

Online, Open, and Equitable Education

Lessons from Teaching and Learning
during the Global Pandemic

*Edited by Nancy K. Turner, Nick Baker,
David J. Hornsby, Aline Germain-Rutherford,
David Graham, and Brad Wuetherick*

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CHAPTER 10

“Thrust into the Fire”

Supporting Faculty Development,
While Building a Teaching and Learning Centre,
Amidst a Global Pandemic

**Sarah Driessens, Kyle Charron,
Denyse Lafrance Horning, and Patrick T. Maher**
Nipissing University, Canada

The COVID-19 pandemic represented an unprecedented time for most faculty members, many of whom had never experienced teaching online before. For example, a BC Campus survey found that 63% of faculty members in the province of British Columbia, Canada, had never taught online prior to the pandemic (Caldwell 2020). Faculty members and course instructors at Nipissing University had similar experiences, and anecdotal evidence suggests that even the most experienced professors reported feeling like novices while navigating unfamiliar systems such as Blackboard Learn, Zoom, and Microsoft 365. In that same BC Campus survey, 57% of faculty members indicated that access to instructional and learning design support, including educational technology support, would be beneficial in a post-pandemic recovery plan (Caldwell 2020).

Enabling instructional and learning design support, both pre- and post-pandemic, depends on a high level of institutional investment in centers for teaching and learning, a distinguishing feature of most large postsecondary institutions. For example, the University of Toronto has over twenty-five staff members working in its Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation; the University of British Columbia offers specialized support in curriculum and

course services, teaching and learning professional development, teaching and learning technologies, and Indigenous initiatives; and the University of Waterloo's Centre for Teaching Excellence fosters innovation by employing over thirty-five highly qualified staff members.

It is evident that institutions who have the financial capital and staffing complement to invest in teaching and learning likely experienced fewer pressure points as we pivoted online at the beginning of the pandemic. This is not to suggest that these larger institutions were immune to these pressure points, but rather to recognize that pre-pandemic institutional investment perhaps mitigated the messiness incurred by the pivot. At Nipissing University, a smaller post-secondary institution in the early stages of re-establishing a centre for teaching and learning, how we responded to the COVID-19 pandemic to prepare educators for a rapid transition to online learning was somewhat limited, and we often wondered what the impact of this was for faculty members and course instructors. As such, our reflection is grounded in the question: How did a smaller postsecondary institution, which was in the very early stages of launching a formal teaching and learning centre, fare in supporting faculty adjustments to online learning? Put differently, when your staffing complement is small and you are just starting to build capacity as a centre for teaching and learning, how do you avoid burning up (or out) immediately when thrust into the fire?

In this chapter, we share with you the journey of an emerging centre for teaching and learning, known as the Teaching Hub, at Nipissing University (NU) in North Bay, Ontario, Canada. The centre opened its doors only six weeks before Ontario went into a province-wide lockdown due to pandemic health measures to curb the spread of COVID-19. The Teaching Hub offers a unique perspective because it began with just two staff members pre-pandemic, underwent significant restructuring and redeployment during the pandemic, and will be a critical factor in the university's post-pandemic recovery plan. Through autoethnographic narrative accounts, we map our journey through a triologue of experiences

(Richardson, Parr, and Campbell 2008) representing three levels of institutional support: Kyle, a learning systems technologist responsible for rapidly transitioning all faculty members online at the beginning of the pandemic; Denyse, a full-time faculty member who, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, had never taught online; and a combined reflection from the Teaching Hub administration (TH Admin) comprised of Sarah, the manager of eLearning, and Pat, the dean of teaching. Our triologue highlights the collaborative capacity of a small, regional, postsecondary institution; the lived experiences of an emerging centre for teaching and learning; and the promise of connection as an opportunity for responsiveness and growth. We conclude our chapter with reflective questions to ponder, as well as recommendations for those supporting faculty members and course instructors interested in adopting or adapting some of our practices and strategies.

To start our critical reflection and triologue, each of us considered the following questions:

1. What were some of the challenges you faced supporting open, equitable, inclusive, and accessible online learning during the pandemic?
2. What were some of the promises of supporting open, equitable, inclusive, and accessible online learning during the pandemic?
3. How did you humanize online learning?
4. What were the significant lessons learned?

As we reflected on the above questions, three themes emerged that enabled our success: capacity or skill building, shifting mindsets, and leveraging relationships. Each one of these themes help to frame this chapter as we contextualize the growth of the Teaching Hub. Woven throughout our collective narrative are points of convergence, including experiences and perspectives, at three levels of institutional organization: academic staff support, faculty member, and administrative leadership. By weaving these narratives together, it is our hope to demonstrate the complex, intricate, and interrelated layers of institutional support that enabled our success.

Context

In 2012, Nipissing University (NU) dismantled its Centre for Flexible Teaching and Learning (CFTL), including most instructional design support. Over the resulting time frame (approximately seven years), NU's learning systems technologists (LSTs), who supported course management and users on Blackboard Learn (our institutional learning management system) and instructor training, balanced this against instructional design tasks. Here's the thing, though—folks can only stretch and bend so far before they break. Is that to suggest that the LSTs broke? Absolutely not! However, when we think about the work that was being asked of this team in 2012–2019, it is evident that there was a greater need for investment in re-building capacity to support teaching and learning.

As a result of a visionary provost and some external funding, the Teaching Hub, and its need for a decanal posting, took shape in 2017–2018. In October 2019, the inaugural dean of teaching started. This position emerged due to a merging of faculties, alongside the physical infrastructure being built for the Teaching Hub. On February 6th, 2020, the Teaching Hub, which consisted of the dean of teaching and an administrative assistant, opened its (physical) doors to the NU community. A little over a month later, NU announced that they would be canceling all face-to-face classes due to the pandemic, shifting the remainder of the semester online. This decision gave faculty and instructors teaching face-to-face classes, and the LSTs supporting them, less than one week to pivot online.

The pandemic catalyzed a rapid and deeper investment in teaching and learning at NU. The decision was made to expand the capacity of the Teaching Hub further, and the five LSTs joined the Teaching Hub team for emergency redeployment almost immediately. At the time, LSTs supported approximately 400 faculty members (full- and part-time) across a variety of faculties and disciplines. To put that into perspective, when the pandemic hit, there was a 1:80 ratio of LST support per faculty member and a 1:200 ratio of LST support per course, with approximately 20,000 Blackboard users. Talk about heavy lifting! These five staff members truly

were the “instructional superheroes” (Eaton 2020, para. 1) of the university, due, in large part, to their Herculean efforts during the pandemic.

A few months into the pandemic, the immediate consolidation of the LSTs under the dean of teaching became permanent (before the pandemic, they had been supervised in a decentralized fashion at the faculty level), and a manager of eLearning was hired with the LSTs then reporting to them. This shift represented a coalescing of areas from across the university where a once siloed system was starting to break down institutional walls. The challenge, however, was learning how to do this virtually, while struggling to keep our heads above water. We were all balancing our personal and professional lives, and the lines of the personal and professional blurred the deeper we ventured into the pandemic. We were working from home (or perhaps living at work) with children and pets and partners all around. We mourned the loss of classes, connections, colleagues, and so much more. Yet we persevered, finding new ways of building the Teaching Hub community, including our capacity to serve and support NU.

The shift to online learning also impacted Nipissing University’s students. The rapid transition in the middle of the semester was undoubtedly disruptive. For example, the Maclean’s magazine annual student survey revealed that 69% of Canadian postsecondary students felt lonely, 77% anxious, 63% worried about their own health, and 79% worried about the health of their loved ones (Kong 2022). From navigating Blackboard to learning online and experiencing increased levels of fear and anxiety, to feeling disconnected from class and the campus community, the new and emerging needs of students during the pandemic were great. Knowing the student experience was crucial, the Teaching Hub took action. Drawing inspiration from various students-as-partners models (see Bovill 2017; Healey, Flint, and Harrington 2014; Matthews 2017), the Teaching Hub created a new student position called the online learning partner (OLP). OLPs are upper-year NU students who provide peer-to-peer support related to online learning (e.g., answer

questions about Blackboard or educational technology tools, host workshops, participate in NU community events). At the beginning of the fall 2020 semester, the Teaching Hub hired four student OLPs, and later extended their contracts into the winter semester. This program continued to grow and expand, so that in summer 2021, we hired five new OLPs to work until April 2022, and six more were hired for the 2022–2023 academic year.

As the dust started to settle during the “great onlining of 2020” (Siemens, as cited in Noffs 2020), the Teaching Hub had to be intentional in further developing our capacity to fill what we viewed as significant institutional and pedagogical gaps. As a team, we decided to take up the funding call presented by the Ontario government’s Virtual Learning Strategy (VLS), “an historic investment by the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) to drive growth and advancement in virtual learning across the province’s post-secondary institutions” (eCampus Ontario, n.d., para. 3) through eCampus Ontario (<https://www.ecampusontario.ca/>), a non-profit consortium of Ontario’s publicly funded colleges, universities, and Indigenous institutes. Our efforts were successful, and we used these funds to hire for two new positions in April 2021 and August 2021, respectively: a senior instructional designer and a media, design, and development specialist. The latest team of OLPs (those who ended in January 2023) were also supported with VLS funding.

When NU made the decision to have most classes remain online for the 2021–2022 academic year, the Teaching Hub expanded once more, and two Teaching Hub technologists were hired in August 2021 and October 2021, respectively, again funded externally using the tremendous VLS success we achieved in spring 2021. These folks have supported faculty teaching on-site by providing hands-on technology help within the physical space of the Teaching Hub, developed new website content to capture the growth of the Teaching Hub, and worked alongside the five LSTs who continue to support faculty members deliver quality online instruction.

Findings

Theme 1: Building Skills and Capacity

Early in February of 2020, the media began to fill with stories of a coronavirus spreading around parts of Asia and Europe that caused respiratory illness, later referred to as COVID-19. Concern of a pandemic started circulating through the media and seemed to be an issue of concern by both the provincial and federal governments in Canada. Kyle remembers talking to a close friend and coworker in the early days of the pandemic and thinking “they’re going to need to have a plan to move [classes] online.” Feelings of persistent uncertainty, and the many stresses that accompany the unknown, left us all feeling uneasy as we wondered how to best support and prepare educators to rapidly transition online, as well as modify their course delivery to include multiple modalities and formats.

Kyle: Our faculty are certainly not technology averse, but most of our classes occurred in a traditional classroom space, meaning technology is deployed to support that mode of delivery. Most educational technology was used to support this classroom space as a file management system or “drop box” location for assignment file submissions. This showed many potential pressure points in the content assessment and communication pillars of course delivery, if classrooms were to transition to the virtual. We were assured that things would progress as normal. They did not. In March 2020, the VP Academic asked us what would it take to move all our courses online? The planning process for the mass exodus to virtual classrooms had begun. When someone wanted to do an online course before the pandemic, the instructor would often share their course design, and we would help reshape and repackage their existing content into an online-friendly format and then curate their tools and assessments to match their lessons. Now, because of the pandemic, the faculty have found themselves

dropped into the virtual classroom out of necessity and not knowing how to navigate all terrains found in this space.

Denyse: I was overwhelmed by the many available options and skeptical of the promised support, always hoping that a return to campus would void the need for these new approaches. But with time, and many trials and errors, platforms and tools for teaching online became less intimidating and more useful with the support of the newly launched Teaching Hub.

TH Admin: Pre-pandemic, pieces of the Teaching Hub were in the formulation and incubation stage in March 2020, but the pandemic put us into overdrive. As a new centre for teaching and learning, we grew up very quickly. Sometimes that means we don't have all our processes together, which has created tension and uncertainty during an already stressful time.

As we pivoted online, we knew a one-size-fits-all approach wouldn't work. We had to consider the nuanced needs of each faculty member and what would best support and prepare them during the pandemic, and beyond. Through in-person and online workshops, and one-on-one virtual meetings, Kyle and the other technologists guided instructors to effectively use a variety of teaching practices, multiple modalities and formats, and alternative assessment strategies.

Kyle: Instructors couldn't just upload a slide deck for their weekly content, but rather were coached how to transform their content into short videos. Text-based lessons had to have clear segments and a visual design that aided accessibility software which supplies text-based information in multiple formats such as braille-compatible (BRF Electronic braille) markup and mp3 audio recordings of the text for those with visual needs. We had to train faculty members how to use the various communication tools available in

online learning. This ranged from asynchronous tools, such as discussion boards, to live in-person video conferencing options such as Blackboard Collaborate, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams. When it came to assessments, we had to support faculty to develop their comfort level with receiving and grading assignments electronically. To achieve this, we held multiple workshops and one-on-one chats about how to use the online grade book, the in-line grading tool to mark assignments, and the retention centre software to get early warnings about struggling students or students who were achieving excellence. For our professional, math, and science folks, we also needed to implement online proctoring options for exam invigilation, which ended up being one of the most challenging aspects of transitioning to an online space. It was a balancing act between exam integrity and student privacy. One-on-one training was also offered, and a system of drop-in office hours for faculty was implemented. This allowed some faculty, who were self-explorers, to navigate the virtual classroom space but have a network of resources with which to check in. In addition to these support options, LSTs would regularly check in with faculty members to ensure that their classes were going as well as possible, listen to their concerns, and aide or guide as needed.

TH Admin: We assisted folks where they were by focusing on primer workshops for new online instructors, but also allowing for continued professional development of more seasoned professionals.

Through collaboration, connection, compassion, and a humanized or human-centred approach to support, the impact of our collective approach was tangible. For example, Denyse, who was a self-proclaimed novice to online teaching, affirmed that “the countless hours devoted to technical training of online platforms and

tools was originally very overwhelming and frustrating. But now, I expect to maintain many of these tools regardless of future course delivery methods."

Theme 2: Shifting Mindsets

As the pandemic persisted, embracing new learning approaches was critical, regardless of how un/comfortable instructors felt. Because learning is uncomfortable; it pushes up against old ways of doing, but we all had to lean into our own discomfort.

Kyle: We were able to facilitate the transfer of both technical and instructional knowledge. Since we were "leading by example," the faculty were able to see the merits of offering smaller digestible chunks of knowledge, as well as the merits of checking in often and providing reliable and consistent office hours. These three things, when used in tandem, are the foundations of not just building a course, but sustaining a course and the community around it. Building and sustaining community positively contributes to students' sense of belonging, including their "social connectedness, support, and respect . . . [which] lead to improved outcomes including academics, happiness, relationships with peers and teachers, motivation, engagement, and self-efficacy" (Borkoski 2019, para. 3). The community-oriented approach also allows the instructor to have a clear understanding of where their students are within the boundaries of their course requirements, and it gives the faculty member the opportunity to adjust content and assessments as needed. Through these supports, and our ability to remain flexible, adapt to continually changing circumstances, and adopt the role of travel guide, we supported faculty members to become their own guide, rather than an agent, in their new virtual classroom. By shifting the roles from travel agents to travel

guides allowed us to support faculty by presenting best practices through modeling.

Denyse:

As a faculty member who had never delivered an online course, there have been significant challenges through every stage of this pandemic. These include technical and connectivity issues, scheduling and time zone conflicts, student and instructor disengagement, diluted collegiality, cancelation of events, and ongoing proctoring, academic integrity, and quality of education debates. I spent the spring and summer of 2020 committed to mastering the tools for exceptional virtual teaching. If needed, I was determined to be ready. When the fall semester began, my courses included optional weekly synchronous sessions (with available recordings), office hours, interactive tools (such as breakout rooms, polls, whiteboards, etc.), guest speakers, email and video announcements, and student discussion groups. I made myself available and accessible to students and apologized profusely for not being able to deliver a true campus experience. I missed the connections to my students. In virtual settings where attendance, participation, and camera use are optional, this connection to students is compromised, and performance and engagement issues can remain undetected. I felt like I was working 24-7. As the pandemic progressed, I adopted a more open mindset and accepted that not all approaches would be successful, and that some failure could actually be constructive. I approached my live virtual sessions in a less formal and scripted manner, and encouraged students to join me in testing and learning these new approaches. Many online tools, such as chat functions, virtual hand raising, voting, annotating, and polling, facilitated class discussions and encouraged new forms of participation. Breakout

rooms were also used to encourage and facilitate small-group exchanges, foster student networking and peer support, and offer a more accessible and flexible medium for student involvement. The various features of online learning platforms also allowed for efficient submission of assignments, feedback to students, and monitoring of engagement and performance. When we first transitioned online, the focus was simply to “get through.” At the midway point, I collected anonymous student feedback. Not only did I share results back with students, but I utilized their feedback to modify the course, thus reinforcing a willingness to adapt and remain flexible. What I learned was that, while status quo is comfortable and requires little effort, we must embrace new learning and approaches, even, and perhaps especially, if it pushes us beyond our comfort zones.

Leading by example, using a community-oriented approach, created the conditions where faculty members felt supported exploring new online tools and shifting their mindsets to embrace the opportunities of online learning. This approach allowed our team to reframe presumptions that online learning is of lesser quality compared to in-person learning. Moreover, compassionate strategies, such as pedagogies of kindness (Denial 2019; Rawle 2021) and care (Bali 2021; Noddings 1984; Stommel, n.d.) that suggest transparency, connection, and self-compassion for ourselves including in our personal and professional boundaries and limitations (Neff 2021), grounded our approaches to faculty support and development, as well as how we interacted within our team, department, and institution more widely.

Theme 3: Leveraging Relationships

As detailed earlier, the Teaching Hub went from two staff members pre-pandemic to twelve, plus five student partners, in less than two years. The centre had just opened as the pandemic began, which meant we had no programming and really no staff either. We

wondered how we could prepare educators to adopt sustainable pedagogical practices with limited internal resources.

TH Admin: We couldn't do much ourselves, but given our previous roles and relationships, we had connections, networks, and knowledge of opportunities. Really it was other institutions that saved us at the start—we capitalized on already existing opportunities such as free, online workshops offered by larger universities and the Ontario Extend program, which is a micro-credentialed professional learning program focusing on technology-enabled and online learning experiences, developed by eCampus Ontario, a non-profit consortium of Ontario's publicly funded colleges, universities, and Indigenous institutes. We committed to collaborating with various departments, accepted redeployments to keep folks working, and worked tirelessly to give instructors and students what was needed to continue teaching and learning. We survived and thrived because we played nice, prioritized relationships, and offered a helping hand as soon as we were able. But before then we found willing, kind partners who could assist us, and were willing to. We needed to hire good, strong people to build capacity—folks who prioritized relationships, understood the importance of meeting people where they are, and would lead with open hearts and open minds. We knew if we could find those people, the rest would (and did) just happen.

Relationship building was critical to the success of the Teaching Hub. The path forward through the pandemic was grounded in caring, authentic relationships; leaning into the discomfort of not knowing; staying curious about how to best support each other; and remaining flexible by changing course as needed. In this way, leadership during a global pandemic required a lot of the same pieces

as good online teaching: care, flexibility, responsiveness, humility, and humanity.

Denyse: Instructors are not super-human and should not hold themselves (or be held) to such unrealistic standards. Faculty struggled through the pandemic alongside students and, as such, also required flexibility and compassion. The pandemic taught me that everyone is more than an instructor or a learner. They have lives and responsibilities beyond courses. We have to appreciate that many folks are struggling with overwhelming demands, and that flexibility and compassion can make an important difference. Students know who cares. Show them you care. For example, screen time can feel longer than real time, so plan for more breaks and a variety of value-added presentation tools (e.g., slides, videos, polls, breakout sessions, etc.). Make students aware of university programs such as mental health and academic supports. To demonstrate care, I always used my camera and shared university images to bridge the virtual distance between students and campus. I allowed more time for casual exchanges and integrated topics that would encourage student sharing. I referred to students by their names (having names on screen was helpful) and encouraged them to do the same (with myself and their peers).

Online teaching also increased access to a variety of learners and learning opportunities, uncovering ways to integrate equity, openness, and innovation. For example, pre-pandemic, Denyse mentioned a limited pool of guest speakers, primarily consisting of local connections who could visit campus.

Denyse: The transition to online course delivery removed geographical barriers and effectively extended access to stakeholders across the globe. Online offerings also integrated students from diverse programs who traditionally have been separated into different

course sections. This more inclusive mix of students allowed for broader perspectives from varied age cohorts, geographic locations, professional levels, and disciplines.

The pandemic also revealed multiple uncontrollable factors that can (and did) unexpectedly disrupt our lives.

TH Admin: We had an opportunity to set the norms of the Teaching Hub—what folks could expect, how we could support them, and what resources were available. Part of what kept us going as a centre for teaching and learning, and a newly formed team working online, was the sense of camaraderie and knowing we were all in it together. We also had a willingness to try, and adapt, and shift as needed, to meet the needs and demands of our instructors.

Denyse: As my understanding and appreciation for online methods and possibilities expanded, I more willingly tried new approaches to deliver learning outcomes. For example, my preparation for online synchronous sessions was less about flawless content delivery and more about exploring engagement tools and anticipating technical issues. With the support of the newly launched Teaching Hub, a valuable resource who assisted faculty throughout the pandemic, my perspectives on what is possible both online and in face-to-face classes has shifted. As I plan for future courses, I no longer think in terms of a rigid divide between online and in-person learning. Instead, I have adopted a more holistic approach to teaching and learning with consideration and appreciation for the multitude of virtual and face-to-face tools that can be used to best support positive learning experiences.

The stories recounted above demonstrate our institutional commitment to championing the value of teaching and learning. Utilizing everything from external resources like Blackboard

Academy, to the relationships established among the Northern Ontario group of universities (e.g., Nipissing University, Lakehead University, Laurentian University, Algoma University) which launched an online conference called the Borealis Summer Institute for Teaching and Learning, coupled by a supportive senior administration courageous enough to trust their team, made it all work.

TH Admin: We were intentional about what areas needed greater, and more rapid, supports; we brought the right team together at the right time; we always supported the team; we understood the need to remain flexible and compassionate during hard times; we saw the merits of humanized, equitable education; and the trust and influence earned throughout our careers allowed us to draw on connections to support our faculty as we continued to build capacity. Our existence just prior to the pandemic was a godsend to NU.

Institutionally, the Teaching Hub has demonstrated deep value to the university, from the learning systems technologists who supported faculty transition online, to our group of student partners who offered peer support, to the courageous administrative leadership who championed the team all the way through.

Implications

As we shifted into our post-pandemic recovery plan and reflected back on the last three years of the Teaching Hub, it was clear that pedagogical practices and instructional skills would have the greatest impact for learners, regardless of technical skills that had to be transferred. As a team, we met faculty members and instructors where they were through an empathic and community-building approach. In some cases, building capacity took place in small workshops, some of which were led by a technologist, and some of which were discussions between faculty peers, facilitated by a technologist. Our focus was to help faculty adapt and modify their courses for online delivery, rather than merely replicate the course online. Our approach helped to combat faculty members' belief

that, as Denyse noted, “the pivot should result in force fitting face-to-face teaching approaches into a virtual model.”

The Teaching Hub started off small, but grew exponentially in its capacity to prepare and support educators for continuous change, sometimes quite rapidly and unexpectedly, throughout the pandemic. The staff working in the Teaching Hub have rescued distressed faculty members, have lifted instructors up to achieve the impossible, have developed faculty and staff members’ capacity through ongoing coaching and workshops, and have kept faculty teaching—which kept students learning, and Nipissing University open.

As a cherry on top, the Teaching Hub’s strength in building up student success and teaching and learning was also awarded a Blackboard/Anthology Catalyst Award for 2021 and 2023—further recognition that we have arrived on the global stage, despite less than three years of existence. To bring this chapter full circle, how did the Teaching Hub avoid burning up (and out) when thrust into the fire? We adapted, leaned in, remained flexible, shifted perspectives, prioritized relationships, and adjusted our sails as necessary, which has set the stage that will allow the NU Teaching Hub to thrive for years to come.

Recommendations

To conclude this chapter, we wanted to offer reflective questions and practical strategies that you can adopt or adapt when working with faculty and course instructors. Take time to think deeply about the following suggestions and questions as they relate to your practice and profession:

1. Prioritize skill development and skill transfer by scaffolding your approach to build faculty and course instructors’ confidence levels. Ask yourself, *who is the learner in front of me and what are they trying to achieve? What are the small steps they can take to achieve their goals?*
2. Create multiple entry points for faculty members and course instructors so that you meet them where they are.

Ask yourself, *what support am I providing faculty and course instructors to achieve their goals? What is one new opportunity that I can explore to meet a need for faculty or instructors, programs, or departments?*

3. Remain open, responsive, and flexible so that you can modify your approach to meet diverse needs. Ask yourself, *how can I remain curious about rapidly changing needs for support? What questions might I pose when confronting new information or challenges? How can I build in opportunities for personal and critical reflection?*
4. Prioritize connection, relationships, and relationship-building by fostering a sense of belonging. Ask yourself, *how am I building connection and relationships with faculty members? Am I prioritizing connection over content? Am I using the resources at my disposal?*
5. Foster a growth mindset by practicing modeling and non-judgment. Ask yourself, *what does my language or body language signal to instructors? How can I foster a sense of trust and non-judgmental practices to encourage faculty members and course instructors to lean into risk-taking?*

So where does this all end? In a nice, neat braid, where a shared telling of three individual threads that represent three levels of institutional organization—academic support staff, faculty, and academic leadership—have come together to create one much stronger strand. The individuals sharing the narratives described in this chapter have done what was necessary for them to survive within Nipissing University's context. However, it's more than that, and the implications of what we achieved should not be trivialized. For example, faculty members and course instructors who had never taught online have gained the skills and confidence to continue using online learning tools and teaching practices both in-person and online. Perhaps more important than skill development are the ways in which we were able to shift the mindsets of many (not all!) course instructors and faculty members to not simply accept online teaching as a temporary response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but

rather view it alongside in-person teaching as a valuable modality in and of itself. Finally, to value the significance of relationships and relationship-building, even where face-to-face connection is limited, is to prioritize connection and humanity.

Note: Sadly, this chapter is already describing a bygone era. Some restructuring has recently occurred at Nipissing University and there are no longer manager of eLearning or dean of teaching positions. Sarah has left the institution completely, and Pat has now reverted to his faculty role as a full professor in the School of Physical and Health Education. Kyle is no longer a learning systems technologist (although those positions still exist with the restructure) and now works as an analyst in the Office of Institutional Planning and Research.

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