



Episode 3: Using Trauma-Informed Pedagogy: Is it Possible to “Let it Go?”

Tierney King (0:01)

This is the faculty focus Live podcast sponsored by the teaching professor. I'm your host, Tierney King. And I'm here to bring you inspiration, energy, and creative strategies that you can utilize in your everyday teaching.

Tierney King (0:20)

2020 was tolling, it was hard. It tested each and every one of us. Whether you were a student, a parent, a teacher, a frontline worker, you were tested, from your mental health, to your physical health, to your relationships to your job and more. But as an instructor, as a teacher, as an instructional designer, as a dean, you were held accountable to become a beacon of light for students. And you did it. You all rose to the challenge and became a pivotal part of each of your students' lives to offer them some peace, stability, and encouragement. As we transition into 2021, many students are still struggling with the aftereffects of the storm we call 2020. But it doesn't mean moving forward, we should put health on the backburner.

Tierney King (1:10)

And I get it. It's not easy to prioritize your health when there are 100 other things on your list that you need to do. But let's keep in mind that your health, your student's health, their learning and your teaching all foster when your mind and body take part in healthy habits, even small minor habits. So, I'm hoping for the next 10 minutes, you stay tuned and we talk about 2020 and how to process and deal with what has happened. We'll talk about this in two parts. First, we'll talk about how you can use six steps to help let go of the little things, the little stressors that we carry around with us and add up over time. And two, we'll talk about how we can implement trauma-informed pedagogy into our classes to help support students specifically during a pandemic. To start, we'll dive into Kristin L. Roush's Magna Online Seminar, Cultivate Resilience: Six Steps for Stress Inoculation. Here, she explains what it means to deal with stressors, small or big, and the steps that can be taken for dealing with difficult events in high stress situations.

Kristin L. Roush (2:15)

What does it mean to deal with something? You know, we've all used this phrase. So, we all know what we mean by it. But do we? What does it mean to you when you say you have dealt with something? How do you know if you have actually dealt with it? We talked about it as though it's important to do. But there's no agreed upon definition of what it means. Several years ago, I started to research the factors that contribute to people's continued stress after difficult life events, and even after they insisted that they had dealt with them. So, I informally interviewed people about their different meanings of dealing with something. And I started to recognize some patterns and commonalities. So, I took my academic training, and combined it with my years as a therapist working with clients, and I read books and poems and quotes by great thinkers and philosophers, and even spiritual leaders. And then I culled all that down to these six steps. And I'm sharing them with you today, suggesting that this is a

systematic approach to consciously recognize and address difficult life events as they unfold, or even later, when you recognize that has traumas has been affecting you more than maybe you thought.

Kristin L. Roush (3:43)

So, step one. Step one is, well what happened? What is the situation? Step two is what are my feelings about it? Identify those feelings and express them. Step three is looking at, well, what am I responsible for in this situation? Step four is well, what am I in control of doing about it now? Five is what do I choose to do about it? And then do it or make a plan to do it? Step six, the very last step is to let it go. Let it go. Let it go. This is a step that nobody ever does. Nobody ever makes the conscious decision to let it go, to allow it to stay in the past, to insist that it stays in the past. We have a tendency to worry about it to ruminate about it to replay it in the middle of the night in the form of what ifs or if only. We retell the story to anyone who will listen. We complain, we recount, mull it over, and otherwise keep it alive. We effectively put it back in our gunny sack, fling it over our shoulder, and carry it into our future in the form of our baggage.

Kristin L. Roush (5:14)

So, what are some concrete ideas for physically representing your intention to let it go? Well, you could write it down, tear it up and burn it. You could throw a rock into the woods. You could bury it. You could attach it to a helium balloon and release it to the four directions. You could put marbles in a jar every time you want to relive it. You might light a candle and represent releasing it when the flame burns out. You could record the date of your intention on a calendar and ask a friend to witness it. The point is that you take the time and the effort to symbolically represent your decision to let this go, to release it today in the present, so that tomorrow begins. You're having left it in the past.

Kristin L. Roush (6:08)

What can you keep in mind as you deal with difficult situations and then become more resilient and lighthearted? Filter your daily life events through a balanced belief system that emphasizes perspective and boundaries and mindful acceptance of what is a healthy and balanced belief system about life will help to inoculate you against interpreting events as more problematic than they had to be.

Tierney King (6:37)

Now let's take all of this information, all of these steps to help let it go and put it into context of what has happened and what is happening in our lives today. In the Magna Online Seminar, Trauma-Informed Pedagogy: Teaching in Uncertain Times, Mays Imad explains why it's important to talk about what's happening, and specifically, how we can use trauma-informed pedagogy to guide us in our next steps.

Mays Imad (7:05)

I want you to think about what just happened. We have a global pandemic that's negatively impacting all of us to a varying degree. And it's leaving us in a relative state of helplessness. As a matter of fact, psychologists, psychiatrists, neuroscientists are warning that the coronavirus pandemic could inflict long-lasting emotional trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, and at an unprecedented scale. Our brains are really struggling, right? We are not equipped to deal with a global pandemic. We're not equipped to understand that existential threat. And as a matter of fact, I noticed in my own, just personally, that in the beginning, when I was looking at all the number of deaths in Spain, and in Italy,

and around the world and the projection of what was happening, our brain absorbs these things and then interprets them. And subconsciously is asking, Is it going to be me? Is it going to be my family, right? And so, I began to have insomnia. And I would wake up and have this anxiety, I checked with my students, my students were having the same and similar effects. And so of course, this is happening. And so back to trauma, the key to defining trauma and why this is so important that we talk about it right now is that it is linked to our instinct to survive. And it's that instinct to survive, it's going to define our trauma, regardless of our conscious awareness. And so, I could tell myself, well, I am healthy. I am in quarantine. I am not going to get COVID-19, but my brain subconsciously is looking at the images of dead bodies of the caskets and my mirror neurons, my empathy neurons, are now wondering, is this going to be me? One of the beautiful things that we're experiencing is the pain that people are talking about because of the empathy and our connection to our fellow human beings, and our our desire to want to help them.

Tierney King (9:29)

This trauma, Imad says, is stored in our body and our bodies keep score. The body remembers what that trauma did, how it impacted the immune system, digestive system and so on. But it's so important to recognize that trauma and heal the trauma, and that resilience and healing that you can foster can be done with a trauma-informed plan.

Mays Imad (9:54)

And the question for us to consider is how do we teach to the lonely, the fearful and to the broken? And what I want to impart to you today is that we can only do this through a trauma-informed lens, right? And we don't need to be psychologists or therapists, we need to have a rudimentary understanding of trauma and make the assumption that we're all traumatized. Right, we're in a pandemic. And look at the lens, look at the framework of a trauma-informed teaching and learning.

Mays Imad (10:31)

Trauma-informed pedagogy is going to encompass all of the teaching practices that we engage in. And we engage in those practices with a keen awareness of our student's traumatic experiences, and the effects of those experiences on students emotional on their well-being. But we don't just stop there. We don't just have awareness. We're intentional to promote an environment, virtual or physical environment of healing, empowerment, one that promotes resilience and recovery. And we're also intentional not to use practices that may hinder or even re-traumatize our students. And this could mean, and this means that we start by recognizing that our students, right now may be experiencing one or all of the following and may be having a hard time keeping track of changes in your class. Right? They may be having a hard time keeping track of changes in your class, they may be having a hard time making decision or being motivated or prioritizing assignments. I have colleagues that say, "My students are not coming on Zoom, I don't know what's going on," they say they're not replying. Well, that's probably because there's a good reason.

Tierney King (11:52)

There are numerous strategies to help encourage students to attend your class, while also fostering a safe environment where they feel comfortable explaining why they might miss a class or two.

Mays Imad (12:04)

It's really important when we experienced trauma, right, in order to begin healing, we need to feel safe. And so, I have a list of strategies that I am using, that some of my students have said to me that work. So, it's really important that we communicate, and we communicate often and also invite conversations. And equally important that we make no assumption about what safety is. And so, it's important I think we understand what physical safety is, right? When we don't necessarily understand what a student needs by their own safety and ask them, you know.

Mays Imad (12:43)

For the fall semester, start with a small, short survey and say, "I want to foster emotional safety. I want to foster a virtual safe classroom. What does safety mean to you?" Let that guide you. It's important to use students' names, so even though it's virtual, it's online, you don't see them, write them. "I really like your assignment, Catherine," and "I was thinking about what you wrote, Jose," and so on. Ask them how are they doing, "How are you doing?" It's so—it's such a powerful, especially when it comes from a deep place of empathy, and students can feel that. "How are you doing, how is your family doing?" This is going to let them know that they're not just a number in your class, that you see them.

It's really important to be intentional and facilitate peer support and mutual self-help. Here, facilitate relationship building, ask your students to check up on each other, and talk about why it's important to check up on each other. Encourage storytelling. Use what's called the check-in method. Invite your students, for example, to share about the challenges that they're experiencing in their lives. You also want to give them a way out, the check-out. If they don't feel safe or comfortable, that they don't need to participate. I would encourage you to have one where you also participate and one where you don't participate, give them their privacy. What I did is I asked the students and they said, "We want to create our own Google document to talk about this," and that's great

What we need to do right now more than ever is impart hope to our students, not the past one but the resisting, the resilient hope. Like I said this is a concept I've been working on, this learning sanctuary. What I want to say is our caravan, it's our home, cloaked with radical hospitality and that our journey with our students, it's a journey on a hope paved road to heal. We do that and we sing to the tune of humanity's heart.

Tierney King (15:10)

Remember, we're on this journey together and there are numerous things, big or small, that we can do to help make this journey a tad bit easier. Even if you just schedule a reminder in your watch, phone or calendar, to walk, meditate, stretch, or just rest your brain for a few minutes, that's something. And I know this isn't possible for everyone but take a moment and consider and think about what will work best for you and your students. Let's make 2021 a journey that fosters hope, resilience and care.

Tierney King (15:45)

Whether you're driving to work, or you just need a 10 minute think session, we hope faculty focus live will inspire your own teaching, and offer ideas that you can integrate into your own course. For more information on the resources included in this episode, please check out the links provided in the episode summary

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