Hello and welcome to the Not So Distant Learning Podcast, which is a pod cast by the folks at Trent Online. And it is shared out on the Trent trentonlineblog.ca and voicEd Radio. My name is Terry Greene and my co-host is Maureen Glynn. Maureen is senior e-learning designer. at Trent Online and I am just a normal, regular e-learning designer. And we're happy to, to get to chat today with Amanda Paxton. And we're going to chat about a course, we all three built together. Welcome everyone. Thank you. So we planned to have Maureen, kickoff the questioning, but Maureen, Do you want to tell us a bit about yourself first? Sure. I'm going to start by saying, I don't think you're a regular e-learning designer, Terry, I think you're a super lucky to have you as a colleague. I really it's fun being on the same team with you and all the Trent online gang who we should hear from as we go through the podcast episodes. Yeah, so I worked as senior e-learning designer with Trent online. I say we begin at the beginning and Amanda, we're so glad you're here. And could you maybe just start by telling us a bit about yourself? Yeah. Thank you. I'm glad to be here. My name is Amanda and I've been teaching English at the Durham campus in Oshawa since 2014. And that's when I designed the course Write in time, which we worked on developing this summer into a web version. It's a first year writing course that is now offered regularly at both the Durham and the Peterborough campus. And my field of specialty when I'm not teaching writing is 19th century literature. And I also teach courses in things like Gothic literature and queer lit. And can you tell us maybe if you had any experience or what experience you had teaching, learning, or developing in an online environment before you had to deal with us at Trent online? That's an easy one because the answer is none whatsoever. I had not taken an online course. So I like to think that that made it really good for you because I was a blank slate and no preconceptions at all. So with that as your sort of your background heading, heading into working with us, Can you, can you tell us a bit about the course and how WRIT 1001 ended up in the lineup to be developed as a fully online course with the Trent online team this past summer? Yeah, the idea. Initially, it was really the same idea behind a lot of these first year writing courses, which is to equip students with the tools that they need to succeed in university. And really to help mitigate attrition rates, particularly in the first year of studies. So with COVID coming in and shutting down in-person teaching, everything moves online. And from what I've heard, attrition rates are even higher with online learning. So there was really a lot of pressure to figure out ways to students equipped for university experience and also to give them a good first year university introduction. And so that was what spurred the Department to invite me to work with you guys to develop a fully functional online course as opposed to a remote version. The idea was that if we can put enough resources towards this really crucial course, that we help students enormously overall, particularly during the circumstances of the pandemic. Actually yesterday, I was I got a request to help someone set up just in Blackboard there how to an assignment drop box. And I was reading the instructions and I was thinking, well, I sure hope the students are also enrolled in WRIT 1001 . So yeah, I think it's just such an awesome course, so beneficial. So we set this up at the beginning of the summer as a cohort of a number of courses to work together, kinda benefit from each other, hopefully. So our question is to you, what benefits, if any, have you derived from participating in that, in that cohort. Yeah well... a lot. I've definitely learned a hell of a lot about online teaching. And that's really been coupled with the work that Trent's center learning did as well over the summer. They did a great job pulling together a lot of resources to guide people through that shift, to run the delivery. I think part of the benefit of working with Trent online was that sense of community and having the ability to take risks and experiment and then have guidance from people who actually know what they're doing. And that was that had made a big difference. That was a lot different from just sort of taking stuff that I'd learned and then hollering into the void on my own and hoping that something actually worked out. And I've also just, it's given me an opportunity to reflect on my teaching practices. And I know that I've become a better teacher through the process. And sort of to me, I think of what I've learned through

working with Trent online as a kind of pedagogical version of constraint-based poetry. So when I teach stuff like, like a sonnet, say in a literature class, people will raise. Reasonable question. Why, why would anyone write this? Why would anyone decide, oh, I'm going to use this very constraint-based forum. I'm only going to use 14 lines in this particular meter and I have to have a Volta. And the answer is, things emerge, insights, emerge, types of beauty emerge from the constraints that you wouldn't have had in any other capacity. They just wouldn't have arrived otherwise. And I think online teaching is something like that. There are a lot of constraints. And those constraints actually lead to insights and beauties that wouldn't have been there otherwise. So you're saying online learning is poetic? I am saying you are poetic, Maureen as well. Very cool. Yeah, I gotta say my heart is full. That is one of the greatest ways I've, I've heard online. Yeah, it was beautiful the way you just described online teaching and your perspective on it. So in terms of what happened this past summer as you were working through all of this, can you describe a little bit about the process that you went through together with us to develop the course. Yeah, yeah. It was really nice, highly structured, clear process. We had weekly meetings and in each of those meetings, we'd go over an assignment that I had submitted a few days previously according to deadlines that we had all agreed on. And each task was clearly laid out. So it might've been to make a broad outline for the course or in other weeks, that would be to make a smaller outline, say for one or two modules. So, you know, when I think of it, it was kinda like a boot camp with a two-to-one instructor to student ratio, which is, and it is as good as anyone could dream of. And in the process, I learned about the tools available for different online teaching tasks and the limitations of the LMS and how to work around those. And then the best practices for online teaching more broadly, if you want to talk about very constraint-based poetry builded in Blackboard a little bit. And we'll experience that maybe, well, this was really helpful to working with you guys. I learned that those frustrations, were not me. Well, they weren't always me and my ineptitude. None of them came from this particular learning management system and their various quirks. Yes. Maureen, we literally never talked about it this way, but we kind of made and delivered an online course in which the project is to build an online course. I think we did a variation on it. I think, yeah, it's all part of passing along ideas and skills and knowledge and building capacity and yeah, community. Yeah, and community. That's right. So Amanda, what were some of the bigger challenges you encountered when designing the course? Or just as part of. Teaching it online as we're now a few weeks into the course. Where I think the biggest initial challenge was certainly figuring out how much is too much. And that was something that had been flagged in the Center for Teaching and Learning workshops as well. That in the online venue, there, there just isn't enough space and time to cover what one could cover in-person. So it was kinda initially at least it was sort of a triage and figuring out, okay, what, what do we, what do we keep in what's exp endable? And that's difficult to do because, you know, with a course like this one, there's so much urgency to equip students with a set of skills that sort of pains you to take any of those out. And yet, that was a necessary process. So that was a challenge. And then in administering it, I I guess this is probably banal to say, but for me it was one of those things that you anticipate intellectually, but you don't really learn until you experience it, which is, you can't just talk to people face to face. Realized how much you can convey in a classroom situation as opposed to being physically removed from all of the students. And so that is, that is definitely a frustration and a challenge, figuring out how to convey the same level and quality of guidance and instruction without being able. to use things like conversation, even fleeting, exchanges, body language, tone, all that stuff , sense like learning a new language. And just yeah, I'm thinking about how the strategic sort of distillation that you were talking about, taking what you've been doing in the past and finding the best way to bring it forward. So I'm wondering what piece of the course are you right now or maybe were you the most excited about as you're developing it. And yet when I think about what is coming down the pipeline with the course, I am really excited

about one element that we included in a module that we'll be starting next week, which is when students start working on their final paper for the course. I've designed it so that it incorporates and elements of a kind of critical self-consciousness about the course material itself. So students are asked to research and write a paper about the politics of grammar policing. And what we've done with online version is as a first step towards that, they're gonna go to the Facebook grammar police page and find a post and analyze it and comment on it. And I'm really looking forward to seeing how they interact with grammar policing in a social media setting. And having already been informed about the sort of larger questions of power and history that attend to enforcing the, quote unquote rules of grammar. And that's not, that's not an assignment that I've ever used before for the in-class offerings. But the online venue makes it really apropos and convenient. So I'm excited to see what happens there. Mee too . So before we hit record, we have a set series of questions here and we realize question eight. We can't really answer yet because too early in the course. So I'm going rogue now. And I'm going to ask you about something else. That previous question, what piece of the course? were you most excited about? As we built? I knew you weren't going to answer. Recording Yuja videos as the thing you're most excited about. But can you tell about? Because you are a little worried about recording them, but they turned out really great and I really enjoyed them. Tell me about the experience of making those videos. The experience of making those videos. I have likened it to a circle of **** that Dante neglected. Include. I, I can only say that I have an enormous new-found respect for YouTubers. I cannot imagine who make a living doing it. I can't imagine sitting and staring at one's own face for hours every day and not going crazy. If I could have outsourced. And honestly, yeah, that was another great thing about working with Trent online because terry, you are good enough to tell me, no they're fine. Good. Because that yeah, they just they represented a kind of slow torture. You kick things off by telling us, I just want to hear this, tell it, tell anyone listening the story of how your plants became involved in kicking things off. But yeah, so I have always historically till people that I'm not a plant person. And it's, it's been borne out because I've always a totally unintentionally killed every plant I've ever been asked to care for. And friends of mine will always say Inevitably, on their way out the door, you know, to catch a plane to their vacation destination, they'll say, don't worry, it's impossible to kill it. And then they come home to these dead plants. So I, yeah, I just figured I would resign myself to a plant free life. But then with the pandemic, I sort of started feeling well, maybe it would be nice to have some living beings. I don't have to socially distance from. And I started getting, getting some plants because I read I read somewhere that there's no such thing as a green Thumb. There's just people who have researched plant care and then apply what they've learned and then learn through trial and error. And it has been working for me so far. And now I'm I'm up to staggering 16 plants. And they are all doing okay. And I thought what a great analogy before writing because so many people say, well, you know, I just don't have a way with words like my sister or whoever. But you're not born having a way with words. No one is there. People who have thought about language, who read a lot of language and who have been trained to use language effectively . So that's sort of my, my encouragement to incoming students. No one is born, you know, as the karate kid, they they have to train. And that's a process and that's okay. You're just making me think I need to watch the Cobra Cai show. That's on now. I'm not sure if it's any good or not. I did not think we'd get to Karate Kid sorry Maureen for going rogue there. I'm ready to pass it back for questions. So other than the painful review that we all have when we're seeing ourselves on video and setting that aside can you, can you see in the course, anything that you might do to improve the course for its second offering, just as it's unfolding. Yeah, I think at this point, I am planning to embed even more of the key elements into the modules themselves. And this might get a little bit into the weeds. For listeners who aren't familiar with the details of the course. But, you know, the way that we've set it up. The assignment sheets are all avail available on the menu, the main menu of the Blackboard page. I'd like to make those available in the modules

themselves because some students still haven't been reading the assignment sheets, which of course does not bode well for their actual success on the assignments. And I'm also thinking about a way to make the calendar, the course calendar, with all of the deadlines embedded somehow as well because it's sort of its own menu link. At the moment. These are logistical things. Just to increase, I guess, to increase student awareness and decrease potential confusion. Overall, I think the trajectory of the course is seems to be looking good. People, people are staying, staying with the track and workshop leaders haven't reported any crucial devastating problems. So yeah, just just those, those logistical tweaks. Those are what I'm looking at now, 99% of my time working on this course was inserting the secret and key to hypothesis links. For various groups. How has hypothesis gone despite any little quirks of how it works, but the, the shared annotation, what's your sense on how that's been going? It's, I mean, I really, I liked the experience of reading the student's annotations, particularly for the first hypothesis assignment. I thought it worked really nicely for the syllabus, and I would definitely use that again. The hypothesis has been glitchy though. It was glitchy On the first, on the first day. And that cleared up but those glitches have returned because a number of the instructors are getting emails from students reporting the same experience, which is, they'll make a notation on hypothesis and then they won't be able to see it. And then usually the instructors will go in and they will be able to see it. So yeah, in terms of what the course of 250 people, those minor glitches here and there really add up quickly. So yeah. Yeah, I guess it's like any tool it has certainly has its advantages and also has its limitations. Yeah, I hope any glitches is just due to the fact that lots more people using hypothesis these days because it's just such a fabulous setup like we can all annotate and share the reading. I just wish so much that I had that I went through school so I could highlight something and ask my friends, what does this mean? I don't get it. I can get an answer right there. So anyway, I hope things are clear up. So our final, ultimate question in our list here. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience working with Trent online using the which we haven't mentioned yet, the, the online course designed for humans workbook that we kick, kick things on with or just general. In reference to your perspective on online teaching and learning. That's a big question. I think. I'll sort of big answer in my overarching impression of online teaching has really shifted from, I think from the paralysis, a fear that most of us started with in March. Something a lot different now, I had, you know, back back in the spring, I think all of us were frantically reading books on online teaching strategies. And something that I'd read. Mentioned this kind of chestnut, that online teaching is so full of limitations. And this writer urges us all to look for what we call the affordances. And that sounded pretty wishful to me when I read it initially. But In the process of working with Trent online developing this course, I have definitely seen that there are real meaningful affordances. And one of the things is just it's drawn my attention to the fleeting quality of in-person teaching. in person teaching is kinda like a, it's a performance. It's like, it's like a night at the theatre. It's there and then it's gone, it vanishes. And if you, if you don't manage to hear a certain exchange in the classroom, if you come in late, you've really lost out on something that's hard to recover. And online teaching is much more forgiving and that respect, you know, people can return to sections much as necessary. And that of course, is a crucial part of pedagogy. And I also, another of the affordances, particularly for this course, is I love having the ability to include online elements like articles or videos, or even memes in a way that I couldn't with in-class in-person teaching. So how else would I have included Snoop Dogg's reminder to everybody to read the syllabus. Well, if you haven't been able to use that link to that video. So yeah, those are my my summative thoughts. Speaking of that video, maybe if we could put, get together another 750 bucks, we can get them to say, oh, and also read the assignment sheets. Yes, please. So if I were a student in WRIT 1001 what would I be working on today? Maybe. Oh, you are going to be working on your outline because it's due tomorrow. So that's your outline for the first essay. And of course, Terry, you would have

read the assignment sheet and you'd be on top. Or you might be emailing the workshop leaders saying, hey, I'm so excited, I'm actually submitting this a day early and I'd be using hypothesis to about Arriana Huffington and Madeline Kim articles. That's right. Yeah. We are. Yeah. This is working out pretty well for time. I think that's so before we go, Maureen, can you tell us about the song just so that people know because you found it and it's a great, great pick for, for our podcast. Sure, yeah, I, I stumbled across the song and I thought, I think this will work because as Amanda mentioned , No, I've encountered in my work that, that sense of paralysis and, and apprehension among all sorts of, of people when they're faced with a shift to this new learning and teaching environment. And it can be OK and it will be okay. And I thought this song just captured that so beautifully. There's, there's one line that I love that it's this. Think it says something like clenched fists can't plant seeds. And I feel like, Oh my gosh, when I'm nervous and anxious because it's all about, you know, that those protective physical reactions we have. But if we can pause and, and, and be told that it is going to be okay then those seeds can, can kind of be put out to the wind and the learners can hopefully grow and benefit from all of that. And so that was a great fit where that came from. Yeah. Great pick. Thank you. And before we hear it, I just want to say thank you so much to my co-host Maureen and for joining us today, Amanda. And if anyone is listening, thank you for listening. Have a great rest of your day! The