**It’s Alive activity**

Context: My department (micro-credentials) is currently focusing on delivery of micro-credentials to our partners as dedicated deliveries. For some deliveries the learners are engaged and participating well; for others, not so much.

Learner challenge: This lack of engaged participation became a particular challenge and the one I based this activity on. While participation is often a challenge, in one particular class we noticed that learners were consistently signing out (it’s a digital class, delivered through Zoom) whenever there was a sharing circle or a group presentation to do.

Empathize with the learners: We check in regularly with our learners to find out what is working and what isn’t. The teaching team (which includes a Student Success Facilitator and a Cultural Advisor in addition to the Instructor/Facilitator) regularly connects with students, particularly when they are struggling or not engaging as much, and tries to find out why. From this and from student evaluation surveys, we know that learners are interested in the material and want to learn; and yet, while participation in sharing circles improved over time, participation in individual and group presentations is still down. I start to wonder if there is a shyness factor with this particular cohort; perhaps they just don’t like having to present orally and have all eyes on them. In Zoom, the speaker becomes the centre of attention, and that can be disorienting and uncomfortable, *especially* when dealing with content that may be emotionally triggering (for example, in lessons about trauma). Perhaps this is the root of the challenge with learner participation in presentations.

Reasoning for technology: This led me to thinking about ways we can use technology to create a different focal point. If viewers are looking at something other than the presenter, and just *listening* to the presenter, maybe that would help increase presentation participation. So, I chose Mindmup as the technological tool to use, as it can be used to create mind-maps that would support just about any kind of presentation of core ideas and themes.

Steps in ideating and prototyping the technology creation: Mindmup is free to use and widely available and accessible. It is also very easy to use; the teaching team could do a quick demonstration or walkthrough of the application to help provide additional support, but for the most part I think learners could use it without any guidance at all. One learners have created their mind-map, they would just download it so it can be saved and used later for presentations and for their own reference. I also appreciated that it can be easily used for multiple purposes; you can create a mind-map to track your sources, to trace and link key ideas, you can colour-code it so related concepts are visually grouped, etc. This particular tool would hopefully help ease students into presentations. They would have a visual to accompany their discussion, which would hopefully help with the shyness factor by making the individual’s face less of a focal point in the presentation; it would also allow for students to essentially have their presentation on screen so they have ‘notes’ they can easily reference. It would allow for a good balance of instructor interaction and student comprehension/development as well, as you can create a mind-map individually, in groups, or as an instructor-led activity. It’s versatile. And as an activity, it wouldn’t take long for learners to do. Generating ideas, writing the text, including graphics, and reviewing for errors etc could take very little time and could have a very big payoff.

Planned implementation: I’d start by introducing the tool and dialoguing to get a sense of how it might best be used (maybe learners have ideas that I haven’t thought of; maybe the teaching team does too). This process would also include a demonstration of the tool and how I would use it. I’d make sure to share the link to the free program so that everyone has access and can experiment on their own as they need. And I’d make sure that they have support if they want it, from both IT and from myself.

To actually use it in class, I’d want to test it out with a small group activity, to get participants used to using the tool, and ask them to share with one another their tips and tricks for its use and application. I’d ask for feedback on the tool; does it work for you? What are the advantages? Disadvantages? Etc. I’d then ask for it (or a similar program, if there’s another one they prefer!) to be used in presentations. I’d follow up to see if it increased participation and engagement, or even if it just had a different kind of engagement. Maybe this won’t work for everyone, but if it works for some people maybe it can be something we would include in a selection of digital tools that learners could draw upon as desired.

