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Trauma-Informed School Practices in Response to the Impact of Social-Cultural Trauma (Chapter in How Shall We Then Care? A Christian Educator's Guide to Caring for Self, Learners, Colleagues, and Community)

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Prelude: Trauma-Informed School Practices as an Ethic of Christian Care

In this chapter we present a model for addressing the academic and behavioral challenges of students impacted by unmitigated stress and trauma. Typically, trauma-informed school literature addresses trauma resulting from abusive, or neglectful behaviors that occur in the home (Bailey, 2015; Craig, 2016; Massachusetts Advocates for Children, 2005; Souers & Hall, 2016). Here, the type of trauma we are addressing is threats to the physical and emotional health of students due to social and cultural factors. Perhaps most detrimental and deadly is trauma resulting from war, economic collapse, civil unrest, and social-political attitudes, laws, and customs that exclude, marginalize, exploit, or subjugate an identified vulnerable population. Like members of a family in which chronic conflict and abuse occur, this type of violence involves all of us, whether we are direct recipients of abuse, observers of those supporting such abuse (oftentimes people we love), or searching for ways to effectively intervene on behalf of the victims. We can not stay in a merely objective observer position as all of us are stressed by events happening across the globe, and emotionally, socially, and perhaps economically impacted as these events occur within our own communities.

Further complicating social-cultural abuse is the co-opting of a religious system to legitimize inhumane and abusive actions. Political responses, referring to laws and practices enacted by elected leaders which both reflect constituent attitudes as well as shape public sentiment, often use religious metaphors and distorted theology to both justify and rally support. This tactic has been used throughout history to garner a collective energy to fight a perceived threat, oftentimes for less than obvious ulterior motives (Kippenberg, 2016; Longman, 2010; McDurmon, 2019; Woodley, 2019). It is an element that makes social-cultural abuse so heinous, as the perpetrators are fomenting hate and violence with a morally superior claim that God is on their side in this battle of good versus evil.

As global populations shift with mass migrations due to violence, war, and the collapse of economic and civil infrastructures required for sustaining life, every country is faced with the intensifying dilemma of how shall we then respond (Arvanitis, 2019). Nationalism, and classifying the immigrant as lawbreakers bent on crime and infested with disease are common rallying cries aimed to exclude and protect self-interest (Fea, 2018, 2019; Hunter, 2010; Woodley, 2019). Upon touring a holding facility with cells crammed with immigrants, adults and children separated from one another and denied proper care for weeks, a prominent religious leader claimed he saw a room of disease-ridden, dangerous, uneducated and undeserving persons who have no business seeking shelter in the United States (Dobson, 2019; Massey, 2019). His words reinforce the attitudes of many of his constituents who adopt the same mindset Scripture speaks to wherein human fear and greed allow us to trade a truth for a lie, to spit upon or ignore the beggar on the side of the road, or deny embrace of those who, according to our human logic, have not earned it.

The story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) is a glimpse into how all of us, regardless of our current response to the needs of those on the losing end of global politics and markets, are vulnerable to not responding to the cries of those suffering social-cultural sponsored abuse. The parable leaves no doubt as to the sloth, greed, or carelessness of the younger son as he flits away his inheritance, leaving him destitute and reduced to barely subsisting as he lives among the swine. Unlike those seeking to immigrate who are most often victims of powers and principalities, Christ drives the point home as to what constitutes care by using a case example of one who we might conclude does not deserve anything more. Upon the son's return home, as his father prepares to honor and embrace him with the ultimate community celebration, the older brother is appalled that unearned honor in attitude (love and care) and action (sharing of remaining resources) is bestowed upon such an undeserving creature.

Who among us has not felt that way, using natural and logical consequence reasoning to justify our position? We are all the older brother. But with a renewing of our heart and mind, we are capable of following the dad's lead, and tapping into our own storehouses of goodwill and resources whether the persons in need have what we perceive to be a legitimate claim to our help or not.

Our internal attitudes do not always stem from mere jealousy and resentment of someone getting something they did not earn. In the news example above, a man of financial power and religious influence could not look into the face of human pain and suffering and see Christ; he could not see the face of those marginalized by some of the same forces that allowed him to succeed, those qualities of privilege that always include unmerited winners and losers. Scripture and psychology might call his defensive reaction shame. When we feel immense distain or

judgement towards a hurting person, we are encountering a series of convoluted internal thoughts and feelings that are difficult to identify. Ultimately it reflects or activates feelings of resentment, guilt, and shame, and our first instinct is to defend against it, and make the innocent victim the guilty party. Have you ever felt that discomfort upon seeing a homeless person living on the street or begging for money? It is the same dynamic, though differing circumstances, operating in persons who want to, or actually do hurt a child or a pet; the innocence and vulnerability seen in others causes this internal discomfort. It contorts into hate and a drive to destroy or banish it from sight. We see this in Cain's impulse to kill his brother, despite God's voice on his shoulder warning him to harness these deep, intense distorted convolutions in thoughts and feelings that lead to deadly actions (Genesis 4).

In the pages ahead we unpack the nature of social-cultural trauma, along with a trauma-informed school method of responding to students whose growth and development are deeply impacted by these experiences. We (Berardi & Morton) do not know how to arrive at solutions to create more equitable and sustainable communities to stem the tide of migrants. It is beyond our scope of practice and competence to figure out how to garner the financial resources to respond to social-cultural trauma victims. But we do have a vision, grounded in social science research and our Christian faith, for how to create communities of care that can make a difference in the lives of all children and their families.

Trauma-Informed School Practices (TISP; Berardi & Morton, 2019) is proposing a rationale and method for extending care to all based on the fundamental building blocks of what each of us need to become healthy, contributing members of society. To enact TISP, we emphasize that it is not about a series of techniques, but a shift in mindset in which we encounter

each student - whether a victim of abuse or a bully, or a seemingly well-adjusted emotionally grounded child - and see their preciousness and vulnerability in need of our care on behalf of their current and emerging developmental needs. Such encounters with the stories and experiences of others change us, soften our hearts, sharpen our eyesight, and strengthen our resolve. We hope that learning more about TISP contributes to this process.

The Nature and Impact of Social-Cultural Trauma

All forms of abuse, whether between family members or enacted by social-cultural forces, impairs development, hence the ability to engage in age-appropriate academic and social tasks (Berardi & Morton, 2019, 2017; Blaustein, 2013; Bremner, 2002; Carrion & Wong, 2012; Cozolino, 2014; Everly & Lating, 2012; Morton, 2018; Morton & Berardi, 2018; van der Kolk, 2014). And most, if not all, interpersonal dysregulation between parent and child has a social-cultural context influencing that parent's ability to respond to the attachment needs of the child. This chapter focuses on traumatic events and practices that are a direct reflection of cultural values and mores that set in motion distinct beliefs and practices endorsed and enacted by a community and individuals. It is never a simple matter of a current predicament being the result of a political party; generational attitudes and relational patterns have created a fertile ground for an astonishing manifestation of human violence or evil.

Figure 1 recalls Bronfenbrenner's (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) ecosystemic model of human growth and development as a visible reminder of the complexity of social-cultural factors contributing to how abusive trends are set in motion with full endorsement of wide segments of a given population. Later in this chapter we will discuss the role of attachment theory in understanding and mitigating the impact of stress and trauma. But it is helpful to remember the

power and influence of cultural attitudes that shape how we view self and other, and also then shape our social behaviors and attachment relationships. Hence, the macrosystem is identified as the most powerful influencer shaping our individual and corporate identities and behaviors, earning the title 'the invisible blueprint".
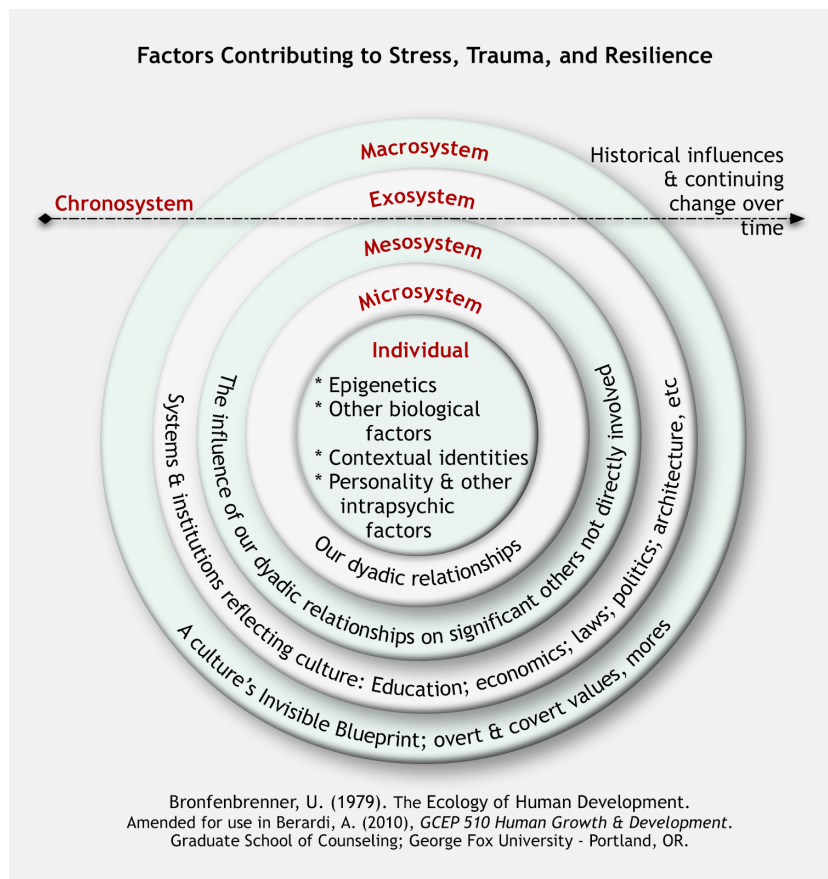

Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development

While all of us are vulnerable to secondary trauma when we walk with others through their trauma recovery process, the nature of social-cultural trauma involves and impacts all of us. Persons throughout the world are on alert as mass migrations are revealing larger pockets of unsustainable communities; the reality of mass migration and the changes this brings to the places we call home is here to stay for the foreseeable future (Avanitis, 2019). Here in North

America, many are appalled by the government's actions towards immigrants, and even more traumatized by the endorsement of such behaviors by religious leaders. We are observing their constituents energized by what they believe to be a holy war against all things wrong and immoral, justifying cruel and inhumane actions (Fea, 2019; Hunter, 2010). This is our family, and we are all involved in these traumatic global atrocities whether we want to or not.

Most persons born and raised in a Western culture such as the United States can easily grasp what social-culture trauma involves. In our own history, the institution of slavery and the seizing of Native American lives and land, both of which were practices enacted in establishing the United States, are vivid examples. The very formation of this country was founded upon declaring certain marginalized populations less than human who had no divine right to their land, government, or culture (Woodley, 2019). Their lives were inconsequential to the invading, and eventually established, culture. The practice of seizing others homeland, and of enslaving others for generations, seems other worldly, as if an ancient version of humans engaged in such practices. As we try to imagine the lives of Native and African Americans, it is incomprehensible. As they were being exploited for generations, their humanity was not recognized; their bodies used and tossed aside while the perpetrators sang hymns of praise to God. All of us still suffer the consequences of these social-cultural traumas from generations ago.

Social-cultural trauma includes horrendous ordeals on a daily basis originating within our home communities, magnified by many of the atrocities being endorsed by a majority culture. On TV, we see seemingly healthy people, with the stamina to walk across deserts, who merely look foreign and out of compliance with human-made laws. Our rejection, our abusive tactics,

and our rationalizations make us culpable in adding to their pain and suffering. The poet Warsan Shire (2009), a Somali refugee, captures the unspeakable truths of those who find themselves fleeing their homelands in her poem "*Home*". We share an excerpt below, and encourage you to read it in full:

> no one leaves home unless
>
> home is the mouth of a shark
>
> you only run for the border
>
> when you see the whole city running as well

If you have taken the time to read her words in full, or the stories of other migrants, perhaps as captured in autobiographies or novels (McCall Garcia, 2018), Shire is not exaggerating. Seeking a life - not just a better life - is not a moral choice but a parents' mandate. But when those of us in privileged spaces use God and country as justification to deny access, we add to their abuse.

As illustrated in Shire's words, families who have been forced to leave their home communities, whether fitting the legal definition of migrant or refugee, have endured traumatic events making the risks and uncertainty a far better option than staying (Ballard, Wieling, & Solheim, 2016). Tragically, they often experience abuse and violence along the path to an uncertain final destination. The situation that prompted their decision to flee, and the experiences they encountered seeking safety, such as detention facilities, separation of parents and children, and potential deportation, have long-lasting implications to their physical and mental health. In their 2019 study, Muniz de la Pena, Pineda and Punsky found family separations to be "one of

the most significant sources of distress among refugees and migrants" (p. 156). It is no surprise that research indicates that children who have been separated from their primary attachment relationships, or who faced significant unmitigated challenges or adversity, were at increased risk for both general and mental health issues (Levers & Hyatt-Burkhart, 2012; Muniz de la Pena, Pineda & Punsky, 2019).

Most citizens of a dominant culture are oblivious to the day to day lives of those who are under seige if they are part of a marginalized group. In the US, those of Central and South American ancestry are aware that there are two parallel worlds: A seemingly safe society where each individual merely goes about their daily business earning a living and providing for their families; and others who know that the safety is but a veil and exists only for those of a dominant group, and they are not apart of that group.

This is what our students from marginalized populations bring into the classroom. They suffer the consequences of losing their homeland, their cultural identity, their place in society, with parents who lost any semblance of being able to promise ongoing safety while secretly carrying the pain of atrocities committed against them. They enter communities where their peers are taught through their homes or media that immigrants are lawbreakers and dangerous, raising up the next generation of adults who will not be able to see the full context that stands before them, blind to human pain and suffering.

In *Trauma-Informed School Practices* (Berardi & Morton, 2019), we introduce Ben, a student who represents a composite sketch of our very neighbors who wake up everyday knowing they are living in a dangerous community, with armed ICE agents who could appear at his door or school at any moment and threaten to take his parents and him away. Ben is no

stranger to the physical and emotional toll of uprootedness as his family has moved frequently

due to his parents seeking economic and social safety for the family. On a daily basis his parents

prepare Ben for the possibility that mom or dad may be arrested, detained, and perhaps deported.

The children are taught how to survive, how to respond if they too are ever questioned or

detained. All family members, children alike, carry proof of their identity and legal status. Ben

knows how to spot whether you are a safe and aware advocate, or are someone he needs to avoid.

He can walk into his school on any given day, and see through visual images such as peer

clothing and overheard conversations, whether or not this is a safe refuge or a continuation of the

danger that exists outside the school's doors.

Similar preparedness processes unfold for African American families as parents need to

teach their children about the legacy of racism still present within the fabric of our society, and

as a result, how to manage social interactions with those in authority, such as an encounter with

law enforcement should they be pulled over for a traffic stop (Coates, 2015). Those most

vulnerable to social-cultural trauma are most aware of this parallel world that many dominant

culture members are often unaware of or unmoved by, inspired by social lenses we use to make

sense of the world (Harari, 2015).

Given the current climate of raids, arrests, family separations, and threats of more to

come, children are at risk for traumatic distress (Levers & Hyatt-Burkhart, 2012). Adverse

Childhood Experiences (ACE) survey data (Anda, Felitti, Bremner, Walker, Whitfield, Perry &

Giles, 2006; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015, 2019; Felitti, Anda, Nordenberg,

Williamson, Spitz, Edwards, & Marks, 1998) has sounded the alarm to the level of distress most

children bring into our classrooms on a daily basis, and the devastating impact unmitigated stress

and trauma wreck in the lives of these students across the lifespan. In fact, ACE data has, in large part, inspired the trauma-informed school movement (Berardi & Morton, 2019; Craig, 2016; Massachusetts Advocates for Children, 2005; Morton, 2018; Morton & Berardi, 2018; Souers & Hall, 2016). Add to this the devastating implications of social-cultural trauma, perhaps best captured in the ACE International Questionnaire (World Health Organization, 2018), and we know our classrooms are complex communities with children who need us to see their hurt and pain, in all its causes and manifestations.

Call for an Ethic of Care

The traumatic experiences of children and families call for a different model of educating children and interacting with parents and community. We explore this through the lens of an ethic of care. When educators hear the term 'ethic of care', many will immediately connect the term with the work of Nel Noddings, who suggested that caring is "both a moral orientation to teaching and as an aim of moral education" (p. 215). Care is fundamental to the human experience. Noddings made the case for the need for teachers and students to be in relationship with one another. She characterized this as "love or hate, anger or sorrow, admiration or envy; or, of course, they may reveal mixed affects - one party feeling, say, love and the other revulsion (p. 218). Noddings defined the relationship as one that is between two individuals, and is characterized by one who is caring, attends to the needs or desires of the individual they are in relationship with. And, in turn, the second individual, the one who is receiving the care, acknowledges the care they are receiving (Noddings, 1988). She went on to say that "if, without knowing a student - what he loves, strives for, fears, hopes - I merely expect him to do uniformly well in everything I present to him, I treat him like an unreflective animal" (p. 224). Martin

Buber (1971) refers to this as I-It relating, whereby the essence of intimacy, of seeing the wholeness of our relational other as much as we allow ourselves to be seen, is inaccessible, prohibiting "I-Thou" relating captured in God's relational movement with His creation.

In our TISP Tri-Phasic model, we acknowledge the work of Noddings, and respectfully add to it through a trauma-informed lens. To that end, we posit that "trauma-informed practice is ultimately a commitment to being in community in a manner that provides a welcome and inclusive environment fostering relational safety and well-being, the basic ingredients we all need to thrive throughout the lifespan" (Berardi & Morton, 2019, p. 120). This ethic of care is not just teacher to student, as Noddings encouraged, but "a consistent ethic of care means that the relational values educators extend to students are offered to each other as well" (Berardi & Morton, 2019, p. 120), including co-workers, parents/guardians of students we serve, and the larger community. "Caring about educator well-being is a central value as expressed in *Person of the Educator* practices, in recognition that attuned and supportive interpersonal relationships nurture resilience and well-being amidst the challenges of educating highly stressed students" (Berardi & Morton, 2019, p. 120). Additionally, trauma-informed practices acknowledges the vulnerability of teachers to secondary trauma as a result of working with students living with pain and chaos, who look to us for help, as well as our own unmitigated stress and trauma. (Berardi & Morton, 2019). In essence, a Christian ethic of care is I-Thou relating, mirroring Parker Palmer's (1993) work "To know as we are known."

Theoretical Constructs Informing TISP

We have offered a quick glimpse into the world of students who have experienced social-cultural trauma as a result of social unrest and upheaval that threaten their safety and

belonging. These students join the chorus of children and young adults filling our classrooms who bring the side effects of unmitigated stress and trauma with them, expressed in a wide range of behaviors that threaten their academic and social functioning. In order to understand how TISP serves all of these students, the following offers a quick overview of major conceptual elements informing the model.

Attachment Theory

Advances in a neurobiological understanding of what happens when we encounter stress and trauma, and the impact of consistent versus inadequate care in response, has led to both a confirmation of several hypothesis that the social-behavioral sciences have long trusted, as well as provided a foundation upon which to design effective responses. Attachment theory has long proposed that attuned and mentoring relationships are key to psychosocial growth and development across the lifespan. Its primary hypothesis is that when you and I get "good-enough" (consistent attunement and mentoring, not perfection) parenting by at least one stable caretaker, preferably more, throughout our first 18 years of life, we will have a better chance of managing anxiety, which is an inevitable companion for all living creatures as long as we have breath (Berardi & Morton, 2019; Bowlby, 1988; Bowlby & Golding, 2007; Cozolino, 2014; Karen, 1990; Levine & Heller, 2010; Siegel, 2012). This concept is resonant with Scripture in which we see illustrated repeatedly that life is full of hardships, dangers, and uncertainty, but God as Refuge, as the One who is always with us, the Rock who offers us assurance that whatever comes our way, even if it costs us our life, is doable and manageable. We can face hardship, we can even face our own death, taking great comfort in knowing we are loved and not alone.

This is made most real when we speak of the love and care of our parents reflecting the first tangible signs of God's love, designed to create in us life-long anchoring schemas that we are loved, that we matter, and we can find our way through whatever challenges life throws our way. Strong, consistent attachment is the neurological and psychosocial key to containing and managing lifelong encounters with anxiety, and is the wellspring of resilience in the face of challenge.

When children do not get good-enough parental *attunement and mentoring* during their formative years, they experience an overabundance of anxiety, and they often fail to develop the cognitive and behavioral skills and ability to contain or manage that anxiety (Scaer, 2005; Schore, 2003; Siegel, 2012). A similar process unfolds when we sense the world outside our home disdains us and threatens our very physical safety. We develop distortions regarding our worth, abilities, the trustworthiness of others, and the value and purpose of living. Anxiety and the factors contributing to its overabundance set off its own unique tumbling effects in each of us. For educators developing trauma-informed competencies, once they revisit the attachment literature and examine the myriad of ways misattuned attachment impacts thoughts, feelings, and actions, they can quickly identify children whose dysregulated behavior (whether displayed through acting out or withdraw) likely reflects signs of unmitigated stress and trauma, regardless of its source (Bailey, 2015; Berardi & Morton, 2019; Craig, 2016; Morton, 2015; Morton & Berardi, 2017).

While attachment theory focuses on the relationships between a caretaker and a dependent child, a foundational principle is that we all need attachment relationships throughout the lifespan (Berardi, 2012, 2015; Bowlby & Golding, 2007; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall,

2015). Stress and coping theory (Boss, 2002; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; McCleary & Figley, 2017), as discussed below, as well as attachment theory, propose that the stronger our formative attachment relationships are, the more resilient we are to relational failures and disappointments we may experience outside the home. But there is a tipping point. The old saying "Sticks and Stones" (Sticks and Stones May Break My Bones But Words Will Never Hurt Me, n.d.), is only true to the degree that our inner *strengths* can withstand the *intensity* of the verbal or attitudinal attack. Because we are relational beings dependent on needing loving and affirming relationships, if a community identifies our essence as wrong or unworthy, this is not merely name calling; this is psychological warfare. If public sentiment results in laws and practices that exclude or threaten to take away a person's capacity to establish a safe and equitable life without socially-sanctioned ridicule and acts of exclusion, that is the equivalent of a spear, not merely sticks and stones.

Advances in neurobiology have allowed us to physically observe changes in the brain when we are in an attuned state versus when we are not (Schore, 2017, Shapiro, 2018; Siegel, 2012). Cognitive psychology and cognitive developmental theories have long proposed that our thinking and affective states are influenced by internal schemas that help us decode and make sense of environmental stimuli. We now know the neurochemicals and the regions of the brain comprising the formation, storing, and accessing of these schemas developed through our attachment relationships (Everly & Lating, 2008; Perry, 2006, 2009; Porges, 2011; Porges & Furman, 2011; Vermetten & Bremner, 2002). The movie *Inside Out* (Rivera & Docter, 2015) illustrates these advancements.

The Neurobiology of Unmitigated Stress and Trauma

If consistent attachment over time is the catalyst that promotes brain development, than what occurs when we do not receive the stress-mediating benefits of attuned and mentoring relationships during our primary developmental years? Attunement and mentoring allows us repeated experiences with having our encounters with the world, whether our interactions with others, or our own internal challenges, to be validated. This validation allows us to feel loved, seen, and understood. Parental mirroring helps us put language to our experience, thereby increasing our ability to engage in abstract reasoning as we continue to grapple with life challenges. The more we feel safe to explore our world both physically and emotionally, the more confidence we gain that we can survive such challenges. Likewise, the more we experience the micro disappointments in trusting relationships - that people we love and trust will disappoint us, as I will them, but we can work through these breaks - the more the developing child can tolerate relational distress even as they strive to figure out solutions. All of these social-emotional process co-exist with meaning-making schemas built through verbal and non-verbal, overt and covert teachings the child is picking up from their primary attachments as well as the broader relational community.

A child denied such consistency in attunement and mentoring will not experience a strengthening of neurostructures required to make sense of internal need states or the complex messages received from social interactions. Coupled with distortions about their own worth and the trustability of others, various domains of neural functioning fail to develop, causing a cascade of social-emotional vulnerabilities. For many, this is accompanied by difficulties focusing on a task, encoding short and long term memories, and being able to delay gratification while

tolerating frustration, all executive functioning skills needed to be academically successful (Berardi & Morton, 2019, 2017).

A quick way to understand the interconnection between neurological functions and behavior is to examine what happens to our stress response systems when impacted by unmitigated stress and trauma. Under typical circumstances when faced with a stressor or trauma, norepinephrine is released to aid us in response as we determine whether we need to fight, flee, or freeze. This coincides with the release of cortisol, a hormone that helps us continue responding to the trauma as norepinephrine is designed to just get us out of immediate danger. When our responses are effective, and/or we receive the safety and validation we need from our relational community, our body returns to its original state of homeostasis. Crisis averted; lessons learned.

But when we are in a constant state of alarm, and those we love and trust the most are either perpetuating or are unable to stop the stress, our brain's capacity to self-regulate states of alarm and calm become impaired (Berardi & Morton, 2019; Briere & Scott, 2006; Morton & Berardi, 2017; Vermetten & Bremner). This mirrors glitches in the formation of internalized schemas regarding their worth and abilities, as well as the goodness or trustworthiness of others. Cognitive distortions and impulsive behavioral choices are often indicators of these faulty processes (Berardi & Morton, 2019). Students unable to regulate their stress response systems are now consumed with survival, whether they overtly know this or not. Academics and social behavioral expectations are the least of their worries, although struggles in these arenas further compound negative internalized beliefs (Berardi & Morton, 2019; Craig, 2016; Massachusetts

Advocates for Children, 2005; Morton, 2018; Morton & Berardi, 2018; Morton & Berardi, 2017; Souers & Hall, 2016).

Therefore, when children struggle to successfully function in the classroom, their behaviors and dispositions are communicating a struggle with a variety of negative neural networks intensified as a result of unmitigated stress and trauma. In response, the developing child needs educators to understand the nature and variation of how these negative neural networks are operating, and how they can be counterbalanced with distinct rituals, routines, and practices that promote the creation of positive neural networks in response (Berardi & Morton, 2019).

Stress and Coping Theory

Stress and coping theory (Boss, 2002; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Rosino, 2016) hypothesizes that we have the greatest chance of being resilient in the face of traumatic experiences when we have access to external (for example financial support or medical care) and internal (for example, a sense of humor or the capacity to be flexible) resources, combined with a *Sense of Coherence* (Antonovsky, 1987) that allows access to additional internal and external resources. One's *Sense of Coherence* is most synonymous with an internalized world view that allows us to a) make sense of what is challenging us congruent with and supported by dominant cultural values and practices; b) find meaning in life that inspires coping efforts; and c) access coping resources endorsed and made available by one's community. These researchers identify our *Sense of Coherence* as having the greatest level of influence over whether or not we stand a chance of successful coping (Antonovsky, 1987; Rosino, 2016).

This is of primary relevance when responding to victims of social-cultural exclusion and violence. When besieged by a group of persons legally having the right to exclude or threaten the safety of another based on some aspect of their contextual identity, victims of such actions will not find the dominant culture even acknowledging, let alone caring about, their pain and suffering. Examples of these contextual identities include national origin, residency status, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomics, appearance, ability, or any other aspect of one's identity that the dominant culture may enact laws and practices to disempower that group. These acts of social exclusion add to their trauma injuries. And finally, access to external resources is consequently limited to non-existent since the dominant culture is not empathically moved by the trauma they are causing, and part of the weaponry is denying victims coping resources (Samuels, 2019).

For educators serving displaced students and their families, it is important to recognize that parents bring their children to school wondering if this is one more place where their experience is ignored, their presence is distained, and if their child needs to prepare for adults and students who will perpetuate their trauma through words, actions, or attitudes, whether in overt or covert ways. If a school or place of worship can do only one thing, this is it: Examine closely what it means to provide a safe space, a space that says "I am so glad you are here..welcome!" A space that calls out and stops all forms of bullying, even while teaching all of its members about the importance to stop abuse, to stop trauma, and promote healing within caring relationship. Then listen to the stories of newcomers, and search for ways to include them in the life of the community even while providing them with much needed tangible resources. This is trauma-informed response, whether enacted within a school or faith community.

The TISP Tri-Phasic Model as Response

Advances in the fields of traumatology and neurobiology have allowed mental health professionals to evaluate and redesign treatment approaches congruent with these advancements. But what has been most exciting is an awareness that the basic blueprint of a best practice response to those impacted by unmitigated stress and trauma is appropriate for use by all persons caring for others, applied according to one's role and context.

Further inspiring the application of best-practice trauma-informed models of care beyond mental health service settings is the sobering data gleaned from the ACE survey (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015, 2019; World Health Organization, 2018). Without intervention, cycles of trauma are guaranteed to impact future generations as well, whether through multigenerational relational patterns or actual biological vulnerabilities due to the unresolved trauma of their ancestors (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015, 2019; DeCocio, 2018; Hurley, 2013; Ptak & Petronis, 2010; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2017).

This best-practice blueprint is commonly called the tri-phasic model of recovery (Baranowsky, Gentry, & Schultz, 2005; Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2019; Bloom, 2013; Briere & Scott, 2006; Kinniburgh, Blaustein, Spinazzola, & van der Kolk, 2005; Herman, 1992; Shapiro, 2018; Van Der Hart & van der Kolk, 1989). While each mental health practitioner may alter the language and tasks of each phase, it generally consists of the following themes. The first phase, *Safety and Stabilization*, recognizes that when we are in a state of panic or alarm, whether that has led to severe anxiety, deep depression, addictions, poor choices, compulsive behaviors, or is simply masked through acting out or avoidance behaviors, we can not begin to make sense of

what has happened to us, how we are responding, and how we need to change (problem solve), until we first establish a sense of emotional and/or physical safety, including the ability to self regulate. This acknowledgement is grounded in our greater understanding of how our stress response systems operate, and what occurs when these systems can no longer work properly, whether over- or under- responding to perceived or actual threats. When our bodies can not self regulate in response to our internal need states or the relational demands in the environment, we feel a lack of control, adding to the sense of fear. We can not access higher order thinking process (executive functions) needed to sort our way through the precipitating issues. Learning about fear and anxiety circuits and how to calm physiological processes is the first step to being able to effectively respond to the need or issue driving the fear.

The second phase of the tri-phasic recovery model commonly referred to as *Remembrance and Mourning,* is the hard work of taking an inventory of the trauma and its impact. Traumatic events or ongoing relational sequences, especially when not adequately responded to by those who know and care for us, undermine our sense of self, leading to all manner of side effects. This is often understood to be the "heart of therapy", and the path through this process is unique for each person.

The final phase, often called *Re-engagement* or *Re-entry* is determined by the person's ability to re-engage in life with a renewed sense of comfort and purpose. For some, it means envisioning a new sense of one's identify. For others it is about discovering a new way of listening to what is most important in their life now along with changes they would like to pursue. As with Phase 2, this process is unique to each person.

This tri-phasic blueprint is embedded within most trauma-informed models shaping best practice approaches when working in clinical mental health as well as disaster response settings (Brymer, Jacobs, Layne, Pynoos, Ruzek, Steinberg, & Watson, 2006). Its principles apply to trauma-informed school applications but not in a manner easily discerned for school professionals. Hence, these authors identified how the tri-phasic model applies to schools and developed the *Trauma-Informed School Practices Tri-Phasic Model* (Figure 2; Berardi & Morton, 2019) as will be described below.

Trauma-Informed School Practices Tri-Phasic Model
Goal: Assist educational systems to structure their culture and processes according to trauma-informed school competencies to promote integrated neural functioning foundational to academic success.

Phase III Commencing
* Cognitive Engagement
* Executive Functioning
* Increased neural network integration allows academic engagement and further social-emotional skill building

Phase II Coaching
* Mentoring
* Stabilization
* Self-Regulation
* Social-Emotional Learning

Phase I Connecting
* Attunement
* Emotional Safety
* Physical Safety
* Seen, Valued

Berardi, A., & Morton, B. M. (2019). Trauma-Informed School Practices: Building Expertise to Transform Schools

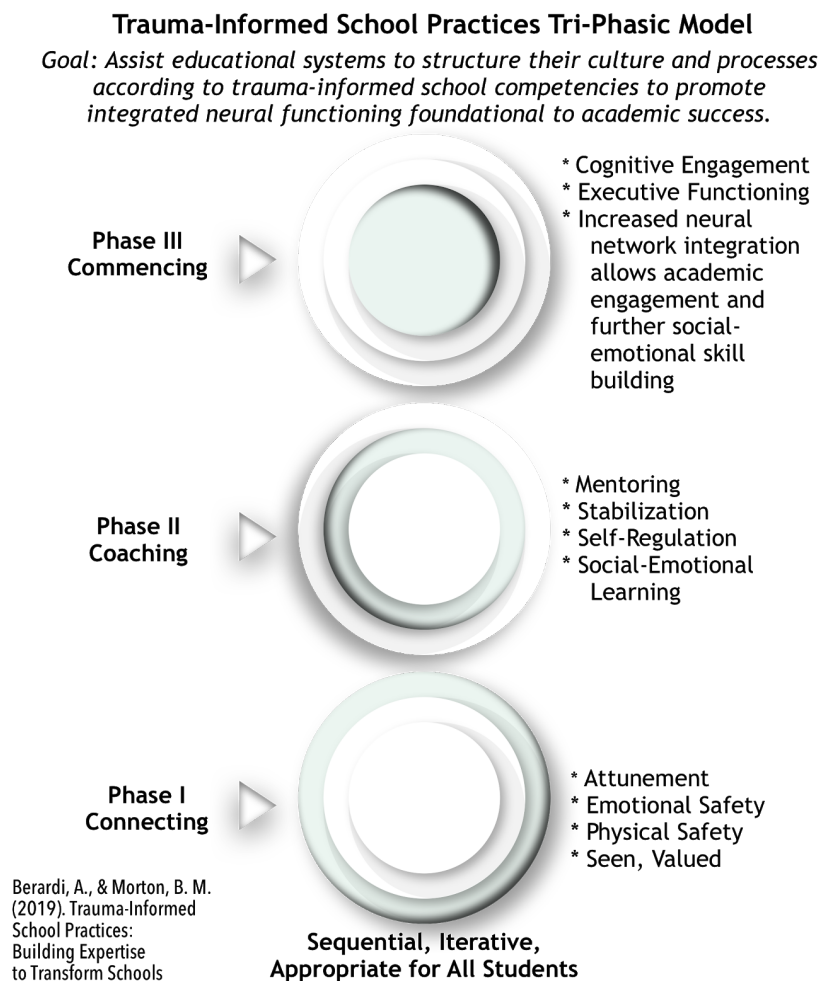**Sequential, Iterative, Appropriate for All Students**

Figure 2: Trauma-Informed School Practices Tri-Phasic Model

The *TISP Tri-Phasic Model* includes language and practices congruent with the tasks expected of teachers and school professionals, extending the principles of the tri-phasic model of recovery to the school setting. As noted in the graphic above, Figure 2, we identified three specific elements essential to trauma-informed school practices; *Connecting*, *Coaching*, and *Commencing*.

Congruent with all trauma-informed triphasic models, *Connecting* recognizes that children cannot learn until they feel safe. *Connecting* is defined in Berardi and Morton (2019) as:

> "*Connecting* addresses the primary need of students to experience adults attuning to their affective states, current needs, and successes in order to feel both emotionally and physically safe and welcome in the school environment. It reflects the recognition that until we feel seen, heard, and valued, key indicators of secure attachment leading to the thoughts, feelings, and sensations related to safety, we cannot self-regulate (stabilize). And until we establish a sense of safety and stabilization, we cannot resume growth or daily tasks, all of which require higher-order executive functioning" (p. 134).

Connection or connecting, describes the method through which we help students learn about how stress and anxiety is hijacking their brain while finding ways to regain a sense of safety and stabilization. It includes examining how educators, school administrators, and district leaders stand in relationship with each other, students, and their families (whose specific needs are addressed in the *Community* element of system change). By connecting with our students and community, we are practicing an ethic of care. This ethic of care includes creating rituals and routines essential to modeling and embodying that each person is seen and valued. Daily, weekly, and seasonal rituals and routines in the classroom fosters connection by creating predictability, inviting the student to relax into the learning space. By connecting with our

students and families, we are welcoming them into the educational setting and partnering with parents and guardians, thus earning the privilege to speak into the growth and development of their child through *Coaching*. (Berardi & Morton, 2019).

Coaching is most synonymous with social-emotional skill building but whose methods are informed by trauma-informed research and best practices. This element of the tri-phasic model has been contextualized to educators who work with students' trauma not through direct memory processing, but through a recursive attunement and mentoring process as they face academic and social challenges. Educators are helping students integrate various domains of neural functioning that have been impaired by unmitigated stress and trauma. Through *Connecting* and *Coaching*, the impact of trauma is discovered and worked through via here and now academic and social challenges.

Coaching is essential to executive functioning growth and development. *Coaching* includes teaching social-emotional self-regulation skills to students for use in all types of educational settings including small and large groups, and one-on-one interactions with peers. Educators teach the skills, provide opportunities for practice throughout the school day, and provide coaching through feedback and support as necessary when interactions with peers and others do not go as hoped. Throughout this process, the teacher continues to *Connect* with students, assuring them that they are seen and valued, and that when they struggle, as they inevitably will, they will be 'caught' by the safety net of the *Connection,* and *Coached* through the difficulties. Realizing that they are no longer alone in the classroom setting, they are able to settle into the academic space and begin to grow through *Commencement* (Berardi & Morton, 2019).

Commencing is evident when a student is able to engage in academic activities and more easily navigate social-emotional relational challenges. As a result of feeling a greater sense of competence in managing anxiety due to the *Connecting* and *Coaching*, the student is now in a position to access higher order executive functions needed to learn and problem solve. This is not to say that the student won't continue to face challenges or even encounter day-to-day struggles, but school has now become a safe and secure place where they can face their fears, and meet new challenges, knowing they are seen and cared for. This builds confidence that it is okay to risk - and to fail, even as they experience successes. The daily rituals and routines of the trauma-informed classroom environment continue to strengthen the internal neural structures required to face the next step of academic and social developmental demands (Berardi & Morton, 2019).

As illustrated above, the *TISP Tri-Phasic Model* has distinct knowledge, skills, and dispositions for each phase. And while initially the stages may be implemented sequentially, ongoing implementation is iterative, and appropriate for all students. The model does not place attachment as more important than academic achievement; rather, it reflects a sober encounter with data that illustrates learning must take place within the context of attuned and mentoring relationship. This also indicates why TISP is a system wide change process; to maximize the benefits of a trauma informed school approach, each child needs a continuity of TISP classroom and school methods throughout their school career.

Fundamentals of Preparing to Implement TISP

Many educators quickly grasp the logic of TISP given the academic and social challenges of an increasing number of students, not just those severely impacted by social-cultural

hostilities. Given the high risk all students have of experiencing the negative impact of unmitigated stress and trauma, a school environment informed by traumatology and the role of attachment-focused relational processes makes sense as an effective approach to promoting the neural integration that is prerequisite to executive functioning.

But TISP emphasizes the importance of understanding that while the concepts are logical and have an inherent simplicity (it is all about attunement and mentoring), implementation requires intentional planning and a commitment to acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of a new content domain. It is not implemented through a series of quick strategies.

Take heart that changes in our teaching and administrative practices can begin immediately. And while most of us want immediate change, it is also comforting to accept that the change process is developmental in nature and does take time. We can begin transferring to a trauma-informed school system even while we are developing the competencies.

The following provides a brief outline of what lies ahead should your system decide to adopt a TISP framework. This overview is intended to inspire you to dig deeper into your TISP specialty training as well as provide insight into what such a commitment might require of you. Our primary concern is that TISP be properly understood and implemented in order that students and staff thrive and benefit from the approach. Misperceptions and improper training creates the potential for frustration, disillusionment, and ineffective results due to improper application of concepts. This potential exists as TISP is acknowledging that educators need to become trauma-informed education experts, not just aware of new strategies.

Preliminary Guiding Principles

TISP is not creating educators who are mental health professionals, but it is requiring educators to become experts in the role of social-emotional processes that influence brain development, and hence the student's capacity to engage in academic and social learning. It also requires educators to understand the traumatology and neurobiology literature that has confirmed best practices in our relational response to those whose academic and social-emotional development is impacted by unmitigated stress and trauma. Negative experiences or results could occur due to educators fearing they are expected to acquire mental health competencies thus avoiding the training necessary to become trauma-informed educators; misunderstanding the role of attunement (*Connecting*) as an ongoing mindset, not a once-and-done stage; or not understanding the scaffolded process of helping students increase domains of self-regulation that co-occurs with academic learning processes (*Coaching and Commencing*). These potential misunderstandings and frustrations are clarified and minimized all along the TISP training process, even while implementing TISP in your school setting.

But perhaps three of the most significant principles that can make or break your system's success in adopting a trauma-informed framework are as follows:

1. *TISP is About Changing the Educator*: Becoming a trauma-informed educator is not so much about acquiring strategies to change the student, but a shift in worldview that changes the educator. Armed with trauma-informed knowledge, such as the nature and impact of social-cultural trauma, the educator is then able to make perceptual and conceptual sense of what they are observing in the classroom, and then make informed decisions on how to act. Prescribed strategies

then serve as a resource to inspire their own brainstorming of how best to implement TISP concepts.

2. *TISP Requires Education System Change*: While a single educator can implement TISP in their classroom, classroom teachers are not the ones primarily responsible for creating a trauma-informed school environment. To expect a teacher to attend a seminar and then return to the classroom as a trauma-informed educator is misleading at best, and abusive at worst, in that it places an inappropriate expectation on that educator who is then at high risk of failing to produce the desired results, or negating the merit of the approach before it is fully understood.

3. *TISP Implementation Must Proceed with Titrated Intentionality*: Titration provides an image of pacing or regulating the speed of change congruent with the needs of your setting. Intentionality requires us to have eyes wide open as to how best to accomplish system change. Successful implementation requires educators from all roles to commit to learning a new content domain. It also requires deep conversation and collaboration with colleagues. And while immediate benefits will be observed, changes in desired outcomes indicating student success in academic and social functioning will take a few years to fully manifest in statistically significant data. Move too fast, expect too much, or proceed without educator support at all levels of the system and TISP may become another passing fad. Building multilateral interest, charting a course of growth that feels "doable" given current time demands, and catching a vision for the developmental process

of an *education community change process* offers the best chance of inspiring successful TISP adoption.

Overview of System Change

This chapter intends to begin building educator interest in a trauma-informed approach to learning as suggested in item #1 above in *Preliminary Guiding Principles*. But what do we mean by TISP requiring education systems to undergo a change process, and why do we caution against assuming TISP is merely about requiring classroom teachers to change?
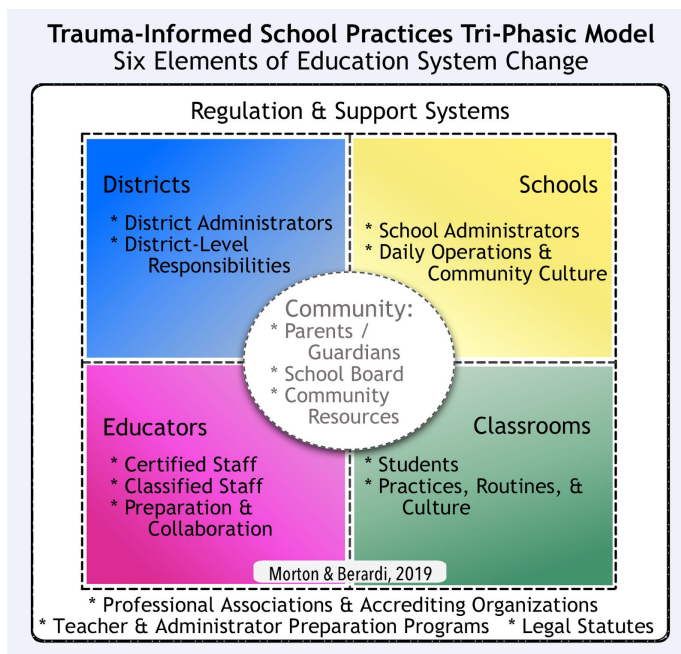

Figure 3: Six Elements of Education System Change

Figure 3 illustrates six elements or subsystems of a K12 education system. When an educator commits to implementing TISP, the brief descriptions of each element's role in the change process provides insight into items addressed in further training.

1. *Districts*: This system element identifies the role of a superintendent and other district leaders as responsible for not only supporting TISP but participating in training and implementation processes as well. A *District Strategic Planning Team* in crucial to giving structure to a process that can feel overwhelming whenever a system undergoes a major change.

2. *Schools*: TISP will require changes in school routines, practices, and ethos. In addition to school administrators also needing to participate in training and implementation activities, a *School Strategic Planning Team* needs to plan ahead for a variety of tasks including how to navigate evaluation and possible changes to pre-existing systems that are no longer congruent with trauma-inform practice.

3. *Educators*: All personnel who serve students are viewed as Educators, including board members to bus drivers. However, this system element places great emphasis on the tasks and needs of classroom teachers who carry primary responsibility for directly serving large groups of students on a daily basis.

4. *Classrooms*: This system element examines both the changes in teaching and classroom strategies that occur between the educator and the student, as well as the inclusion of *students as partners with educators* in creating trauma-informed learning communities

5. *Community*: This system element recognizes key stakeholders and providers who serve our schools: Parents, board members, and community agencies. Community member support and involvement, including participation in TISP training, are crucial to the success of TISP.

6. *Regulation and Support Systems*: TISP represents a shift in the way we understand how students learn best in the face of pressures that have eroded their historic ability to function in academic settings. These shifting realities require education systems to re-evaluate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of an educator. This system element addresses changes needed in professional associations and accrediting organizations, teacher and administrative preparation programs, and legal statutes responsible for establishing competency expectations. In the absence of infrastructure change within the education profession, Districts and their Schools will constantly be required to retrain new hires, draining human and financial resources.

Form a Strategic Planning Team

School-based and district-wide *Strategic Planning Teams* are crucial to successful TISP implementation. These teams should be diverse; choose your team wisely from a range of administrators, teachers, instructional assistants, school based personnel, and community members. We encourage you to choose wisely as this is not a committee for those who have demonstrated interest or investment in maintaining the status quo. Identify key people; those who are your teacher leaders, or those others look to within your school. Choosing these type of individuals can often sway others to consider adoption of new practices. Look for participants you believe would be willing to commit to deep professional development, including continued education, professional readings, and conferences that can inform your team. We advocate for a "Board to Bus" approach, so be inclusive in who you invite to join this team. Create space for this work to take place so that those on the team are not unduly burdened by an increased

workload, and set clear expectations up front regarding expected time commitments and length of service (Berardi & Morton, 2019).

Commit to Learning a New Content Domain

Perhaps most daunting at first is the realization that to become a trauma-informed educator, each professional must commit to mastering a new content domain of knowledge, skills, and dispositions. This includes absorbing the professional traumatology literature (not just literature related to the application of trauma-informed practices within the school setting) as well as attending trainings regarding the specific application of trauma-informed practices within school and classroom settings. These activities will deepen your knowledge and create the mindshift necessary for this work. If you are an administrator, create a space for those who have received training to share their learning with others (Berardi & Morton, 2019).

Don't Expect Changes Overnight

As you begin to implement trauma-informed practices in your classroom, school, or teaching practice, recognize that you will have good days and days where things just didn't come together as you had hoped. This is a normal part of the transitional process! You may see progress with a student, or a glimmer of hope, only to find that student revert back to previous behaviors or dispositions. Stay the course. Demonstrating consistency, creating those rituals and routines, and continuously connecting with your students will bear fruit. Celebrate the small victories along the way (Berardi & Morton, 2019).

Engage in the Change Process Together with Others

Do not go it alone! Join with your colleagues for book clubs and strategic goal setting. Recognize your limits and consult with trauma-informed education and mental health

professionals. Be sure these individuals have proven experience in the application of trauma-informed principles within school settings. Rely on them for strategic planning advice and TISP trainings. Talk with other teachers and administrators from other districts on how they navigated the change process; they are full of wisdom and rich ideas. TISP is still relatively new; we are pioneers and benefit most from engaging in this journey with others committed to the same.

Final Thoughts

This chapter provided insight into the rationale and process for transforming schools into trauma-informed learning communities. The source of human distress inviting this examination reflects current events for much of the world's population impacted by war, social upheaval, and unsustainable communities forcing mass migration. Our additional lens of examining just what a Christian ethic of care requires invites us to ponder how our own faith communities may be having a deep encounter with the cost of care. TISP offers a process for inviting all of us into the world of trauma, and the hope we find in knowing that overt acts of love and care truly are the first steps in a long, complicated recovery process.

We began our chapter with an acknowledgement that the trauma we are addressing here is one in which we are participants; all of us are impacted, not just students whose classrooms, at any given moment, represent a meeting place of social-cultural wars. We can not just approach the needs of our students from an abstract, conceptual level but as participant-observers. This requires us to examine our own mindset, and the role our faith communities play in either guiding us to sit in our human tendencies to be protectionist and merit-based like the older brother in Christ's parable of the prodigal son, or open to a renewed understanding and embrace

of what care requires and looks like as exemplified in the father. We reflected on how encounter with the needs and vulnerabilities of others is a crucial step in being able to realize the Gospel message and its embodiment of care; TISP practices then has the potential of helping lift the veil from our own eyes, and dare we say, invite a "clearing of the temple" in our own hearts and minds.

We close with this image of Christ walking into the Temple (John 2:13-17), the place where the children of God come to worship their Creator, with a humbleness of spirit in order to lay open places where we need a renewing by God's Spirit, reflected in a changed perspective and a radical new way of discerning how to respond to the needs of self and other. We see a rage let loose in Jesus as he absorbs how this sacred space had become consumed with the values and practices characteristic of the world. What Jesus witnessed was not merely misguided brainstorming that led to a poor decision regarding how to solve the Temple's financial problems or aspirations. It was a systemic, cultural failure on the part of those professing faith in Yahweh to preserve the sanctuary. The persons responsible for allowing the Temple to play host to a marketplace had lost sight of who God is and requires of us, and instead traded the truth for a lie, a god fashioned in their own image and logic. Jesus's outrage was appropriate and logical, as any of us might respond if we were to walk into our home and witness our children being exploited and coerced into doing something heinous and harmful.

Christ cleared the Temple with strength and conviction grounded in the passion of love and the pain of grief. So too do we need to clear our temples - both our faith institutions, and our own inner sanctuaries. Clearing our inner temples takes courage, and conviction of spirit, born

from compassion with the ultimate goal to live in the fullness of the Word of God as Love, and

Christ as Word made flesh.

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