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00:00:07,660 --> 00:00:16,570

Hi, everyone, and welcome to the staff lounge, a place to unwind, reflect and connect with the faculty at Hunter College in Toronto, Canada.

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00:00:16,570 --> 00:00:22,930

In each episode, we'll be having casual chats, interviews and tips from our teaching and learning support team.

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00:00:22,930 --> 00:00:31,100

I'm your host, Shirantha Beddage. I'm a saxophonist, composer and faculty in The Bachelor of Music Program.

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00:00:31,100 --> 00:00:34,970

Today's episode is a special edition of the staff lounge.

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00:00:34,970 --> 00:00:42,590

Our regular host, Shirantha Beddage, is taking a very well-deserved summer break, so I'm stepping in for the day.

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00:00:42,590 --> 00:00:48,800

I'm Fiona to the price. Digital media specialist in teaching and learning creative productions.

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00:00:48,800 --> 00:00:54,350

And generally, I'm busy behind the scenes as producer and editor of the staff lounge.

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00:00:54,350 --> 00:01:00,230

But lucky me, today I get to chat with the amazing Anthony McClain.

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00:01:00,230 --> 00:01:10,520

Anthony is the keynote speaker for Hummer's Faculty Orientation Adventure Days, which takes place August 26 and 27th.

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00:01:10,520 --> 00:01:18,560

Anthony McLean deliver his keynote in celebration of teachers on Friday, August the 27th at 9:00 AM.

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00:01:18,560 --> 00:01:26,900

Don't miss it. It really will be a treat. You'll remember Anthony as the actor who hosted the CBC television show The X,

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00:01:26,900 --> 00:01:33,950
and he's also featured in the documentary films Calame, Soul and Rising Above.

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00:01:33,950 --> 00:01:39,460
I reached Anthony in California, where he lives with his wife and kids.

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00:01:39,460 --> 00:01:48,040
Welcome to the staff lounge, Anthony, it's great to have you here. Before we dove in, can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

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00:01:48,040 --> 00:01:50,890
Yeah, for sure. So I'm Anthony McClain.

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00:01:50,890 --> 00:02:01,840
Born and raised in Ontario, I was an actor for years and I hosted a CBC kids show called The X from, like, 2001 to 2005.

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00:02:01,840 --> 00:02:07,720
And with that show, we got to travel across the country and go into schools and talk to students.

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00:02:07,720 --> 00:02:16,450
And I remember traveling to one school and doing this school presentation, and all the kids come to the gymnasium and we're giving away free stuff.

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00:02:16,450 --> 00:02:19,780
And I do some rapping for the kids and it was really fun.

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00:02:19,780 --> 00:02:28,300
And I remember being in that school environment and, you know, as an actor, as an artist, school was never really my thing.

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00:02:28,300 --> 00:02:34,210
But when I went back as a performer, being in that school environment, something just happened.

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00:02:34,210 --> 00:02:38,170
And I remember saying to my co-host of the show, Sally,

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00:02:38,170 --> 00:02:46,660

I remember saying to her if I could do this for a living like going to schools and speak, I would like this even more than acting.

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00:02:46,660 --> 00:02:50,590

And I said it, not knowing that that would become my path.

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00:02:50,590 --> 00:02:57,760

And for the last 15 years, I've been a speaker and I've been speaking in schools and now corporate clients as well.

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00:02:57,760 --> 00:03:02,320

But I love speaking to audiences and I love just speaking in schools.

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00:03:02,320 --> 00:03:07,510

I think it's just so inspiring. So what is it that inspires you?

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00:03:07,510 --> 00:03:20,020

Why is it thrilling for you? I think the act of teaching another human being, whether you're a parent teaching your kid how to tie shoelaces,

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00:03:20,020 --> 00:03:28,120

which is the hardest thing in the world, I've done that and it's so difficult.

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00:03:28,120 --> 00:03:35,350

But or if you're, you know, a teacher in front of a class with 50 students and you're trying to teach economics,

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00:03:35,350 --> 00:03:39,880

there's just something about the act of one human instructing another human.

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00:03:39,880 --> 00:03:43,690

And then when that one human has to instruct 50 humans, I just think, I don't know,

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00:03:43,690 --> 00:03:54,130

there's something about that dynamic that I think is so sacred and whether or not you are able to teach the other human.

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00:03:54,130 --> 00:04:00,460

I still think it is sacred work to even attempt to instruct another human being.

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00:04:00,460 --> 00:04:09,890

There's something about it that I think is just so special. Yeah, no, I absolutely agree, and you see it in action so, so often.

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00:04:09,890 --> 00:04:21,800

So for you, what's the importance of that relationship between the student and the teacher that that's so important for for learning?

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00:04:21,800 --> 00:04:28,670

Yeah. So this is where if I don't feel safe, I can't learn.

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00:04:28,670 --> 00:04:39,860

So I've got I've got two kids myself, right? And I remember my daughter was having trouble in math and she said to me, I just, I don't get it.

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00:04:39,860 --> 00:04:45,530

I just don't get how to do this. And I kept saying to her, Did you ask the teacher, Did you ask the teacher?

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00:04:45,530 --> 00:04:49,070

And she said, I don't want to ask. It's embarrassing. It's embarrassing.

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00:04:49,070 --> 00:04:59,010

And it turns out that my daughter felt like the teacher she had at the time who will be left on named.

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00:04:59,010 --> 00:05:02,230

She felt like that teacher.

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00:05:02,230 --> 00:05:08,470

Was making her and other students who didn't get the material was making them feel like there was something wrong with them.

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00:05:08,470 --> 00:05:19,660

Like, why don't you get it? And that feeling of I might be judged if I ask a question, I might be looked down on.

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00:05:19,660 --> 00:05:28,540

She no longer felt safe, and therefore she couldn't ask a question. And psychological safety is so key,

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00:05:28,540 --> 00:05:38,900

and it is the duty of the teacher to do everything she can to make sure that every student feels safe in the classroom.

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00:05:38,900 --> 00:05:49,210

And for me, as as a as a black kid in Ontario who is often the only black kid in my class.

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00:05:49,210 --> 00:05:57,210

There were times where. My psychological safety.

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00:05:57,210 --> 00:06:07,340

Well, I didn't feel safe in a classroom, and I didn't feel like my my culture was valuable.

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00:06:07,340 --> 00:06:15,110

I didn't feel like the contributions of people from my race were worth anything because it was reinforced,

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00:06:15,110 --> 00:06:22,520

you know, through the books that we were given. I mean, I never read a black author the whole time I was in in school.

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00:06:22,520 --> 00:06:25,850

I never read an indigenous author, an Asian author.

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00:06:25,850 --> 00:06:32,690

Every book that was given to me, I believe, I mean, I can look back and maybe I'll have to check that.

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00:06:32,690 --> 00:06:37,520

But I don't. I think every single book I was ever given was by a white person.

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00:06:37,520 --> 00:06:41,900

And what they did is just kind of reinforce the notion that this is what's a value.

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00:06:41,900 --> 00:06:46,840

This is intelligence. This is knowledge. This is what's important.

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00:06:46,840 --> 00:06:54,880

And any contributions on our side of that just weren't viewed as important, and that made me feel like I didn't belong.

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00:06:54,880 --> 00:07:04,590

And so one of my passions is to. Encourage teachers to bring in their own humanity, their own interests,

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00:07:04,590 --> 00:07:12,630

and to create an inclusive classroom where everyone feels like they belong and everyone feels a sense of psychological safety.

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00:07:12,630 --> 00:07:20,040

So now I'm getting into sort of what I'm going to be speaking about when we have our time together, but that's a really important thing for me.

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00:07:20,040 --> 00:07:25,350

Does that does that make sense? Yeah, no, absolutely. No, absolutely. I totally hear you.

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00:07:25,350 --> 00:07:31,200

And I think the whole topic of implicit bias comes into play here.

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00:07:31,200 --> 00:07:39,660

Are you comfortable telling us that you know what your thoughts are about that and how that impacts that whole student teacher relationship?

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00:07:39,660 --> 00:07:48,360

Yeah, for sure. I think implicit bias does have a big impact, but I think if we're really going to get to the nitty gritty,

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00:07:48,360 --> 00:07:56,720

I think we have to look at white supremacy, which is it's funny that term white supremacy that made me like bristle for four years.

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00:07:56,720 --> 00:08:01,380

I would. I would. I just didn't. I thought it was too much.

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00:08:01,380 --> 00:08:11,240

I thought it sounded way too extreme. But now I understand this idea of white supremacy is this idea that that which is beautiful is white,

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00:08:11,240 --> 00:08:20,150

that which is intelligent is white, that which is, you know, worthy of praise is white and growing up in a mixed race family,

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00:08:20,150 --> 00:08:26,870

I remember because I'm more fair skinned as a black person than some of my friends who are darker.

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00:08:26,870 --> 00:08:34,830

And I remember growing up and having people tell me that I was good looking because I was light skinned.

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00:08:34,830 --> 00:08:41,880

And that comes from this white supremacy, if you picture, you know, a triangle on the top of the triangle white or a mountain,

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00:08:41,880 --> 00:08:47,250

you know, if you think about it, you know, a snow capped mountain at the top, it's white in the bottom.

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00:08:47,250 --> 00:08:50,310

There's, you know, browns and greens and everything.

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00:08:50,310 --> 00:08:59,460

And this idea that white is beautiful and that the closer you are to the top, the more beautiful you are.

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00:08:59,460 --> 00:09:08,100

That's white supremacy, and it's so painful and it causes so much hurt and within the black community.

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00:09:08,100 --> 00:09:18,090

There's colourism and shadeism comes from that notion of the closer you are to white, the more beautiful you are, the more intelligent you are.

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00:09:18,090 --> 00:09:27,450

And my family's from Jamaica and four years in Jamaica to have a job in a place like a bank,

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00:09:27,450 --> 00:09:36,100

they would only want to hire people who are light skinned. The closer you were to white, the more esteemed you were in society.

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00:09:36,100 --> 00:09:44,340

And. I mean, that's happened around the world with colonialism, and so I think that's what we have to unpack.

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00:09:44,340 --> 00:09:49,980

And then we've got to look at what are we? You know, the books that we're teaching, what are we upholding and saying?

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This is what is excellent. And I think that's where we need to do some of this deconstruction.

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00:09:55,840 --> 00:10:00,190

That's really impactful. I'm looking forward to hearing more about that.

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00:10:00,190 --> 00:10:09,820

When you speak at Tumba, I mean, it's the impact on children must be enormous and also at college level as well.

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Oh, absolutely. I remember like so growing up, so again, I'm an actor, right?

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00:10:15,280 --> 00:10:23,680

And so I remember I had a drama teacher who she changed my life, Tessa, and she was in my life from the time I was 12.

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00:10:23,680 --> 00:10:30,460

At the time I was 19, and she believed in me. I was a bit of a class clown and always, you know, talking to the students and everything like that.

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00:10:30,460 --> 00:10:37,390

But she overlooked my kind of troublemaking abilities, and she always called out the good that was in me.

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00:10:37,390 --> 00:10:44,470

And every time I got up to do a poem or a monologue, she was always so encouraging and she showed me like,

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00:10:44,470 --> 00:10:51,400

literally how to stand with my feet, shoulder width apart and how to use my hands and when to move on stage and when to be still.

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00:10:51,400 --> 00:10:59,620

So the audience kind of comes in for a close up. And then when you move, the audience kind of goes to a wide shot and she taught me all these skills.

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00:10:59,620 --> 00:11:04,450

And for years again, I started when I was 12 with her and I studied with her 2019.

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00:11:04,450 --> 00:11:07,870

For years, she said, Anthony, I've got to get you to do Shakespeare.

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00:11:07,870 --> 00:11:12,640

And I was like, Oh, I don't want to do Shakespeare of vows and I don't want to do the Shakespeare.

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00:11:12,640 --> 00:11:16,840

And every year she would beg me, she said, Please just do Shakespeare. And I was like, I don't want to do it.

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00:11:16,840 --> 00:11:23,620

I don't want to do it. I don't like the language. And finally, my final year with her, she said, Anthony only have one more year.

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00:11:23,620 --> 00:11:29,170

Please just do one monologue from Shakespeare.

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00:11:29,170 --> 00:11:32,740

And I said, Tessa, I hate Shakespeare, but I love you.

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00:11:32,740 --> 00:11:42,560

So I'll do it. I'll do Shakespeare. And so she got me to do the villain Giacomo in the play Cymbeline and.

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00:11:42,560 --> 00:11:50,960

The first time I looked at this piece, I it was like 16 lines, iambic pentameter, I didn't know what that meant.

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00:11:50,960 --> 00:11:58,250

And as she started explaining to me what each line meant and the importance of iambic pentameter,

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00:11:58,250 --> 00:12:02,360

you know, 10 syllables per line in the second syllable is stressed.

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00:12:02,360 --> 00:12:12,440

The first syllable is unstressed. And when she starts explaining the genius of Shakespeare's writing, I got it and I fell in love,

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00:12:12,440 --> 00:12:18,420

but what prepared me for Shakespeare and to appreciate that language?

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00:12:18,420 --> 00:12:23,560

Was rap music. It was listening to Nas.

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00:12:23,560 --> 00:12:29,620

And Nas, he was like my favorite rapper in the 90s.

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00:12:29,620 --> 00:12:32,950

And he had this one song called I Gave You Power.

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00:12:32,950 --> 00:12:41,390

And listeners, if you don't mind a little language in your music, listen to this song I gave you power is like release in 96.

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00:12:41,390 --> 00:12:45,940

Lot of language of the kids around, you know, maybe have some headphones, but I gave you power.

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00:12:45,940 --> 00:12:53,740

In that song, Nas tells a story from the eyes of a gun, and he tells an entire story from the eyes of a gun.

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00:12:53,740 --> 00:13:01,810

And it is enthralling and is brilliant, and what he does with language is just mind blowing.

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00:13:01,810 --> 00:13:10,990

And for me, that's what made me fall in love with. Just like the spoken word and poetry and Shakespeare, it's all the same.

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00:13:10,990 --> 00:13:17,710

And yet I feel like my culture when it comes to things like hip hop was just spat upon and looked at like a joke.

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00:13:17,710 --> 00:13:25,990

And even like, you know, black slang, what people would like, joke about it like we're we're silly or it's just funny to say,

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00:13:25,990 --> 00:13:30,620

yo, or, you know, rap music as a joke, and it's like, Nah, this is art.

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00:13:30,620 --> 00:13:39,040

This is beautiful. This is power. And I love it because now I feel like it's being celebrated in a way that never was before.

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00:13:39,040 --> 00:13:45,280

So I love that. And so I encourage teachers bring culture into the classroom,

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00:13:45,280 --> 00:13:50,230

whether that's rap music or that's an indigenous artist that you find or that's an Asian

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00:13:50,230 --> 00:13:55,300

artist that you find and you could hold up for the class to say this is worthy of praise.

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00:13:55,300 --> 00:14:00,430

This is beautiful. Let's diversify not only our classrooms, but our bookshelves.

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00:14:00,430 --> 00:14:09,250

Let's really diversify the art that we consume, the toys we give our kids, and let's celebrate the beautiful culture that's all around us.

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00:14:09,250 --> 00:14:10,960

Yeah, how wonderful is that?

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00:14:10,960 --> 00:14:20,980

And I feel like there's so many, you know, educators, teachers out there who are definitely diversifying their in their teaching materials,

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00:14:20,980 --> 00:14:27,910

and I look at the educators and the faculty at Humber and they've been through a year.

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00:14:27,910 --> 00:14:32,770

You know, this pandemic has really impacted everybody.

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00:14:32,770 --> 00:14:40,390

And I'm wondering if you have a message for the educators themselves, you know, for the for the faculty.

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00:14:40,390 --> 00:14:45,130

Yeah, this is this has been a year, this has been a year.

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00:14:45,130 --> 00:14:53,950

And um, there is something about collective suffering that I don't know.

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00:14:53,950 --> 00:15:00,100

I think we will look back on this time and and in many ways, I think you can bond us.

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00:15:00,100 --> 00:15:04,720

I think we can look back at this time five, 10, 15, 20 years from now.

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00:15:04,720 --> 00:15:14,530

And it's the first time in my lifetime. I'm 42, but it's the first time in my lifetime that the world has gone through suffering together.

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00:15:14,530 --> 00:15:19,450

You know, often you hear about forest fires in Australia, and that's that's awful.

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00:15:19,450 --> 00:15:23,590

But it doesn't impact me the same way when I'm living in California.

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00:15:23,590 --> 00:15:30,760

And then you hear about some horrible event that happens in another place in the world and it's awful and your empathy goes out,

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00:15:30,760 --> 00:15:40,750

but it doesn't affect your daily life. This is the first time in my lifetime that we've gone through something that affects everyone.

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00:15:40,750 --> 00:15:49,380

And what I'm hoping is that it will make us have more empathy for each other and for our individual suffering.

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00:15:49,380 --> 00:15:57,440

I love that that quote, I don't know who said it. Maybe, maybe, you know, but Fiona, but I don't know who said it, but someone said.

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00:15:57,440 --> 00:16:05,030

They said. Be kind for everyone you meet is fighting a battle, you know, nothing about.

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00:16:05,030 --> 00:16:12,470

So be kind. And I just I hope the world will take that to heart in a way that we haven't.

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00:16:12,470 --> 00:16:17,390

I hope that when we come out of this will remember that everyone is going through something.

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00:16:17,390 --> 00:16:21,590

So let's be kind to each other. Let's be good to each other. Let's have some empathy.

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00:16:21,590 --> 00:16:26,580

And also, and this is so important for me.

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00:16:26,580 --> 00:16:30,740

Be gentle with yourself. Like, during this time,

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00:16:30,740 --> 00:16:37,010

if you're not able to keep up with your workout routine and drinking the amount of water you're supposed

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00:16:37,010 --> 00:16:42,500

to drink and then keeping up with your guitar lessons because that was one of your goals and you know,

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00:16:42,500 --> 00:16:50,090

learning Spanish on Duolingo and doing your chess training that you've been meaning to do ever since you watched The Queen's Gambit.

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00:16:50,090 --> 00:16:56,750

Like, if you're not able to keep up with everything. Be gentle with yourself.

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00:16:56,750 --> 00:17:01,310

This is a really hard time. So be gentle.

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00:17:01,310 --> 00:17:12,340

Be soft with yourself and with others. Yeah, no, it's it's it's a great thing to remember just to to be gentle with yourself and you know,

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00:17:12,340 --> 00:17:17,200

you don't have to have a good pandemic where you learn a second or third language,

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00:17:17,200 --> 00:17:25,420

you know, some of us just, you know, just have to take it easy, take a gentle and just get on with it.

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00:17:25,420 --> 00:17:30,970

That's exactly it. So give yourself permission. If you're having a hard time, it's OK.

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00:17:30,970 --> 00:17:38,770

It's OK. Be gentle with yourself. I know we've only got you for a short time for this podcast.

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00:17:38,770 --> 00:17:46,900

I'm curious if you have one key lesson as we lead up into your keynote.

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00:17:46,900 --> 00:17:52,810

Yeah, so if there's one, one key lesson to remember is that, you know, when you're when you're a teacher,

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00:17:52,810 --> 00:17:59,290

you might have a hundred and fifty students that you're responsible for in any given time.

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00:17:59,290 --> 00:18:07,030

And so you've got one hundred and fifty students, but those students, when they're looking at you, it's just you.

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00:18:07,030 --> 00:18:08,920

They just have you.

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00:18:08,920 --> 00:18:19,450

And so when you make eye contact with the student or you smile at a student, or maybe there's a time where you get to learn a student's name and you,

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00:18:19,450 --> 00:18:27,750

you learn how to pronounce their name and you show them that it's important to you, that you learn how to pronounce their name correctly.

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00:18:27,750 --> 00:18:37,970

When you take time to appreciate a student's perspective. Or to encourage them to share and and you support them in that way.

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00:18:37,970 --> 00:18:50,360

And you echo their voice, you echo what they're saying or you give space in the room for that student to speak and you hold that space for them.

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00:18:50,360 --> 00:18:56,300

For you, that might just be, you know, a Tuesday at 10:30 am or whatever.

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00:18:56,300 --> 00:19:01,250

But for them, that can be life changing.

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00:19:01,250 --> 00:19:09,020

And I don't say that lightly, I say it because I've had teachers that literally changed my life and they didn't know that they changed my life.

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00:19:09,020 --> 00:19:17,000

And I'll share that more in our time together, but just know that every act of kindness,

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00:19:17,000 --> 00:19:26,040

every act of connection that you make with a student, those those ripple effects cannot be.

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00:19:26,040 --> 00:19:30,780

Overstated, like it is huge. So be patient.

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00:19:30,780 --> 00:19:39,260

Lean in and just look for those those opportunities of connection because that is where the gold happens.

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00:19:39,260 --> 00:19:41,120

Thank you very much for that.

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00:19:41,120 --> 00:19:49,160

And I think, yeah, we all just have to pause and remember that there's a lot of eyes on you when you're at the front of that classroom.

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00:19:49,160 --> 00:19:57,950

Mm. Very much so. Thank you very much for joining us, and I really look forward to hearing your keynote.

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00:19:57,950 --> 00:20:02,360

Can't wait for that. Thank you. Hey, thank you. I'm really looking forward to it as well.

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00:20:02,360 --> 00:20:09,160

And listeners, thank you for taking the time. Look forward to hanging out more.

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00:20:09,160 --> 00:20:13,990

It was a real pleasure to have a sneak preview from Anthony to hear more.

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00:20:13,990 --> 00:20:22,000

Register for his keynote address during teaching and Learning Adventure Days on August 27th at nine a.m. You'll

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00:20:22,000 --> 00:20:29,470

find a link to register for the event in the show description or visit Humpers Teaching a learning website.

177

00:20:29,470 --> 00:20:34,540

Shirantha Beddage will be back to host season two of the staff lounge in September.

178

00:20:34,540 --> 00:20:41,090

I'm looking forward to it. The staff lounge is brought to you by Humber teaching and learning.

179

00:20:41,090 --> 00:20:48,230

Our producer is Fiona Tudor Price. Our theme song is composed and performed by me, Shirantha Beddage.

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00:20:48,230 --> 00:20:53,540

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181

00:20:53,540 --> 00:21:01,725

Thanks again for listening, and we'll see you next time. On the staff lounge.