

TLX Xchange Podcast – Episode 4 Transcript

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NICKI MONAHAN: Hello, faculty and welcome to Exchange; the TLX podcast for faculty by faculty. I'm Nicki Monahan, TLX faculty facilitator and coach. And I'm here this morning with Mike Avis, also a faculty facilitator in the TLX. We're practicing good social isolation protocols so we're coming to you from home which means that you may hear Morley my wonder dog bark if somebody comes by the door. Where are you, Mike?

MIKE AVIS: Well, I'm in my COVID-19 bunker in the basement.

(laughing)

MIKE AVIS: You might hear barking, running, screaming and crying. My three kids are upstairs running around so, we'll see how this goes.

NICKI MONAHAN: Well, thanks for agreeing to do this today, Mike. I know-- I know continuing to work full-time when you're also taking care of three kids is, is something that lots of folks are dealing with. So, we're gonna go on with our Xchange.

MIKE AVIS: So, how you been, Nicky? What's-- what's been happening?

NICKI MONAHAN: Well, it's been a busy week for everyone but for me, it's so inspiring to see folks working hard to support one another; share resources; and basically get ready as best we can to meet with students again next week.

MIKE AVIS: Yeah. It's been-- you know what? It's been a really interesting time for, for I think all of us at the TLX and me too. Just to see all the energy and all the fellowship that's happening and people helping each other, I think it's really been phenomenal to see this-- the group of faculty come together and really work hard to make this happen.

NICKI MONAHAN: Absolutely. And, you know, and really-- that's what we're here for. And I know some people have been connecting with students in a variety of ways online for a long time and so maybe it feels like business as usual next week but for other folks, I know this has been anxiety-provoking and a bit of a learning curve and we're really hoping that folks have received the supports they needed to get up to speed. And, and that's really our job to help one another and, and build this TLX community where there's a lot of mutual support going on.

MIKE AVIS: Yeah. And I've heard-- I've heard a lot of questions sort of recently in our discussions about-- my discussion with faculty is, what do we do when we're actually "face-to-face"-- and I'm using air quotes. You can't see it but face-to-face or screen-to-

screen with our students? So for those people who don't have a lot of experience online or distance teaching, teaching from off campus, what are you-- how is it going to be different from a normal class and how do we have to change the way that we do things and the way that we think to engage with our students when we're not physically near them? So I think maybe today we could just talk about a little-- we could talk a little bit about what are our strategies; what are some ideas to engage your students when you're not actually physically in the same room?

NICKI MONAHAN: I think that's a great topic for today, Mike and you know, I'm always thinking that, you know, we have an incredible teaching faculty and right now it's just a matter of taking-- what are the best things that you do with learners face-to-face and in some ways replicate them when we're doing remote learning? So, Mike what do you think are the most important things for faculty to keep in mind when teaching remotely?

MIKE AVIS: I think the most important is-- especially when it's your first session or your first time where your students and you together are working remotely, is to welcome your students into your-- and I'm using air quotes again-- "room". I hope most of you are using Blackboard Collaborate. Some of you might be doing classes, synchronous classes so that you're actually doing them live. Some people might just have a Blackboard Collaborate room open for group discussion or for "office hours"-- again in air quotes. So I think really the first thing is to make sure that your students are welcome. Give them a chance to understand their environment. One of the things that I've suggest to faculty is if they're using Blackboard, instead of-- so for some of you who have been doing the Blackboard workshops-- instead of having just a blank screen and people sitting there waiting and wondering who's-- are you there? Is anybody there? To put a slide or some kind of welcome message on your Blackboard session so that when someone comes in, they see a message from you, the professor. Maybe you put a thought provoking question or you put something for them to think about but something to engage them when they're actually waiting for everyone else to appear. I think it's a really good way to start.

NICKI MONAHAN: That's a great idea, Mike. I think about my days in the classroom with students and, you know, it's a 10:00 start but you've got 50 students, you can only see, you know, 20 of them in front of you. I had a tendency to stand at the door and say 'good morning' or 'good afternoon' and welcome students; trying use as many names as I could when they came in. The same thing does happen in the, the Collaborate live session. You know, maybe you're supposed to start at 2:00 and there's only a couple people there so say 'hello', let people know, hey, we're, we're waiting for others to, to join us and, and, and make sure that people are not just feeling that dead air time in a live session because that can feel a little bit uncomfortable and increase student anxiety.

MIKE AVIS: Sure. I would also say that it's okay as the professor to admit that this is a new experience for you. To say, "We're here to support. I'm here to support you as

students but I'm also hoping that you can help support me as a professor and we can, you know, get the best learning experience possible in this situation". I think that puts your students at ease to-- for you to admit that, you know, this is a new situation and we're both-- everybody's learning. I think that's also really exciting that, that you're putting yourself at that level. So I would really steer against sort of waiting and being, being as rigid as perhaps you would be in your face-to-face classes and say, you know, give some flexibility; give people time; a chance to acclimatise themselves to their environment.

NICKI MONAHAN: For sure. And, and we do know that these are anxiety-provoking times. Now if we talk to our counselling faculty, they say you know, student anxiety is a real issue and, and we know that when people are anxious, it makes it harder to learn. Lots of students are familiar with the Blackboard environment and know how to go in and access content online and doing readings, etcetera but again, if you're using Collaborate Ultra for the first time, maybe you can send out some information to students ahead of time to, to go in and, and find their way around. But if it's the first time you're meeting live with the group, even just a basic orientation. So, you know, check out those icons at the bottom, you know? You might wanna turn your video off if you don't want everybody to see you in your pajamas. Or turn the microphone off until you need to speak. And that little icon with the person with the hand up, that's how you put your hand up in a live session. Some students, just like in a classroom, will never feel comfortable asking a question out loud and so it's great for them to know that there's a chat box there that they can key in their question. And so just even a basic orientation around the environment I think will, will do a lot to help reduce some of that student anxiety.

MIKE AVIS: Right.

NICKI MONAHAN: Any other key tips, Mike?

MIKE AVIS: Yeah. I would say be prepared for chaos and some faculty are more or less com--- are more comfortable or less comfortable with that chaos but that's gonna come with the package, right? There are gonna be students who can't get their microphone to work and they're gonna be frantic and there are gonna be other students who are gonna hog the air time. And there's gonna be a whole bunch of things that are new so, patience. Just waiting to let things work out. I would say a few sort of technical tips would be the mute button is your friend.

NICKI MONAHAN: M'hmm.

MIKE AVIS: I've been in quite a few meetings on Teams and on Collaborate and use of the mute button is, is a really good tool. So it's-- I would say you can mute all and then release people to speak when they want to. Maybe use the raising your hand function I think, as you mentioned, is really important. And then you can unmute them and let

them talk. But also maybe-- and again, these are just suggestions-- maybe just a free for all. Maybe the second class you say, "Okay. I'm just gonna open it up and have everyone talk". And maybe nothing happens or maybe something does but again, don't try to control everything but try to control the little things that will make-- make it easier for you as a professor.

NICKI MONAHAN: Yeah. That's really great advice, Mike. And there will be technical problems so not expecting perfection of ourselves or other students and, and I think that's really important. And I don't know if people heard beeping but I had a call come in a minute ago and you may have heard some beeping. So this is an opportunity for us to role model with our students. You know, what happens when we make mistakes and, and it's okay to make mistakes and nobody is expecting perfection at this time.

MIKE AVIS: M'hmm.

NICKI MONAHAN: One of the other things that I think-- you know, this, this virus is having implications in terms of our education but everybody is really aware it's having huge implications in terms of economics and one of the things that I want people to keep in mind is that many of our, our learners really are living through precarious economic times. So in addition to the anxiety of learning a new way of learning, some of them are also juggling having kids at home; maybe they've lost their part-time jobs; they're dealing with financial stress-- stresses; worrying about how to pay the rent or feed themselves and their loved ones. So I, I think we can never err on the side of being too kind or too compassionate with our learners.

MIKE AVIS: Yeah. Abs--- absolutely. And, and really the-- for those students who have children-- and I can sympathize with all of them. (laughing) You know, maybe a three hour or a two and a half hour Blackboard Collaborate Ultra class live is not the best solution.

NICKI MONAHAN: M'hmm.

MIKE AVIS: Maybe shorten-- keeping it shorter than maybe you pro--- you probably would. Maybe uploading some content for them to be able to do it on their own rather than creating sort of a similar synchronous class that you would do-- a synchronous class you were thinking of doing online. I think that's a really important thing is to be really aware of what the students are going through and---

NICKI MONAHAN: Yeah.

MIKE AVIS: To limit some of your online time 'cause again-- and I've heard this from other faculty-- is we're all really concerned but what we're doing but remember, this same process is happening with every single one of their classes. So---

NICKI MONAHAN: M'hmm.

MIKE AVIS: Are they gonna be really happy to be sitting in front of a computer for 15, 16, 17 hours while their professors continue to do these sort of long Blackboard Collaborate Ultra sessions? So again be aware, some of this learning can happen on their own. You can upload video; you can upload PowerPoint; you can upload content articles that they can actually do on their own. And just one more thing, Nicki. I wanna make this real-- I wanna make this shout out. The Blackboard team at eLTI and the instructional designers and developers have been doing a wonderful job in helping everyone get online on Blackboard. So if you haven't done any of those sessions, those are running three times a week. They'll continue to run next week while you're in classes. So they have been a momentous support to all the faculty going forward.

NICKI MONAHAN: Yeah. Thanks for that shout out, Mike. I mean, really important. Those folks have been working around the clock and I know again, not everything is perfect, but it is really important for faculty to know that there are all kinds of resources and supports available there. So, so thanks for making that shout out. But I also like the reminder that you made that, you know, while each of us as faculty members may be dealing with however many courses, we are preparing, you know, our students might be juggling, you know, four or five courses at the same time so that-- so that's a lot to manage.

MIKE AVIS: Yeah, of course. And I can hear the ping going off in the background. You're getting like me, getting lots of messages from faculty which is great.

(laughing)

NICKI MONAHAN: That's for sure. That's for sure.

MIKE AVIS: That's great.

NICKI MONAHAN: So, maybe we should come to the end of our podcast Xchange and go respond to some of those faculty requests. Any final words before I close out our session, Mike?

MIKE AVIS: I guess my final words would be keep going; keep at it; use your resources available to you which for me is the faculty that you work with. There are lots of champions out there. There are lots of people have a lot of expertise and I really see that happening already. So keep that up and my other message would be, keep it simple as well. Don't try to do anything that you haven't done before. Keep it to a few basic things. Get through the first week or two 'cause remember, this could go-- we don't know how long this is gonna happen so---

NICKI MONAHAN: M'hmm.

MIKE AVIS: If you feel like you wanna add something then yes, you can start adding something as you move down this process week by week. I hope it's not too many weeks. But keep it simple. Talk to your-- talk to your fellow faculty and keep learning.

NICKI MONAHAN: Fantastic advice, Mike. Thanks so much. So, on Monday morning when classes resume, we really hope you put student learning first. Take care of yourselves, take care of your families. Don't forget to wash your hands. And stay tuned for the next episode of Xchange.

MIKE AVIS: Thank you very much.

NICKI MONAHAN: Thanks, Mike.

MIKE AVIS: All right. Bye, Nicki. Have a-- have a good day.

NICKI MONAHAN: You too.

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