

## M1-S2: Four Constants Across Learning Environments

CLH	Hi Gina, what is on the menu for today?
GK	We are going to talk about the things that really matter.
CLH	OK I'm very excited, this is what I've been waiting for my whole entire life.
GK	I have to be honest, let's narrow that down, we are going to talk about the four things that were shown to really matter to students during pandemic teaching.
CLH	Well that's a different thing then. So sort of like what we learned from that whole experience kind of thing?
GK	Exactly, and we're going to connect those four things to what we also know about trauma and equity.
CLH	OK because brain scientists taught us that the one thing that can really shut down learning, in person or wherever, is the amygdala, when it's unhappy. The effects of traumatic experiences and the conditions of chronic inequity can seriously hamper students from reaching their goals.
GK	Exactly, so here's what came out of early pandemic teaching. Dr. Alex Chevrin Venet published important work on identifying four core priorities for trauma informed distance learning.
CLH	Wait, so priorities, not strategies? I'm used to things being packaged as strategies.
GK	Me too, but what the Venet difference here is that Dr. Venet zoomed out and isolated core priorities that should be guiding our planning and instruction to be as broadly and universally trauma informed as possible. So they're not strategies, the idea is that by zooming out away from, kind of above strategies, we shift our mindset and end up developing teaching content from a trauma informed place that is strongly tier one, it goes to everyone not just those identified as survivors of trauma.
CLH	So I mean aren't we all sort of officially survivors of trauma at this point?
GK	And that's the basic idea, that we have to assume that we don't know, and that all of us are sort of dealing with some trauma.  So Venet says we need to infuse our teaching with trauma informed practices because all of our students, to one degree or another have been affected by trauma, some just by the pandemic, but some by the pandemic plus, systemic inequities and some by even more of those adverse life experiences that cause trauma.
CLH	Yeah, like experiencing domestic violence or experiences of homelessness, food insecurity, stuff like that.
GK	Exactly, unfortunately stuff like that.
CLH	So what are these four priorities and do we have a better way to think about them when we're working across learning modalities?

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GK	We do. So we're going to take Venet's four priorities, and consider them as four constants. Things that need to be so deeply woven into the fabric of our teaching that they remain constant no matter where or how we're teaching.
CLH	Alright, so our listeners are listening, let's just say the four priorities or the four constants and then let's break them down one by one.
GK	Yes, the four constants that underpin learning in any environment are: Predictability, flexibility, connection and empowerment.
CLH	OK so let's take a closer look at these four constants of an equity centered trauma informed approach to learning environments.
GK	Let's start with predictability. So trauma creates a profound sense of unpredictability in our students. So teachers can prioritize predictability, they can counterbalance that by establishing routines that build a sense of normalcy, responding in very predictable ways and planning ahead for dysregulation or just understanding that it's going to happen.
CLH	OK so you're sort of saying that boring is good. That makes a lot of sense to me. Traumatized kids are hypervigilant, they are always on the lookout for danger so if you can make yourself deeply predictable and have your classroom routines be very predictable, there's a better chance that a hypervigilant student can sort of let down their guard.
GK	Yeah, I used to work with a teacher who said the same thing every time something happened, whether it was good or bad or average, he always said "Oh my goodness". That was his thing. I honestly believe he was the most comforting person I've ever met. Very predictable man.  So as with all four of these constants, our listeners will have a chance to explore a related strategy more closely in the explore section of this session.  So what's the next core priority?
CLH	OK so that's connection. Traumatized children need trusting and caring relationships to help them heal and teachers can prioritize these connections by investing in relationships with and between others and by being deliberately positive instead of being neutral.
GK	Investing in relationships seems like a no brainer to me at this point in the story of teaching, but I am super interested in that second one. Being deliberately positive instead of neutral, I never thought of neutral as being threatening.
CLH	Yeah I mean I guess it's because you don't know how that neutral person is really feeling or what they're thinking, so the advice is to actively engage your positivity and then you don't leave any room for doubt.
GK	I get that, I think that's brilliant. I have to wonder what older students, like highschoolers, are thinking of these super boring, positive teachers.

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	I want to dig into something later that specifically addresses the four constants and adolescent students.
CLH	OK, so the third core priority is flexibility. Periods of dissociation and inability to listen are just two of the trauma responses that can be easily mistaken for behavioral issues. Students with trauma again need flexibility so they can feel their feelings and not feel rushed and out of control because they're trying to fit into someone else's schedule. So teachers can really prioritize predictability by observing and adjusting targets and approaches and allowing for multiple paths towards demonstrating learning.
GK	That's great. That connects with one of our later topics, Universal Design for learning. When teachers use Universal Design as the basis for their unit and lesson planning, they're automatically planning multiple, equivalent ways that students can access content and demonstrate learning, they're building in flexibility and the choice and voice in flexibility that traumatized students need and everybody probably likes.
CLH	Right and that's so aligned with this idea of being able to use teaching practices that translate easily across in-person, remote and hybrid environments.  Isn't the flexibility example of observing and adjusting targets and approaches just another way to describe using frequent formative assessments and sort of differentiating instruction?
GK	I believe so, you're saying it without saying it, or at least, the core priority of flexibility is already baked into practices like formative assessment and differentiation and they can be grab and go's for us.  So we've talked about Predictability, Connection and Flexibility, the last core priority is Empowerment.  So trauma most often results from events and circumstances outside of a child's control, and that leaves them feeling powerless in other situations- so sad- Teachers can prioritize empowering students by: Providing students with authentic choices, practicing and modeling consent, establishing opt-in not opt-out policies and minimizing compliance for compliance sake.
CLH	What do you think is a good example of practicing and modeling consent?
GK	The one that comes to mind is the predictable connecting practice of a door greeting, where the students know they can pick a handshake, highfive, or a friendly wave, whatever their level of comfort is.
CLH	So that single practice manages to be a predictable routine, something that builds connection and a place where we can model and practice empowerment and it's so simple.
GK	So simple, what do you think is a good example of establishing opt-in rather than opt-out policies?
CLH	I think that's like having students choose to participate in certain activities through setting up stations or maybe creating a choice board.

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GK	That's what we're exploring in this section. I'm always excited by the efficiency of zooming out and seeing what's going to do the most good for the most students.
CLH	Like we were saying earlier, which of us has not been affected by the past few years? These four priorities are constant across all learning environments which makes them even more efficient.  Remind me again, what's the difference between a priority and a strategy?
GK	You can think of a priority as a post-it note on your computer screen, reminding you of what is essential and baked in, it's the highest level of planning, the mindset that you bring to your planning.  A strategy is a teaching practice that reflects your priority.
CLH	Got it, this was great. Next time we'll be talking more in depth about the connection priority and how we build stronger relationships in-person and online.
GK	That sounds good.
CLH	Bye Gina!