

NEXTcast Season 1 Episode 16: Humber Showcase 2018 Preview

In this special preview of Showcase 2018, we speak to Mary Goral (Humber Libraries), Adam Thomas (School of Media Studies and Information Technology) and Dawn-Marie Warren (The Centre for Teaching & Learning) about the workshops they will present at the event.

For more information on Showcase: www.humber.ca/showcase/2018

Note: This is our last episode of the season. See you in September 2018!

Nathan Whitlock: Welcome to NEXTcast. My name is Nathan Whitlock, an editor at Humber Press. NEXTcast is a podcast about teaching and learning at Humber College. Every episode we talk to some of the faculty and staff who are leading innovation both inside and outside the classroom. This is actually the last episode of our first season, thanks to everyone who's been listening. Thank you to all our guests and a special thanks to all the people at CTL's creative productions department. Especially Santino Pannozzo, who always tries to make these episodes sound nice before I mess them up in the editing.

Nathan Whitlock: We'll be back in September with new episodes every second week. For this episode, we'll be doing a preview of Showcase 2018, which is happening on Thursday, June 7th at Humber's Lakeshore campus. We'll be talk to a few of the people who are presenting at this years Showcase. If you want to find out some more information about Showcase, you can go to humber.ca/showcase.

Nathan Whitlock: So our first guest on this Showcase preview NEXTcast episode is Mary Goral, who is a library technician at the Lakeshore libraries at Humber. Mary's going to be presenting a workshop at Showcase that deals with a video project that she put together with the help of The Centre for Teaching and Learning. Welcome to NEXTcast, Mary.

Mary: Thank you.

Nathan Whitlock: So I was wondering, could you tell us a little bit about that project? What was the genesis of it? How did it come together? And what was the idea behind it?

Mary: Sure. It really just started when the Lakeshore launch happened here at Lakeshore and I went to see the CTL Creative part of it. And that day, I saw a video clip that had been made with a program called GoAnime. And it captured me. My personality, I'm a little bit shy. But I really was interested. So I asked the guy who made it "What's that program? And what can it do?" And all of a sudden the wheels in my head were turning and I thought there's something I could do with that for the library.

Nathan Whitlock: What does GoAnime look like? I'm not actually familiar about it and people who aren't-

Mary: Well it's a software program that their slogan is 'Anyone can animate.' But the world of animation is, you know if you're really into it, is very involved.

Nathan Whitlock: Right.

Mary: So I'd never done one before but I'd always drawn cartoons by hand and I have that interest. I also do the display case here at Lakeshore campus. I've been doing that for years so that's kind of another creative outlet. So already in my mind, I was thinking "I think we can use this." So that day was kind of a key day where I thought "I'm going to float this idea." So I approached CTL. I had a direction of where I wanted to go and what I wanted to say, because when I'm at Lakeshore I'm a front line person. I'm on the research help desk. And one of the motivating factors was that... over a year ago, the word was out that the research help desk... statistics of students coming to our desk was actually dropping. Now it wasn't dropping here at Lakeshore as much as it was at North campus. And that could have been due to the new design of the building itself. It's a sad reality to me to see students struggling and not come and see us face to face when they can.

Mary: So the creation of this video came from, really, my heart. Because I see students every day and I see them struggle and they'll come. And I've seen students... one of the funny things that we pulled out in the video is traveling with a USB or at least making sure students know to save all their work to the H drive. It may sound really basic and it is once they know, but for first year college students who don't know, we can actually witness some of them kind of break down in tears because they've lost a good hour of their work because they didn't save it.

Mary: So that comes out... there was an acute, kind of humorous way we showed that in the video with the characters. The USB and the H drive become these prominent graphic symbols but they're worked into the story. And the students... their chosen group of characters and there's also the library host who a lot of people think he looks like a particular staff member here at the Lakeshore campus.

Nathan Whitlock: But that's not confirmed. That's not official-

Mary: You know, some of the characters just might look a little bit like some of our staff. And sometimes, because I did it together, there was a

certain person I might have been thinking of. I have to say. So anyways, there's a guy that plays the host and he really has become the prominent figure to lead the students all through the different places where they can find help on their research journey.

Nathan Whitlock: So in your workshop, you're going to talk about this project and everything we just talked about. But is part of your idea that anybody can do this? That this is a project that anybody should take on?

Mary: Well, it is to show that anybody can do it, but with caution. Because anybody can do it if they're willing to be on a very steep learning curve and never give up. If you love this sort of work, the passion will keep you going. What I want is that people would be realistic in knowing there's many, many steps. So my workshop will show you just how many details you had to think about in a project like this. Yes, anyone can do it because I myself didn't think I could and I pulled it off. But I have to say I pulled it off with amazing support from CTL and some very trained people that could tell me and show me the ropes.

Mary: I can't say enough about CTL. I had no... and I've been at Humber for quite a few years, but I had no connection personally. And so it was kind of like a fresh start for me and working with people I'd never worked with before. It really opened a whole new world for me and now I can even go home and tell my family I'm on a podcast. How cool is that?

Nathan Whitlock: It's very cool. Well that's fantastic. I think it'll be a great workshop. Are you looking forward to it? Are you nervous about it or-

Mary: A little bit. It's always good to put yourself out there and try something new, so that's what I'm doing.

Nathan Whitlock: Absolutely. Well thanks for talk to us, Mary.

Mary: Thank you.

Nathan Whitlock: So our next guest on this special edition of NEXTcast our Showcase preview is Adam Thomas, who is a professor of multi media design interactive and web development in the school of media studies. And he's going to be talking at Showcase about making code engaging for all learners, and specifically some tools that he uses to get some reluctant learners into coding. Welcome to NEXTcast, Adam.

Adam: Thanks for having me.

Nathan Whitlock: Thanks for doing this. So I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about this workshop. What are you going to be telling people?

Adam: It started a while back from just having a really hard time engaging students into learning code. I teach in three programs. It's the graphic design program, multi media program, and a web design and interactive media program. And the students in those programs seem to pretty split on looking to learn design or coding concepts. And it's really hard to engage coders into learning code. So that's kind of where this started.

Adam: I'm a new faculty. This is the second year of full time. And as a new faculty, one of the things we had to do was observe existing faculty and just watch them teach. So I observed a class in industrial design and the class I observed, the students were presenting their final concepts, some industrial design concepts. And I was watching it, kind of taken aback because they actually had physical stuff which is something strange to me. Everything we do is digital, and it was almost... I was almost jealous. You guys actually get to build things.

Adam: So it kind of spawned from those two things and just how can I make code more tangible and more engaging to students, especially those students who don't want particularly to learn code. They're kind of in the course because it's a prerequisite.

Nathan Whitlock: So how did you solve that problem exactly? How did you get... what did you actually do to get the kids into coding?

Adam: So what we did is we wanted to make coding more engaging and more tangible and less abstract to our students. So when you're coding something like a contact form, you write your code and you test it out and you fill out your form and you click submit. And then you're like, well, did that just work? So we took code and we configured a bunch of LEGO Mindstorms kits to run off of JavaScript. So this way they're using the same code to code these LEGO robotics are they are coding their websites. That was actually a really big hurdle to get past, because the LEGO doesn't typically run off JavaScript.

Adam: So when you're coding these robots, it's a lot less abstract because it's a lot more obvious if it worked or not. One of the first things we code is a little LEGO robot, a little vehicle. And the exercise is to just have it drive around a table and use a proximity sensor to avoid the edge, to avoid falling off the edge. So when it's not working, it's dead obvious because the LEGO falls off the table and smashes.

Nathan Whitlock: The thing crashes, literally crashes. So at Showcase this year, what are you going to be presenting? What are you going to be passing on to other faculty in terms of what you learned going through that exercise?

Adam: So this is the second year we've done this, this research. This is kind of the second round. We did it last year, we learned some stuff, we improved it, and we're on a second round. So this year's Showcase, we'll actually bring some of the LEGO robotics. Any faculty attending will have a chance just to do some really basic code to code these robots around some obstacles and get a sense of what learning code is like. And then we'll just have a discussion as to what kind of tangible activities or engaging activities could you possibly integrate into similar curriculum or other curriculum. So hopefully these concepts that we're kind of learning from this specific research can be applied to more than just learning code.

Nathan Whitlock: And you mentioned you did do some research. Did you research through the SOTL program here and the Teaching Innovation Fund? And I believe you've actually spoken at some conferences on this. What's the kind of reception when you tell people about this?

Adam: It's good. When I go to these conferences, the title of the conference doesn't usually specifically mention code because I'm looking to bring in all sorts of faculty, all sorts of educators and just really have a discussion as how can we kind of integrate play even in adult education. Because there's a ton of research on play with children. And despite the fact that children and adults typically learn in the same manner, we almost kind of... we're not allowed to play anymore. Because we're grown up, right? So just finding ways to integrate tangible play, engaging activities, into the classroom. That's just a lot more rewarding in a sense when you code something and something is physically happening.

Nathan Whitlock: Well that's really cool and I think that's going to be a really cool workshop. You're going to have a lot of people wanting to play with those robots.

Adam: If you list the fact that we get to build LEGO, then people show up I hope.

Nathan Whitlock: Well good luck and thank you for doing this, Adam.

Adam: Yeah, no problem.

Nathan Whitlock: And our final guest for this special episode of NEXTcast Showcase previous is Dawn Marie Warren who is the head of multi media design at The Centre for Teaching and Learning. Welcome Dawn Marie.

Dawn Marie: Thank you, happy to be here.

Nathan Whitlock: Well thanks for doing this. So you are doing a workshop with Theresa Stager at Showcase this year and it's about a bunch of kind of new technologies and what they mean... you're going to make people a little less afraid of them, I guess? Things like VR, AR, XR, a number of other R things that I don't understand to be perfectly honest. I wonder if you can just tell me what are the actually technologies you're going to talk about.

Dawn Marie: Okay, so there's lot of different technologies. You know, technology is at break neck speed right now and we want... we don't want our teachers to feel overwhelmed. So it's an opportunity for us to introduce these things to them in a way that provides them with "Oh I might be able to use that in my classroom." Rather than them going out, doing the research, trying to stay on top of these things. So this little workshop will give them an opportunity to look at "Oh, that's AR. Oh that's XR. Oh that's VR." I have a much better understanding, I want to give them the idea of what it's like to be in that experience, whether it be immersive or just watching it on a video.

Dawn Marie: And then from that position, it'll give them some idea around perhaps how they might be able to use that technology within their classroom, with their students, in a way that's a deeper learning experience for the student.

Nathan Whitlock: Is there a sense that these students are... many of them are there already anyway and these teachers need to be up to date and current with that technology because the students are using it and they want to use it?

Dawn Marie: That's right. I know a lot of people don't want to have the phone in the classroom but the reality is, we all know it: it's in the classroom. Or the people looking at Facebook. But there's are ways we can use the technology to the advantage, where the teacher engages the student, they're bringing these devices to the classroom anyway. They would be more interested in engaging with the teacher's content if it were presented in a way that they could use their devices. So it's introducing a different way of using the devices rather than them being off on Facebook or whatever.

Nathan Whitlock: Right. Meeting them where they are, in other words. Engaging them where they actually are going to be.

Dawn Marie: That's right. And we can help out in that process with another piece of technology is 360 video. So all those things are very easily... not all of them, but we can work with the teacher in order to make it happen where we can get that content pulled together and presented in a way that's beneficial to them and the student.

Nathan Whitlock: You do a number of workshops throughout the year on this kind of stuff. Do you find in your interactions with faculty that there is a yearning to learn about this stuff? Or is there a fear of it? What's the most... I'm sure there's a little bit of both sometimes but do you find it stronger that people really want to know what it is or are they just too shy, they're too afraid, they're too intimidated?

Dawn Marie: So the folks that come to us, there's an openness, a willingness to want to understand this technology. There's also obviously a level of uncomfortable-ness with it. So we try and just present it in a way that's comfortable and they don't need to know all the details. It's just about that just in time learning, do the basics that you need to know, and let us work with you to find the easiest route and the most efficient route for the teacher to work with that technology.

Dawn Marie: And then from there, it's more about them brainstorming and starting to generate different ideas. Leave the workshop. That's going to continue to happen as now they have a deeper sense and a great understanding of the technology. It's like "Hmm, maybe this will work."

Nathan Whitlock: In doing these kinds of workshops and talking to people about these various technologies, have you had instances where people have come in with zero knowledge? They want to know about it but they have no understanding of it. They want you to tell them what this actually is. And they've gone away and they've actually started using it and they've become even adept at it. They've gone further with it and they've actually started using it in the class.

Dawn Marie: What I've actually found is that teachers actually may feel and think that they're really illiterate with technology but not really. They're actually pretty good. And I think it's just simply around building confidence and once folks gain that confidence in working with the technology, whether it's really Power Point or a video camera or even their own iPhone, just taking photos or video and that type of thing, that they walk away realizing... I see empowerment happening. So absolutely folks have

stepped away from those workshops and said "This is something I can see myself doing." And that's a win. That's a win for everybody.

Nathan Whitlock: For sure. And I'm sure it'll happen again at Showcase at your workshop.

Dawn Marie: Yes.

Nathan Whitlock: Good luck with it.

Dawn Marie: Thank you very much. Thank you for having me.

Nathan Whitlock: Thanks for doing this.

Dawn Marie: Great.

Nathan Whitlock: NEXtcast is produced by Humber Press and the creative productions team at The Centre for Teaching and Learning at Humber college. A special thanks to Puneet Wagh, Santino Pannozzo, Allison LaSorda, Darren Richards, and Eileen DeCourcy. To suggest stories for future episodes of NEXtcast or to let us know what you think, email HumberPress, all one word, at humber.ca. That's humberpress@humber.ca.

Nathan Whitlock: To learn more about the workshops, teaching certificates, and other support offered through The Centre for Teaching and Learning, and to read issues of NEXt magazine, go to Humber.ca/centreforteachingandlearning. Thanks for listening, see you next time. That's not a pun.

Nathan Whitlock: Especially Santino Pannozzo who always tries.... I screwed up your thank you.

Nathan Whitlock: Alright, especially Santino... see I'm just going to put these at the end. The blooper reel.