

From Laurel's Desk – December 2020

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As I write this, it has been 260 days since March 13, 2020, the day the government announced schools would be closed and we were thrown into teaching and operating in a virtual world. There are 277 days until September 1, 2021, the date by which, if all goes according to plan, more than half of all Canadians will be immunized. This is not intended to discourage, but to situate where we are and to think about what we can do to support one another and our students today, tomorrow, and over the upcoming months.

In thinking about this introduction, I came across two relevant essays. The first is by Daniel Scott, a high school teacher in North Carolina, and it is entitled “The 6 stages of coronavirus grief.” I’d encourage you to read it as I am certain it will resonate with you. The author describes different types of grief: anticipatory, complicated, cumulative, and disenfranchised, the latter being the dismissal of grief felt by individuals or groups. The author notes “the current culture has often made grief felt by educators and students insignificant” (Scott, 2020). We are all familiar with the five stages of grief: denial, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance. Scott supports the idea of a sixth stage of grief following acceptance, one where we give “a meaning and purpose to the grief we experienced” (Scott, 2020).

The second essay, “To Weather The Storms of Higher Education, Remember Why You’re There” by Dr. Cali Morrison, calls upon us, regardless of our role, to focus and reflect on our individual “*why* – not on *how* we get through this or *when* this storm will be over” (Morrison, 2020).

What does this look like in practice? It is recognizing the importance of what Flower Darby, author of *Small Teaching Online* with James Lang and keynote at our Teaching & Learning Day Fall 2020 in October, calls the three core areas of presence: cognitive, social, and teaching (Darby & Lang, 2019). In-person or online, students need the presence of their professors and peers to learn, particularly the social presence. Darby noted that emotional presence encompasses cognitive, social, and teaching presence. And we need the presence of our colleagues and others for support. It’s not surprising to see that in the recent survey of over 10,000 Seneca students, in the open response questions where almost 3,200 took the time to write, 22% wrote about challenges related to teaching and learning. Suggestions

included more clarity around expectations, greater empathy for students, and more or better communication; in other words, presence. In a virtual world, this can be overwhelming for the teacher. Flower Darby provided several concrete suggestions to faculty to increase and improve presence and at the same time set boundaries, including high-impact communication. Increased presence decreases frustration and improves the teaching and learning experience for students and faculty. Our Teaching & Learning Centre Team can provide support if you need it. I have also included a link to a webinar recording on “Managing Your Online Presence” presented by Flower and Kevin Gannon and April Mondy, as well as Flower’s keynote from Teaching & Learning Day Fall 2020.

I encourage you to consider the advice of Daniel Scott and Cali Morrison. According to Scott, “Our 100% will be different each day, but we must focus on doing our best to provide what we can for the career that we love” (Scott, 2020). Dr. Morrison challenges her readers to write down their ‘why.’ “So when the whats and the hows have taken over your day, you can glance down and remember why you’re here in the first place” (Morrison, 2020).

In closing, thank you for your dedication, flexibility, creativity, patience, and professionalism in carrying out the important work that you do. If the mood strikes you, write down your ‘why.’ I wish you a restful break. Stay safe and take care.

Laurel

References

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