Trauma-Informed Pedagogy

Webinar Presentation on 3/26/2020

Mays Imad, Ph.D.
Pima Community College

Email: mimad@pima.edu
@lrngsanctuary
For you, what is the purpose of higher education?

- “To innovate and leave a meaningful impact on my community.”
- “To develop skills that can be useful in helping my community; to give back.”
- “To stand on my own and help my community.”
- “To help myself become a better person so I can help others.”
- “To become a better human being.”
Describe Your Professors:

- “They do make a huge difference in our education.”
- “I appreciate how much of an impact they make on our young adult lives.”
- “I really admire what they do and I love to learn.”
“Teaching is a radical act of hope. It is an assertion of faith in a better future in an increasingly uncertain and fraught present. It is a commitment to that future even if we can’t clearly discern its shape.”

– Kevin M. Gannon, 2020
1 in 4 college students have a mental illness.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death amongst college students.

One third of college students are depressed.

26% of adults live with diagnosable mental illnesses.

Plus...
Three in 10 Millennials say they always or often feel lonely

How often, if ever, do you feel lonely? (% who say they "always" or "often" feel lonely)

- Total: 21%
- Millennials: 30%
- Generation X: 20%
- Baby boomers: 15%

YouGov | yougov.com
July 3 - 5, 2019

Plus...
Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) update
How Do We Teach to the Lonely, the Fearful, the Broken?
Learning Objectives

You will develop an understanding of:

1. Trauma & the physiological impact of traumatic experiences.

2. The impact of traumatic experiences on the brain & learning.

3. Strategies to mitigate this impact and improve learning.
Learning Objectives

You will develop an understanding of:

1. Trauma & the physiological impact of traumatic experiences.

3/26/2020 Webinar Presentation | Mays Imad, Ph.D. | Pima Community College | Email: mimad@pima.edu | @lrngsanctuary
What is Trauma?

“Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea.”

– American Psychological Association, 2014
What is Trauma?

“Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.”

– Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2019
What is Trauma?

“Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.”

– Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2019
The Key to Defining Trauma

Our **instinct to survive** defines **our reaction** to trauma regardless of our conscious awareness.
Minimize Danger, Maximize Reward

http://www.thebrainsavvyadvantage.com/article/brain---savvy---engagement---leading---your---team---through---change---with---the---brain---in---mind
The Key to Defining Trauma

Our **instinct to survive** defines **our reaction** to trauma regardless of our conscious awareness.
Negative Experience ➔ Helplessness

• Robert Scaer: “Any negative life event that occurs in a position of relative helplessness.”

• How does trauma engage our natural instinct of survival? What do these instinct of survival do to our body?
How We “Deal” with Trauma?

Trauma

- Intrusive memories
- Hopelessness
- Nightmares, Flashbacks
- Startle response
- Shame, self-hatred
- Panic attacks
- Emotional overwhelm
- Chronic pain, headaches
- Eating disorders
- Substance abuse
- Self-destructive behaviors
- Depression
- Dissociation
- Hypervigilance
- Little or no memories
- Numbness
- Loss of interest
- Irritability
- Decreased concentration
How We “Deal” with Trauma?

- Physical
- Emotional
- Behavioural
- Cognitive

Trauma

Intrusive memories

- Hopelessness
- Nightmares, Flashbacks
- Startle response
- Shame, self-hatred
- Panic attacks
- Emotional overwhelm

- Chronic pain, headaches
- Eating disorders
- Substance abuse

- Loss of interest
- Numbing
- Irritability
- Depression
- Dissociation

- Hyper vigilance
- Little or no memories
- Self-destructive behaviors

https://fampsy.org/psychological-trauma/
Your responses are NORMAL reactions to ABNORMAL events
Learning Objectives

You will develop an understanding of:

1. Trauma & the physiological impact of traumatic experiences.

2. The impact of traumatic experiences on the brain & learning.
Trauma, the Brain, & Student Learning
Trauma & the Brain

- **Prefrontal Cortex**: Helps us make good choices, pay attention, and learn.
- **Amygdala**: Helps keep us safe; it is where all of our emotions come from. Sometimes, if we have strong emotions, it keeps us from thinking clearly.
- **Hippocampus**: Helps us remember what we learn and store our memories.
Stress

Adrenals → Cortisol → Circadian Rhythm → Sleep disturbances

Inflammation → Brain cell destruction → Brain fog, Memory issues, Neurologic dysfunction

https://flihealth.com/the-fight-or-flight-loop-are-you-stuck-in-this-cycle/
Trauma Negatively Affects the Brain

- ↓ Attention
- ↓ Perception
- ↓ STM
- ↓ Decision-Making

[Image: Depiction of brain regions affected by trauma]

Trauma Impairs Our Ability to Make Decisions, Remember, & Learn
Trauma Impairs Our Ability to Make Decisions, Remember, & Learn

- Students may have a hard time:
  - Keeping track of changes in your class
  - Making decisions about learning
  - Prioritizing assignment
  - Engaging with classmates or subject
  - Managing their time
  - Not quitting
“We are not thinking machines that feel; rather, we are feeling machines that think.”

Teaching through a lens of trauma-informed practices
Learning Objectives

You will develop an understanding of:

1. The physiological impact of traumatic experiences.
2. The impact of traumatic experiences on brain & learning.
3. Strategies to mitigate this impact and improve learning.
“You Can’t Give What You Don’t Have”
She is a friend of mind. She gather me, man. The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order. It's good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind.

— Toni Morrison —
Who/what is your support system?
Trauma-Informed Strategies to Help Students Engage & Learn
Trauma Informed Care
(Hummer, V., Crosland, K., Dollard, N., 2009)

• Connect – Focus on Relationships
• Protect – Promote Safety and Trustworthiness
• Respect – Engage in Choice and Collaboration
• Redirect – Encourage Skill-Building and Competence
Trauma-Informed Strategies

1. Inform
   a) “If you are scared ... this is normal. Your fight or flight reaction is working.”
   b) How can we mitigate our sympathetic nervous system response?
      i. Stress versus immediate threat to life
      ii. Activate parasympathetic nervous system (breathing, walking, laughing)
      iii. Taper news consumption & computer screen
      iv. Why are we afraid of the unknown?
Trauma-Informed Strategies

2. Connect

   a) Radical hospitality
      i. Be present, communicate often
      ii. Show intentionality & transparency – tell them you want to be there for them
      iii. Remind them you are there *and* you want them to be there
Trauma-Informed Strategies

2. Connect
   b) Guiding Community
      i. Create safe space by building optional discussion to talk about daily lives
      ii. Suggest for students to check up on each other (facilitate it)
      iii. Write an article together on any topic your class decides on
Trauma-Informed Strategies

2. Connect

c) Enchanting Beauty
   i. Create an assignment to highlight the beauty within your discipline.
   ii. Showcase your humor (as a form of beauty)
   iii. Ask them to share their favorite poem with their class
Trauma-Informed Strategies

3. Protect

a) Reflective Hope
   i. Document your journey online and encourage students to keep a journal reflecting on the new “normal”
   ii. Create a shared document where everything can add one thing they are grateful for
Trauma-Informed Strategies

3. Protect
   b) Grounding Empathy
      i. Offer Structure
      ii. Be flexible with that structure
      iii. Autonomy and allow their voice to be heard (give them options to document their learning and come up with alternative assessment but don’t inundate them with many changes)
Trauma-Informed Strategies

4. Redirect
   a) Focus on materials you already covered
      i. Remind them by using language such as “remember, when we went over this and…”
   b) Ask them to come up with a topic you haven’t covered they want to learn about
   c) Talk about the future: “When we come back in the fall …”
   d) Keep them engaged
The Power of Personal Connection
The 2014 Gallup-Purdue Index found that having the personal relationships with faculty members made students far more likely to be successful later in life.

- "a mentor who encouraged my hopes & dreams"
- "professors who cared about me"
- "at least one professor who made me excited about learning"
“I would like to know more people I can relate to in the class. If the professor helped facilitate that, it would help me. I can join study groups then.”
“[Professors] can create an optimal learning environment by building relationships with students and making themselves available to those who need help.”
Come, come, whoever you are. Wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving. It doesn’t matter. Ours is not a caravan of despair. Come, even if you have broken your vows a thousand times. Come, yet again, come, come.
Our caravan is cloaked with radical **HOSPITALITY**... we journey on the **HOPE**-paved road to **HEAL** and we sing to the tune of humanity’s **HEART**.
"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I will meet you there."

- Rumi

quotographed.com
“When you want to become a healer, you must begin by forgetting about yourself.”

Dr. Erick Gbodossou
Thank You

Mays Imad, Ph.D.
mimad@pima.edu
@lrngsanctuary

“HOPE MATTERS”

Inside Higher Education, March 17, 2020