

Engaging with/in the Messiness of Curriculum Alongside Educators in a Trauma-Informed Microcertificate

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Abstract

To attend to educators' experiences as they work in the midst of competing demands, increased classroom complexity, and a growing understanding of the importance of well-being, a group of stakeholders from across Saskatchewan co-developed a microcertificate entitled *Trauma-Informed/Sensitive Pedagogies and Practices*. The microcertificate was piloted in 2023, and we used community-based action research to better understand the experiences of participants. From their feedback, experiential themes arose drawing our attention to the messiness—of time, of delivery, and of beginning and becoming—in relation to an understanding of curriculum as the dynamic interaction between teacher, student, subject matter, and milieu.

On Coming Together—An Introduction

Nathalie

*My fourth day teaching was September 11, 2001. I was in Ottawa, and within minutes of the news breaking, F-18 fighter jets were flying around Parliament Hill. Students were diving under their desks screaming "They're here! We're next!" And so began a period of young people trying to make sense of their world that no longer made sense. We didn't have the language "trauma-informed/sensitive/integrated" back then. But I did feel, deeply, that something had been missed in my teacher education program. As my years in the classroom continued, I encountered other experiences that I would now story as traumatic, and that I felt ill at ease navigating. I therefore chose to study teachers' experiences of and with trauma for my doctoral research, and what I came to understand was both the need for more thinking, (un)(re)learning, and growing in the midst of the messiness of individual, collective, and structural experiences that can cause trauma. So, when I began my role at the Child Trauma Research Centre at the University of Regina, I felt the need to shape something that would be supportive of children and youth in schools, as well as those entrusted with their care. As such, in partnership with the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation Professional Learning, the Treaty Education Alliance, the Centre for Continuing Education (UofR), Indigenous guidance, and a facilitator community of diverse educators, we created a microcertificate entitled *Trauma-Informed/Sensitive Pedagogies and Practices*.*

Hang

Eleven years ago, my daughter was just starting Grade 1 at an urban elementary school in Vietnam. My daughter and I were so excited for her very first month of the first grade after transitioning from Kindergarten. However, her experiences were upended after the first week of joining the class of 30 children and one main teacher. I was shocked to see that my daughter was having nightmares every night after a long school day. In her sleep, she always cried and shouted to someone to stop beating her: “Đừng đánh con, đừng đánh con, con không làm gì sai!” in her mother tongue, which means “Don’t beat me, don’t beat me, I didn’t do anything wrong!” I kept hearing her screams during those nights. Later on, I tried to calm her down and open a friendly, safe space to invite her to share with me what had happened at school. The truth turned out that at school, her teacher used a long wooden ruler to beat her hands and some other friends’ hands because the class monitor reported some students made noise when the teacher was away from class for a teacher meeting. Every day after that beating experience, my daughter had lingering nightmares and it was hard to sleep tight at night, while during the daytime she lost her appetite and much of her weight. I started to become aware of the strong impacts of traumatic experiences on the mental health of a child/student. As a mother, I tried to learn more about trauma to best support my child. As an emerging educator, I learned about diverse ways to support not only students but also teachers.

Beginnings

A microcertificate through the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) at the University of Regina (UofR), requires the completion of three badges, or mini-courses. Our intention for this microcertificate was to offer teacher-participants (TPs) three badges focused on different aspects of trauma, as follows:

Badge 1: Foundational knowledge of trauma, its sources, its impacts, and its behavioral manifestations in schools

Badge 2: Indigenous wisdoms for walking alongside Indigenous children and youth in community in good ways

Badge 3: An elective badge tailored to different audiences and needs (e.g. understanding refugee and immigrant children, youth, and families’ experiences; trauma-integrated leadership; grief; prevention; etc.)¹

At its inception, we drew together a Facilitator Community (FC) who co-created the learning engagements and whose members then became the instructors for the badges. From January 2023 to April 2023, we piloted the developed badges with 26 TPs. What drew our attention was the nested messiness of the layered interactions of a) the FC members, who held the responsibilities typically associated with the role of *teacher* b) the TPs, most of whom were adults working in school environments, coming to this microcertificate holding the responsibilities typically associated with the role of *student*; c) *the subject matter*; and (d) the opportunities and restrictions of offering the badges through *the milieu* of a digital platform. We found ourselves, in the planning stages, drawn to considering the messiness of coming alongside students of teaching/teachers of students. It was in and with this unfolding awareness that we

sought to engage the messiness of the experiences of development, pilot delivery, and reflection as we move toward additional offerings of the microcertificate.



Fig. 1. A graphic of our microcertificate

Theoretical Frameworks Underpinning Our Research Journey

The following theoretical frameworks have shaped our reflective engagement with/in the messiness of the experience.

Theory of Experience

Our research takes Dewey's (1938) theory of experience as central because it has grown from the experiences of the students and teachers who are composing lives—building a narrative understanding of their lives in transition (Clandinin et al., 2013)—in the messiness of learning, teaching, and everyday life-making. Central in Dewey's (1938) theory of experience in education is his understanding of situations, which he sees as shaped by two criteria: interaction and continuity. While interaction accounts for the intersection of internal and existential conditions, continuity is defined as the temporality of experience. For Dewey, situations do not just happen but are historical and temporally directional according to the intentionality of the person in the midst of the situation (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). Dewey (1938) also considered growth as the overarching goal of any experience, in terms of the quality of experience. It is meaningful that when each experience unfolds, each subsequent situation can offer us “a novel perspective to look back on the experiences leading up to, and out of, an experience, making growth provisional and emergent rather than fixed and found” (Downey & Clandinin, 2010, p. 384). This sense of experience as educative shaped the unfolding of the microcertificate's learning engagements, and we continue to draw on this sense of continuity in the shaping of this reflective space in which we inquire into the experiences of the development and pilot of the microcertificate.

The Messiness of a Curriculum of Lives

As we began, we came to understand that we were engaging an understanding of curriculum-making (Huber et al., 2011) in a curriculum of lives (Aoki, 1993). We grew in our awareness that we were engaging with a theoretical understanding of “curriculum” not as “plan” (Aoki, 1993, p. 257), but rather as a “lived curriculum” (Aoki, 1993, p. 258). This knowing reminded us of how Clandinin and Connelly (1992) suggest that curriculum “might be viewed as an account of teachers’ and children’s lives together in schools and classrooms ... [where] the teacher is seen as an integral part of the curricular process in which teacher, learners, subject matter, and milieu are in dynamic interaction” (p. 392). This experiential understanding of curriculum as shaped by, with, and in the dynamic interaction of Schwab’s (1973) four commonplaces of curriculum—teacher, student, subject matter, and milieu—invites engaging with/in messiness. According to Schwab (1973), while the *teacher* is the one who wants something more for students than rote learning, the *learner* is the one composing their lives on learning landscapes with different “personal histories” (p. 518). With regard to *subject matter*, Schwab (1973) believed that the contents of subjects should be flexible rather than being seen as fixed structures. The fourth commonplace that Schwab includes is *milieu*, conveying the contexts of teaching and learning. In this paper we use this framework to untangle some of the messiness of the experiences. Schwab (1973) also offers the pathway followed by this paper: he names *discovery*, *coalescence*, and *utilization* (p. 501) as operations, and we draw on these operations in this paper in order to understand, analyze, and shape hopeful forward-looking stories for the microcertificate.

Methodology: Community-Based Action Research

Having seen our work originate from community and be dedicated to community, we embraced community-based action research as our methodology. Strand et al. (2003) offer three significant features of community-based action research, showing that it “is a collaborative enterprise between academic researchers and community members,” “validates multiple sources of knowledge and promotes the use of multiple methods of discovery and dissemination of the knowledge produced,” and “has as its goal social action and social change for the purpose of achieving social justice” (p. 6). In addition, Strand et al. (2003) focus on “collective/collaborative learning that de-emphasizes hierarchy, including authority differences between teacher and student,” “demystification of conventional knowledge, including the notion that objectivity is impossible, that knowledge is not neutral, and that people’s ‘lived experiences’ are valid sources of knowledge,” and “teaching for social change” (pp. 11–12). These goals again strengthen our intention in supporting the development of, delivery of, and reflection on the microcertificate.

From the outset, we drew on specific conceptualizations to shape the direction and development of the microcertificate. Here we highlight the three most influential.

Composing Lives in Transition

Clandinin et al. (2013) foreground five qualities that shape our narrative understanding of composing lives in transition. These qualities include that transitions shift over time and place; that we compose lives as a process of change; that there is a need to stay open to understanding transitions as liminal spaces; that improvisation is an integral part of transition; and that imagination and relationship are not separated from transitions. Significantly, when we began to think about the conceptualization of composing lives in transition in teachers' lives, we began to understand more of the complexities that drew the TPs personally and professionally. Understandings of trauma are a relatively new transition in classroom/school relationships, and we sense the counterstories that bump against the dominant narratives of thriving at school. We were drawn to attend to the complexities—life dynamics, time constraints, multiple diversities, etc.—that are essential to understanding the teachers' experiences in this messiness. We shaped the microcertificate in ways hopeful of supporting the TPs' becoming, striving to understand the TPs' stories in "more diverse and complex ways, in the shaping and reshaping in embodied moments of transition" (Clandinin et al., 2013, p. 256).

Trauma-Informed/Sensitive Pedagogies and Practices

The microcertificate is grounded in trauma-informed/sensitive pedagogies and practices. Nathalie Reid, who is one of the program designers and facilitators and also the first author of this paper, has done much research on trauma and trauma-informed/sensitive pedagogies and practices. In her doctoral project, Reid (2020) moved away from more clinical understandings of trauma (e.g. Harris & Fallot, 2001) to center a more experiential understanding of trauma. She drew on the work from the *Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative* (2013), or TLPI, which differentiates between *trauma informed* and *trauma sensitive*:

TLPI believes it is important to distinguish between the terms "trauma sensitive" and "trauma-informed" in order to recognize the different roles of schools and behavioral health providers. The term "trauma sensitive" helps emphasize that educators are not expected to take on the role of therapists. (para. 5–6)

This understanding has significantly shaped our microcertificate's content and modes of delivery, but as the common language is still *trauma informed*, we retained the word for the title. However, the development of the microcertificate focused on moving away from notions of service delivery to clients and toward a more experiential understanding of trauma.

Etuptmumk (Two-Eyed Seeing)

We grounded this project in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action through the practice of Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall's concept of *Etuptmumk* (Two-Eyed Seeing), which calls all people to bring together their different ways of knowing and being in order to shape a better world for future generations. Marshall describes Two-Eyed Seeing as "to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together" (as cited in Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 335).

Our practice of Two-Eyed Seeing drew us to consider the understanding that “in the context of post-secondary education, [Indigenization] involves bringing Indigenous knowledge and approaches together with Western knowledge systems” (Wilson, 2018), thus enabling learning across the systems, with the intention of “epistemic insight, the awareness of knowledge and knowledge provenance, that permits collateral and learning” (Moorman et al., 2021, p. 204). Two-Eyed Seeing facilitates the relational and ethical pedagogies and practices in areas of trauma. As such, from the project's inception, the Facilitator Community worked alongside an Elder who offered wisdom and guidance in the creation of each badge.

Shaping the Facilitator Community

At the project's inception, I (Nathalie) felt that in order to create something supportive, responsive, and meaningful, it would take a much wider circle. While this would invite a less linear pathway, it felt critical that whatever was to be created for community would be created by, with, and in that community. I reached out to the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, Professional Learning (STFPL) so as to begin building the relationships I felt would best support this project's development. I was connected with Nicole Turcotte, an associate director with STFPL who was already responsible for a myriad of learning engagements with teachers. Together, we decided that in order for this project to be representative of the needs and experiences in Saskatchewan classrooms, we needed to build a Facilitator Community (FC). Our intention for this community was for its members to be representative of the experiential, professional, cultural, sex, gender, age, career-lifecycle, and other diversities present in schools. In May 2023, STFPL provided facilitator training to the FC as we spent time building community and planning badges for the microcertificate.

We then subdivided the FC into badge teams based on members' interests. These teams were responsible for the content and organization of their respective badges. From June to September 2023, each badge team met online to finish planning their badge. The microcertificate was marketed in November/December 2023, and the 25 spots for the pilot filled within six hours of being made available. The pilot began in January 2024. The members of the badge team responsible for shaping that particular badge became its instructors. TPs each earned three badges, thus earning the microcertificate. As this was a pilot, we obtained TPs' feedback at the end of each badge, and at the end of the microcertificate.

Navigating Alongside Teacher Participants

It was a central commitment of the FC's work to always strive to understand both the commonalities and the complexities of the TPs' experiences. Each TP came with their unique experiences and circumstances. As such, while laying a foundation together, the FC strove to always attend to who the TPs were, who they were becoming, what they wanted to know, and what they wanted to do.

Feedback from Teacher Participants

TPs offered formal feedback through the Centre for Continuing Education's post-badge feedback questionnaire; the FC also invited them to participate, on a voluntary basis, in community-based action research data collection. Our intention was to continuously draw on this feedback loop to contribute to the microcertificate's ongoing evolution. Each of these data sets underwent thematic analysis with particular themes reinforcing the emerging "messiness" of this kind of work. Additionally, the authors of this paper engaged in dialogic reflection, laying our experiences alongside those described by FC members and the TPs. The following section shares the key themes that surfaced through our analytic process as they called and continue to call us to engage directly with the messiness.

Discovery: Messiness in the Midst

The Messiness of Time

Working alongside young people and colleagues who navigate their lives with trauma is a process that takes *time*. Often, negotiating inappropriate or hypervigilant behaviors in classrooms takes *time* away from classroom instruction or practice time. Educators are often encouraged to practice self-care *on their own time*, of which they have very little. This is a complexity with which we wrestled from the project's inception. As we developed and offered the microcertificate, we continued to ask: How could we be offering ways to *make time* by *taking time*? In the questionnaires, we invited feedback on our ongoing question of how to best satisfy the 14-hour requirement: what would work better—a weekend, four 2.5-hour sessions, or three longer sessions? We wondered if winter/spring break might be more amenable. We wondered about travel time: would TPs prefer to travel and be face-to-face, or would they rather save the travel time? What day of the week would be best? We wondered about other, outside-of-school commitments. These deliberations shaped the FC's decisions.

We decided to use observation and to ask TPs about their preferences during their participation. One observation was that the number of TPs decreased over the course of the three badges (in January, there were 26 participants, and in April there were 16). We used the TP Feedback Form to gain valuable information from the TPs regarding time preferences and constraints. One TP noted, "March was AWFUL," while another noted that they would prefer "October, January, April—slower times." However, as we engaged with the messiness, another TP noted, "There is never a great time, but I think Feb–May was a good choice." Some TPs preferred the 3 hour class sessions saying, "It worked better for my other commitments to have fewer evenings to meet. I don't mind lengthier class time." However, others preferred four meetings of 2.5 hours, admitting, "I struggled to pay attention during the 3 hour class—it's a long Zoom [video call]."

Another TP noted, "I would avoid the school breaks because I think educators don't take enough 'recovery' time as it is," which echoed some of the tensions around time and planning we were experiencing and attempting to navigate. This made us ask, how did we become yet another demand on

an educator's time to inquire into trauma sensitivity, in trauma-sensitive ways? These questions shaped and continue to shape not only scheduling decisions, but also class and homework requirements. We engaged deeply with and in the messiness of *time* in life as we continued to reflect on the microcertificate's offerings.

The Messiness of Delivery

Another aspect the FC wrestled with was the "how" of delivery. Our FC comprised people from across Saskatchewan, and we met mostly over Zoom, except during a two-day session in Saskatoon dedicated to planning the individual badges. While we all felt that this face-to-face gathering was exponentially more productive and enjoyable, we decided that we would offer the pilot entirely via Zoom so as to maximize its geographic reach, and decrease barriers to participation. This was well received by one of the TPs, who said, "I really liked that it was virtual and we could connect with educators throughout the province. It was very valuable to hear about others' experiences and divisions." TPs noted that they enjoyed not having to travel to go to class, but that three hours on Zoom after a long day's work was difficult. One TP also noted, "I would not have been able to join if it were face-to-face because I wouldn't have made it to Regina in time after work"; others advocated for a more blended delivery, requesting that both face-to-face and virtual options be offered.

The Messiness of Beginning and Becoming

As with any "beginning," we experienced the expected growing pains, technological glitches, and pacing issues. Additional points of being and becoming also surfaced.

The Messiness of Coming From Different Beginning Points and Wanting Different Things

As each badge comprised nine hours of class time and five hours of independent work, a difficulty that arose was our awareness that TPs were coming with different experiences, different perspectives, different career and life trajectories, etc., and as such, with different understandings of trauma. Thus, we shaped the Foundations badge intentionally in order to create a common understanding, and we received competing responses. One TP shared, "I expected the course materials to address the outcomes. It did, and so much more. Discussions and readings left me wanting to continue to learn," while another participant shared, "I think we could have dove deeper." Other responses were also conflicting, ranging from "useful" to "wishing for more."

People come to learning engagements with a sense of what they hope to accomplish, and most students come to a Zoom engagement with memories of their COVID-19 experiences. As such, for some participants, smaller breakout-room discussions were an excellent place of safe exploration, while for others they wanted more whole-group instruction from "the experts."² One TP articulated, "The breakout groups are great in Zoom, but keep groups similar for the same class. Too much change creates a disconnect and resets the conversation and doesn't allow it to build." Another wrote, "I found the content of the class thought-provoking and it was easy to apply to my work. However, ... there was less time in

breakout groups discussing readings and case studies and this diluted the value of the class for me.” Yet, another participant shared, “I think I was expecting more content delivery by the instructors.” Being in the midst of, and trying to balance, the messiness of desires and learning comfort/preferences mirrors the discussions the FC had around how much content to “dump” onto students while simultaneously shaping learning engagements that would build their confidence to be able to navigate in trauma-sensitive ways following the completion of the microcertificate. The FC was drawn toward shaping learning spaces of inquiry, while some of the TPs wanted more direct instruction, shaping a messiness requiring reflection.

The Messiness of Intentions

The FC members, with the guidance of the Elder, set their intentions to shape something useful and responsive. The TPs intended to give up some of their time to learn. The FC felt the responsibility of activating every minute. As such, there were outside-of-class readings offered to the TPs that the facilitators used as springboards for the learning engagements during the synchronous sessions. The intention was not to dissect the readings but to have them enrich the synchronous learning. The messiness arose when we realized that several of the TPs were engaging in the course as though it were a more typical course where the readings would be directly addressed in class. While the FC’s intentions were good, they did cause some frustration for some TPs, with one participant stating that “the discussions and conversations were usually very good. However, I felt that there wasn’t enough connection between the posted readings and the class activities and the assignments. I initially tried to read all/most of the posted materials, but gave up when they weren’t referenced as part of the class.” This TP’s understanding of the purpose of the readings was for academic engagement, while the facilitators’ intention was for the class time to extend beyond the readings. This resulted in some tension within the feedback, ranging from “this course exceeded my expectations” to “No. I wanted higher academic content” and “I learned more about how to work with Indigenous youth and their families, and I learned valuable information about the Medicine Wheel, and ways to incorporate this into my practice.” Each of these TPs offers invaluable insight that contributes to our engaging with/in the messiness of course orchestration and delivery.

Coalescence: What We Are Learning

Engaging in the messiness supports us to improve the microcertificate. It is our sense that in *thinking with* (Morris, 2002) the four commonplaces of curriculum (teacher, student, subject matter, and milieu) as a theoretical interpretive framework, we can untangle some of the messiness in order to shape hopeful forward-looking stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) for this microcertificate. In this section, we use the commonplaces to inquire into the complexities of the threads shared above, shaped as a conversation between Hang and Nathalie.

Teacher Commonplace

Hang

The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (2024) reported that "over 10 years, the total number of students increased from 173,548 in 2014–15 to 195,582 in 2023–24, representing an increase of 20,034 or 12.7 percent" (p. 2). I believe these statistics show how much pressure has been put on the K–12 teachers. This increase of 12.7 percent, plus the diversity of students' cultural, social, personal, historical, familial, religious, linguistic, and educational backgrounds, has definitely brought more challenges to the teachers. The microcertificate's TPs enriched our teaching and learning with their own lived stories of being situated under countless constraints. Often, the TPs became the "teachers" revealing for all present the layered complexities of their daily experiences. All of these together situate teachers within the themes of the messiness of time, of responsibility, and of becoming. However, the design and content of the microcertificate have made the teachers more grounded in this world of messiness in ways supportive of flourishing. One said,

I appreciated having an Indigenous knowledge keeper and an immigrant as part of the badges because it helped with the authenticity of information being taught. I really enjoyed that the group was small enough and non-judgmental, so that we could ask questions and dive deeper into discussions in breakout rooms.

The TPs' understanding that parents, guardians, and community members are also teachers in our midst will contribute to enhancing the microcertificate.

Nathalie

Thinking with the teachers' commonplace draws me to think deeply about the unique simultaneous positioning of people who teach as learner and teacher. This thinking pulls forward the threads of the FC's intentions and decisions. Building on what Hang said above, long-term flourishing was often the product when the intentions were supported by, and taken up by, the TPs through the learning engagements shaped by the FC. As such, Schwab's sense of the role of the teacher might invite a move away from the idea of teacher as expert, pouring knowledge through a metaphorical conduit (Olson & Craig, 2005) into passive students. Rather, it supports us to engage in the messiness and move toward being facilitators of learning invitations while foregrounding the importance of making this intention extremely clear from the outset. It is my sense that if we had positioned the conversation spaces as places of deep inquiry, we might have had less tension with the delivery. In thinking with the "role" of facilitator or teacher through the lens Schwab offers, we have learned that clarity and communication of intention is a significant aspect we will draw into future offerings of this microcertificate.

Student Commonplace

Hang

When taking a student-centered approach as the orientation for our teaching and learning activities during the microcertificate, we respected that students were vulnerable when being exposed to information about trauma. Understanding this, we acknowledged that trauma can happen at any time and anywhere; therefore, throughout the three badges, we also focused on supporting the TPs. Learning about different theories and practices helped build the TPs' confidence in stepping out of comfort zones to best support the messiness of their, and their students', experiences of/with trauma. One participant shared about her experience after attending the microcertificate: "The readings, videos, and assignments were directly connected to (my) teaching and leading in our current world of education. After each class I felt I could take my learnings and implement them into practice immediately." As students of this microcertificate, the TPs drew our attention to understanding that they, as teachers, need to pay more attention to the increasingly diverse student needs while having limited time, limited familiarity with diverse cultures and languages, limited support resources, limited facilities, and increasing demands. This drew us, as the FC, to witness and reflect on the TPs experiences to shape future versions of the microcertificate.

Nathalie

I agree with Hang. Much in the same way that the FCs were positioned in the midst of complexity, so too were the TPs who were also evaluating the "experience of the experience" (Feiner, 1970). As such, their intentions, desires, and expectations are all interwoven, are all in dynamic interaction not only with the content, but also with the facilitators shaping the learning engagements. This complexity is also the engagement's greatest strength. Through reflecting on the often contradicting responses, we have been able to better understand the TPs' needs and intentions. There is clarity in the messiness, and this clarity emanates from centering the TPs as "holders and makers of important knowledge" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992), not just as students.

Subject Matter Commonplace

Nathalie

The messiness, as noted above, underscores the importance of balance. One TP spoke of their deepening understanding of the Medicine Wheel and how that understanding is now applicable in their professional and personal life. TPs articulated they wanted some academic reading, but not too much; they wanted some direct instruction, but they enjoyed the community that was created and wanted more; they wanted to extend the forum beyond the course to continue in digital conversation, but not too much. The interaction of the above-named threads demonstrates that balance in each badge and across the microcertificate is what is desirable. One TP reflected,

This experience was incredibly personal. It offered many opportunities for participants to share their learning and personal experiences as they fit into the badge content. Instructors took the time to get to know the participants which made each class feel relevant to teaching and leading in these spaces.

Hang

To create the balance Nathalie identifies, our microcertificate badges are designed to walk alongside the TPs from the foundational knowledge of trauma-informed/sensitive pedagogies, to supporting the refugee and immigrant students and families, and to better understanding the experiences of Indigenous children, youth, and families. There is complexity in the breadth of the subject matter. Yet, the TPs shared that theories and practices of trauma-informed/sensitive pedagogies can be applied across the disciplines, which supports them as they engage in the messiness of optimizing the holistic and sustainable teaching and learning.

Milieu Commonplace

Nathalie

In delivering this microcertificate, there were two milieu considerations: the first was all of the contextual factors that shaped the TPs and FCs' experiences that drew them into the course. The second was the digital platform offered by Zoom. We are all aware that we are living in the aftermath of the pandemic, and its downstream effects are palpable. We are also living in difficult times with economic crises, food crises, a housing crisis, etc. The impacts of these intersecting complexities are experienced in schools daily. Anecdotally, many of our TPs joined the microcertificate in order to better understand and serve the children and youth they work alongside. TPs shared their desire to shape their school milieus and their relationships in thoughtful, caring, and trauma-sensitive ways. The milieu of Zoom offered interesting complexities. Yet, while this platform is usually criticized for its fragmentation, we were able to create a sense of community in a very short time through maximizing the milieu's potential, which proved to benefit the teachers, one of whom shared: "Yes, this worked for my scheduling. I was able to meet synchronous in evenings and then continue the asynchronous learning on my own time (like once my kids were in bed)."

Hang

In addition to what Nathalie said, the desire to support the education of the whole child (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018) calls us to acknowledge and value the messiness of the milieu commonplace. We believe that teaching and learning do not isolate the students from the messy world around them but, rather, teaching and learning should be interwoven with the milieu in which the learners and teachers are working, studying, and living—in the same way that we honored their experiences (Dewey, 1938) at the beginning of this paper. Drawing on the importance of the messiness, both FCs and TPs engaged with/in the milieu's elements including but not limited to social,

political, historical, ecological, familial, linguistic, and cultural contexts as inseparable from trauma-informed/sensitive practices bridging learning and living. In this same vein, we saw that using a virtual space could offer a higher degree of access. Just as our FC was composed of people from across Saskatchewan, so too were the TPs, several of whom acknowledged that had the course been face-to-face, it would not have been accessible to them. Another aspect that the TPs highlighted was their appreciation of some of the functionalities of the platform, such as the discussion forum. TPs wrote that they enjoyed “Dr. Nathalie’s contributions in the chat on each of them” and “appreciated Nicole [Turcotte]’s strategies in encouraging Zoom participation.” These foreground the possibility of shaping a relational and responsive milieu in the dynamic interaction of Schwab’s four commonplaces.

Utilization: Our Forward-Looking Recommendations for Teachers Who Are Composing Lives in Messiness

Currently, we seem to be living in a time with a pervasive sense of transition. The world is transitioning out of a pandemic. Canada is in a time of economic transition. Globally and nationally, we are in a time of political transition, with elections occurring at multiple levels of government. Globally, we are also in a time of knowledge transition in multiple ways, ranging from the emergence of AI to the dramatically increased knowledge about health, trauma, and well-being. In the midst of all these transitions, and the resulting messiness, educators and young people come alongside each other in schools. It has been our FC’s experience that educators are seeking out ways to support the young people they interact with who are navigating these transitional times, reportedly with increased anxiety, discontent, fear, and anger, which often manifest as negative behaviors in schools. Thus, our FC shaped this microcertificate into a hopeful forward-looking story supportive not only of young people, but also of the well-being of educators. The complexities are more easily understood through attending to the dynamic interactions of teacher, student, subject matter, and milieu. This framework supported our engagement with, and inquiry into, the complexities of this emergent microcertificate, offering us a pathway to inquire deeply into our senses of curriculum as co-created in the midst of the FC and then as co-created again with the TPs. We encourage others considering similar ventures to attend closely to these commonplaces as they untangle their experiences. Taking up a similar reflective inquiry for any program or development in education holds the possibility of rich data and even richer learning.

Gaps in the literature focus on trauma-informed professional development for teachers and their attitudes toward trauma-informed pedagogies, and there is little evidence linking changes in teacher attitudes to changes in practices (Gherardi & Stoner, 2024). Our work revealed insights into the practical experiences of the teachers during the microcertificated. The understandings from the teachers’ feedback will continue to shape future iterations of the microcertificate. The TPs called on us to consider how they are currently stuck in their dilemma between a wish to learn and develop professionally amidst many constraints of time, resources, budget, students’ diversity, their mental health and well-being, etc. Our work also suggests more research is needed to understand the effectiveness of microcertificate programs in preventing teachers’ burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and even leaving the field. While

microcertificates and teachers' mental health are not new topics, we felt that our approach to creating this microcertificate with a Facilitator Community guided by an Elder was both holistic and innovative. Finally, (re)thinking with/in the messiness supports forward-looking hopes not only for the microcertificate itself, but for how it might continue to support teachers composing their lives alongside students composing their lives, in communities composing their lives in messiness.

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Notes

1. For more information, please visit the University of Regina's page about the microcertificate: <https://destiny.uregina.ca/public/category/courseCategoryCertificateProfile.do?method=load&certificateId=1523032>
2. None of the instructors/presenters/facilitators would name themselves as experts, but rather as learners and facilitators. This participant's language draws us to deeply consider the pervasive power of "expertise" and the hierarchies that are sustained within that structure. While we tried to move away from a deficit sense of non-knowing by facilitating conversations in which the participants could draw on their experience to think with each other, this desire to return to a "right" and "wrong" way of "doing" trauma-sensitive work calls us to consider the messiness and discomfort many educators feel when bumping up against their typical assumptions of school and of professional development.

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