

Knowledge is Power - Equity considerations in the Age of COVID

Topic: Understanding Disruption: Conducting Empathy Interviews with our families

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Bagula: I want to welcome you to this session called Understanding Disruption. It's an empathy tool that was developed by my brilliant colleague and I, Jeff Warshaw, who is also on the call. And I hope also contributes. Thank you very much. We came together to talk to about how might we understand the families that we serve and how might we understand the different ways that people's lives are being disruptive. Jeff, I know I shared your story earlier, but do you want to talk about the empathies for this? The grocery store?

Warshaw: Yes, so a couple months back as all of the different hurdles we were all learning to navigate with the quarantine coming into place. I was in a grocery store and I witnessed a little bit of a meltdown by a customer who was very upset that the usual brand of chicken that this person preferred to buy was no longer available. There was a need to adjust to a different brand of chicken. I started to wonder about the different kinds of disruption that we and our families and students are experiences during this stay at home time and which ones generate different kinds of challenges and responses and trauma in the lives and the experiences of our communities. That was the sort of jumping off point for what's become kind of a fun project to explore and develop with Fabi.

Bagula: At the same time that Jeff was having this experience, I've been keeping track of San Diego COVID cases by zip code. I try to go on and look periodically to look where are the pockets that are being hit the most. Not just getting sick, but also economically. I know we've heard in the Latinx Panel, our northern cities, like Vista and San Marcos, there's a large unemployment rate. That has been having a different impact on the community that we're serving. In any case, I was looking at the zip codes and looking at where I live, there's very few cases. Where I grew up, it's triple the amount in San Diego County. I just kept thinking if I was still a principal I would really want to pay attention to the zip codes, just are hard it's being hit both economically and physically and mentally because the way I'm going to be proactive and intentionally prepare for supports is going to be slightly different. That was the thinking behind this tool. How might we, that was the question we kept asking, how might we understand the disruption that our families have experienced because of COVID? We did also play into the deck this piece around trauma. Trauma works very differently.

There's four different layers to trauma. If you've heard me speak before I do tend to say this, but I'm going to say it again until I think it finally sinks in, that there's personal trauma. There's like myself getting sick, myself losing my job. There's also vicarious trauma. I have two friends who were currently in the ICU. Actually, as of last week they were released. They are getting better, but it was still touch and go for a while because one of them is actually 80 years old. That was vicarious trauma as far as it is very close to home. There's collective trauma because as a community we're experiencing this. As a community we're social distancing, self-quarantining and we're experiencing different things because of it. Then of course, historical. Now, that's just talking about COVID. We can layer on top everything that's happening with our current civil rights movements. I live in La Mesa, so my son and I fell asleep two weekends ago to the sound of helicopters and sirens all night. That adds a layer of the different kind of collective and historical trauma as well. I know right now we are only talking about COVID, but I also think it's applicable to our civil rights movement and what's happening.

What we developed was this continuum of disruption, thinking about four different categories we live in. There's our physical health, our mental-emotional health, the quality of our life and the routines of convenience. Please know that there's a lot of discussion of which category expresses what and what is the definition of each. We are going to go a little bit deeper into each one of them. Because we keep calling this an empathy interview I want to make sure that we those perimeters. There's an assumption as us, as authors that you have some knowledge of an empathy interview. If you don't this is a very quick cheat sheet. There's a lot more information. An empathy interview is for you to be empathetic towards the user. The user is the families and the students that we serve. An empathy interview would be open ended questions, built in curiosity, really foundations of relationships, their sensitivity, especially with certain communities. I want to say this specially about cross race dialogue, I am a Latina and I was raised to learn that questions were rude. I've been in situations where my mom is being questioned, just normal questions and I've had to tell they are not being rude, you have to answer these questions. There's a lot of considerations for the cross race dialogue that you are going to be engaging in, but also empathy interviews are to show that you care and want to understand. They're very open ended so it's not really prying. We also recommend that it should be someone that's had a relationship with the families. A current teacher would be best. Of course the empathy interview is how you craft these questions to get the information to understand without being too pointed. Did I miss anything Jeff?

Here's the physical health. The way that we did each category is this is what we mean by physical health and here's some potential empathy interview questions and here's some practical support. Again, if I were in the audience right now my practical support would be different just based on the region or the school or the level of educational system that you're in. We do want to get into the nitty gritty of these. Physical health meaning actual Coronavirus diagnosis. Was there a family or friend or yourself sick? Did you recover? I hate saying this, but did you die? Was there a death in the family? That's going to impact. There's also this piece of postponement of health issues. I have several people I know who have put aside some treatments that they need to go and get because they can't expose themselves. Also hospitals are overloaded with the task they have to do, so they've also been postponing surgeries and things like that. An empathy interview question which would be very open ended. It would be how is your health? How is the health of your household? Were there any health concerns that were postponed or ignored because of COVID 9? Very general sort of question. You go with what they tell you. If you see that there's an entry point to ask more. I would just say tell me more about that. Still leaving it open ended, still leaving it up to them to see what they want to disclose. This one particularly is hitting me pretty close to home because I have a niece whose got teeth issues and the dentist office

isn't open yet. Her dentist office isn't open yet. I just kept thinking if I was her teacher, I would want to know this in order to get the supports necessary for her once she returns to school because this is a postponement of physical health. There's going to be little things like that that we want to make sure we know, just what our children are going to need when they return.

Mental and emotional health. We thought that first we needed to really talk about how that shows up for children. Asking a child just how are you doing or how are you feeling sometimes doesn't get us the data that we need because children's anxiety shows up differently. My son is having very different sleeping patterns and so I know that that's some of the anxiety and that's how it's showing up. I notice it in his eyes when he wakes up in the morning. Some of the things that you want to make sure is that when we ask about these questions we have to be thoughtful. We want to be authentic, but we also want to get in to is have you noticed any changes in the child's behavior? Are their sleeping patterns different? Are they getting along with their siblings? Little things like that that we know are how a child's anxiety shows up. What do we mean by mental and emotional health? We're talking about the impact of self-isolation, of social distancing, of fear and anxiety. We're very concerned of children whose parents were essential workers who could potentially be home alone while their parents go off to work. Were children providing home care? How many people were quarantining together? What's the quality of those relationships? Of course, then some of the open-ended empathy interview questions are things like: How are you feeling? How's your child? How did you feel during quarantine? Did your child act any differently? Did your child have different responsibilities while at home? Then of course, what are some of the supports that we have. Now I know one of my hard, hard lines when I was a principal was we need a full time counselor. I know I would always go into lean with her but even we had a special clinic where we referred children for therapy as well. That's what I'm thinking about. If you get some information here that you know you have further needs, then what are the supports that exist at your school site.

Quality of life. This one I will say that quality of life and routines of convenience tend to bleed with each other, but I have the ability to work from home, I am an essential worker, but I can work from home. I'm very comfortable here. Were parents essential works? Were they working from home or were they out exposing themselves? Were the children providing home care? The space, like how much outdoor space did they have? Can children still play outside? Was there inside space for learning? Was there virtual connectivity, like were they playing Minecraft together and can the person still socialize? Some of the questions are; Did you have everything that you needed? What could the school do that supported you? What responsibilities did children have at home during this quarantine? Of course, an open ended question could lead you to get deeper into things like food security, employment and space. Something could also kind of pivot into a proactive way could be what other needs do you have that we could help facilitate? Some of the practical supports that we were thinking about is what are the community partners? I'm really thinking about this one because I had close to 800 students and most of them lived in apartments. I know that green space, outdoor play is necessary, not just for your mental health but it's also quality of life. I would be trying to figure out, when they return, how might I get them outside regularly, more than usual, more than the weekly P.E. Even starting the day just to improve their quality of life and their mental health state when they come back to camps.

Lastly, we have this notice of routines of convenience. Part of my privilege of self-quarantining is that I can have my groceries delivered. I have all of the entertainment. I have books, I have Netflix and Hulu and you name it. I can do my laundry at home. I don't have to go to the laundry mat and

expose myself or I don't have to have dirty clothes on. I have recreation that I can do. There's errands: playing bills online versus going in to get cash and a money order. This one's really important to me because I grew up going to the liquor store to buy a money order to pay my bills. My mom still does that, much to my chagrin. She's still going off and doing that. That's very much a habit. There's a lot of our families that are doing that. Some of the empathy interview questions that we came up with were; What are some things that got a little harder to do? Were there any new habits that were developed? I'm going to really lean on to this community partners that you would need to activate or even how might you help coordinate some sort of book entertainment exchange in the community. I saw a really beautiful post from New York where this woman actually outside of her building wrote, "I've read all the books in my household and I'm really bored. Do you have any books?" Her neighbors just started leaving her books. Little things like that that we can do just to show care, to show that we are supportive of this would be really beautiful to have.

Then there's the now what. If we are encouraging you to get to know just how disruptive the community that you serve was and then really thinking about how might I start to prepare to be proactive to really integrate and reengage with the children, what are some of the trends and patterns that you notice? You're going to be noticing some of the way the whole community experienced COVID and so what would that mean for your whole organization? How might you be proactive instead of reactive once the kids come back? How do you communicate those trends and patterns across the school site so that we're all empathically aware? I think that that's a big one because sometimes we conduct these empathy interviews but we keep it with whoever is doing the empathy interviews that they've been delegated and we don't sit down as a staff to say these were the trends and patterns that we noticed of the community that we drive to serve everyday experienced COVID.

Then of course, there's the edges. There's families who are going to be in crisis that we are going to need to support. There's leverages, I mean we can leverage our resources across our school, across our district and the county to help them. We have a very long list of the DA actually specially for all of this help. Lastly, who and with whom do we need to communicate across the whole school site so that we're all empathically aware? Those are the two things that we recommend once you have all of the data that you've collected. Jeff, did I miss anything?

Warshaw: I don't think you missed anything. I would just add two quick comments. One is the potential for this to also inform you about the experiences of your staff members. While we built it more with students and families in mind, it certainly would be relevant to staff members as well. The other is just that the encouragement that the conversation across these categories and questions really should be just that. It's a conversation and not an interrogation. That point then that Fabi made at the beginning about the value of someone with a relationship with the family would probably be in the best position to engage in the empathy interview. It's really important because at its core this is about a relationship and cultivating and nurturing and really honoring a relationship that we have with our families and communities.

Bagula: I appreciate that reminder because I know that with the principals, I'm still coaching I actually have asked them to do one on ones with their staff. I know I would want to know where my whole staff was. I jokingly say, I would have the very nervous, anxious teacher all the way to one who's out there fighting for her right to get COVID. I would have everybody on my staff. I would want to know just what culture do I have on my hands right now that we're experiencing this pandemic and that we're experience the Black Lives Matter movement. I really want to kind of gauge who it was that I could lean on when we come back. Thank you for that reminder, Jeff.

I see a question about when do you recommend doing these interviews. I'm a year rounder parent, so I understand that. If I were to lead this, I would want my teachers to reach out to the families and sit down as a family to do that zoom call and collect that data just because the relationship is there and it's really important for the relationship to be there. I would try, I would actually start doing it now just for next year. Especially, you're going to have about a month and a half to design whatever fall looks like. I would rather have that data now so I can start thinking about what are the supports that the kids are going to need right when we come back. Maybe there's something that I haven't even thought of that we can implement in the summertime and I can lean on the district to help me put in place.

Warshaw: I would also had, there's a follow up question about parents and students? The age of the student is an important consideration and exactly who you're speaking with as well. For younger kids, their parents are going to be an important perspective to be able to share. Not that we shouldn't also speak to your kids but including the parents. With older kids, I think the opportunity for them to have their own face and speak for themselves and have that honored is super valuable as well.

Bagula: That wraps up our quick fifteen-minute session. They go really fast. Actually, I appreciate them because that's about my attention span, I think. I hope that you enjoyed it too. All of this will be available to you. We are recording this session. The session will be available to you, the slides will be available to you and I know Jeff and my information is also on the slide desk. If you want to follow up with a question, we're definitely here to support you. And now we have a quick poll. If you can take that poll before you go and if you want to stay behind and for further dialogue, we're going to be here for a few more minutes to do that.