Redesigning Time and Space for Quality Learning

Cognitive science has provided us with the essential principles for facilitating successful teaching and learning. We understand, for example, that what students already know affects their learning; that setting short term, specific and moderately challenging goals enhances motivation more than establishing long term goals; that interpersonal relationships and communication are critical; and that clear, explanatory and timely feedback is important. Psychological science has contributed greatly to enhancing what we do in the classroom. But is it possible to apply those same principles when time and space are redesigned in an online environment? And is it possible to apply those same principles to adult leaders?

At the Academy for International School Heads (AISH), we sought to find out. With a membership of 500+ Heads and Deputy Heads of International Schools in 90 different countries, our mission is to support advocate and provide professional learning for Heads of School. However, due to distance, funds, and a Head's taxing schedule, it is unrealistic to get more than 125 members in the room at one time. Additionally, Heads are experienced learners with unique, targeted needs thus opportunities for growth need to be differentiated and available "just in time."

If online courses could embed many of the principles of quality learning so that leaders could control the path, pace and place of their learning, we could establish the conditions under which agency could thrive. And, given that leadership is the second greatest influence on student learning in a school (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom) after the classroom teacher, we believed this to be a worthwhile endeavor.

AISH partnered with Global Online Academy (GOA), to develop online courses "by Heads, for Heads." Before developing content, the AISH leaders took a course provided by GOA about quality online learning. We learned the importance of curated resources, which do what good museums practice by selecting only a few of the best artifacts to represent an idea. We learned how to create community online through video introductions and forums, because we know that learning is social. We learned about providing timely feedback through various discussion mechanisms and how to best involve the participants in providing feedback to one another. And we learned how to provide options online for short-term goals so that leaders could create their own path, according to their needs. As one of the AISH leaders expressed:

> The first learning for me relates to the ability for the learner to access depth and breadth of the material in an online environment. We are dealing with complex issues in the AISH course material and need to honour the complexity and avoid taking the easy, simple, sometimes superficial options that may fit into the timeline, but not explore the

depths and difficulties involved in something as involved in measuring mission, developing learning principles, or leading change.

I was also prompted to think about our pathways during an online course. Like a climber, we all go up, but rarely on exactly the same path. We need the flexibility to choose our route, stop when we need to, press on and take risks when we are ready.

The courses we developed are for leaders committed to continuous improvement and honing their skills. Mapped to the AISH Standards and Threads, each course addresses a critical leadership issue identified by international Heads of School. AISH leaders have curated all content and designed course activities. Skills courses are bite-sized, introductory courses that can be accomplished online in one-to-two hours. They are asynchronous, meaning that all content and activities are published in advance and participants are invited to work on their own schedule. Participants will gain an understanding of the topic, obtain resources, and acquire insights that can immediately be applied to your practice.

Should participants wish to dive deeper, we invite them to sign up for the Impact courses, which are an extension of the topic. Impact courses are four weeks long, two to four hours per week. An experienced AISH leader will engage participants in a cohort group in practical, job-embedded discussions designed for immediate application and impact. Customized around the needs of an educational leader, there are choices within the courses so that the content is personalized for each leader's strengths, needs, skills and interests.

Have we been successful? Do our courses facilitate quality learning by utilizing the principles of teaching and learning? Do our courses adapt for the leader's hectic schedule and specific needs? We believe so! But the proof will be how our participants evaluate their learning.

We encourage you to register and to let us know. AISH's Leadership Series is open to Heads, Deputy Heads, school leaders, and leadership teams. We offer discounts for teams who register because it is a powerful way to learn and move forward. If interested in a team discount, please contact office@academyish.org.