Tell me about a time you, and they're all interview questions, right?

So we're getting them, throughout the term, reflecting on these and talking about them with each other and then, so that when, at the very end of the program, when we talk about interview questions, difficult interview questions, they're ready for that, right? Yeah.

The other points of reflection we're always talking about is just share some stories about your life experience and we draw out, "What are you doing in the day that you want to do? Tell us a story about that." And we draw out the skills and strengths.

So, someone loves sailing. There's a quiet student sitting in the corner and they haven't spoken hardly a word and I say, "Will you tell us a bit about, will you share a little bit about this sailing that you do?" And then, all of a sudden, this big story comes out and they tell us about one of the toughest moments in that and then it's like okay. And then the students, "What skills and strengths did you just hear in that?" "What other work areas could you transfer that to?"

It's so generative. Reflection is so important because, especially with social anxiety, to call on them in the moment they freeze up. Now you can relate to that. You're in the classroom and your instructor asks you a question and it's like all of a sudden your mind goes blank.

Reflection to me is a key. Getting them to think and write or think overnight. Think about this overnight. I don't know if they do, but then the next morning I have them do a little bit of writing about this.

Dan Reeve: Even just to take a break. Absorb and then come back to it. Sure. That sense of timing is important on the reflection too. Not to be put on the spot to reflect but sort of have some time to generate their reflection.

Diane Gilliland: Or we'll have a guest speaker. "Let's take a ten-minute break". They've been listening intently, asking questions. "Let's take a break. Bio break. Come back. What stood out for you from our talk?"

Dan Reeve: And probably organically students are going to start chatting, you know.[crosstalk 00:20:38] They're going to chat. Maybe some of it is not about the speaker but some of it will be something caught their ear or their eye.

Dan Reeve: Can you pinpoint times or breaks when student reflection is really critical and maybe not planned, but nonetheless you're like, oh, I think we need to think about this.

Diane Gilliland: The first thing that jumps into my mind is at the very end of the program we do a next steps plan, and we actually draw it out. It's called the PATH: Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope. I customized it with a few of my own additions and the students customize it to their own. But that's a whole process of reflection. Think about where you'd like to be five or ten years from now.

I used to give a question-and-answer reflection sheet at the end of the program as a way to help them prepare for next steps after BEST, and it was a question and answer. This was another thing I've honed over the years.

I've tried all kinds of different ways because the students weren't really enthusiastic and it showed in the quality of the writing. So, I decided to do the big visual map path and the feedback I get with this process is they're relieved. They're relieved, we do it in class together. We use colorful markers, big paper, and it's like, they see all their thinking. They like the intrigue of, you know cause it starts five or ten years and then it goes, their gifts and then now, and then who to enroll and what are you going to... you know..., what strengths do you need to build. What are you going to commit to in the next three months and then 30 days. So they love that.

Diane Gilliland: So, that's at the end. To route, reflection? This is a reflection question? Is that what you're asking me?

Dan Reeve: Yeah, they're all reflective practices.

Diane Gilliland: Yeah. So, the key one, another key one is we do group guidelines at the very beginning. We talk about how are you going to be together in a way to make this a safe environment for people to take the risk to share their ideas, their opinions, or to try a new skill, without feeling embarrassed.

In the middle of the program we'll check in. So, "how are you doing on the skill of one to ten? How are you doing with these group guidelines? Which ones are you doing well with and what one might you like to focus on as we carry on working together in this cohort."

Diane Gilliland: That's another key one cause it relates to teamwork. This is all about teamwork skills and strengths and it's, I acknowledge that it's just hard work to work together and be together 18 hours a week.

Dan Reeve: Do you get moments where students reflect on a particular activity or a series of activities like simply questions like, "How did today's stuff go?" And how does that impact your, like when you're thinking about the future, obviously you seem deeply connected to your students in terms of your antenna is there and you're really listening, but also do you position things so that their feedback on like, "Hey, that was amazing!" or "Yeah, I don't know, it left me not all that inspired."

Diane Gilliland: Every Friday we have Friday Feedback, and so I ask them, we ask them, what are the questions but, it's three specific questions. Here it is. Every Friday, every Thursday Zack does a Thursday review at the end of the day. "What did we cover together? Do you have any gist to go over?" and then on Friday, that kind of warms them up for Friday.

"What learnings, insights, appreciations did you gain this week about yourself when working as a member of a diverse team? What can the instructional team do to further support your learning? Please let us know if there's any confusion, and would you like a one-on-one appointment?" Is that what you're asking?

Dan Reeve: That, absolutely.

Diane Gilliland: Every Friday. Because, I don't want them sitting silent. I know that it's hard to talk to us sometimes, and it's hard to say things in the groups, so I want this written reflection as another modality for them to communicate with us regularly so resentments or frustrations or fear doesn't build up, or that they go home on Friday really stressed out about something that we can resolve quickly. It's also conflict resolution. To me it's like, yeah.

Dan Reeve: So we're going to turn now, a little bit towards, a little more about your sort of preparation and planning. How do you prepare yourself to guide a day? What's your process as you come in?

Diane Gilliland: I say to myself, Diane, this is like being an Olympic athlete in training, teaching every day. Building myself up to be an energetic facilitator in the class, so I have to get to bed at 9:30. I have to eat regular meals. This is what you're asking? Yeah. I have a dance class on Wednesday, I get outside in fresh air because I'm inside all day, so I get outside for fresh air after work, walking some friends' dogs.

Dan Reeve: So it sounds like you take your idea of self-care as vital.

Diane Gilliland: It's vital. Yeah, it's absolutely vital, yeah. And, I finish work at 4. I go home and enjoy some things, refresh. And then I'll do an hour of work, like 7:30 to 8:30. I'll look at my emails, I'll hone something, cause I'm doing the chair role too, so there's a lot happening.

And then on Sunday night I'll look over emails, I'll look at what's coming up in the week. If I have marking or whatever to do I'll do that.

Dan Reeve: You have a set, sort of set plan.

Diane Gilliland: Yeah. I won't go to movies during the week. I have to say "no" to some social engagements. My social life, my friends and family are really important. I try not to let work totally absorb me in that way, but I also do have to say "no" to some things too.

Another thing I do is to..., I go in the classroom at night at the end of the day. I'll erase the board, put up the agenda for the next day, find the quote for the class. One of my students said: "you have to get your head in the game so the prize will show, right?"

I arrive early. I arrive at 8 a.m. every day. The classes don't start until 9, so I'll go in and set up anything in the room and, depending on the type of groups some people arrive early so I'll have conversations with them. That'll be a time for me to get to know them a little bit better and have a little bit more conversation.

I play music in the classroom in the morning as people are arriving. Sometimes I'll put on the crackling wood fire but I tried that and students started to feel sleepy.

Dan Reeve: Relax, but not this relaxed. Okay.

How do you explain, some students really appreciate, they are going to ask you the question of, "Why are we doing this?" connecting to "How are we doing this?"

You're trying to get them to discover some skill, and they might say, "But, why are we doing this and how does that connect to what we're supposed to be learning?" Maybe you can walk us through a little bit of your process like, what's the connection between the "why" and the "how"?

Diane Gilliland: The learning outcome?

Dan Reeve: Yeah. Yeah.

Diane Gilliland: So, I, depending on the workshop I'll be really explicit. I'll put the learning outcome on the board. I don't want them to hang in the uncertainty of that. For conflict resolution, for example, I'll put the learning outcome on the board. "Today we're going to..." and, what else? It's sort of like, "how do I design this?"

But if they ask me a question I'll answer it directly. I'll use the skill of summarizing throughout the program. These are good questions. I'll use the skill of summarizing throughout the program, like, "this is where we've been. This is, in the small amount of time this is what we've covered. This is what we're doing. This is where we're going." So, for instance, I'll be introducing... I love this topic, "Information Interviews as a Strategic Work Search Tool and Skill That We Can Use Throughout our Life." And I'll say...I'll introduce the topic of Information Interviews... and I'll say I'll umbrella it. "We are

learning this within the context ... We're going to..., within the context of your life sound like? This is a vital tool throughout your lifespan and we're going to talk about it today, what it is and what it's not, and we're going to practice it together. We're going to, you're going to practice it safely with your friends and family and then we'll get you warm contacts to do it with other people in the community" Zack calls it the ZED PD, Zone of Proximal Development.

So, I'm trying to take them through all the different steps so they're not hanging in the anxiety of like... "Oh, my God, Information Interviews. I'm going to have to talk to strange people." You know, I don't like them freaked out like that at the beginning. I'm doing a lot of soothing and comforting. I don't know if it's soothing, but [crosstalk 00:31:00]

Dan Reeve: It builds confidence maybe?

Diane Gilliland: Contextualizing the usefulness of it, working the growth zone versus the panic zone.

Dan Reeve: Let's talk about, there's always continuous improvement, and we've talked about this a little bit. Recognizing that sometimes activities don't always go as planned and sometimes that's for the better and sometimes that's for the worst, how do you assess student's experience in light of your learning goal?

Diane Gilliland: Every Friday... the feedback, and at the end of every group we also have a feedback form. It's right here, and it's all, it's based on the learning outcomes of... they are articulated learning outcomes of what feedback is ... At the back it says, "Any additional comments? How helpful were the guests?" You know...suggestions to make BEST more effective.

So, we fold these suggestions into everything. For instance, we had a student who had her undergraduate degree and we do some Math and English upgrading, not upgrading but warm-up skills, because some of them haven't been as prepared to write the assessment, and she didn't really need that. Even though I asked for Friday Feedback, you know, come and talk to us, she didn't tell us that, until the end, that she didn't really need that and she thought she was, she felt kind of bored sitting in some of that stuff.

With this class I made it, the next round I just made it, listen, if you feel this is not useful for you then you can go next door and work on the computers on your career research. I'm just listening to those student feedback at the end, you know, during and at the end and tweaking things. Small tweaks as we go. Because you know... we're always working with such diverse people.

We tried, we did something new this cohort. We got involved with Volunteer Victoria and we went and volunteered on Valentine's Day with some mustard seed to serve a meal in cooperation with a restaurant. So, that, you know, Applied Learning was the first run of that. I just said to you two or three sentences but there was a whole process.

Dan Reeve: Oh, of course. So how was it a little different working with a community partner?

Diane Gilliland: Oh, how was it a little...? It was enriching. You know, it's more organization, especially the first run of something. So lots of emails back and forth, surveying the students. What kind of volunteering experience would they like to do? Getting commitment from the students, commitment from the organization, showing up. It was the first run for them. The mustard seed with this event in cooperation with the restaurant.

And then there was also a law firm that were giving free legal advice to the folks. So... and that was enriching because, you know, you take a risk and it turned out to be kind of cooler than I ever thought. Meeting new people, and the students had a good time, and... yeah.

Dan Reeve: Okay. If you're doing an activity and things don't go as planned, do you have a reset button or a reset technique or some practice that you kind of fall to when you're like, "oh, this isn't..." and you can see it? What's your practice?

Diane Gilliland: The first thing that comes to mind is... certain things go on in the classroom, right? Maybe someone's having a really rough mental health day. Maybe the group is really sick, like there's lots of people with sickness and low energy. So they're, you can just see them out there... and it's like "okay, this isn't the right time to teach this". I'll just say it, you know.

If someone's in a rough mental health place and it's like coming into the classroom in a way that feels somewhat disruptive, we'll call a five-minute break and try to pull something together, like bring in..., see if my teaching assistant can come in... if she's not in there and take the person for a walk, take the person down to counseling, you know, that's the most stressful situation I've found.

If the group is low energy, they're not feeling well, I'll just stop and we'll do something else. We'll do some grounding ice breaker or something in the center of the room. And there's a couple of lessons, like, I had this one kind of fun one about international volunteering, so I can show them websites or you can stay with, you know, that kind of gets their...their interest [inaudible 00:36:52] about something like that. Yeah.

Dan Reeve: Their energy back up.

Diane Gilliland: Um-hum. Their energy back up. Yeah. I don't know if that answers your question.

Dan Reeve: No, no, it does. There's a very... you have such a diverse style that it's intriguing to see all the different processes you use.

Dan Reeve: This may not apply perfectly, but I'll ask it. How do you structure your formative and summative assessments of the students, and I don't know if there are formative and summative assessments, but if there are, what's your process?

Diane Gilliland: Yeah. So, BEST is articulated based on attendance, so the attendance says that they can't miss more than four days of class.

Dan Reeve: Right.

Diane Gilliland: And because it's building employment success. And so I say: "it's like welding. You have to be here to see the weld, to hear about the weld, to see the weld and then to practice the weld yourself" Right?

That's how I introduce it at the beginning of the course. And so in terms of this I'm still struggling with attendance and articulation because I have students who are in recovery from mental health issues, mental health crises, in recovery from addictions who get... this past winter I've had students miss a couple weeks because of illness, you know? Yeah, I'm still uncertain about this one. How to manage this.

Dan Reeve: Right. And the flexibility you need to build around, because I'm sure there's a million stories for every...Some of them are... you know, someone gets sick and what are you going to do? Others are "you taking this seriously enough", you know, this is...

Diane Gilliland: Exactly. That's the - I don't really - it's maybe one student a year that I'll see one or maybe two at the outside. I haven't had one yet where I think they're blowing off the course. I think these are legitimate [inaudible 00:38:57]

Dan Reeve: Right, right. Mental health problems -

Diane Gilliland: Mental health, addiction stuff, and actual illness and depression.

Dan Reeve: So that causes a real challenge when you can only miss four days.

Diane Gilliland: So I just encourage them to keep coming and just come and pick up where we are and, yeah -

Dan Reeve: Okay.

Diane Gilliland: Sometimes I'll say to someone in the beginning of the term if they've missed a lot, I hate it when - hate's a strong word - I really dislike it when someone messes up group guidelines. I think I expect people to be there for that. But, um, sometimes I'll have, if a student's missed too much at the very beginning I'll just say, you know, why don't you withdraw and come back at another time. But then it's like "Oh, I really want to be here" so it's hard.

So the other piece is we do have assignments, like a vision board assignment, a vision board reflections, the listening field assignment... They have to write a three-point essay. They do an information interview with a family or friend member and hand in that.

They have to hand in an actual information interview they do with someone in the community that we've given them warm contacts for or they generated warm contacts themselves. So there are those assignments that go through, and it's basically, just mostly strength-based feedback like "This looks great," "Congratulations on

accomplishing this", but there's no final grade. It's complete or incomplete based on attendance. That's what it's supposed to be.

Dan Reeve: Right, right. The last piece is acknowledgment. How do you celebrate student transformation?

Diane Gilliland: Yeah. So, I actually am doing more of this without the cohort, like expressing explicitly my appreciation for them. You know, on those days when they're really tired and just saying "I can see that you're really tired and I just really appreciate your courtesy, your listening, your attendance, you know what I mean?" Just express it.

Or if, I have a feeling when I'm working with them, I'll just, you know I feel like "okay, this has been a great day". I've been nervous at the beginning and then get in the groove with them and we do, and I'll just say "I've enjoyed being with you today."

Just remembering their courage, remembering the courage it takes for them to show up, like this young fellow with, you know, trying to grapple with his, with schizophrenia and how he's going to... his disappointment about he can't function normally like his classmates. Like, just saying to him, "I see your determination. I see your commitment. I see your kindness." You know, just mirroring back what I see. "I see your disappointment."

Can you repeat the question again?

Dan Reeve: So, how do you celebrate the student transformation?

Diane Gilliland: Yeah, and then we have a party at the end of each cohort. You know, every week we begin.... I try to...I remember to say "It's great to see you here this morning." Welcoming, you know... "It's great to see you here, remember that this is a success to be in the seat this morning. You felt like you had the flu or you didn't want to get out of bed. It's an accomplishment to be here."

Not forgetting that. Keeping that in sight. Not taking it for granted, cause there's that other perspective, right?, that kind of "pull up your bootstraps" and "this is what I expect, you to be here" and not say anything about it, you know? Yeah. I don't know if that makes sense to you.

Dan Reeve: Right, no, I understand it. Well, actually.

Are there any final thoughts you had? This interview has kind of kicked up around applied learning, or just kind of, anything that's kind of on your front of mind?

Diane Gilliland: No. No, I think it's enriching for all of us. I don't think I could handle just, personally, I don't think I could handle just lecturing for an hour. And it's so engaging to get them up and moving around and talking to each other and hearing their thoughts and, you know, like the other day we're wrapping up when...

I teach a lesson on how not to get stuck after BEST. So we talked about, I asked them, "What are you worried about?", or "what are you stressing about in terms of after this class is over?" Plus they're going to lose the structure and the community and everything.

And then I asked them to brainstorm. "How, what steps will you take not to get stuck together, right?" And they'd come up with all these great ideas, really specific things, and then I show them what the experts say about career research about how not to get stuck, and their ideas are way more detailed and rich than, you know, the experts say. Well, you know, you have your social supports, your managed time and all those great things, but their details that they come up with are way more interesting. Then we categorize them. We classify them.

Personally, I find it really kind of stressful and requires a lot of energy and rest on their part but also really kind of thrilling.

Dan Reeve: Yeah. That's the thing about being an Olympic athlete.

Diane Gilliland: A little bit of -

Dan Reeve: Being an Olympic athlete. You said initially that it's like being, training for the Olympics.

Diane Gilliland: I have never been -

Dan Reeve: Nor have I -

Diane Gilliland: An Olympic athlete. But yeah, it's that discipline. It probably uses skills of acting and, you know what I mean? Like -

Dan Reeve: Yeah, I do. Okay, I think that's it.

Diane Gilliland: Okay, cool!

Dan Reeve: Thank you for your spare time Diane. I appreciate [crosstalk 00:45:40] your insights and your devotion to your class.

Diane Gilliland: Well, thank you.