

# A Journey Of Appreciation For Care-Based Pedagogy

Chrissy Michelle Deckers, *EdD*  
Humber Polytechnic

## Keywords

artifact, care, persistence, relationships, student success, teaching

## Article History

Received 30 Oct 2025

Received in revised form 5 March 2026

Accepted 12 March 2026

Available online 25 June 2026

 This article is published under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International License \(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

\*Recent graduates of Humber Polytechnic's **Teaching Excellence Program (TEP)** were invited to select and submit work from their time in the program to JIPE. This sample of reflective essays offers an engaging glimpse into faculty perspectives, their approaches to teaching and learning, and their experiences as Humber educators.

## Abstract

This reflective essay recounts my experience in Humber Polytechnic's Teaching Excellence Program and my transition within the post-secondary education system from student success services into my current full-time teaching role. Through an exploration of an artifact—a hand-drawn picture of a bumblebee—I reflect on what I learned during my time spent working in student success services and its significance to my current teaching practice. Through my time working in student success services, I gained an appreciation for the many challenges students may experience during their time spent in post-secondary education. My professional background has emphasized relational practice and holistic supports. My chosen artifact symbolizes convocation. Within the post-secondary system, we all have a role to play in supporting students to successfully complete their studies while maintaining their well-being. Through embracing pedagogy grounded in care, I can do my part as a professor to support students' persistence through to graduation.

## Introduction

As participants in Humber Polytechnic's Teaching Excellence Program (TEP), we were required to reflect on an artifact that symbolized our experience as new full-time faculty. As part of this reflection, we were guided to comment on what made us unique. This reflective essay is derived from my first semester artifact submission. The exercise on selecting and reflecting on an artifact helped me to think about my journey into this role.

## Context and Rationale

I am a child and youth care practitioner who has worked in various milieus, including mental health, live-in treatment, and educational settings. An early role I held in higher education was as a part-time professor teaching in child and youth care programs. My experience connecting with students outside of the classroom was particularly impactful on my future trajectory. These one-on-one connections with students cultivated an interest in the work of my colleagues in student success services, to whom I often referred these students to for additional

support. Within student success services, I went on to work as a learning strategist counsellor and student success advisor. In these roles, I spent much of my time working one-on-one with students. Space was created for students to share their stories, and I gained a deeper appreciation for the numerous and diverse barriers students contend with. Individualized supports and referrals were provided in recognition of students' holistic well-being. It was a privilege to have students choose to share their experiences with me. I supported many of these students throughout their academic journey, thus allowing me to build strong professional relationships with many of them. In my first semester of full-time teaching in Humber Polytechnic's Faculty of Social and Community Services, I reflected on the importance of remembering the stories shared with me and doing my best in my new role to continue to intentionally communicate care and take the time to build community within the classroom.

### Professional Learning Journey

My selected artifact was a picture of a bumblebee drawn for my 4-year-old child, which was kept on his bedside table (see [Figure 1](#)). One morning, I went into his bedroom to say goodbye before leaving for work. I let him know I would not be home until after he fell asleep, as I had to work late to attend an event. He asked about the event, in this case convocation, and what it was. I explained convocation as an event held to celebrate the students who have just finished school and all their efforts. I shared that they would be given a piece of paper to acknowledge their accomplishment. My child said, "Okay Mom," and quickly grabbed his beloved bumblebee picture and said, "Just don't give them my piece of paper." I laughed and thought to myself about what an illustrative example of literal thinking in childhood this exchange represented (Neff & Falkum, 2025).

That evening, I attended my first convocation at Humber Polytechnic as a full-time professor. It was lovely to see students' excitement, and though I did not know any of our programs' graduating students, I found myself looking forward to future ceremonies where I would know the graduates well. I have always loved convocation. Working in student success services, I worked with many students who were considering leaving their programs or were failing. Within Ontario's college system, the most recently available Key Performance Indicator (KPI) statistics indicate a province-wide graduation rate of 65% (Colleges Ontario, 2024). While I supported many students who ultimately left the college system, many others,

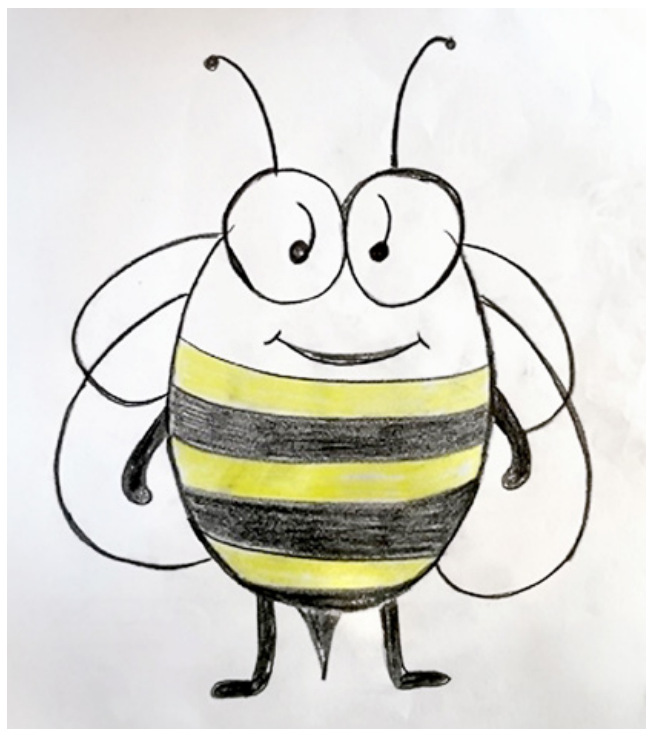


Figure 1. Image of a hand-drawn bumblebee.

through assistance and great determination, persisted to eventually graduate and attend their convocation ceremony. I will always be grateful for the opportunity to participate in convocation and celebrate students' grit.

On my drive home after convocation, I reflected on my time in student success services as well as the earlier exchange with my child. I thought to myself that the illustration of the bumblebee is my artifact. To me, this picture will always remind me of convocation, and that it is someone's child crossing the stage to receive their hard-earned credential. What is distinctive about me is my bridging from student success services into a full-time teaching position. I want to honour the stories of my former students while intentionally creating space to foster new relationships with the students in my classroom that are grounded in care.

### Reflections and Impact

My artifact reminds me of the importance of communicating care to students and building relationships to support student resilience. As a child and youth care practitioner, this is unsurprising given that the field is grounded in relational practice (Garfat et al. 2018). When I think about those professors who are most memorable to me, it is the ones who were authentic and who seemed to care about my success as a learner. Specifically, I recall a biopsychology professor I had

during my undergraduate studies. She was not what I would think of as a typical professor. She had chili pepper lights hanging in her office and was quick share a personal story that did not align with common stereotypes. I appreciated her authenticity so much that I continued to take her courses and minor in biology despite feeling out of my depth as a Bachelor of Arts student. Not only was she approachable, but she was very encouraging of me and took the time to express her belief in my abilities. It is this authenticity, care, and the willingness to take the time to build relationships that I hold in high regard as a professor. As I understand from my own experiences as a student, and from my time working in student success services, these values create optimal conditions for student well-being and, in turn, persistence.

Research is increasingly identifying the significance of care, as demonstrated by professors in higher education, in supporting students. Desmet et al. (2025) explored post-secondary students' perceptions of care and its impact on their academics and overall well-being. In relation to academic success, students reported perceiving professors' communication and feedback, academic support, and flexibility as supportive. Regarding overall well-being, the researchers found that professors taking the time to communicate care, check in, and demonstrate compassion were significant themes highlighted by participants. Similarly, Motta and Bennett (2018) outline key components of a pedagogy of care to include recognizing the whole student, focusing on relationships built on authenticity and mutual respect, and creating inclusive learning spaces.

## Conclusion

The opportunity to select and reflect on an artifact that explains who I am as an educator was a welcome opportunity to contemplate my journey working within the post-secondary education system. My time spent working in student success services has shaped who I am as a professor. In this role, I aim to continue to center the student experience and embrace a pedagogy of care to support students on their journey to convocation.

## Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest exist.

## Acknowledgement

Thank you to the many students and educators who have shaped my teaching practices. I am grateful for the students

who have trusted me with their stories. I am also incredibly appreciative of the educators who have inspired and supported me.

## Funding

This study did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

## Note on Contributor

**Chrissy Michelle Deckers, EdD**, Professor, Faculty of Social and Community Services, Humber Polytechnic, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, [chrissy.deckers@humber.ca](mailto:chrissy.deckers@humber.ca).

Chrissy Deckers is a full-time professor within Humber Polytechnic's Faculty of Social and Community Services. Her teaching practice is informed by her experience as a certified child and youth care practitioner and years spent as a student success practitioner.

## References

- Colleges Ontario. (2024, February). *Key Performance Indicators*. [https://cdn.agilitycms.com/colleges-ontario/documents-library/document-files/CO\\_KPI\\_2024\\_EN\\_20240228114931\\_0.pdf](https://cdn.agilitycms.com/colleges-ontario/documents-library/document-files/CO_KPI_2024_EN_20240228114931_0.pdf)
- Desmet, O. A., Davis-Walker, E., Parra, E., Wood Hopkins, M. M., Reynolds, R. L., Antonoff, M. S., & Bond, D. R. (2025). Exploring college students' perceptions of care-based pedagogy: A mixed-method study. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 25(3), 52-66. <https://doi.org/10.14434/josotl.v25i3.36921>
- Garfat, T., Freeman, J., Gharabaghi, K., & Fulcher, L. (2018). Characteristics of a relational child and youth care approach revisited. *CYC-Online*. 236. <https://cyc-net.org/pdf/Characteristics%20of%20a%20Relational%20CYC%20Approach%20Revisited.pdf>
- Motta, S.C. & Bennett, A. (2018). Pedagogies of care, care-full epistemological practice and 'other' caring subjectivities in enabling education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 23(5), 631-646. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2018.1465911>
- Neff, M.B. & Falkum, I. L. (2025). Decoupling literalist behavior from children's early metaphor comprehension abilities. *Language Development Research*, 5(2), 130-171. <https://doi.org/10.34842/ldr2025-819>