

The Dance of Trauma in a Post-secondary Education

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Abstract:

Many post-secondary educators, me included, believe that an educational experience involves a relationship between the student and teacher. We also recognize that we narrate ourselves based on larger social contexts, our interpretations of present lived experiences and our history. We all have a past and for some that may include a trauma experience. Students with a trauma experience exist in our classrooms. Although trauma may be a contested term in some interpretive or philosophical discourses, when individuals experience a traumatic event, it can remain with them and impact their being-in-the-world. Does this impact their learning? Through the experience of a young post-secondary student, Sarah, you are invited to join the reflections about the education of the traumatized female student.

Key Words:

trauma, post-secondary education, violence, women.

Introduction

There are legitimate barriers for women in education; some relate to finances, others relate to more logistical concerns such as childcare. There is another more insidious barrier, however, the impact of trauma on learning. Statistics indicate that the number of women who are victims of violence in Canada is one in five (Statscan, 2007); therefore, there must be traumatized females in our post-secondary institutions (McCammon, 1995). Some trauma is from early life experiences, such as the one that will be presented in this paper through Sarah's story, while others might be from present situations such as acquaintance rape, which is on the rise on campuses across North America (Shultz, Scherman, & Marshall, 2000), or domestic violence, which is perpetrated against more women than men (Statscan, 2007). Given these statistics, how does an educational space, particularly in adult education, respond to the experiences of the traumatized female? Is this even a concern for educators?

According to Wagner and Magnusson (2005), feminist pedagogy works toward systemic change that would break down the obstacles women face in attaining higher education. However, these authors admitted that one area that remains unchallenged, even among feminist educators, is the effect that trauma has on learning. Since trauma affects an individual and crosses into her personhood, trauma is present in the post - secondary learning environment.

While recognition is given to the fact that there are traumatized men in our post-secondary institutions, this article speaks specifically to a young woman's experience. If we take the notion of the traumatized in post-secondary education seriously, we of course, must examine this topic from a variety of perspectives. The point in this essay however, is that we should not allow trauma to exist in the post-secondary system at all, regardless of gender, or the traumatizing event. Sarah's story offers one perspective, that of a young female, in order to illuminate the topic of the traumatized students in the post-secondary environment.

Sarah's Dream

Sarah is a young woman of 21 years, who has had a desire to be a dancer since she was a little girl of six or seven. She has pursued this calling in community dance programs and in various performance opportunities, but recently she decided to become more serious and applied to a fine arts dance program in a post-secondary institution. Sarah' application was successful.

Holding tightly to the yellow Post-It Note with the correct room number Sarah entered the classroom. *Looks typical*, she thought to herself. *No windows, I better sit by the door*, she noted; this was in an interior room, although it was brightly decorated with posters of various dancers in their most difficult positions. *Feels inviting, which is important*, she thought, seating herself near the exit.

"Oh, you're Sarah," said the woman, Marie, as she listened to the student introductions during the new student orientation. "The director would like to speak with you. I will take you there when we are finished with the paperwork." Sarah looked around and noticed people were looking at her. Her heart was pumping louder, but was still a distant pulse. Sarah looked down. She could still read the papers in front of her; she took a deep cleansing breath and tried to focus.

Sarah knew the signs. Her heart pumping might trigger an unwanted episode. She needed to stay present but that can be difficult for those who struggle with traumatic stress. It was necessary for the sympathetic nervous system, when threatened, to send hormones surging through the body; however, it was disconcerting to the one who lives it over and over again, well after a trauma has ended, particularly when she needed to be calm and stay in control of her body. Sarah told herself, *calm down, relax, and breathe*. She managed to complete the daunting forms.

Sarah followed Marie down the long hallway, attempting to steer her thoughts toward the posters on the walls and the décor of the building, but Marie was in a hurry. They walked swiftly. As they rounded the corner, Marie stopped abruptly and knocked on the door. The sudden stop caused a jarring breath, *that didn't help*. Trying to absorb the space, Sarah looked at the title on the door: DIRECTOR, *This is good*, thought Sarah, /

can still read and understand, I'm okay. The self-talk she had learned was working, so far. The door was ajar, and through the crack, Sarah could see a tall, thin man coming toward them. She could feel her breath leaving her body. *Hold on* she told herself, maintaining her self-talk strategy, *stay focused, listen, say hello, listen, stay present.* "Mitch, this is Sarah. You wanted to speak with her about the troubling issues we have had to deal with all summer," Marie said in a curt tone. "Oh, yes, hi Sarah. Nice to meet you," he said as he shook her hand. "Please sit down." Her fingers let go of Mitch's grasp, although she was not particularly conscious of the handshake; awareness and presence can disappear when traumatic stress takes over.

Sarah made eye contact and forced her lips to curl in a smile. "Thanks Marie," Mitch said while looking directly at her. Understanding she was dismissed, Marie left. Although she was gone, Sarah had an eerie feeling that Marie was still staring at her. She had trouble shaking this feeling. Sarah knew that she carried these feelings in her body and sometimes sensed things that were not actually there. She was aware of her tendency toward unreasonable paranoia, but that was also part of her trauma curse. The symptoms materialized both in her mind and in her body. Sarah thought Marie was still staring at her because she felt it in her body, even though she knew Marie was gone from the room. Her body would not let go of the prickly feeling; any sensation similar to trauma ignites her fear and her hyper-vigilance.

"Sarah, who is your father?" Mitch asked. Sarah could feel her heart sink, she looked down, embarrassed, and the tears began to form. *I must stay focused*, she thought and answered his question. According to Mitch, Sarah's father had called the program staff and he wanted some information about her class schedule; when not provided with the information, he became threatening. "We can't have this Sarah. Our front office personnel are scared and worried about their safety. We need to know they are safe. Tell me what to expect." Mitch's voice was quiet but stern. Sarah understood, she has been here before. Attempting to manage the emotions pulsing through her body, her fear was heightened; all she heard now was the blood pumping in her ears. She wanted to run or hide. Sarah remembered what her past counsellor had told her about these situations: in the face of any stimuli reminding her of the violence, her fight, flight or freeze response would want to kick in. After all, this was an innate human response when under threat; her father was stalking her again.

"I'll call him and tell him to stop calling. I'll do what I can. I'm sure once I let him know I am living here in town and go to see him, he will stop calling." Sarah already dreaded making this phone call. Sarah left Mitch's office as she wondered what would happen if she could not find a way to control her father's violence. She called him that evening. After talking to her dad, she poured a cup of tea; she loved holding her hands over the hot steam rising in the cup. After numbing her emotions for the phone call with her father, she placed her hands dangerously close to the water, the steam so hot she almost burned herself; doing this helped her to feel and become present in her body.

Sarah worried her father could ruin her chances in this program. Dance kept her sane. Sarah pursued jazz and modern dance, which led her to more success as a dancer, as in these dance forms she was exposed to a less rigid, more fluid movement. She found that the freedom of improvisation helped her listen to her body rather than control it. Knowing how to be both fluid and controlling, where her body was concerned,

had come in handy when she felt anxious or frightened. Prior to learning how to listen to her body, her trauma could easily take over through nightmares or unpredicted traumatic flashbacks. She knew that she needed to move, when she began to feel anxious; traditional classrooms did not allow for this. Sarah wondered how she would manage her need to move in this new environment. Sarah hoped her teachers and her classmates would be tolerant of her frequent breaks.

The morning alarm rang and Sarah rolled over. She should feel excited, but she did not. Not only did she question her ability to measure up to the other dancers, but her fresh start had been tainted. She felt embarrassed and responsible for her father's behaviour. *Everyone knows, all the teachers and other staff will be watching me, especially Marie*, she thought. She yawned and stretched, threw back the warmth of the covers and pushed her legs to the side of the bed. She slowly stepped onto the floor. Her feet accepted the weight, and Sarah launched into her day.

In order to succeed in post-secondary education, it is likely that learners who experience the impact of trauma will attempt to hide these effects. However, as witnessed in Sarah's story, thus far, this lived experience cannot be compartmentalized and put away during class times. Trauma is embodied; the body comes to the class. Attempting to block the expression of trauma takes a vast amount of energy (Ogden, Minton & Pain, 2006). While many teachers in post-secondary education strive to create active learning environments, we still tend to contain learning within a specific space using a lecture format in face-to-face education. Often times, students sit for hours on end, moving from one classroom to another, sitting yet again. Horsman (1999) described how difficult it is for learners with a trauma background to feel comfortable within their own bodies, let alone being comfortable in an academic space. She also noted "the lack of notice taken of the body" (p. 196), in general, in education. For those students whose trauma experiences surface unexpectedly, there may be a need for movement or safe space. However, these students will often suffer in silence in order to comply with the classroom norm.

This need to hide the effects of trauma only acts to further the victimization by intimating that a person's trauma experience is private, not for others to have to bear. Keeping one's traumatic past private in our institutions perpetuates the secretive nature of violence. What is this need to hide the trauma? What does hiding it accomplish? Since space/education is constructed, it might be useful to understand the rules that are embedded and how we construct educational space in order to recognize the related factors. While looking at early school experiences, we can see how the system and those within it tend toward high achievement (Ayers, 2001). High achievers, even at a young age, gain status. This hierarchy establishes a pecking order, the strong versus the weak. Differentiation between the rights and the needs of genders emerges, and the hierarchy becomes entrenched (Ayers, 2001; Gordon & Lahelma 1996). However, this hierarchy is not simply an issue of male privilege, particularly, if, as Wagner and Magnusson (2005) point out, teaching the traumatized is questioned even among women's studies and feminist professors. Therefore, the construction of how, what and whom we teach in an educational space, particularly in post-secondary education, may be an underlying unanswered question.

Barriers to Success

Arriving on the bus to the program, she followed the same path she mapped out a few weeks earlier. Being prepared helped her quiet the anxiety and keep the monster, as she called it, at bay. This endearing term ‘monster’ was adopted during one of her past counselling sessions. She needed to “name it,” since there was no single ‘it’ for her to pinpoint as a traumatic event. Apparently, many people who live through domestic violence as children have similar experiences. According to Sarah’s counsellor, trauma specialists call her situation complex trauma. The impact that domestic violence has on children, and particularly their learning, has emerged in empirical research (Cook, Spinazzola, Ford, Lanktree, et. al. 2005).

Grasping the cold metal door handle Sarah entered the school *I don't recall the door being this heavy before*, she thought, perhaps this was an indication of the year ahead she wondered. She wanted to be done with ‘heavy.’ She realized as she reached the classroom that she had hardly been present; she had barely taken in her environment. *What was on the walls in the hallway? Who was in the area?* she thought. Awareness comes and goes. Sometimes she takes in every detail due to her hyper-vigilance, and at other times, she wanders along half-dissociated from her own presence. This is ‘normal,’ she has been told. Dissociation or wanting to be so internal that one’s body becomes the only comfortable space, since no one can invade the secret recesses created there. Sarah remembered this place as her favorite strategy for managing the violence at home; it can be very effective for avoidance, but not so if a person wants to accomplish anything.

Sarah’s long anticipated visit with her dad went as smoothly as possible. As always, he questioned her about her decision to pursue dance. As she stirred her coffee, she knew she must be careful with her language now; she does not want to exacerbate his fury. Making limited eye contact, she began, “Dad, I love dance. I’ve been in shows since I was little, and this is what I want to do. I don’t know if it will lead to anything, but I want to try.” The next few questions land like bullets, but Sarah was able to hold her own.

“No, I can pay for it myself.”

“Yes, I’m taking out student loans.”

‘Not too much.’

“I can handle it.”

“I know it would be cheaper for me to live with you.”

“You don’t live close enough to the campus.”

“Sometimes we have early morning rehearsals, so I need to be able to get there.”

These latter statements may or may not be true. She does not actually know if they are, but they work to stop the barrage of demands and commands from her father.

It had been a while since the monster appeared in her nightmares, but it returned that night. Sarah woke up screaming, sweating and crying. Gasping for breath, she willed her body to unlock the terror she felt. Her grip on nothing released slowly. She

could not yet open her eyes, but her jaw loosened, and her breath slowed. She opened her eyes. Blinking, she took in the darkness around her. As the fog lifted, the pink and yellow flowers on her curtains came into focus. The red numbers on the clock radio glared into the darkness like a neon motel sign. She took a deep breath. It was 3:45 am. She would not sleep tonight. Sarah was tempted to pour herself a drink when she arrived in the kitchen. *Oh yeah, she reminded herself, booze is a form of self-medication. No, I'm supposed to acknowledge and feel this experience and deal with the feelings instead of turning to alcohol. Fuck that!* she thought, but she did not pour the drink; instead she turned on the kettle and began the ritual of scorching her hands.

Sarah was tired the next day, and she was late for class. She ran into the studio, but the warm-up had already begun. On the eight-count, she joined the group while leaping across the room. Her jumps were not as high as normal. She was not following very well and the teacher, Marie, noticing, her furrowed brow, following Sarah around the room. *Oh god, Sarah thought, I'm making a bad impression, and I'm only in my second week.* She noticed the rolling eyes of the other students as she interrupted the flow. Sarah's heart rate increased, the movement helped, the gaze of the teacher did not.

The school assignments came fast and furious over the next several weeks, but she was managing and meeting some friends. Sarah avoided her dad. He started leaving messages; she counted twelve of them one day alone. This was not a good sign. She had better call him as he was using a tone she knew too well, his need to sound out every syllable slowly and harshly. *Not tonight, she decided I have too much to do.* This decision was a mistake.

“Sarah, there is a note on the board for you,” a classmate informed her in passing. Sarah reached the bulletin board to find a hand-written note: *Sarah, please report to Mitch’s office as soon as possible.* Several weeks had passed, and there had been no more trouble with her father after promising to visit with him each Sunday, even though that was her study day. Recently, she had missed a Sunday, and she had avoided calling him. Class was about to start, so Sarah decided Mitch could wait. It was no use, however; half an hour into class, Sarah was unable to concentrate, unable to connect mind and body. Sarah was tired and had been lagging behind. The teacher did not know Sarah’s monster had visited almost every night this week. Sarah made an excuse and left the studio.

Walking into the changing room, Sarah could not help but think someone was following her - remnants of her nightmares. She was feeling chased, into the darkness, around and around, and always waking up before she could see if the form was human or not. The hangover effect from the lack of sleep made her sluggish and skittish, but the carry-over of fear disturbed her most.

Sarah began to berate herself before she even knew what the call to Mitch’s office was about I knew I should have called him. He’s probably started being a jerk again. I can’t believe I was so stupid. I should know better than to avoid him. These thoughts ran through her mind. She did not even notice, she has become so accustomed to her own barrage. After all, she had learned from the best. As she neared Mitch’s office, her throat constricted, and she heard another man’s voice; she stopped and listened. It was

not her father thank god. Her shoulders dropped in relief. Perhaps it is just another meeting, she thought. Turning the corner, Mitch's door was slightly open, and Sarah noted the security guard standing with another man. Nervously, Sarah tapped on the door so lightly she was hoping they did not notice. Mitch looked up, "Oh, here she is now. This is Sarah. Let's go into the boardroom where we have a bit more space and talk." Sarah had no idea how she got from Mitch's office to the boardroom; all she remembered was the thumping in her ears and looking down at the floor.

She sat but did not feel anything except tingling. Her whole body was on fire, pulsing hot blood through her veins. She blinked her eyes in order to focus. All she could see was the time a security guard she referred to as John Wayne rescued her when she was in a mall and her father was screaming at her. She knew to let her feelings run their course and to breathe deeply, slowly. Introductions began, but Sarah had not registered names. Sarah began the internal dialogue of positive self-talk and continued to inhale, forcing her breath from her chest to her diaphragm. Mitch explained to Sarah that her father had been calling again and, apparently, he showed up one day ranting at the office staff. The security guards were called at that time; 'John' confirmed his involvement. Holding her head in her hands, she began to cry. Mitch was sympathetic and gave Sarah a moment to compose herself. Another man, the head of security, began to speak. "Sarah, we understand your father must be very difficult for you to deal with. We are here to help you. I am going to suggest that you get a restraining order so that he cannot come to the building and harass you. As a matter of fact, if you get a restraining order he will have to stay away from you altogether."

This strategy has been tried before. She knew how her father got around these things. Sarah explained that she has learned over the years that she was better off not to piss him off with police action. She explained that staying in contact with him and meeting him in public places usually kept the peace. The pressure Sarah was feeling was enormous, and they had papers for Sarah to sign. She was not sure what was contained in the papers, but she refused to sign them and continued trying to help them understand that their tactics would not work. They did not appreciate her history. *What a sight*, Sarah thought wishing she could show them a picture of this scene, three big men surrounding one small, young woman wearing tights.

Then she heard it loud and clear, the guilt. "Sarah," Mitch said, "perhaps you have a history with your father that will assist you in dealing with his aggression, but our staff does not. For their sake, I would like you to consider this as an option." Sarah frowned and shook her head. *Why do I always carry this guilt? I didn't do this, my father did. Why am I the one who is being held responsible?* Sarah had been dancing with this line of thinking for the last decade – taking responsibility for her father's behaviour.

Sarah knew the dance well. When someone tries to leave, the abuse continues in the form of stalking and harassment, and this includes the stalking of children (Jaffe, Crooks, Bala, 2009). Sarah's father's behaviour was typical. He will harass her until she does what he wants. The workplace, in this case her school, has begun to harass her in order to maintain a safe workplace, although it may not be seen to be harassment. Sarah remembered being told about the times women were fired from their jobs because of harassment from the abuser. Sarah wondered if Mitch would ask her to leave the program. In order to stop the bombardment, Sarah said that she would think

about the restraining order and that she would call Mitch tomorrow. The program where she had hoped would be a new start, was now contaminated because her past and present have merged.

Wagner and Magnusson (2005) believed that we have constructed trauma as an individual's pathology, thereby removing trauma and violence as a larger social issue from being dealt with in the classroom. Horsman (2004) attempted to identify one particular construct related to teaching the traumatized and considered the discourse that trauma is a counselling issue not something to be discussed in the classroom. Horsman (2004) argued, however, that the dialogue needs to become focused on how we will deal with trauma in the classroom, since it already exists. If we do not acknowledge the impact of violence and trauma in the lives of students in our post-secondary classrooms, we are complicit in perpetuating oppression. If we do not begin to examine how our pedagogical practices foster the 'survival of the fittest' attitudes, then we will ensure that only those who succeed are those who do not suffer.

It is possible, given the spotlight on grades and learning outcomes in western education, that the post-secondary teacher is focused on content rather than the student as an individual with unique needs. Smith (2009) illustrated how the new knowledge economy has created a distancing from human meaning, since the focus is on economic development. Friesen and Jardine (2009) added to this discussion and showed how the schools' use of efficiency promotes product over humanity. As Britzman (2006) noted, "it takes a great deal of time to actually notice students in the room" (p. 109). Is it possible that the post-secondary teacher does not observe his or her students closely enough to recognize disrupted learning, or emotional transformation, particularly given the systemic issues related to the post-secondary system such as time, space and the focus on outcomes? Additionally, as post-secondary teachers, we have our own distractions and expectations in relation to time, and product.

Avoiding Mitch and the security people altogether would be Sarah's preference, but she knew that would not help her situation. The next morning, she stopped by Mitch's office before class. Mitch invited her to sit and asked how she was doing. Her chest was tight; she was nervous about his reaction. Sarah told Mitch that she was doing fine, although it was only a half-truth. *I'm sure he doesn't really care*, she thought to herself, although she sensed he actually did care. Sarah let him know that she would not pursue the restraining order, but that she would be willing to fill out any reports if they needed. Mitch let her know that they discussed the situation after she left, and they were considering another option given her reluctance. He said, however, that they would need her cooperation in an attempt to get a peace bond.

When the phone rang, she knew it was him. "Hello" she said still sounding annoyed. Her father told her he was sorry and just wanted to see her. He said that he wanted to help her in any way he could; he even offered her money for her education, which she

knew would never materialize. He told her that he felt isolated when she did not contact him. *Part of the cycle*, Sarah rolled her eyes as she realized what he was doing. In a calmer manner, Sarah explained that she could not give him the time he expected. She laid down an ultimatum and said, "I will call and see you when I can, and if you don't like it, I won't bother seeing you at all." He agreed, for now. Sarah did not inform him about the security meeting, but she knew it would be the next topic of conversation when she and her father meet again.

Writhing in her bed, she was saying something to the monster while she slept. Her body was moving; she was kicking and rolling. Whispered screams forced their way out of her throat. The dampness from her sweat woke her. She was cold; her breathing was laboured. Pulling her knees up to her chest, she wrapped her arms around them, as if becoming a ball. It was no use; she could not get back to sleep. Tomorrow was a big day. Mitch was teaching, and he had a huge assignment for them. Sarah needed to make a good impression.

So far, Mitch had been patient with her haze, but she doubted it would last. Other teachers seemed less patient; when late, Sarah would receive a frown and shaking head. She felt judged and ashamed that she was not measuring up, at least that is what she thought. Since she avoided most of her teachers, she rarely clarified assignments or asked for assistance. The one time she took a chance, Marie responded "I explained the assignment at the beginning of class and will not explain it again for those who were late."

Disclosure

This assignment is worth a great deal of my mark, and I must complete it on my own, she thought. This opportunity is so I can express something about myself that I think represents how I came to be who I am today. Knowing myself and what has influenced me in my life will help me to understand my choreographic style. Sarah was recalling the expectation of the assignment. The students were required to complete a self-portrait that would be presented in class before an audience. Sarah was excited. By now, she knew her emotions well enough to feel the difference between scared and excited, even though they resided in similar places in her body. Sarah had an idea for the assignment: I want to do something related to my trauma. This is probably what has had the most influence on me.

Water dropped from the showerhead in the changing room, and the drops splashed as they hit the tiles. Sarah was alone, and she appreciated the quiet. Her dance routine was complete, and her nerves tingled with delight and apprehension. She now needed to go back and face the teachers, as well as classmates and audience members who would give her feedback. She took a deep breath and stood. After a dance, Sarah always felt solid regardless of whether she did well or not. She took pleasure in being in touch with her body, and dancing helped her to connect with herself. Turning toward the stage, she pushed open the door and entered. With light applause from others, Mitch came into focus as he approached her on the floor.

Later, Sarah thought about the feedback from Marie, “more diversity in movement” was what she had said. That means then that Marie didn’t really get it. Sarah was trying to represent how the trauma was stuck in her body and how it takes over. Marie had been a source of stress in this program, but somehow this disclosure, through dance, helped Sarah feel less afraid of Marie, the hug Marie gave her probably helped. Mitch’s feedback was to continue to make authentic dances like this one. *I think he finally understood what I have been going through.* Sarah felt her own strength. Sarah smiled; it was great to know that she no longer needed to hide her trauma.

It is what it is.

When Sarah chose to disclose trauma through her dance assignment, she was dissolving the construction of her trauma as a private affair. She began to own her true-life experiences and no longer concealed them for the comfort of others, including her teachers and classmates.

Sarah was fortunate in that she was in an arts-based program and that she was given the opportunity, through her self-portrait assignment, to disclose her traumatic experiences. Fortunately, her instructor, who suggested that it made her more genuine by representing her pain, appreciated this disclosure. Perhaps this program and this assignment is where some of the discourse about educating the traumatized could begin. Did the arts-based program allow for the disclosure that would not normally take place in other academic arenas? Was it this instructor, in particular? Are there purposeful pedagogical applications that might be borrowed by mainstream academics that would invite the traumatized and their unique needs to participate more authentically in their own education?

The nature of trauma makes it impossible to create a sterile space where we can guarantee that a student with a traumatic past will not become triggered. Nor do we want to create these kinds of spaces. Instead, the educational space needs to be opened up to allow the student to live in the space as opposed to hiding his or her pain. Pain, suffering, and vulnerability speak to the need for sensitivity and care toward the individual(s) having these experiences, whether teachers or students. Responding to the day-to-day effects of a student’s trauma, whether that is lateness to class, tiredness, extra assistance with assignments, or repeating instructions and being less judgmental about behaviours, means we acknowledge that we too live in a shared world and know what can happen to our fellow beings.

Depending on the post-secondary program, we may or may not receive disclosures of a student’s previous history. However, according to Vrana and Lautherbach (as cited in McCammon, 1995) “84% of undergraduate students in introductory psychology courses reported experiencing at least one event sufficiently enough intense to meet the stressor criteria for PTSD” (p. 109); therefore, we can assume there will be students who have a trauma background within our classes. Regardless of the program, there may be ways in which we can ensure our classes are at least in some small ways attending to the needs of those who might be hiding their suffering. For example, when trauma is lived in the body, the individual may need to move (Ogden, Minton & Pain, 2006). Therefore, learning activity that involve moving around, such as going to the

library for a quick search, walking and talking in pairs to answer reflective questions, or small group activities that require getting up from the seat, such as chalk-talks (writing on the blackboard) are useful.

Students who feel unsafe and vulnerable likely need more space, and while this is not always feasible, there may be an opportunity to re-arrange the classroom seating. Opportunities to reflect in a journal or to answer short surveys and questionnaires in the hallways, as opposed to in a classroom desk, may be helpful to an individual who needs space. Additionally, post-secondary teachers would serve their students well to get to know the counselling services in their buildings. Most, if not all, post-secondary institutions have on-site counselling departments. Knowing where this department is located, or to whom a referral should be made, will increase the likelihood of a student accessing services. Finally, a smile goes a long way to help too.

As a post-secondary educator, I have seen, first-hand, students who struggle to stay present and learn when their traumatic past has been triggered. As a therapist, I understand this issue well. Having worked in the area of domestic violence, I see survivors wanting to move forward, yet they struggle every day to mitigate the impact of trauma. As an educator, I understand there are curriculums to deliver and a standard to maintain. However, I believe there must be a way to create an educational experience for the traumatized that does not become 'therapy' yet still acknowledges and gives legitimate space in the mainstream post-secondary institution. In this way, educators will also recognize the social impact on violence in our society and adjust to the needs of trauma survivors.

As we are reminded on a regular basis, in our capitalist society, higher education is necessary if more than survival is desired. Therefore, those who have experienced trauma and want to be more than a survivor would do well to engage in higher education. Can we make space for them?

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