Mindfulness for Teachers in Difficult Times
Building Resilience with Compassionate Teaching

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Roadmap

- 3 Survival Systems
- Understanding Stress-Adaptation
- 3 Keys to Compassionate Teaching
  - Cultivating supportive relationships
  - Creating safe spaces
  - Building on strengths by supporting adaptation
- Building Resilience with Mindful Compassion
3 Survival Systems

Context

Threat

Drive

Affiliation
3 Survival Systems

Threat

Drive

Affiliation
3 Survival Systems

- Threat
- Drive
- Affiliation

Reduce Threat
Promote Affiliation
Learning and the Brain

- Pre-Frontal Cortex (PFC)
  - Regulates: Inhibits, focuses, modulates attention
  - Executive functions: planning & goal setting (working memory)
  - Social decision-making: perspective taking, mentalizing
Stress and the Brain

- Stress may impair the development of self-regulation
- Interferes with learning
- Over time may cause learning and behavior problems
- Especially for those exposed to risk factors
- Social support may be protective
- Teacher stress affects students
Trauma, Chronic Stress, Toxic Stress

- A single incident
- Ongoing adversity
- Individual differences in impacts
  - Personality
  - Health
  - Age
  - Poverty, racism, inequity compound effects

Threat
Trauma, Chronic Stress, Toxic Stress

- Adaptations
  - Hyperarousal
  - Avoidance/Dissociation
  - Negative thoughts/beliefs
  - Re-experiencing
  - Insecure attachment
What’s Wrong With Him? vs What Happened to Him?
3 Keys to Compassionate Teaching

- Cultivating supportive relationships
- Creating safe spaces
- Building on strengths by supporting adaptation
3 Keys to Compassionate Teaching

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Affiliation
Affiliation System

• Critical importance of belonging to human survival and flourishing
  – a basic human need based in the parent-child bond
  – Feel seen and accepted for who you are
  – Given opportunities to make valuable contributions to the community
  – Having one's contributions valued
  – Recognizing and honoring the value of diverse facets of humanity
3 Keys to Compassionate Teaching

• Cultivating supportive relationships
• Creating safe spaces
• Building on strengths by supporting adaptation
Create Safe Spaces

• During normal times:
  • Promoting physical and psychological safety
  • Trustworthiness and transparency
  • Peer support
  • Collaboration and mutuality
  • Empowerment, voice, and choice
  • Cultural, historical & gender issues

(SAMHSA, 2014)
Create Safe Spaces

• During difficult times:
  • Confinement is stressful for everyone
  • Everyone is dealing with some level of trauma
    • Fear
    • Uncertainty
  • People with trauma histories may suffer more
  • Home may be low resourced
3 Keys to Compassionate Teaching

• Cultivating supportive relationships
• Creating safe spaces
• Building on strengths by supporting adaptation
Build Upon Strengths

• Identify students’ existing strengths.
• Honor, value, and acknowledge these strengths.
• Help students become aware of their strengths.
• Build instructional programming that boosts social ties and networks by drawing from students’ strengths
How Can We Do This?
Building Resilience with Mindful Compassion

- Understanding context
- Building resilience
  - Self-care
  - Emotional mastery
- Practicing mindfulness
- Cultivating compassion
What is Resilience?

• The ability to
  – Flourish in the face of adversity, ambiguity, and rapid change
  – Creatively respond to challenges
  – Grow and learn to adapt quickly
  – Recognize the constantly changing nature of reality
GRACE:
Practicing Compassion in Difficult Times

• G  Gather your attention
• R  Recall your intention
• A  Attune with self and other
• C  Consider what will serve
• E  Engage, enact, end
Emotions & the Brain

• Emotions are adaptive functions that engage biological, cognitive and behavioral processes designed to promote survival
Function of Emotions

• “Negative,” unpleasant or uncomfortable
  – Trigger stress response
  – Narrow focus
  – Reinforce negative perception with thoughts
  – Limited, conditioned reactivity

• “Positive,” pleasant or comfortable
  – Build resources (relationships, resilience)
  – Broaden focus
  – Openness, awareness of others’ perspectives and context
  – Creative responses
Negativity Bias and Survival
Gratitude Practice

I am grateful for
Savoring Positivity

• Positive emotions “undo” the effects of negative emotions
• By savoring moments of love, joy, inspiration, gratitude, awe, and other positive emotional states we build resilience.
Critical Importance of Self-Care
• Self Care
• Emotion Awareness
  • Didactic lessons on nature of emotion
  • Emotions in relation to teaching & learning
  • Experiential exercises to promote emotional awareness
• Mindfulness
  • Mindful awareness practices
  • Mindful walking
• Empathy & Compassion for self and other
  • Caring practice (metta)
  • Mindful listening exercises
• Applications of these to teaching through discussion and role plays
CARE FOR TEACHERS

Teacher Improvements
- Psychological Distress
- Time Urgency
- Mindfulness
- Emotion Regulation

Classroom Improvements
- Emotional Support

Student Improvements
- Engagement

Jennings et al., 2017
Brown et al., 2017
Teacher Improvement

- The CARE program promotes teachers' social and emotional competence and well-being.
- Long-term impacts on mindfulness, psychological distress, and emotion regulation
- Teachers with higher levels of psychological distress at baseline showed improved in emotion regulation (relative to declines among high risk teachers in control group)
Mindfulness-based interventions delivered to individuals may have “downstream” effects on the classroom social environments they inhabit.

CARE resulted in observable improvements in the quality of classroom interactions or protected against declines.
Student Improvement

• CARE has a direct positive impact on teacher-reported student engagement.
• Students with low social skills at baseline showed improvements in reading competence.
• Students of teachers with low mindfulness at baseline showed improvements in motivation and reading competence.
Questions?
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