Igniting Student Empowerment through Collaborative Development of Trauma-Informed Education

By Rana Halabi Najjar

I started my Trauma Informed (TI) learning journey about 7 years ago and initially, what struck me was the close connection of TI approaches to nursing practice. At the core, nursing is about listening, empathy, compassion, understanding, and caring not curing. So, for me, it seemed a natural transition of using TI approaches in the learning environment with our students, similar to how we educate our students to use these approaches to care for patients and their families. After several trainings and learning about TI, I began to envision how we can use TI in nursing education. I have spent the last several years working with collaborators in my organization to develop TI education practice (TIEP) training for faculty and staff.

After implementing the training for faculty & staff, we began discussing training for students on content related to neuroscience, the science of learning, mindfulness practices, and other TI approaches in the learning environment. Watching Module 3 several times and listening to student experiences, I remembered research out of UCLA in collaboration with the East Union Unified School District called 'Nothing for us without us'. That work focused on students' civic duty, engaging them in shared decision-making related to policies and practices in their school district. I reviewed that work recently and what emerged were the principles of empowerment and mean-making, with evidence that if students are provided the opportunity and tools, they will step up, take responsibility to get informed, and engage in the shared decision-making process. This has been my experience in the classroom when I've utilized TI approaches with individual students. Providing them autonomy over their learning and guiding them in self-assessment and grading, students can see the importance of their learning and the applicability of it in their future nursing practice.

My capstone project is to guide and mentor students in developing TI training for themselves and their peers. I have already begun taking the first steps by working with our strategic workgroup that leads TI trainings in our school. I am currently recruiting and will be engaging Master of Nursing Education Students next term to collect data from students through surveys and focus groups. In the summer, I plan to utilize a funding opportunity to recruit undergraduate students to gather a team of undergraduate and graduate students across multiple programs and campuses/units. Additionally, there are multiple opportunities for students to get involved in this work through their course work, organically generating opportunities for experiential learning and meaningful work. With the data from the spring term and integrating their lived experiences, these students will have the opportunity to collaborate on examining, curating, and deciding on the curriculum of the training. As the curriculum is being developed by students and collaborating with faculty, I can apply for funding to acquire resources needed for students to develop the videos for the training. Students and faculty working collaboratively will make decisions on where this training fits in the program depending on the type and length of the ir nursing program.

Several outcomes will be achieved with this project: 1) Develop training on using trauma informed approaches in the learning environment by students for students 2) Proving evidence and a process for how a school can utilize the power of collaboration and shared decision making to ensure collective healing.

3 minute video link