



Washington State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

“The Practitioner’s Best Friend”
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Would Cinderella feel safe, cared about and successful in your school?

I recently had the opportunity to see the Broadway performance of “Cinderella”. It wasn’t the Disney performance that I remembered from my childhood where the girl is saved by her prince. In this version, Cinderella is a resilient girl who experienced trauma, abuse and loss. Instead of being saved, Cinderella saves the prince and advocates for the poor within her community.

Throughout the performance, the commonalities between Cinderella and the students who continuously impact my practice were huge. Unlike Cinderella, students who are impacted by trauma don’t usually have a fairy godmother to wave her wand and make their dreams come true. Our students have a different type of fairy godmother that comes in the form of a teacher, para educator, secretary, bus driver, counselor or social worker, recess supervisor, administrator, or many others within our learning environments. While we don’t have a magic wand, we have something better, the gift of relationship.

I often ask myself, what protective factors influence circumstances in which “all” children are learning ready? How do we as educators increase these protective factors that lead to resilience. For many of our students, school is their only protective factor. In a culture in which many educators feel overwhelmed by initiatives, how do we support the work that must be done? PBIS, trauma informed practice, social emotional learning, disproportionate discipline, and restorative practices are a few of the issues that our school communities are grappling with.

There is not a magic wand or fairy godmother to support this work. We, are it. We have the privilege of educating children during a time when research is clear about the impact of trauma on brain development. We know that zero tolerance policies of the past are ineffective, even detrimental. We understand that the school to prison pipeline is a real risk (Teasley, 2014). Yes, this is an opportunity to do what is right for all students. We know that if students mental, physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological needs are met, they will be learning ready (Souers, 2016).



Thus, we create environments where students feel safe, they are taught to self-regulate, deal with conflict and experience academic success. This requires a commitment to provide systems of support for all students. In a culture of accountability, where data drives our academic decisions, I challenge you to place that same value on the social emotional well-being of our students. There is not a curriculum that will guide us through this process. These are children who ultimately need relationship, caring consistency, accountability and empathy.

We must move away from a deficit model that attempts to define children who have experienced trauma as damaged. It is our moral responsibility to capitalize on the strengths of our students. This requires a major shift in educational mindset. Students can learn emotional regulation and social skills the same way they learn to read. Many educators do not come out of teacher preparation programs with the skillset to support social emotional growth. Thus, we must make it a priority to train staff regarding the latest research and support them as they support students. We must shift our priorities to include emotional intelligence as an indicator of a successful student. We must shift from merely admiring the problem and blaming students, parents or teachers to a culture that supports the growth of the whole child.

Would Cinderella feel safe, cared about and successful in your school? It doesn't require a magic wand to make this a reality for all students. The magic is in the relationships we build, the support we provide and the priorities we make.

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