

Book Review

Jennings, P. A. (2019). *The Trauma-Sensitive Classroom: Building Resilience with Compassionate Teaching*. W.W. Norton & Company. (200 pp., paperback \$25.66; ebook \$15.88)

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A guide to trauma-sensitive K-12 teaching might not seem an obvious reference for a college Communication Center. But this book, *The Trauma-Sensitive Classroom*, offers the tools we need to help college students regain their footing at the end of 2021, a year of intense change and trauma. Broadly, the book is a reminder that trauma is widespread among our students and colleagues, and that Communication Centers can serve as resources and allies to traumatized members of our communities. Patricia Jennings offers us terminology, assessments, checklists, and practices for a mindful approach to this work.

Jennings is an internationally renowned Education scholar and the co-creator of a prosocial classroom model that emphasizes teachers' social and emotional competence (SEC) (see Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). *The Trauma-Sensitive Classroom* reports the rigorous research for which Jennings is known. But the book is also a training manual for supporting traumatized students (p. xvii) and promoting mindful pedagogy (p. 129). In that regard, the book delivers dozens of useful conversation starters, suggestions, and strategies for trauma-sensitive pedagogical practice. Communication Center practitioners will find the book useful in their primary work with students, and as a tool for engaging faculty and university

administrators in broader discussions of trauma-sensitive campus climates.

The book is a well-organized pedagogical support resource. It is divided into three logical sections: Part I, Understanding Trauma in Schools, Part II, Addressing Trauma in Schools, and Part III, Building Resilience with Mindful Compassion. Jennings' focus on mindfulness in Part III draws from her personal practice (p. 11) and prior research. Part III is more adaptable to higher education than Jennings' prior edited collection on mindfulness pedagogy in K-12 settings (Jennings, 2015).

Initially, Communication Center professionals can leverage this book to better understand student trauma. The book's Introduction reviews sources of trauma, including structural racism, political polarization and bullying, the opioid crisis, widespread poverty and job insecurity, and our nation's refugee crisis. The Introduction also operationalizes working terminology, a feature that carries through the book. For instance, *trauma-informed* is a term used by behavioral health practitioners to describe delivery of clinical services, whereas *trauma-sensitive* is a term used by educational researchers and practitioners to describe educational services, with an emphasis on creating prosocial school cultures. The Introduction thus offers a foundation for staff trainings and outreach

materials. However, this section is largely K-12 focused and university practitioners will need to translate case studies to address common postsecondary student challenges, such as sleep disturbances in a dormitory environment (see Iarovici, 2014), or the experiences of combat veterans.

Beyond enhancing their own understanding, Communication Center professionals can use individual chapters to help students learn trauma-sensitive terminology, discover seminal research, and develop mindful approaches to communication. Chapter 1 unpacks basic terms like stressor and toxic stress, and identifies longitudinal research studies, such as the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACES). Communication Center professionals will find the chapter useful in their work with student teachers, service-learning students, and other students working in the community. The chapter can help these students understand how the toxic stress of poverty and transgenerational trauma spill over into their clinical and practicum settings.

Chapter 2 offers a useful trauma-sensitive school checklist, which Communication Center professionals could use in their work with student leaders, particularly tutors and student affinity organization leaders. Again, the checklist will need to be adapted from the K-12 context for the college setting. Communication Center staff can coach students on how to catalog community spaces and practices, and craft persuasive messages for making these spaces more welcoming to students of diverse backgrounds.

Chapters 3 and 4 are focused on classroom climate. As a result, they are less useful for one-on-one and small group student support. Nevertheless, they provide interesting material for staff discussions of workshop climate

and large group support. Chapter 3 discusses terminology such as positive and negative classroom climate, and K-12 teacher assessment instruments such as the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) (see Allen, Pianta, Gregory, Mikami, & Lun, 2011). Chapter 4 argues that clear expectations, consistent routines, and emotional coaching are requisites of inclusive, trauma-sensitive classroom teaching. These chapters can serve as a jumping off point for staff discussions about how to engage diverse audiences and assess whether teaching practices are inclusive and effective.

Chapters 6-8 are skills-building chapters focused on resilience, awareness, and compassion. Communication center professionals can use these chapters to support students with communication apprehension and public speaking anxiety. Chapter 6 operationalizes resilience as a skill built by taking risks, becoming emotionally self-aware, and cultivating and savoring positivity and human interconnectedness. Communication Center staff can use this material to frame public speaking as risk-taking that can foster connection with one's audience. Chapter 7 offers mindfulness techniques that can be used to calm stress responses common in public speaking situations. These chapters also offer Communication Center staff concrete techniques for (re)gaining resilience and remaining mindful and compassionate in their work with students. For instance, Jennings suggests "keep[ing] a journal of emotionally challenging situations" (p. 129) in order to identify recurrent responses and default scripts that undermine our empathy for students' learning challenges and social issues.

Beyond student support and staff development, Communication

Centers can leverage this book to lead trauma-sensitive campus initiatives. As resource sites for ethical, inclusive, and effective communication, Communication Centers are uniquely positioned to take on this role. Center administrators and practitioners can engage university administrators such as associate provosts and residence life staff using Part II, Addressing Trauma in Schools. Part II offers a template for a campus-wide faculty/staff development program. Similarly, Chapter 4 briefly reviews K-12 frameworks for responsive behavioral interventions. As Jennings notes repeatedly, these models emphasize high quality instruction as a first-tier intervention for students with learning and behavioral challenges; additional tiers of faculty, staff, and administrative support should be available when needed. Chapter 5 offers implementation strategies for the various tiers of support and concludes with a trauma-sensitive action-step list that can help individual faculty members understand and (re)engage with the tiered support system. Communication Center professionals will find Chapter 5 useful in mediating administration-faculty debates about how to balance academic freedom and pedagogical assessment and effectiveness.

In *The Trauma-Sensitive Classroom*, Jennings incorporates and then transcends the scholarship for which she is known. She offers concrete tools for campus-wide pedagogical improvement. As noted, the book's K-12 focus requires translation to the higher education context. The book assumes a smaller, more centralized primary/secondary school structure led by a principal and anchored by classroom teachers. It can be easier to identify cultural change agents in such schools as opposed to larger, more

complex universities. This leadership lacuna presents an opportunity for Communication Center practitioners to lead campus discussions about trauma and the human capacity to care for ourselves, our colleagues, our students, and our communities. Jennings' book is an invitation and roadmap to creating systems of support that benefit us all.

References

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