

Transcript - Democratizing Learning Environments

5/4/2022

RAY KEITH: --to transform teaching and learning. In today's session will be democratizing learning environments. And so thank you all for joining us. This has been a great experience over the last six months, and we had some amazing panelists who have been sharing their expertise as it relates to operationalizing equity. And so, today will be our final session.

If you could put in the chat your institution and your title so we know who's in the space with us. And then please feel free to use the chat if you have questions. And my name is Ray Keith. I work for Achieving the Dream as a program development consultant, and I'll be the moderator for today's session. And then we're going to move into introductions of our amazing panelists.

Oh, sorry. Let me give you the overview of our session. And so, today, you'll be engaging in a dialogue and discourse with panelists as it relates to co-creating environments that support and humanize students' academic experiences, while affirming their strengths and potential in the classroom.

Our panelists will be sharing practices, inclusive practices, instructional strategies, and digital tools that foster a climate of belonging, open dialogue, student-centered engagement, and co-construction in the classroom and beyond.

And then our objectives for today are for you all to increase your knowledge, understanding, and abilities as it relates to the practice of democratizing the classroom, co-creating learning environments with students to holistically support their learning and teaching experiences in your classrooms, and then recognizing and implementing culturally responsive and equity-minded practices and instructional strategies that foster a climate of student empowerment and agency. And then we want to share how you can incorporate digital tools and technologies to enhance student engagement.

And so we have with us today, Dr. Michele Hampton, who has been a professor at Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland, Ohio, for over 20 years, where she teaches in the business administration department. She earned a PhD in education with a specialization in instructional design for online learning.

She has a high technology MBA and a bachelor's of science in computers, and she was a former manufacturing engineer, management consultant, business owner, and information technology faculty member. Thank you for joining us today, Michele.

MICHELE HAMPTON: Thank you.

RAY KEITH: And Ayse Durmus is our next panelist. Ayse serves as an English, as an additional language instructor at the University of Colorado, Denver. She started her career as an ESL teacher straight out of college and has held several positions in her career, including English chair, drama teacher, instructional coach, and an academic content specialist at both public, private schools and settings at higher education institutions. She holds a master's degree in culturally and linguistically diverse education and a bachelor's degree of Arts in ESL. Thank you for joining us, Ayse.

AYSE DURMUS: Thank you.

RAY KEITH: And then we have Dr. Shirley Burnett, who serves, Burnett, who serves as the interim chair, instructor of mathematics at the University College at Jackson State University. In this position, her sole responsibility is to develop and implement best practices in developmental and intermediate courses.

She earned a doctorate of education in educational leadership with a specialization in curriculum and instruction. She also serves as the contributor and project lead in the Every Learner Everywhere digital equity research practitioner partnership project, and participates in the digital justice faculty learning circles. Thank you for joining us, Shirley.

SHIRLEY BURNETT: Thank you.

RAY KEITH: And so, we're going to get started. We're going to move into the "why" for democratizing classrooms. And so we want our panelists to share their aha moment and what led them to recognizing the importance and the value of democratizing their classrooms. And so we'll just ask them to come off mute and share your experiences with our folks in the-- with our participants. Thank you.

MICHELE HAMPTON: I'll go since nobody's going. How about that? Good morning. Afternoon. Hopefully, it's not evening, no matter where you are in the world. So I think it's important to look at democratizing learning environments, because we often talk about having students be accountable for their learning. So we're really big on that. But rarely, do we talk about providing students the opportunity to have a say about their

learning environment. And so that was kind of an aha moment for me. Like, well, let's just ask students.

We're often the sage on the stage, or most of us are used to playing that role in the front of the classroom if you teach, and rarely do we ask students, what do you think? What do you like? What do you think about this? How is this landing for you? And so that was kind of my aha moment. How about talk to my students and see how they feel about things, especially their learning environment?

RAY KEITH: Great. Thank you, Michele.

AYSE DURMUS: Thank you, Michele. I can go next. And I want to echo everything that you just said. And I think when I thought about the "why" question and the reasons why, I think it's important to revisit. I wanted to revisit one of the most fundamental principles of democracy itself for a betterment.

Democratizing the classroom is the natural rights. Whenever you google it, even if you google it, it's going to come out-- the natural rights, right to life, and liberty, and property that no government can take away. So I wanted to see this principles reflection in my educational environment.

And then when we see or when we look at the classroom culture, it should be alive with this living, changing, evolving, sustaining dynamics. And then we want to see that it is liberated. And the members ways of knowing, diverse ways of knowing, and ways of expressing their knowledge and their authentic existence are valued, seen as contribution and an asset.

So the verb "democratize" occurred to me when I felt the need for it the most. As I was reflecting on the syllabi, the former syllabi examples I was provided for institutional framing, I first looked for values as an educator. Then I sought the language that would communicate these values to my students in an authentic way.

And then, I also skimmed to find the parts where the students can contribute, collaborate, co-create, and be that one member of this community of learners with their cultural wealth. But I was only able to find the statements that would define how to be a student within the dominant norms.

So there was no right for Liberty, or property that we can call intellectual or cultural wealth that students are bringing in this space in the syllabus. And no government, in our case, the institution can take away. But I couldn't find them.

So instead, we had the expectations from authority and no space for student anatomy or vote or choice, just like Michele stated. Then I imagine myself standing before my students reading this to them aloud, and they share their hearts, their cultural wealth, their respect, their stories, and love with me, while I share these things with them. So that is my aha moment, I think, for democracy, and I looked for democratizing practices. So thank you.

SHIRLEY BURNETT: And I would just like to add that, for me, I was trying to figure out that missing piece. It seemed like there was just something missing, because we know that we're all experts in our field of study. But I was like, it was-- it just seemed like there was a gap between what I was trying to deliver and my students.

So I reflected on a famous researcher, Vincent Tinto, and he made a profound statement. And it was way back in 1975, but it is so profound. And his statement was, "No matter the situation, the greater the student's level of academic integration, the greater level of substantial commitment to the goal to college graduation." So I wanted to figure out how can I make that classroom experience better so that it will retain the students. And that was my aha moment. I needed to do something different.

RAY KEITH: Great. Thank you. This is a great way to get our conversation started. We do have a question from one of our participants. "Does democratizing have a boundary?"

MICHELE HAMPTON: Ray, I can take that question. The answer is absolutely yes. So we're talking about infusing student voice in the learning environment, not allowing students to just completely take over the learning environment.

And so I think a couple places in this presentation, we use the term "co-create". Co-create means we're still around. And so, absolutely, democratizing does have boundaries. And what those boundaries look like actually can change from class to class because each class is a different set of students.

And so it's really, to Ayse's point, the comment that she opened with was that the classroom is a living, breathing, changing, evolving thing. And so we've got to live, breathe, change, evolve, and be flexible as well. But yes, democratizing, in my opinion, definitely has boundaries. It's a co-creation situation.

RAY KEITH: Yeah, and I would think about how we're thinking about boundaries and thinking about how we're positioning ourselves and positioning our students in that space as we're co-constructing and co-creating these environments that are democratized. So thank you for that question.

We're going to move into our next section of the session. And so, again, we're going to be talking about how we co-create environments that support and humanize the students lived and academic experiences, and again, affirming their strengths and the potential in the classroom.

And so, here, we're going to have our panelists share approaches, practices, and processes that they've used to democratize their learning environments and making sure that they're using a student-centered, equity-minded, and culturally responsive lens when they're doing this work. And so I will turn it over to our panelist.

AYSE DURMUS: I can take the lead on this one. To me, I think this is about belonging. Students learn when they own and belong-- actually, not just students, ourselves too. And as we know, in order to own something, we put our effort, time, passion, skills, potential, joy, and love in it.

So democratizing the education then will give students the ownership of their learning and teaching experience that their effort is validated, and their time is appreciated, their passion is heard, and potential is considered as an asset and a contributor. And joy and love, I think, in my opinion, are a must.

So democratizing is taking students with holistic approach and co-creating a holistic experience that would acknowledge their lived and academic intellectual experiences as a collective strength through project-based learning or problem-solving exercises or community building, or innovative tools and strategies that, in very short, my colleagues will share with us some of their examples. And by democratize classes that dismantle the norms that are both results and the causes of inequities in education.

RAY KEITH: Ayse, would you share just again, why we want to have a common understanding of terminology, and maybe unpack a couple of these terms here?

AYSE DURMUS: OK. So we wanted to, as we were getting ready for this, we wanted to work on some terminology that we challenge as positionality and that we need to understand and focus on our research on such concepts like transparency and how it is linked to democratizing the environments. And we need to analyze to better capture the connection between the learning and terms, such as a student agency and communities.

So as we proceed in our equity journey, we also want to acknowledge that according to CUE, which is California Center for Urban Education, Equity-Mindedness is an anti-racist project that envisions equity as means of corrective justice to defy the institutional

structures, policies, and practices that are unjust, inequitable, and dehumanizing for historically marginalized students.

So in this concept of democratizing, positionality is defined as where we stand with respect to power by location within shifting networks and relationships. And then, it can be analyzed and changed depending on the situation.

So in our democratization process, it's one of the things that as educators, we need to challenge to better serve our students and allow equitable opportunities for student empowerment and ownership of learning. So it requires us to reimagine the teacher's role as a partner, and the relationship between the teacher and the students as a partnership.

Then comes the transparency. So according to research, transparency is a set of teaching strategies that focuses on making transparent to students how and why they're learning and engaging with course content in particular ways that are relevant to their contributions and meaningful to them.

And Keisha Lambert, who was named as Illinois best history teacher in 2019, in her words, it means ownership, an active process of engagement and authority over our learning. So transparency clears the floor for student agency, helps classrooms become student-oriented, student-centered, more equitable, of course, and definitely more democratic for the fact that it's open for validation of student voice and power.

And the community of learners is one concept that is coming from culturally responsive pedagogy framework. Within this framework, with the dominant lenses in this community, education is seen as an active liberatory practice, and the members of this community claim a knowledge base in late Bell Hooks' words from their experience and wisdom that they can speak to, and they can speak from.

So in this community, the students uniqueness are recognized and validated. It is safe because the practitioner, the instructor, the teacher in this community acts as one of the crew to facilitate learning and teaching, that is microaggression and microassaults free. So this community is the one that democratizes the learning. And maybe--

RAY KEITH: Great. Thank you, Ayse.

AYSE DURMUS: On a final note, to connect it to what we are about to share, we wanted to visualize how this classroom looks like. So democratizing learning and teaching looks like when education solely respects and cares for our students souls and creates arenas for intimate and deep learning. Through democratizing of education, rich and

varied practices of communities of color—Black, Latinx, Asian-American, Pacific Islander, and multicultural communities of color are valued and centered.

It looks like where these practices are not only valued, but sustained, and Drs Nouri and Sajjadi call it liberating ourselves from dominant ideology in order to convert learning and teaching experience into something that explores, honors, extent, cultural practices and potentials of our students. So it feels like liberation.

It is decentering the norms and centers the wholeness, holistic union of body and spirit that individuals are students, take education as part of their real life that allows their authentic selves to be the agents.

And democratization is love. Our love for contribution, transformation, engaging experience in our students. So now, I'm turning to my colleagues to provide the best examples and models of democratized classrooms. Thank you.

MICHELE HAMPTON: So when we look at co-creating the learning environment, I had an example of an experience from— I teach macroeconomics and microeconomics, and survey of economics, and I was looking for a new courseware for ECON classes, and I had done the initial research. So this kind of speaks to the question we had about boundaries.

So I did the initial research and came up with two options that I thought might work well in the classroom as we switch to new courseware. And what I did is I took the time to talk to my students, and I involved them, and I had them pilot two chapters under, let's call it courseware A, and two chapters under courseware B.

And then had them—brought them back together and got their thoughts about, what do you think would work best? What did you like about each one? What didn't you like about each one? So in effect, I gave them options, but I also heard their voices. I mean, so they really did vote between the two choices of which courseware that they felt most comfortable with and thought would best enhance and augment their learning environment.

And so what was really neat, they were so into it. I think they worked harder on those chapters than they did on any of the other chapters that we had that semester, and they had done such a good job that it turns out the courseware that we went with, the publisher was so impressed with how they had prepared their notes and the feedback

they got, that they flew from Boston and had a formal focus group with my students. And we had a big party.

And you guys don't know me, but the people on the panel that do know me know I love a good party. So we had a good party, and they were debriefed by the publisher. And we were one of, I think, only two community colleges in the country that were even allowed to participate in doing the pilot.

I was just so proud of my students and ever since then, so I went with their suggestion, which was mine. But I didn't let them know that to influence their decision. And as I teach the course each semester now, I do a survey, a feedback survey, just so I know what I need to change or improve or delete or modify in the class. And one of the questions I ask is so what we chose is a completely digital platform, so we don't have a traditional economics textbook.

The thinking behind that is, if you're confused in economics, reading three paragraphs in a textbook is not going to help unconfuse you. And so the digital platform has really been a plus in helping to improve the learning environment for the ECON classes.

But I asked the students, so would you rather have a digital textbook, or how do you feel about the all digital component of the course with delivering the content? And I think we chose the new courseware almost five years ago now.

And every semester since then, all the students have reported-- I think I've had two that said, no, I really rather have a traditional textbook in the almost five years. But all of the students are like, no, this is great.

And then I tell them, hey, your students back in 2018 thought this was a really good idea. And that's where I got this from. And they're like, hey, cool. So it really has worked out well. It definitely has improved student engagement. It definitely has improved student learning, and it really has helped me improve my teaching.

RAY KEITH: Thanks, Michele. And then I, yeah.

MICHELE HAMPTON: Am I supposed to answer this question now?

RAY KEITH: No, we're going to follow up at the end. Yeah, Dr. Burnett's going to share what she's done, and then we'll answer the question we have from one of our participants.

SHIRLEY BURNETT: So with me, when reflecting back on that aha moment, I wanted to change the dynamics of what was going on in my classrooms. And so one of the things

I did was to embrace the whole thing of inclusion, making the students feel connected to what they were learning.

So my initial attempt, it started in mid semester. So it went off a little well, but I thought that I could do a better job. So what I did the next semester, I set the tone earlier. I started from day one trying to change the dynamics of my classroom, and so I wanted to do what I usually do.

I'm concerned about content. I teach math, so I always want to set a good tone. As to this class, we're going to be doing work, and we're going to be doing work every day. That's what I want to set the tone. But I didn't necessarily set the tone to let the students know that I'm human, I'm approachable.

So I noticed someone asked the question about time restrictions. How do we find the time to do this? So with my classes, they're a little different because I teach co-requisite classes, where we have extra time embedded within our classrooms.

So I had the time to carve out time to get acquainted with my students, what I'm recommending. So during these get-acquainted sessions, I allow my students to upload videos, instead of that common practice of, stand up, introduce yourself, tell me what your major is. That normal introductions that we do.

And I always ask the students that, when you share your photo that it had to be something that was valuable to you, and that I really wish that if they could be included in the photo.

So what that allowed for me to do is to get to know a intricate part of who they were, and then in return, I would also share videos and photos of me just so they know that I am approachable.

This is your teacher transparent. I'm going to be transparent here. I have family that I love just like you do. And so what this does in breaking down those barriers that the students know that I'm approachable.

And then the next thing I carry on, that I start setting the tone of giving them the voice to let them know that I hear you. I asked them two questions on day one to set this tone. And the two questions are, I first do a poll. How do we want to use cell phones inside the classroom? And then I ask what is considered tardy for class?

And based on their feedback, I let them know these are the policies, these are the things that we're going to abide by. And I set this tone for day one so that we can matriculate

throughout the whole semester. And I'll share more with you to let you know how it goes throughout the year from this day-one interaction.

RAY KEITH: Great. Thanks, Shirley. And so we had a question about-- again, and Dr. Burnett spoke to this about, how do you create time to do this? And one of my colleagues who led this, our equity journey at a community college here in Aurora, talks about how we need to do this incrementally.

This is not a process where you redesign your entire course over the summer or a semester. It's finding maybe a couple of assignments that are going to have actual impact on student learning and the student experience, but figuring out how do I redesign and then also, again, bring in that student voice, their perspective, their feedback as it relates to specific assignments in the course. And so it's doing this in increments, not overhauling your course over a summer or something like that. And so that's one way to be able to do that. And to Shirley's point, I really appreciated how she talked about her own transition and transformation as it was like, I'm so focused on the content that we weren't even building community. And then, once you begin to build the community, the work is easier than you would actually believe it would be.

And again, my colleague in Colorado often talks about after redesigning and developing those courses, he said he's working less harder, and working more smarter than he had been previously.

And so, again, it's incremental. It just takes time. And once you've redesigned, again, it really is a cyclical approach that you need to be redesigned, implement, assess and then reassess. But once you've done that, I, most folks that I've talked to, they said their work as an educator is much easier.

MICHELE HAMPTON: Just to add quickly to that too. It's not separate and apart from what we normally do. It really is integrated and woven into exactly what we're doing in the classroom. And so I think as long as you make sure that it's integrated, it goes a lot better. And as you said, I mean, it makes our job a lot easier.

RAY KEITH: So now, we're going to move into digital tools that support centering and empowering students while creating those requirements. Oh, go ahead.

ERIC FIERO: Can I pause you? The person who asked the question about that balancing added a clarifying follow-up. Can we take a look at that and give a quick follow-up briefly to the question about balancing how we build the community with the content?

MICHELE HAMPTON: I don't see the question, but I can go from what you just said, Eric.

ERIC FIERO: Well, so it was, "How do you have the time in the course itself to co-create the content, pull the students, do all of those things and find time to teach?" And I myself as a faculty member, understand the difficulty of this balancing act. So what are some advice you'd give or how do you do that?

MICHELE HAMPTON: Well, one, you don't do it for every single unit. So you're not co-creating every week that you're running your course. So, for me, I pick out strategic points like I was going to move to new courseware anyway, so why not involve students in the decision?

Actually, this is a good entree into the next slide. I give examples of how I infuse these things into my courses. And it's not every single assignment, every single week, every single unit. It's strategically where it makes sense. And so, I guess I will-- if it's OK, I'll start with my slide here.

So interaction is the glue that holds the learning environment together. At least, that's my belief. And when you're looking at co-creating the learning environment, I believe we have to create space for those interactions to exist. And so, for me, interactions exist on three levels. So there's student-to-instructor interaction, student-to-student interaction, and student-to-content interaction.

And I give just a few examples there under each of the interaction types there. And so, one, I'm going to show you an example in each, but timely feedback. There's nothing magical about that, but you would be surprised at how it goes such a long way for letting students know that you really are involved in the course. I mean, you haven't taken your hands off the steering wheel and you're in it with them.

If they do an assignment and it takes you eight weeks to get back to them, it looks like you're not involved. So why should they be involved. And so it's not always high tech. It's not always something that's fancy. And it definitely is not something that's separate and apart.

Visual presence of instructor, I teach quite a few of online classes. I teach a couple in person, mainly blended or hybrid, but in my online classes, I really work hard on social presence. And so because it's easy to flip the switch and just let the class go into autopilot, the students don't know you. You don't know them. You've not created any community. Nobody's engaged. It's just really easy to go down that road.

And so I use an avatar that acts as the online course guide. And it's something really simple. And it's kind of a-- well, it's an avatar. So I'll let you see her in a moment. I guess, maybe I'll do the example under each one, rather than do them all three together.

So I'm going to share my screen, Eric. And I think, wait, wait, wait. I think it's this one. Eric is much better at this than I. Did I get to the right? Here we are, I think. Here I am. OK, so I happen to-- can people see my screen? OK, good. I happen to use Voki. And you see, I mean, I'm moving my cursor. Her eyes follow the cursor, but I think she looks like me. And if you disagree, I don't want to hear your answer. I mean, I don't want to hear your comment if you disagree. So I think it looks like me, and--

RAY KEITH: We can't see your avatar, Michele.

MICHELE HAMPTON: You can't--

RAY KEITH: We only see your link page.

MICHELE HAMPTON: Oh, so what's wrong?

RAY KEITH: Yeah, I think the avatar just didn't come up.

MICHELE HAMPTON: Huh, can you see--

RAY KEITH: We just see your links.

MICHELE HAMPTON: Oh, wait, wait, wait, I linked to the wrong thing then. Hold on, hold on. That's why we let Eric run the slides. All right, let's try this again. I'm really sorry. I don't-- here, let's try. Let's try to share this screen. Now, can you see her?

RAY KEITH: Yes.

MICHELE HAMPTON: OK. So, hopefully, she looks like me. And she talks briefly.

[AUDIO PLAYBACK]

- Hello, and welcome to ECON 2620, macroeconomics. I am Professor Hampton's electronic guide for this course.

[END PLAYBACK]

MICHELE HAMPTON: So did we hear her talk? OK, good. All right, so every week, she comes on and she basically says, this is what we're going to do for the week. Make sure you do this. Make sure you do that.

And it's really simple. But the students were sending me emails like, is that your real voice? Yeah, I did not hire a professional actress to play me for this course, but it made me realize just how easy it is for the students to become so disconnected from us, especially in an online learning environment. And so I work really hard to make sure that

I infuse social presence in my online classes to help improve the student-to-instructor engagement.

So under student to student, the examples are immediate presence of your classmates. Of course, group work is an easy way to create student-to-student interaction, and then peer review.

Well, I came up with what Shirley was saying. We can do the same old, same old stuff for group projects. We can do the same old, same old stuff for introduce yourself to the class. But I happen to use VoiceThread for my group projects. And so with VoiceThread, I can give the instructions with my voice and hopefully, will it play?

[AUDIO PLAYBACK]

- Please describe what's happening in this graph, and then provide an example of what may have caused this scenario.

[END PLAYBACK]

MICHELE HAMPTON: So I put my students in groups, and they then drop their picture, and they can record their section or their input into what's going on in this particular assignment, which happens to be a production possibilities curve graph.

And so I use this, especially with graphs and putting the students in groups, so that they can phone in their answer. They can type their answer and have it translated into voice. But it's just a different way to approach group projects without everybody getting the group and get on this discussion board and write.

We're really prone to a lot of text-based responses from our students. And so just trying to mix it up for, what about those students that have different learning styles? We definitely seem to favor tech space.

Here's my last one. So the third piece of engagement is student to content. And I think I mentioned the course where will I use adaptive courseware. And I use-- I'm definitely media heavy-- so lots of audio, lots of video. And I use a formative assessment along with polling.

Well, formative assessment that I use is Kahoot. And again, simple. Students love it. They take out their phones. But the part that's really cool is I allow them. So I have a video that's our lobby video. So while everybody's on their phone and logging in and I'm waiting for players, they tell me which videos they want me to play for the week. It's a link. It's not a whole lot of extra time.

And so we've had Bollywood videos. We've had country Western videos. We've had R&B. We've had rap. We've got Latinx. Whatever they want me to play, that's what I play a lot. I mean, it can't, it has to be appropriate. That's my only request with that.

So these are things that I use in my learning environment to help, that are some digital tools that are pretty easy to use, relatively inexpensive or free. Free is always the best price, but students absolutely love it. And again, these are integrated into my course. They're not separate and apart from my content.

RAY KEITH: Great. Thanks, Dr. Hampton. These are really amazing digital tools that can enhance the student learning and student engagement. So we're going to ask Dr. Burnett to share out some things that she's utilizing as it relates to digital tools that support student-centered learning as well.

SHIRLEY BURNETT: So Michele, I'm going to have to steal that doing the videos as I do my Kahoot, while they log in. Yes, so the changes that we make to our classes is not overnight, as we have stated. It's a continuum.

And someone asked the question about, how has the pandemic changed what we do in the classroom? What I now do is my face-to-face classes still have a complete Canvas shell that goes along with it.

And so both the face to face and the online classes resemble greatly. But the face to face, I have a chance to echo what was presented in the Canvas shell. And it also gives us that opportunity that we carry on the discussions inside of Canvas if we run out of time for things that occurred in the face to face.

So some of the things that I do for as individualism, we use a Pearson MyLab, and Mastery is our LLMs of choice. And we use it, where we adapt the lessons for each student, and then they have an accessibility feature embedded within.

And then, inside the classroom, I try to use personalized feedback. In the online environment, as well as the face to face, I try to give each student individualized feedback on things that they have presented to me.

So we move from the individualism where we try to do a collectivism, where we don't want students to feel that to be productive in society is going to be a solo act. I try to encourage them that they got to learn also how to interact with one another.

So some of the things that we do is I use games, and there's a link there that has every game that you can think of and the tool will allow you to create your own game that's applicable to your situation.

So that tool, I have a member of my team and she does an excellent job with creating, I mean, Jeopardy, Who Want to Be a Millionaire, I mean, everything. I mean, and she can do it quickly.

So we use that as a means of, for the review for a test. We use Kahoot, as Michele talked about, just to get them engaged so that they can get their mind off of I'm just being that sage on the stage.

We try to actively engage them in the process. And then, lastly, we use the authentic projects, where we give students a chance to respond to a real-life application issue and just to see how they would respond, how does this situation relate to them?

And so we use the group discussion forums and Michele mentioned the VoiceThread. I mean, that has been an awesome tool in trying to communicate with students that they can hear your voice, and I can hear their voice.

And a lot of times, I send that message every Monday. I send a message to my students. Hi, how was your weekend? I did this this weekend and it just forms that relationship, that community that is unexplained. Like I said, my goal was to bridge that gap, that I wanted to have a good classroom experience with the students, as well as help them to master the content.

RAY KEITH: Great. Thank you all for sharing those tools. And just based off of the responses in the chat, these really are highly engaging, and folks are really excited about the opportunities to actually use these tools in their courses.

And so we're going to move into successes and opportunities for democratizing learning environments as we are entering into the last 15, 14 minutes of our session. And we do want to allow some time towards the end of the session for you all to ask questions of our panelists.

And so we'll just start with our panelists sharing their successes. And as we engage in this work, there's always opportunities or challenges that we might need to address or that we might face. And so our experts will share how they've overcome some of those challenges, but maintaining a focus on how to become-- how to operationalize equity through a student-centered lens.

AYSE DURMUS: So in this part of our presentation, I just want to provide a very brief background information on the class, the design process, and student products as examples of their experience.

So this is an online advanced grammar class that is recommended to be taken simultaneously with an advanced composition class under college prep ESL program in Colorado and their prerequisites for the college level classes.

So as we started the term, as Shirley was mentioning, because I wanted to humanize the experience, and this was our first time that we were doing online version of this class, I held pre semester office hours that took place at AM and PM hours for students, diverse schedules. And I reach out to students via email to invite them for these hours, and that would be just about them.

So they would come to this office hours just to say hi, or short introductions, ask anything, say anything, see their peers, meet the classroom, start building our community before the semester started.

I also aim to provide this experience for them prior to the first day of class. And we shared our stories. What likes, what dislikes, the goals for our education, and then how we want to define success.

So I came up with some prompts, such as what would you title the book if your life was a book? Or who is your inspiration in life from history, and what do you think they would tell you if they were here or if you had to meet them now?

So this experience led us to conversations about the community we wanted to create and we wanted to build and sustain in them, and the community principles that we co-created. I also ask them what they think about it is the most important thing in this class.

And the student responses, of course, varied from time management to getting an A, from submitting assignment on due date to using proper grammar in written tasks. And then I shared that, I announced that the most important thing in this class is you folks and you're learning.

And then, this statement, I think, changed the climate from a pressing one, I think, to a democratized one. The conversations took place on their responses. And we look into what it is saying about higher Ed, as well as how our wholeness as people should be part of the experience.

So our first week became a time we called this class of people "we" and help us create culturally relevant learning experiences because we redefine the concepts of participation, engagement, assessment, roles of students, and the role of teacher instructor and how we want to plan on these things together.

Then, for particular class, grammar class, in the topical outline, it's time for us to learn about models. And in the source that we were provided from the department, which is from one of the biggest ESL publishing companies, there are repetitive drills for models, a very short paragraph where models are used frequently, questions that stay in the remember and understand levels of Bloom's taxonomy, and on the text, no cognitive labor requirement for creativity analysis or evaluation.

And one of the primary things that we had to design for this class was the assessment. So instead of a final or a test, or final test, I decided a scaffolded project that would allow authentic expressions of knowledge and learning process, creativity that I wanted to include, and critical thinking skills because it would involve decision-making and making for a plan.

So students were asked to create a business plan through which they were able to use their grammar repertoire in a way that is meaningful to them, of course, and with higher order thinking and conditioning and authentic and engaging ways.

So going back to this project, students first worked on where they wanted to start their business in Colorado. They brought their research and analytical skills at this stage to evaluate the needs of the regions, demands from the populations, and how they address these in their business plan. So this is also where students were able to brainstorm, share, get feedback from their peers in teams, and if they saw the need, they were allowed to use their native languages.

Then they started the design step, in which their cultural wealth was an asset to be able to serve the people in their business. So descriptions of proposal descriptions, proposal for the nature of the business, determining employee rights and requirements for the specific business they want to create. Some interview questions for important positions in this business. Design the place that business would take place that brought so much fun, and then naming it with this reasoning.

So throughout this project, students used one of the typical outcomes that we were required to cover models in authentic, free, and meaningful ways that they were ready to

transfer all these skills they brought to this project for an English Composition class that they can take after this grammar class.

So some examples included an Ethiopian restaurant that serves food by providing information on the historical background of the food and drinks for their cultural importance, and how it has brought people together for centuries.

A real estate office to build bridges between prospective immigrants and real estate in this state so that they can start planning on their housing budgeting beforehand. And in this business, student had even a translator at the office. A similar agent office that provided language and business services before immigrants arrived, and so on.

And after this project, we utilize our sociocultural conversations, that are mostly happening individually, but this time, we had it as a class, in order to understand the cognitive processes. The impact of acknowledging that knowledge is meaningful not in only one setting, but everywhere, and it's a whole experience. And that's the opposite of dominator values in the education.

So these conversations also gave students their authority in their learning and shifted the power and the positionality dynamics toward a democratic one. And I think we created a sense of belonging. So with the feedback I received from students during these conversations, I was able to switch the source from the former one to an elder and share this with my students, of course, by thanking them on how they shape my understanding of sources as well.

And with this understanding, I asked if I could design an intermediate reading class to my department. And as I get the permission, I used OERs that are culturally relevant, authentic, and validation of linguistic repertoire that my multilingual students are bringing with them to the classroom and serve them in the best way culturally sustaining possible.

RAY KEITH: Thank you, Ayse. And so I know that we have about five minutes left, and I want to make sure that we have time for some Q&A. And so, if you could raise your hand or just put your question in the chat, and then, surely, if you wouldn't mind just quickly giving an overview. We have about one minute or so that you can share out what you've seen happen with successes in your courses.

SHIRLEY BURNETT: So, I guess, just quickly, I want to say that because of these changes that I've made with my classes, the students are coming to class. I know I have no longer have to fight that low attendance rates that we so often find. And that's not

just for my face-to-face classes, but that's for my online classes as well. The students are actively participating. So that social presence is so important to this current student.

And then I'm going to-- one student mentioned to me that he felt free in my class, and I was just like, oh, my Lord, it was worth the investment. It was worth it. So anything that we can do to show those students that we care, that their voice matter is really worth it.

RAY KEITH: Great. Thanks, Shirley. We do have a question. "Could you address the tension or distinction between democracy as a majority wins versus equitable practices that intentionally seek to center the systemically non-dominant, wondering about the logistics of co-creating?"

And so I think we think about the democratizing the classroom and thinking about what does that look like in practice. Is that really about majority wins, or is that again, about sharing the space in a way and redefining the space when we think about positionality of students and positionality of the faculty member? And so that's the approach that we're taking that it's about, how do we give them space, voice, power in the classroom to enhance their own teaching and learning?

SHIRLEY BURNETT: And then I want to add that it's a partnership. So sometimes you win, and sometimes you don't. And one of the examples that I think of, because I give my students the opportunity to have a say in what's going on in the classroom. And so the one instance they wanted to say about not having class during homecoming week. And so I said, OK, that's fair. But as Michele said, let me give you some options as to what we can do. And so that-- but when we came out, the students were satisfied with the response. So I did allow them a free day in lieu of the homecoming, but we added some extra time somewhere else. So that they wouldn't lose instruction. So it is a balance.

RAY KEITH: Any other final thoughts about democratizing the classroom? And I really appreciate the word "partnership" when we think about we're partnering with our students. All right. Well, I want to thank our panelists today. This has been an amazing session and an amazing way to end our webinar series.

And I want to thank our panelists from the previous webinar series sessions, and really them sharing their expertise and being able to help folks begin to operationalize equity at their own institutions.

And then I want to send out a heartfelt appreciation to nearly 1,000 participants that have engaged in this series over the last six months, and thanks for the opportunity to be a part of this experience and to be able to engage folks as it relates to equity, inclusion, culturally responsive teaching and learning, and centering our students in their educational experience.

And we do have some upcoming events at ATD. And so we have our K-12 partnership Institute, which is going to be an end conference, in-person conference June 28 through the 30th. And that will focus on dual enrollment, early college, and equity.

And you can use this QR code to scan here. For more information, you can go to our website. And please be sure to complete the survey as well. We want to thank you all for joining us today. We are at time, and we want to hope you have a good rest of the week.