TEACHERS LEADING TEACHERS TO PREPARE FOR BACK TO SCHOOL DURING COVID

By Jillian Ma, Teacher and Graduate Student.

This summer, I joined four other teachers to plan a professional development training on virtual teaching for the faculty of our small private school. Our primary charges were to emphasize asynchronous teaching and learning and support teachers to reimagine their course designs to fit semester 90-minute blocks as opposed to last year's year-long 45-minute periods. In addition to our training, our faculty would also be learning to use a new and more complex learning management system as well as undergo training in trauma-informed, healing-centered pedagogy.

We wanted our faculty to walk away with usable created content and a framework for how to build out the rest of their classes. We realized we needed to overcome the barrier of unfamiliarity. How do you teach in a way that you have never experienced yourself? This was our opportunity to model the practices we were hoping to teach. It would be insufficient to use our time to simply lecture at the faculty, have them read articles, or give them totally unstructured time to work. Our teachers needed to see that it was possible to create a meaningful asynchronous learning experience delivered through the very tools we were being asked to use while exemplifying trauma-informed practices.

We designed a week-long asynchronous course to both teach and demonstrate the following guiding principles:

1. Rethinking time - Learning experiences should be largely asynchronous. Synchronous time should be used carefully to maximize its benefits as a limited resource. We structured our course to span a week, tasking teachers to asynchronously work on a design challenge and provide peer feedback each day. Our synchronous times were reserved for a kickoff orienting meeting and closing collaborative reflection meeting that modeled a synchronous 90-minute class.
2. Student choice and agency - Learning experiences should seek to empower students to make decisions and assess their own learning. A trauma-informed approach recognizes the need to have choice to counteract loss of control. Our course offered several design challenges to choose from each day.
3. Orientation and wayfinding - Courses must be organized in a way that allows students to navigate them on their own. Minimizing executive functioning demands is critical for students experiencing trauma. Our course utilized several organizational tools to make navigation clear including a predictable routine, consistent web page layout, and a pacing guide that laid out all tasks for the week, estimated task durations, and due dates and times. We used both an introductory video and our kickoff meeting to orient teachers to the course.
4. Clear purpose and outcomes - Learning experiences are grounded with clear purposes and objectives that are made obvious to the student. These principles were highlighted at the outset of the course, listed on the homepage, and referred back to within each day's work.
5. Reflection and feedback - Students and teachers engage in regular reflection and feedback. Feedback is varied in type and supported with explicit guidelines. Daily peer feedback was built into the fabric of the course. We provided both individual and collective feedback after faculty submitted each day's challenges to the public discussion board. Each challenge was also accompanied with reflection prompts, and public reflections were shared alongside each submission. Additionally, we concluded with a feedback form for us as instructors.
6. Relationships and community - Relationships drive meaningful learning and are core to a trauma-informed approach to teaching. We used virtual help chat threads, cohort chats, as well as rich and varied feedback to build a thriving learning community.

In our feedback, we learned that faculty had been starving for professional support of this kind. All our professional development, faculty meetings, and in-service days ought to model exactly the best practices being discussed, but this almost never happens. We sit through meetings spanning hours of lecture. Crucial information is scattered throughout multiple emails. The purpose of meetings is not always clear nor is it obvious what advantage particular synchronous meetings have over asynchronous communication. Providing feedback to leaders ought to be genuinely embedded into daily work. We teachers are not exempt from the benefits of the practices discussed in this piece. We too are experiencing varying degrees of trauma. Our planning group dubbed ourselves the "Fab 5" referring to the television show *Queer Eye*, and we found that the show's tagline was more than appropriate for the fundamental shifts we needed to make in our practices: "More than a makeover."

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