TLX Xchange Forum Podcast – Laura Pastrik

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>> Patricia Robinson: Hi everyone and welcome to Xchange, the TLX podcast for faculty by faculty. I'm Patricia Robinson, Faculty Facilitator with the TLX. I'm hosting a new segment of Xchange called Xchange Forum in which I interview our faculty colleagues from across the college. So, today I'm joined by Laura Pastrik, Faculty in the Behavioural Science Technician Programs in the School of Health and Wellness. Laura, maybe you could introduce yourself and tell us a bit about your work at the college?

>> Laura Pastrik: Sure. I'm happy to be here. As you said, I'm currently full-time faculty in the BST programs and also took on coordination last year, but prior to becoming full-time, I spent quite a few years as contract faculty teaching across all of our behavioural science programs.

>> Patricia Robinson: So, so yes well that sounds like between part-time and full-time and the programs you probably taught a wide-range of courses. Is that right?

>> Laura Pastrik: Yeah. I mean, it's been over 10 years total and I've taught across our diploma, or postgrad, our degree, you know, if they needed a course taught I usually picked it up and figured it out.

>> Patricia Robinson: Great. So, so we've all moved to online teaching and I'm really interested in hearing about your experience with that. So, can you share some things that you've tried out? So, and actually what have you tried and what worked, and then I'm actually going to ask you later about maybe something that hasn't worked, but I'll ask that later.

>> Laura Pastrik: Sure. I'll start with the good stuff. So, yeah I can share a few things that I've tried. I guess I want to make sure that I share that this isn't just stuff that I've figured out since March when we were all forced to go online. I've been interested in online teaching for quite a while, did some asynchronous teaching previously, did a lot of reading before the pandemic, and I was really comfortable with Blackboard by March as well, so all of that definitely helped in making the transition. But one of the first things I decided to do when we went online was use a mix of asynchronous and synchronous delivery in my classes with the synchronous bits being more interactive. So, discussions, breakout sessions, content review, and then leaving the asynchronous for things like YouTube videos, my video lectures, readings, you know, stuff like that.

>> Patricia Robinson: Okay. And again I think you brought up a good point about that you were already comfortable with Blackboard before March. So.

>> Laura Pastrik: Yeah.

>> Patricia Robinson: So, that's [multiple speakers]. Yeah. And just in talking about the faculty, I know what we're all kind of in different--on a different part of the curve at the learning curve, and so, and I think that's important to keep in mind is that you know we're all learning here, so. And I want to talk to you about the discussions in your synchronous class; so how do you do that?

>> Laura Pastrik: Yeah. So, you know I implement some of the things that I would use in class as many other faculty have probably experienced being online. Students aren't necessarily any more comfortable speaking out or speaking on mic. So, I will often start by posing my discussion question or questions, and then I'll put them--the students into breakout groups, into smaller groups so they can discuss those with one another. Once they do that, we come back together as a full class and because I find I get more participation this way, I will give multiple ways for students to then share what they talked about. So, I tell them you can raise your hand and speak on mic, you can just put your answer in the Chat, or because they recognize that the Chat still identifies them and some people might not be comfortable with that, I have used polls where they can answer completely anonymously. So, basically I don't care how you respond, I just want to hear from you.

>> Patricia Robinson: So, that's really cool. So, in your answer there I can hear some examples of universal design for learning. So, you're giving students a choice about how they want to participate, and the other thing about the breakout groups and giving students time to talk about something first before they share an answer, I think that that's really good practice because you know students might feel shy or they might need time to kind of develop their ideas further by practising them on their classmates.

>> Laura Pastrik: Yeah. I think sometimes if they hear somebody else say the same thing they were thinking, they're like "Oh, okay I do know the answer."

>> Patricia Robinson: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. That's great. So, we just spoke about kind of that meta level looking at your course, and so how have you changed your lesson plannings each week? So, how did you make those decisions?

>> Laura Pastrik: Yeah, so once I knew that I had about an hour-and-a-half for the synchronous and asynchronous and that's a lot of ynchronous [brief laughter], I would have to of course look at each week and then figure out what I was going to do. I mean, in class it would be all mushed together so I had to sort of pull it apart. So, like a lot of people I'm guessing, I've got PowerPoint slides with the content, but also activity instructions. So, I went through those, wrote out the various pieces that I had along with like the estimated timing of how much time they would need. It did mean I had to be more organized, because the whole purpose of this was that the asynchronous components would be completed by students before we met synchronously so that we could review, discuss stuff like that.

>> Patricia Robinson: So, right. So, this is a lot like a flipped class model. So, the students are prepared or hopefully prepared to participate by the time that you have your synchronous interactive sessions, is that right?

>> Laura Pastrik: Yeah, exactly. And you're like on the spot with that, hopefully prepared. The intent is to reinforce the learning and it's a little bit hard to give up, you know, do I know whether they've actually engaged with that asynchronous material, but I tried to keep in mind that even if they're in class I don't know how engaged they are with that material. So, hopefully yes they have watched it ahead of time, they come in doing their readings so that it can reinforce some learning, but as I kind of alluded to, it does require more planning. So, if my class is on Monday it means I can't be working on PowerPoints, choosing videos on Sunday which I will admit sometimes happened when I was in class. So, I do have to have them prepared ahead of time, content prepared, the recordings prepared, uploaded. I'm to give the students at least a few weekdays ahead to do the asynchronous material, so if we're on a Monday I usually try to have it posted the Wednesday before.

>> Patricia Robinson: So, that yeah that actually makes sense. So, you're giving them enough time again to go through the material and then prepare for that interactive piece. So, so just if you can, tell me a bit more about the asynchronous classes, so what's involved in those?

>> Laura Pastrik: Sure. You know, so I try to avoid--well I don't try to avoid, I just don't do long lecture videos. Even when I was in class I tried not to lecture for long periods. I would intersperse more interactive components. So, online I also don't post just one video with the lecture material. That's in part due some reading that I did as well that told me our attention span is about 10 minutes before we look for a shift. So, for things like videos I try to aim for 10 minutes, I'll admit they do go over, you know, they can go up to 20 minutes, but I will take the entire lecture content and break the material into what I've called mini lessons. So, I look at sort of topics within that material.

>> Patricia Robinson: Okay. And that timeframe, that kind of you know makes me think of podcasts and that's the reason why they're usually only 10 to 20 minutes long.

>> Laura Pastrik: Yeah.

>> Patricia Robinson: So, in terms of those longer videos, how do you keep your students engaged knowing, again, that our attention spans aren't typically longer than 10 minutes>?

>> Laura Pastrik: Right. Yeah. So, to make it more interactive, break it up, there is an online program that I got access to through the college called H5P and that program actually does a bunch of things that are very cool, but the feature I use most often is what's called an interactive video. The great thing is that not only can I record my own videos and use them, but you can use pre-produced content from YouTube. And so, with H5P you can layer in questions, so basically you can set the certain time the video pauses and these questions

pop up and the students need to answer the questions before they can move on. So, I use it not only you know to break it up, but review to highlight important points.

>> Patricia Robinson: Nice. So, this H5P sounds like such a great idea and it's actually, it's again it's online and it reminds me a lot of you know when we're using videos in the class and we support students learning by having handouts and like pause the video, answer these questions, discuss it with a partner, so it's kind of mimicking that in an online way. And so, in terms of your synchronous sessions, you mentioned earlier that you will meet your students for one-and-a-half-hours, so yeah can you describe in more detail what happens in those sessions?

>> Laura Pastrik: Sure. I mean I talked a little bit about the discussions, but like I said I try to keep this part more interactive. So, one thing that I might do is pull in tools like Kahoots, Popplet, Socrative pull everywhere, different ways that we can engage with the content. Those are some more things that I would do in class and they translate really well to online I find. Kahoots definitely a fan favourite. I get a lot of requests for it once I use it. It's been a favourite for years. When we were in class they loved it, when we're online they really enjoy it. The way that I've used it is primarily like as a review of content. So, at the end of a lesson or prior to a quiz we'll do a review. The one thing I really miss about being online though, is like how excited and competitive the students would get in class and like you could hear them and online it's just crickets. But, you know, they'll put things in the Chat and stuff like that, so that's really fun.

>> Patricia Robinson: Yeah. I remember using Kahoot in my class too and it's so hilarious when you know you think someone is quiet or shy, but as soon as they're involved in some kind of competition they're just.

>> Laura Pastrik: Oh yeah.

>> Patricia Robinson: "I can win this. Come on."

>> Laura Pastrik: For sure.

>> Patricia Robinson: And you mentioned earlier that you use breakout groups in your synchronous classes, so tell us a bit more about that.

>> Laura Pastrik: Yeah, so I mean I use them like I said for discussions and I'll use them to allow students to brainstorm on content, you know, sometimes there's things we're talking about that I feel like well they should either know from life experience or from pre-readings so I'll get them to talk that way, they might walkthrough a case study, but also for community building. So, especially with my first year students, you know, fall semester they were all coming into college on an online environment and so I purposely planned breakout groups especially at the start of weekly classes with the intention of them getting

to know one another a bit more. So, there would be randomized breakout groups. I did give them some direction, you know, so I would say okay you're going to meet for about 10 minutes, while you're in your groups, introduce yourself, share where you live, you know, I would give them some prompts that way and then because it's an academic class, one question related to the material that would kind of transition us into class too. So, yeah I was really aware of trying to build in those social connections for first-year students. They've never seen each other. You know, they can't sit next to each other in class and just start chatting and get to know one another. They can't interact easily outside of class. So, I really wanted to give them those--those opportunities to get to know each other. The one thing about breakout groups though that I have not gotten used to yet, is you know in class I wonder around and I kind of listen in and I comment on things that they're saying and you can't float around the same way, so they kind of go off into their breakout groups and yeah I can monitor their chats, but I have not yet had the nerve to just pop in unannounced into a breakout room.

>> Patricia Robinson: So, I mean that's such a good point because again when we're in the class we can also observe them like you know who's having challenges, who's having tons of fun, who's off topic or whatever. So, yes so it's interesting that you haven't popped in to their breakout rooms yet.

>> Laura Pastrik: Yeah, I know not unannounced. So, you know, I've definitely gone in if they summon me with questions. I talk to them why we use teams, so you know I gave them the instruction on how to @laurapastrik me so that it tells me that they have a question and then I'll pop in, although oddly enough even then I'm like "I'm coming." I don't know. You know, in class like they could see me coming. It feels weird to just all of a sudden show up on screen, and you know, I want students to feel like they have to be on task at all times because you just don't know when Professor Laura will show up. Yeah, being on task definitely important, but like I talked about before, I think there's real value in those side conversations and getting to know one another and I don't know maybe a goal for this semester will be unannounced pop ins.

>> Patricia Robinson: So, if you're going to pop in maybe I will get to pop in sometime too.

>> Laura Pastrik: Sure.

>> Patricia Robinson: Although, you would have to invite me. You have to give me a formal invitation.

>> Laura Pastrik: Yes, [inaudible].

>> Patricia Robinson: And I actually want to go back to something earlier that you mentioned about authenticity and what are the ways do you think that shows up for you as a teacher?

>> Laura Pastrik: Yeah, that's a good question. And I would have to say that, for me as I've taught more, I've become more authentic. If that makes sense.

>> Patricia Robinson: Yeah, that's interesting.

>> Laura Pastrik: As I've become more comfortable with teaching, I have realized that I can be my goofy self and it's okay. So, I try to represent that online, but you know, especially now I've tried to share with them how I'm feeling. You know, not overshare, but let them know that I find things challenging right now. I'll ask them how they are doing and, again, sometimes I will do that in a poll. So, one question I'll ask is if you a weather report you know and then it's kind of a way for them to say without saying I feel terrible.

>> Patricia Robinson: Right.

>> Laura Pastrik: So, if get a lot of tornados I know they're really busy. I don't know, I really want to show them that I recognize that this is a difficult time and by sharing my own experiences not only saying that yes it's hard for me, but here's some things that I've tried. And, I don't know, I find myself that if somebody shares strategies that way I'm more likely to be open to them than if they were like you should do this, this, this, and this. And I also share with them, you know, thinks that I don't do well. You know, I don't break away from my screen well. I don't work [brief laughter] enough. I don't know, you know I'm operating from the point of we're all trying our best here. I am doing my best. I'm not always going to be on, I'm going to make mistakes, I'm going to forget things, students are doing their best, we're all under these really unusual conditions, they're changing. You know, I do recognize that they are not all exactly the same conditions, and with that I try to keep in mind that you know students don't hand in assignments or they hand them in late or they miss a class, it's not necessarily that they don't care, it's probably because there's some sort of external factors, and I mean, if that's related to the pandemic or not that I feel like this time has really amplified that. You know, part of that thinking, and I'll admit that I don't think that way all the time, but a big part of that is my training as a behavioural analyst. So, our science looks at understanding and changing behaviour from the viewpoint of what's in the environment. So, what is that's happening around the person.

>> Patricia Robinson: That's really interesting. And I think really important for us all to keep in mind, so you know, what my day-to-day reality and how I'm working at home is going to be different for someone else, so it will be different for my colleagues, it will be different for our students and it's important to keep that in mind I think. And we are all, you know, trying to do our best in these strange times.

>> Laura Pastrik: Yeah.

>> Patricia Robinson: And how else, you mentioned a little, you talked a little bit about this, but how else do you think that's impacted your priorities as an instructor?

>> Laura Pastrik: You know, I would say probably flexibility in assignment due dates, there are still due dates and I think due dates are important because it makes sure that students don't leave everything to the end and you have to get things done on time in the real world, but I'm definitely more flexible on those. You know, so how and when learning happens with the asynchronous helps with that too, while still respecting the outcomes of the course. And I'm reminded by something that a friend of mine would tell me even before the pandemic, which was in the end the most important thing was that students learnt what they needed. So, during this time I've really tried to keep that in mind and reflect that and students have been super appreciative of it. I've gotten so many comments about thank you for being so understanding, a lot of students apologizing for submitting things late for reasons that they should not apologize for. You know, like I said we're all under really new circumstances; things come up. We're all trying to do our best. I know I have days where I'm not as productive. I forget things. And so like flexibility and due dates for example, you know especially if they get it in before I get them marked, you're good. They still have to meet criteria, but you know, a lot more flexible on dates.

>> Patricia Robinson: And, again, that piece you know you're friend's advice about you know in the end students--it's important that students learn what they need to learn, and again, that's why you know that's not why, but I mean well one of the reasons why, but I mean we have course outcomes right? So, you know the student is already in the course outcomes and so then providing that flexibility with deadlines, so actually that's a great example of applying universal design for learning. So, Laura at this point we are nearing the end of our podcast and I just want to ask you if you have any final thoughts that you would like to share?

>> Laura Pastrik: Sure. So, I guess we've hit our 20 minute detention window.

>> Patricia Robinson: Exactly.

>> Laura Pastrik: I mean, I think my final thought would be that, and this is not an original thought by any means, but online is a lot of work and I know I've talked to other people who are feeling it too. I'm going to be authentic, I'm really tired and I know I'm not the only one, but I keep in mind that the work that I'm doing now it has value, not only for my current classes and my current students, but even as we move forward. So, not only in the future do I see myself potentially having some of these classes you know like hybrid or flipped model or maybe online, but even if I end up fully face-to-face hopefully; we are going to get there right?

>> Patricia Robinson: I hope. I hope.

>> Laura Pastrik: I do see myself using what I've created especially the videos I talked about. So, for example, I have assignment videos that go over assignment expectations in rubrics and I would be quite okay to not repeat that every year, as well as, it's like a permanent product for students. So, you know, if you don't gather all the information the

first time it's there to go back and review. If they have questions l can send them back there, probably use some of the video content and the interactive videos. One thing that has actually come out of teaching online that I would like to bring face-to-face, if I can figure out a way to do it, is a Chat Box, because I have found that I get way more interaction from students online in the Chat Box than I would have students speaking out in class.

>> Patricia Robinson: I think, so that's--so too like a couple of the points there, so yes I you know I was away on PD leave and coming back it's so clear to me that people are exhausted and tired, and how much--how dedicated faculty are and how much work people have been putting in. And I think that you've, you know, you're--you've got a really positive mindset here and that you can be using a lot of this stuff for the future, right? So, you're not--you're not wasting time by making all these things and yes it's time-consuming upfront, but again ideally you'll be--you will be able to use it again in the future.

>> Laura Pastrik: And so yeah, if I'm teaching the same course.

>> Patricia Robinson: That's right. Fingers crossed. And you're part about the Chat Box, again like that's I think that's such a great idea, because you know if we look at our numbers, you know, everyone expresses their knowledge in different ways and participates in different ways, and I think having this providing some type of Chat Box in a face-to-face class, again, you can kind of remove that stress of having to you know speak out loud, so you're giving students other options, right of how to participate, again, another example of UDL, Universal Design for Learning. So, I just want to thank you so much Laura for joining me today and sharing your time and your experience, and it has been a pleasure to have you here with me today.

>> Laura Pastrik: Well, thank you for having me. I mean, this was a scary, cool experience.

>> Patricia Robinson: Thank you so much Laura.

>> Laura Pastrik: Thank you.

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