

Knowledge is Power - Equity considerations in the Age of COVID

Topic: Designing to Design- As Educators work on re-entry, re-design, how are we creating healthy spaces for us to do so?

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Hello everyone. Thank you for joining us on our fourth and final session of Knowledge is Power. This session is called Designing to Design. It's actually one of my favorite sessions to put together. I appreciate that you are here for these 15 minutes. I think that I've gotten positive feedback on the venue which is like a short 15 minutes sort of piece and then hang out and talk a little bit if you want to and then beyond and go on with your day. I think at this point in time and I'm actually going to go into it right now is that we are really full. Our brain is really full and there's a lot of brain science that will say yes you are. This comes from my desire to have really healthy teams. I'm a big believer in that's actually how I tried to run my organizations whenever I was in charge of them is that our team health matters. Right now, what I'm seeing is a lot of us in education are coming together to dream of, create, design new ways of being come fall. What I'm concerned about is that we aren't paying enough attention to our own health. Under normal circumstances even if there is some sort of tragedy or some sort of event and we're in school, it happens to be to the community and then we're coming in because we usually don't live in the community that serve. We come in and we try to create a healthy environment. This particular time and space that we are in now, we are actually also experiencing what everyone else is experiencing, at different rates but we are also in that space. I wanted to add a little bit of a disclaimer, when I was designing these four sessions it really was about the pandemic and COVID and then of course as you know our current civil rights movement also just sparked in a great beautiful global way. I don't mean to be tone deaf. It's not that I'm not addressing it. It's actually that it's going to be woven in. I want to be more intentional, so coming soon will be another four sessions really based on Black Lives Matter and our current civil rights movement. I just wanted to make sure to say that.

I love this quote because it emphasizes everything. I can be very critical of education but I'm also really in awe of our current state of being able to quickly pivot, adapt to change, support students, serve the community without a bail out. Wow we were able to do that really quickly and nimbly. I always like to add and yes with a budget cut. One of the reasons why this is important though is because what we did was beautiful, but it was an emergency. The things that we provided for families and for students really wasn't remote learning it was emergency remote learning. What this session is talking about today is how we now some time, not a lot but some time to actually think through and really be intentional in our design and really think about how we're going to welcome and reengage students in a healthy way.

Now, you should also have some data. What I mean by that and I'm not talking about literacy or numeracy. I'm talking about experience during this remote time. You have the data of which teachers are nimbler than the others, which students are actually engaging in the work. There was getting the Chromebooks, being connecting, engaging and then there's equality. There's a couple of different things that you should know now that emerged from these last few weeks. So, now it's the time to think about how am I going to be intentional? How are we going to be intentional in designing a beautiful re-engagement space for students?

Here's what this is mostly about. Our current state isn't the healthiest. We are living through a global pandemic. We have a very charged civil rights movement. I'm actually very concerned about Tulsa, Oklahoma this week. I'll be actually probably saying a protection prayer over everybody. We're currently in risk negotiation all the time. When we do go out, whether or not and I don't understand the politicization of masks but whenever we go out, we're assessing a risk. Crossing the street if we see a group of people that aren't wearing mask or vice versa. We're really in constant risk negotiation. That's taxing on our brain. We're usually not oriented in that way. There's change every day normal behavior. What I mean by that is even getting groceries delivered or anything like that. You're cleaning your hands, you're not touching your face. There's a lot of changes in our behavior and then of course the Zoom Gloom. I want to go into the Zoom Gloom a little bit more than usual because it's not just about the blue light and the sitting in front of the screen. It's actually a lot deeper than that.

I have put this slide up at every presentation and I'm going to keep saying it because I wanted to make sure that we are really knowledgeable about the level of impact and trauma that we're living through. There's four layers of trauma. There's personal, vicarious, collective and historical. We are currently sitting in all of it. Whether it's economic impact, health impact, routines impact, quality of life impact. All of it is being impacted and then of course if you layer our civil rights movement, we're also being impacted in this way. There are several layers of multidimensional complexity of trauma that's happening to our brain and to ourselves right now.

We're calling this forced adaptation because working from home was definitely a forced adaptation for many of us who are lucky and privileged enough to be able to work from home. We've been developing this pandemic persona because now that we're in the 2-dimension space we have to emote more. You would probably if you've done any of the zoom happy hours you can see how we all talk over each other. It's really hard to kind of maintain because we don't have those social cues that we would normally have when we're in person. There's also Zoom Fatigue. This is the part that I wanted to get really into this space. There's a couple of articles that I linked. One's from the Wall Street Journal and one from National Geographic. They talk about how if we were in a meeting, if all of us were in a meeting together right now, you would have one environment and one speaker. I would have a view of all of you, but it would be one of environment and I can actually hone in and make eye contact with several people. Now, when we're in Zoom it's about twenty different environments, depending on the largeness of who's on the screen. Twenty different faces including our own which is really weird by the way to be watching yourself talk all of the time. We don't ever really look into the mirror that long. All of these little things, usually that your brain would get in peripheral information is right up front. Your brain is constantly collecting this data and that is way you're so exhausted. It's more about how much information your brain is collecting than the the blue screen time. It also talks about how group chats are less collaborative. Our brain becomes overwhelmed. We can't find the normal, nonverbal cues that we seek all of the time from body language. The last article I know got a lot of press when it first came out

is that we are grieving. We were forced to adapt in many different ways. The loss of routine. I know I'm grieving just going to work, waking up and changing and putting on a dress and driving away. I miss that and I didn't think I would, and I really do. There's a lot of changes in our life that are forcing us to grieve in very different ways.

Here's my concern is implicit bias which we all have. Our brain is bias because our brain is very efficient. It's very efficient in data that it receives and it stores it and that's how we act out. Usually, for implicit bias to come out and manifest itself is because it's taking shortcuts and we're acting too quickly. Well guess what? If you are grieving, if you're experiencing trauma, your brain is going to make these shortcuts for you because it's the healthiest thing. Think about this, you're planning and designing for students, you're grieving, your trauma and it's ripe ground for this implicit bias. This is the part that I'm thinking it's going to come out. It's not going to be mall-intended, but we're going to start replicating old paradigms over and over again. When you receive a copy of this PowerPoint, if you ever want to nerd out, this particular graphic, every little line right here are all of the studies that have been done on our brain and the biases we hold. I always kind of do it like a little oracle and go to one and its' really interesting to read what it does because most of the times I go oh, yeah I do that. One of the things that happened was I was in a meeting where an educator said, "Well let's dream of a new way. Let's dream of new way of welcoming students." Although, I love that positive frame, I'm most like that's my jam, that's usually where I lean into. I try to find the positive aspects of it. All I could think of was, I can barely sleep. I can't dream of a new way. I can barely sleep.

What can we do? First of all, let's normalize our normal routine. If there's kids or pets or significant others that make these Zoom cameos. I know this morning when I was doing this at 8:30 there was a lot of noise coming from my household. Yes, on the Wednesday session, my son barged in while we were recording. It just happens. Let's just normalize it and let's give ourselves permission to stop video when needed because sometimes it is necessary for us to remove ourselves from the space and go and do something else even if it's just to take a little breather outside.

Communication during a crisis is also very important. A lot of people try to carry on as normal. I know I've seen this happen in teens where everyone's pretending nothing's going on. Please acknowledge the crisis and give voice to the concerns because it's very real. We're in very different conditions right now. There's also bad news that is coming down unfortunately, especially with budgets, with planning for next year with all of the feedback from stakeholders and the concerns that are happening. Let's not hide. We have to be up front. We have to be transparent. We have to talk about it. We have to put it on the table and actually really think about how everyone's feeling and what everyone's thinking.

Continuing with the what might we do. Acknowledge that things aren't normal. This isn't the time to put on a smile and pretend that everything is. Establishing a really good routine for communication and sharing is important. Also allowing for flexible schedules with asynchronous communication. I think right now when people are socially distancing themselves. It becomes almost like an othering from the group. Just even that term is othering. So how might pay more attention and be more intentional about really communicating. Agree on what it means to be a good digital colleague and create pandemic norms. I know many of you have created norms with your groups. They're probably hanging on some wall in some collaboration room. Guess what? You're on a totally different task now and totally different conditions. So I really think the creation of pandemic norms of how we want to be

during this time is really important to do so. Kind of bubbling up with what I said earlier encourage transparency and inclusion. I was talking to a group of teachers and there was a few young teachers that are living by themselves and they stated around afterwards and they said I live alone so I'm actually lonely. This piece of like social isolation and self-isolation especially with people who live alone I think is very necessary to ensure there's transparency and inclusion in almost an invitation to be a part of teams and discussions.

Considering healthy check ins and check out I'm a big proponent of this. I think I wrote an article right in the beginning of this. It's really important for our team's health to check in. I have two very simple questions that I ask my team which is what are you bringing today and what do you need from the team. There's an article that I will link that talked about the importance of rituals because it makes us feel safe to establish your routine. What I do want to warn you though is if you've never done something like this before and you ask that question to your team, they're either going to be silent or they're going to talk a lot. I know the feedback is I can't check in every time, this took like twenty five minutes and it's only an hour meeting. That means that they had a lot to empty. The more routine you get into it, the quicker it's going to be because you're going to get used how ever often you meet. Oh we're going to do a check in, I know what I'm going to say. I know what I want to share with the team. They're going to be a little bit quicker so don't let that set you off from doing a healthy check in with your team.

Intentionally leveraging other identities. Currently, we are all kind of living in this space of being all of the identities at the same time. Normally, under normal circumstances, I drop off my son, so my mother role would be on pause and I'd go to work and I would be educator self. Then when I would come home. I wouldn't be educator self. I'd be mom self, wife self. Currently I'm doing all three all at the same time and I'm negotiating through all those three roles all day long. Why not bring them into the room? If we're planning a design, what does my parent perspective say? What does my wife perspective say? What does my small business owner perspective say? That will diversify also the types of things that you're thinking about, like some healthy questions to promote diverse points of view, like let's argue with this idea that was just presented. If you don't take anything of anything that've said today, please take this one. You need to intentionally establish healthy feedback loops for whatever you're doing. I say that because it builds your credibility. It builds your supportive structures and people are more akin to actually take some risks in their practice if they know that in a week and a half or 2 weeks someone's going to check in and we're going to talk about the things that are emerged that maybe we weren't planning and create some changes. It becomes a really nice healthy way of being innovative and taking information from the fields and really being open to the user's perspective.

Again, if anything, if you don't take anything home except for that one I would be so happy because just in general I think education needs healthier feedback loops all across from the superintendent all the way down to the classroom.

Lastly, be okay with leaving or asking for homework, like I can't read this anymore can I take it and come back and tomorrow I'll read it before I go to bed and think about it. I think it's okay to ask for the time because we are really overwhelmed as I made the point earlier.

I'm going to end with this, I love this belief. The Chinese believe that before you can conquer a beast you must first make it beautiful. What you're about to, to redesign the way school is with, I got the parent survey, so I know you're thinking about virtually or in the classroom or combination. Whatever it

may be, it's a beast. So, really paying attention and spreading that compassion and that love and the care for your internal team first. Again, do the airplane thing first. You put your mask on before you help anyone else. Make it beautiful for your team.

I know this was a lot of information and I felt like I needed to write about it so I linked an article that I published. Everything that I said is actually in here and it has a lot of other information as well because like I said I know I did not address our current civil rights movement, but I did put...I don't mean to make you dizzy as I scroll. We're trying to reason and so I pose this question. So, you want to dress internal inequities as you design? Here are some questions for you to ponder as well when you come together as a team. This was a very heavy topic but I hope that the fifteen minutes gave you a taste and that you're curious enough to click on all of the links of the articles, including the one I wrote. I hope that you're able to design a space for all of the designers to come in and design from a very healthy space for themselves. That concludes our fifteen minutes.