

## Resiliency, Untapped Strengths and Compassionate Learning Communities

Often in presenting on trauma-informed practice to professionals and practitioners, we ask the question about untapped strengths of people served (clients, patients, students, families) and of staff. This strength sometimes requires a little extra attention, time and compassion to become known and used. Resiliency has been described as the ability to overcome adversity which is often measured as psychological hardiness and coping. Many of us in helping professions believe that compassionate understanding facilitates resiliency. To have a better understanding of students' context and their current needs helps us as educators to build on their untapped strengths and capacity, expanding their perception of what is possible to learn and accomplish. A mantra for good education that many of us use is to lower the stress and enrich the learning environment.

Yet educating such diverse learners as we do in post-secondary requires us to tap into our strengths. So many educators, administrators and staff have experienced adversity and exhibit great resiliency, but stress can wear this ability to recover down. It is hard to maintain our ego strength when we are stressed by work and personal expectations. The wellness of faculty and staff directly impacts students' wellness. In developing compassionate learning communities, we don't just focus on strategies to better support students, we also stress the need for educators, staff and administrators to find strategies that work for them to stay regulated, compassionate and curious around how to better understand our students and colleagues.

Trauma-informed practice may be the foundation that assists educators in increasing workplace wellness. The core principles of trauma-informed practice include safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment, all principles required when working towards psychological, emotional, cultural and physical safety for students and educators. This is big work with current research in education emphasizing relationship first. Yet relationship building is complex, recognizing that in most educational settings, students inadvertently trigger staff, staff inadvertently triggers students and we trigger each other. The need for compassion for human failing becomes even more important.

All large institutions have a long way to go in accomplishing a true compassionate learning environment, but many are starting the work. Trauma-informed practice or care is the term that came out of the U.S., but many of us who have intuitively worked with this lens for decades might call it best practice, and best practice may help us to sustain academia at a standard that best meets the needs of the students.

On an individual level, perhaps it starts with something as simple as the key message that we found works best in northern practice, "be nice." And perhaps this starts with being kind, compassionate and understanding to yourself, finding more untapped strengths.

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