INTRODUCTION

In his bestselling book, *Creating Significant Learning Experiences*, Fink (2013) begins by inviting readers (who are primarily college instructors) to dream. He asks instructors to imagine their ideal teaching situation and reflect on these questions:

> In your deepest, fondest dreams, what kind of impact would you most like to have on your students? That is, when the course is over and it is now one or two years later, what would you like to be true about students who have participated in your courses that is not true of others? What is the distinctive educational impact you would like for your teaching and your courses to have on your students?
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> *(Fink, 2013, p. 10)*

As I read these questions, I could not help but think about their relevance to the context of professional learning. As facilitators, we also seek to create meaningful and impactful learning experiences, whether our learners are instructors, staff, administrators, or students. So inspired by Fink, I also invite you to dream. Think about your ideal professional learning situation and reflect on these questions:

> What unique and lasting impact would you like to have on your learners? What do you hope will be true of learners one to two years after they have participated in your professional learning program?

Take a moment to pause and consider what this ideal professional learning situation would look like for you. What would this experience entail? What do you hope learners will say, feel, and be able to do as a result? How do you envision your role in designing and facilitating such a robust experience?

This book aims to support you in creating engaging, enriching, and effective professional learning experiences with lasting impact. Perhaps you are a new facilitator seeking guidance in how to design and facilitate professional learning experiences for the first time. Maybe you are a seasoned facilitator seeking to glean new ideas to add to your toolkit. Whoever you are, wherever you are in your facilitation journey, this book is for you.

Let's dream together.

Two Short Stories

In May 2019, I was invited to do my first-ever plenary address at the Lilly Conference in Bethesda, Maryland. At the time, I was an associate professor in a teacher education program. While I was excited about the opportunity to share my passion for teaching and learning with such a wide audience, I was also terrified. Introverted me, who struggles with imposter phenomenon? On a stage? In front of over 300 professors and administrators from various disciplines? Who would have thought?

As I planned my plenary address, I made an important decision. Even though I was used to attending keynotes where the speaker primarily spoke to the audience for the entire time, I was going to treat this like a workshop. To be honest, I didn't know any other way to operate. I have never been one to lecture for extensive periods of time, and active learning techniques have always been a cornerstone of my professional learning approach. Thus, facilitating the session like a workshop felt most authentic to who I was and to my facilitation style.

The night before my plenary address, I went into the ballroom and placed small blue paper bags containing playing cards on each of the round tables. I also taped a mini brown envelope containing a card sort activity under each table, and I placed handouts at each seat so that participants would have a place to capture their thoughts and reflections throughout the session.

The next morning, I walked on the stage in a red dress and heels (despite my fear that my legs could give way at any moment), and I facilitated my plenary address entitled "Structuring Your Lectures to Engage Students and Optimize Learning." Within the first few minutes of the session, I had the entire audience of 300+ people using the playing cards to do a suit partner greeting. Not long after that, I had them searching under their tables for the brown envelopes (which was a fun surprise for them) and had them do a card sort activity with their groups. Later in the session, participants did a turn-and-talk activity. Near the end of the session, they completed a digital exit ticket. (You will learn more about these strategies in Chapters 5 and 7.) Although there were times when I talked to the audience, my entire plenary address was punctuated with opportunities for participants to actively engage with the content and each other.

Fast forward to the EDUCAUSE Annual Conference Online Event in November 2023, where I was facilitating a simulive session entitled "Using QR Codes to Design Engaging Student Learning Experiences."[1] As my pre-recorded session was playing and I was monitoring the chat, I saw a comment that immediately brought a smile to my face and tears to my eyes. It said, "I may be Tolu's #1 fan. Saw her first at [the] Lilly Conference in Bethesda, MD pre-COVID, and her creative teaching/learning approaches revolutionized how I instructed and NOW how I train my faculty colleagues to instruct. TY [thank you] TOLU!" Never did I imagine that the plenary address I facilitated years ago would resonate with someone so deeply and result in lasting change in their practice that was now impacting other educators.

On to story #2…

In May 2023, I facilitated a session entitled "Designing Engaging Microlectures" at the online Teaching, Learning, and Technology Conference (TLTCon) for the first time. During the 1-hour session, we explored what microlectures are, their benefits, tools for creating them, and a planning template for designing them. We also discussed recording and accessibility tips, as well as ways in which instructors could share microlectures with their students.

The next year, I had the opportunity to present at TLTCon again, this time about metacognition. On the morning of the first day of the conference, I received a message from another attendee via the conference app. It said, "Good morning, Dr. Noah. I attended your session at TLTCon last year. What I learned from you transformed the way that I approach video creation and online engagement with my students. Your session produced long-term change in my teaching. I wanted to thank you so much for sharing your ideas and demonstrating how you use videos to engage more deeply with students. I am looking forward to your session tomorrow."

I share these stories because my 2019 plenary address at the Lilly Conference and my virtual session at TLTCon in 2023 were only an hour long, and yet each had a meaningful impact on at least one participant. I believe this was because of how the learning experiences were designed.

By designing and facilitating with intentionality, we can create impactful professional learning experiences that help equip, encourage, and empower others in their work.

Who This Book is For

The main goal of this book is to support professional learning facilitators in developing meaningful, impactful, and engaging on-site and synchronous online workshops for adult learners. We will examine both the design and facilitation of workshops. Bell and Goodman's (2023) definitions of design and facilitation are particularly useful here:

> *Design* includes all the planning, assessment, and evaluation activities that facilitators/instructors engage in prior to, during, and after meeting with participants. Design includes establishing goals for learning, setting an agenda for the course or workshop, selecting reading and other course materials, planning activities, and organizing small- and large-group procedures for engaging participants actively. …*Facilitation* refers to the leadership strategies and skills that we draw upon to actively engage participants in learning, mediate interactions within the group, and guide interpersonal and group dynamics as part of the learning process.
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> *(p. 58, emphasis in original)*

Whether you facilitate short-term workshops, long-term workshop series, or both, this book will offer helpful principles, practical strategies, and concrete resources that you can apply to the design and facilitation of your sessions. You will also find that many of the principles I share can be applied to other types of professional learning programs.

If you are an educational developer, faculty developer, instructional designer, academic technology specialist, learning designer, educational technologist, teaching consultant, faculty peer mentor, administrator, librarian, trainer, learning and development professional, or other academic leader whose responsibilities involve facilitating professional learning workshops at your college or university, this book is for you. This book will also be useful for consultants who facilitate workshops for multiple educational communities and for individuals who facilitate workshops at conferences. If you facilitate workshops in a different context (such as in a K-12 school/district, nonprofit organization, or corporate setting), you will find helpful principles and resources here that you can adapt to your work.