

Xchange Podcast – Episode 5 Transcript

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MICHAEL AVIS: Hi, I'm Mike Avis, faculty facilitator with the TLX and I'm here with Nicki Monahan, faculty facilitator and coach at the TLX. How you doing, Nicki?

NICKI MONAHAN: I'm doing great, Mike. I'm desperately in need of a haircut and earlier this week I found myself watching YouTube videos on how to groom your poodle and I figured well, how hard can that be? Let's just say, Morley's happy that eventually his hair will grow in but other than that, I'm doing okay. How are you doing, Mike?

MICHAEL AVIS: I'm good. I can say that I've seen you this week and you did not apply those principles to your own hair which we are all very thankful of. For those-- those of us who will be in video meetings with you coming up, that's good to know that you didn't take that risk.

NICKI MONAHAN: (laughing) And you, Mike? How are things going in your part of the world?

MICHAEL AVIS: Ah, it's good. I'm here as usual in my bunker in the basement. My cat, my dog, my three children are all asleep so there's-- this is the hour and a half of tranquility that I get during the day. So, it's nice to sit down and talk to you, Nicki.

NICKI MONAHAN: I'm looking forward to being here with you tonight and doing our fifth episode of Xchange.

MICHAEL AVIS: And we are calling this one, 'Be who you are, wherever you are: teaching with authenticity and humanity'. What does all that mean, Nicki?

NICKI MONAHAN: Well, you know, Mike, this title came from, you know, as always, some of the conversations we've been having with faculty members in this transition time to remote learning. In the past week or so, both you and I have had some interesting conversations and both online and in Teams discussions and through a faculty learning circle and also in our classroom visits. And so some interesting themes are emerging. One-- one that emerged in one of my conversations was this notion about challenging our own assumptions about teaching online and I had a great conversation with a faculty member who I know had assumed that, you know, she loves her face-to-face classroom work and wasn't so sure about how much she loved working remotely with her students and has had incredibly positive experiences and is really looking at ways to, to build community. Some of the faculty that I worked with in the past week also talked about stretching out of their comfort zones and doing new things and I can think of two of my very favourite math teachers, Melissa Manzo and Alma Kasneci, both of whom for the very first time made videos for their students. So there's been a lot of good things

happening in terms of folks just really challenging their own assumptions about what can and can't work. What about you, Mike?

MICHAEL AVIS: Well, just to give it-- just to give it some context, you and I have been dropping in on some classes and, by the way, this is a-- with everybody being "online", everyone using online digital technology to teach, it's really, really quite simple to just say to someone, "Hey, can I come observe your class?"; clicking on a link and actually being able to sit in and watch and observe and see what people are doing. So we've had the great luxury of being able to do that and I've learned a ton about some of the great practices that have been happening. I also want to just expand a little bit on your-- challenging your own assumptions. One of the things that have come up with-- in my conversations is the assumption that students are technically savvy and they know how to do it. And I think there's a lot of us who are-- sort of say, 'well, they'll figure it out'. But they're in as much of a learning curve as we are. Maybe it's not with the technology but it's with the learning, it's with the strategy of how to learn independently. So there's a lot of assumptions about students as well that we should be considering. So one of the things that I've really-- in all those meetings and talking to people in the-- in the drop-in-- sorry-- in dropping into classes was the idea of humanity. And I, I just thought of seeing some of these teachers teach that I got a chance to see who they are not as-- not necessarily only as professors but as people. As people with real lives who live in real homes who have real family members. And I thought that that was a really, really rich experience and I was really excited to be able to see who some of these people were outside of their office and outside of their classroom. So the humanity part was how do we inject that 'cause I know the challenge with online learning and the challenge with distant learning or whatever-- whatever we're calling it-- alternate delivery, is how do we engage our students and make them feel they're part of a learning environment and part of a community of learners? And part of it is being human and I-- and I've been looking at a lot of the chat that's been coming up on the Team site and there's a couple things that stood out. So Beverly Taft who teaches Communications, she sent a really nice message on the Team site talking about how she had her students all saying goodbye in different languages and how she did that in her normal face-to-face class but didn't think it would be possible to do it in the online class but was able to do it and still had a really great experience with their-- with her students and something that didn't have to do with pedagogy. It just had to do with humans sharing a learning environment. And I thought that was really, really great. Also, Jeff-- Jeffrey Reffo has been creating these heartfelt and creative videos every Friday where he takes questions and answers from his students and he creates a little YouTube video of two or three minutes where we really get to see his personality and we get to see who he is. And those are really two great ways to, to connect with your students and be human.

NICKI MONAHAN: And Jeff is certainly always himself in his videos and I think his-- I think his students really appreciate that.

MICHAEL AVIS: Indeed, he does and it's the bow tie that I like. He's always got a nice outfit whenever I see him. We by the way will---

NICKI MONAHAN: He does, indeed.

MICHAEL AVIS: We by the way, we'll put that link to his YouTube channel so you can check out to see what he's doing. So one of the things that we're doing in this podcast and we're trying to do is just to give a glance at what faculty are doing. It's-- remember, this podcast is for faculty by faculty so what we did was we talked to a few other faculty members who were doing some interesting things and we had a little, just a little conversation with them and they recorded what it is that they were-- what they were doing. So I had a chance to sit in on Jason Inniss' chef's class-- cooking class and also Boban Mathews' cooking class and both of them were unique in that they were actually cooking in their own homes and I think in Boban's case, his-- his wife was doing the serving and his daughter was doing the filming and you could see everything going on and you could see his interaction with his family and it was great. And Jason, who has a nice organic farm just outside of Hamilton, was taking his students to his greenhouse and then bringing them into his kitchen, you could see his dog walking around behind him. So I asked Jason what his thoughts were about filming these demos in his kitchen and this is what he had to say.

JASON INNISS: At first I wasn't sure what to do and I felt a little embarrassed about showing my, my home kitchen and then I thought to myself, you know what? I'm teaching culinary skills. I live on a small organic farm so I thought, you know, the humanity would be in me showing people my house and my reality. There's my dog, there's my wife, there are my kids, here's the farm and so I thought, you know what? I'm gonna show students some of my kitchen and what I can do with what I have in my house during these COVID times. And the response immediately was fantastic. So the next week, I decided to expand it a little more and actually started the class in my, my wife's greenhouse. And, you know, I showed the students what she was growing and actually picked some of the food and then brought it in and did an entire demo in my kitchen. The students loved it. And we had another professor on the line who was answering questions. We had another professor, John Payne, and they were sharing their expertise and then my wife came in and tasted something and we used-- we used her feedback to, to let the students know what I was doing and to say, you know, I actually know what I'm doing. And during that whole time, one of the other professors on the line was, was monitoring all the chats. So while I was cooking and laughing and having a good time in my kitchen, they were calling me out because, you know, I was in my kitchen, I wasn't wearing shoes and, you know, they were like, 'Chef, are you allowed to not wear shoes when you're in your own kitchen?' So the humanity part was me exposing myself and showing my vulnerability in my, my own home and also letting students know that it was-- it was okay for them ask questions and to share their thoughts and to, to have that other professor in the room was amazing as well to, to moderate those questions and, and let the students know that, you know, it was okay to, to ask these questions and take part.

NICKI MONAHAN: Thanks, Mike. And that's so great to hear from Jason. Of course, some of you may or may not know that Jason also has his very own podcast called Chefs Pod that he does with another faculty member, Wendy Mah. One of the things I loved about that clip was Jason not only talking about his own humanity, a chef cooking in his own kitchen with his wife but also the notion of collaboration. So there were multiple faculty members there and you

could really feel the sense of community that Chef Jason Inniss was trying to create with his class there. I also, while you were, you know, while you were popping in on the chef's class, I popped in and visited Francois Oullette and Francois is one of our ESL teachers. And he was teaching a class on persuasive writing techniques with his ESL students. And one of the things that I was really struck by was the way in which he clearly had found a transition from face-to-face to working remotely of maintaining that sense of community. Francois is very much himself, a very, you know, warm-hearted individual and you could tell that there was really a sense of community amongst his students. He had students volunteering to read out-- read passages out loud and they were encouraging one another and teasing one another and it was a very friendly and informal conversation happening which was clearly as a result of Francois' efforts to both be himself but also create this community of learners. So let's take a listen to see-- to hear what Francois had to say about what he's trying to do in his transition to a remote learning environment.

FRANCOIS OUELLETTE: Now we find ourselves all teaching and learning online and, and we're on this kind of adventure trying to figure out how the tools and the technology are going to work. But also, what is the learning experience gonna look like? So I asked myself, what works in the physical classroom? And it's probably not teacher-fronted lecturing. It's, it's usually that, that student-centered learning experience where there's lots of interaction, problem solving and in working on activities. So in the virtual world, I'm-- I want to try to bring those same techniques, that same learning experience online and kind of embrace that adventure and leverage what new tools are available to us in an online world and try to create that interaction. The other thing to consider about interaction is not just the, the problem-solving but also that, that social interaction that's so easily lost in an online environment but comes so naturally in the physical classroom. So when I'm trying to build a community in a virtual world, I'm trying to emphasize that social interaction and we can leverage that through the breakout rooms and having like student-to-student interactions and when I'm maybe lecturing let's say, trying to engage my students directly as often as possible. So whenever I can call upon them or ask them to contribute their thoughts, call them out by name and, you know, if it feels natural you can-- you can have that spontaneity, that banter that, that takes place in a physical classroom in the online world and, and hopefully what you're gonna create is an environment where the students are looking forward to coming to class and I think that's what we are as teachers always aspiring to not only in our physical classrooms but in our virtual classrooms.

NICKI MONAHAN: So I love Francois' sense of adventure and as he described, you know, we're all on a online or remote learning journey and it was really clear that Francois has a sense of adventure and he's going on this trip but he's bringing his students along with him. So the focus for tonight really is about our authenticity, our vulnerability and our humanity and bringing that to whatever learning situation we're in. So we're really going to encourage you to be who you are; don't be afraid to be vulnerable with your students. Don't forget to emphasize on building community regardless of the learning environment. And before we sign off tonight, we wanna let you know about some new things that are coming up through the TLX.

MICHAEL AVIS: So thanks for that, Nicki. Yeah, I agree with you about just Francois' really-- sense of that really being there with his students, for his students. It's palpable and it was great to see. So with the TLX-- with the TLX Teams channel, you may have noticed that I've been-- or Teams site, whatever you wanna call it, site or a channel-- I've been adding little videos to help you sort of navigate all of that. We have over 900 users now and there's lots of activity but I just wanted to help sort of streamline it. By doing that, I've added a couple new channels. So channels are like, think about-- think of them as separate rooms within the whole team that you can go and have sort of more specific conversations. So we created one for families. I think we call it the Family Channel-- it's very original-- where we've been posting videos that you can watch with your kids, some learning activities for your kids, just sort of focusing on what you can do with yours-- with your kids when you are working. We've also added a couple more-- there's some tech tips there to help you and some Blackboard channels as well. So if you have any questions that are more specific, go to those channels to have those conversations. We have also, with the hard work of our instructional designers in the TLX: Stella Bastone, Liz Romero and Ian Craine as well as lots of good work by Laz Simeon, we've created a learning continuity website. So that's gonna be full of resources specifically for faculty when you're thinking about creating your alternate delivery models, there's lots of good content there and that's learningcontinuitygbc.com. I will include the link in the description below. And there's one other thing, Nicki. What's going on there?

NICKI MONAHAN: And stay tuned for the launch of a new online community in Blackboard called, 'community for alternate delivery'. That community will consist of four modules and you can do that in a self-directed way. You can do all four modules. You can go in and pick and choose. There will be a host of resources, articles, materials and also just quick tips. We know it's the end of the semester. Many of you are still buried in marking, getting your final grades in but we also know that you're looking ahead to getting ready to work with your students again remotely. And before we sign off, we want to remind you too, don't forget to take care of yourself. Take care of your families, take care of your loved ones and stay healthy.

MICHAEL AVIS: Thanks a lot, Nicki. It's always a pleasure and I'll see you next time.

NICKI MONAHAN: Always pleasure to work with you, Mike. Have a great evening.

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