Chapter 7
Reimagining the Magic of the Workshop Model

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ABSTRACT

Entering a classroom that embraces the workshop model is like walking into a galaxy of magic. You could feel a sense of wonder as teachers and learners examine new skills and strategies and feel a thrill as students are empowered to move towards independence. It's a framework that builds human connection and cultivates relationships; it honors authentic literature and relevant learning experiences. During the pandemic, the essence of the workshop environment was compromised. There were barriers that prevented teachers and students from communicating in the same ways. This chapter delves into how to shift the gradual release of the workshop model to blended/hybrid/hyflex learning environments; it will explore how to invite change, rally learners, examine non-negotiables in physical and virtual spaces, and honor the framework. It will look at utilizing digital platforms efficiently, setting expectations, and creating spaces where all learners are valued. When learners are the heart of decision making, the magic of the workshop model has the potential to live on in any environment!

INTRODUCTION

There is a certain kind of magic that lives within an educational universe. If you orbit around an organization and open the doors, you will find sparks of light. These sparks of light shine brightly because they are ignited by communities of educators who pour their souls into maximizing and elevating learning experiences for kids. It's that spark that ignites into flames when curiosity and wonder spread like wildfire. It's that spark that rallies a community of learners together to support one another through the learning process. It's that spark that embraces the idea of agency, voice, choice, and productive struggle. It's that spark that empowers and guides learners towards independence. And just as the flames happily dance and spread around our magical learning hubs, the intensity of the flames can just as easily be disrupted, startled, dimmed, faded. What happened to the magic? It can be described in one word: CHANGE. When

change invites itself through our doors, it can be paralyzing. It can be suffocating. It can be stressful. It can be shocking. It can also be eye-opening and an opportunity for reflection and growth.

Change is the Epicenter of the Journey

Historically, change has been the epicenter of every educational journey. Most of the time, change has been a gradual occurrence that happens over a steady course of time. It's so slow, that at times, it cannot be recognized until it's looking you straight in the eyes. However, recently change has looked quite different in the world of education. Across the globe, educators have been pushed to rethink education. Educators have been challenged to question their core values. Educators have been pushed to revisit their philosophical beliefs. Educators have been remixing existing teaching and learning practices that have lived in the nucleus of their daily lives and in the book Innovate Inside the Box, George Couros brilliantly states, "I've long believed that change isn't to be feared; it is an opportunity to do something amazing...Change will come our way. We can "go" through it or "grow" through it. We grow when we seek out solutions rather than letting those obstacles hinder us" (Couros & Novak, 2019, p. 53). This quote resonates even more deeply since the Covid-19 global pandemic has jolted the more traditional educational landscape educators have always lived and known. Since the sudden shift to emergency remote learning, educators are now teaching face-to-face, in hybrid and/or blended learning environments, and in some cases are teaching in physical and virtual spaces simultaneously, otherwise known as Hyflex/Concurrent instruction. In an infographic created by Dr. Torry Trust, she defines the expectation for Hyflex instruction as based on an EDUCause (2020) article, "Highly-skilled teachers who provide simultaneously in-person and online learning experiences, students and teachers who move seamlessly between in-person and digital interactions, high-quality technology infrastructure for teachers and students, equitable learning experiences for all, and additional support (e.g., teaching assistant)." Many have paused multiple times and questioned the what and the how of instruction. Many have questioned whether or not the philosophy of the workshop model can live on in virtual learning environments. Many have questioned if they can make the workshop model come alive for learners the same way they did in more traditional physical learning environments. Katie Martin, author of Learner-Centered Innovation confirms how vital it is to move forward and invest in the current educational landscapes we live in while looking toward the way we learn, grow, and consider different solutions with this astute notion, "Closing the gap between what we know about learning and the changing world and what we actually do in schools requires that we take action now to impact the trajectory of those we serve" (Martin, 2018, p. 8). If we want to reach learners effectively, we MUST consider the new educational contexts that have been thrust upon us. Educators cannot look back, they must keep moving forward! In the book, Personal & Authentic, by Thomas C. Murray, these ideas are solidified as he reminds other educators to revisit their "why" and shift their focus. He simply states "Prioritizing the social-emotional aspects of learning helps us see more than what we teach. It helps us see who we teach" (Murray, 2019, p. 87). When many educators revisit their WHY, a common theme one may hear is that they want to continuously cultivate lifelong learners who feel empowered to reach their social, emotional, and academic potential. Through the workshop model, educators can work toward rallying their learners and build community by prioritizing the social-emotional needs of students and keeping "who" at the heart of the teaching and learning journey.

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