Too hot, too cold, or just right? Strategies for creating a class climate that fosters growth

Presented by Janice Carello, PhD, LMSW
Assistant Professor, Social Work
Edinboro University
jcarello@edinboro.edu
Agenda

- [Self-Assessment]
- Focusing Activity
- Background & Theory
- Forecasting: Signs of Class Climate Problems
- Storm Gear: Strategies for Addressing Climate Problems
- Weatherproofing: Additional Methods for Improving Class Climate
Focusing activity
You’re invited to a party!

Please bring a dish to pass!
You RSVP’d for this party!

So you should know to bring a dish to pass.
Don’t you dare miss this party!

You will be punished if you don’t bring a dish to pass.
Only a loser would miss this party!

For once, could you bring a dish to pass?!
How come you never come to my parties anymore?!

If you do come, don’t bring that disgusting dish you brought last time. Bring something edible. Make sure it can serve at least 30 people, and don’t store it in plastic. Plastic is evil and will not be tolerated. Neither will nuts, sugar, dairy, gluten, meat, shellfish, food dyes, preservatives, or alcohol. Or fun. You will be asked to leave if you try to sneak in any of these.
Background & Theory

but why?
Effects of trauma on teaching & learning
Neurobiological impact

**Survival Mode: Flight/Fight/Freeze**

Frontal lobe (Prefrontal cortex) goes offline
Limbic system / mind and lower brain functions take over
### Neurobiological impact cont.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of Brain</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amygdala (becomes over-reactive)</td>
<td>Management of emotions</td>
<td>Emotional dysregulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hippocampus (shrinks)</td>
<td>Memory and memory consolidation</td>
<td>Impaired memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broca (gets smaller and deactivated)</td>
<td>Speech</td>
<td>Shuts down speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefrontal Cortex</td>
<td>Executive functioning</td>
<td>Impaired thinking, judgment, and processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cortisol (gets over-produced)</td>
<td>Hormone (chemical secreted by an endocrine gland)</td>
<td>Triggers amygdala resulting in fight, flight, freeze responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norepinephrine (gets released)</td>
<td>Neurochemical (chemical released from a nerve cell)</td>
<td>Hypervigilence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Groner et al., (n.d.)
Impact on emotion regulation

The Bi-Phasic Response to Trauma

(Figure 2)

- Regulated
- Hyperarousal
- Optimum
- Arousal Zone & Learning
- Freezing/Numbing
- Fight or Flight
- Stay & Play
- Freeze or Appease

(Re)traumatized

Adapted from Schupp (2004)
Trauma-informed teaching & learning is about culture & climate
To be trauma-informed in any context means

a) to understand the ways in which violence, victimization, and other forms of trauma can impact individuals, families, and communities and

b) to use that understanding to inform policies and practices in order to prevent (re)traumatization and promote resilience and growth

(adapted from Butler, Critelli, & Rinfrette, 2011; Harris & Fallot, 2001)
TI means shifting our focus

Individual

What is wrong with you?

Trauma as disorder

Individual in Environment

What has happened to you?

Trauma as injury or disability

(Bloom & Sreedhar, 2008; Harris & Fallot, 2001)
### Sources of retraumatization (i.e. what’s happened)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiences Within Program</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy/Policy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Work</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video/Lecture/Readings</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Discussion</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field/GA Supervision</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Death</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiences Outside Program</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death/ Illness of Loved One</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault/Injury/Bullying</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client Death</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Carello, 2018
Retraumatization is often about conflict between educators and students

- Threatening
- Abusive
- Oppressive
- Neglectful
- Abandoning
- Unfair or disproportionate punishment
Teaching & learning & trauma are about relationships
Marshall Rosenberg
Nonviolent Communication Model

When we understand the needs that motivate our own and others behavior, we have no enemies.

(Rosenberg, 2003, 2005)
Stages of Emotional Growth

- **Emotional slavery**: feeling responsible for others’ feelings

- **Emotional rebellion**: angry and not wanting to be responsible for others’ feelings but unsure how to responsible *to* others (vs. *for* others) in a way that is not enslaving

- **Emotional liberation**: taking responsibility for our intentions and actions and responding to others’ needs out of compassion rather than guilt, fear, or shame

(Rosenberg, 2003, 2005)
Emotional regulation & growth

The Bi-Phasic Response to Trauma

Figure 2

- Anger, Fear
- Compassion
- Guilt, Fear, Shame
- Emotional Rebellion
- Emotional Liberation
- Emotional Slavery

Fight, Flight / Attack & Defend
Stay, Play / Self-Disclose & Connect
Freeze, Appease / Avoid or Deny
Gottman Institute
Sound Relationship Research

https://www.gottman.com/
SAMHSA’s (2014) TI Principles

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness and Transparency
3. Peer support
4. Collaboration and mutuality
5. Empowerment, voice and choice
6. Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues
Forecasting: Signs of Relationship/Climate Problems

(adapted from Gottman & DeClaire, 2001)
Harsh Startups

Starting a conversation negatively:

- Attacking
- Blaming
- Accusing
- Using one of the “four horsemen”

"96% of the time, you can predict the outcome of a conversation based on the first 3 minutes of the 15 minute interaction." - The Gottman Institute
Harsh Startups in class

Student

- “Can we get out early?”
- “Why did you give me such a bad grade?! You’re going to make me lose my scholarship!”
- ?

Instructor

- “You’re late.”
- “Why would you think I would accept this late? Does this look like high school?”
- ?
The Four Horsemen

**Criticism**: attacking character; different from feedback or complaint because focuses on identity not on behavior (e.g. “What’s wrong with you?”; “Why can’t you do this right?”)

**Contempt**: ridiculing; treating disrespectfully or as lesser than (e.g. eye-rolling, name calling, sarcasm, mocking, ‘splaining, hyper correction or opposition: “No, this...”; “Yes, but...”)

**Defensiveness**: seeing yourself as the victim; making excuses; cross-complaining; retaliating (e.g. “How could you say that about me?”; “That’s not my fault”; “Well if you hadn’t...”)

**Stonewalling**: avoiding conflict; withdrawing; shutting down; acting busy (e.g. not responding; monosyllabic responses)
The Four Horsemen in class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Not responding to email.</td>
<td>• Not responding to email.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “If you didn’t give ridiculous amounts of homework I might get it in on time.”</td>
<td>• Collecting papers and putting them in the recycle bin after announcing your contract hasn’t been renewed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “Whatever.”</td>
<td>• “The ship has left the dock, and you were not on it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “I don’t know how/why you got into this class/school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Flooding

- Physical and emotional distress (e.g. fight/flight or freeze/appease mode)
- Feelings of indignation: “I shouldn’t have to put up with this.”
- Feelings of victimhood: “Why is everyone always picking on me?”
- Hard to hear repair attempts when flooded
Flooding in class

Students

▪ Silent treatment during class discussion
▪ Walking out of class
▪ “Why are you making us do this busywork?”
▪ ?

Instructors

▪ Avoiding discussion of some topics
▪ Canceling class
▪ Losing control of a discussion
▪ ?
Failed Repair Attempts

- Inability to de-escalate tension
- Inability to hear repair attempts
- Inability to make or accept apology or amends
- Repetitive cycle of recrimination or defensiveness
Failed Repair Attempts in class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Instructors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Walking out of class</td>
<td>▪ Canceling class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ “Yes, but…”</td>
<td>▪ “Yes, but…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ “I did what the prof said, but I still got a bad grade.”</td>
<td>▪ “I changed the policy, but I still get complaints.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Four horsemen</td>
<td>▪ Four horsemen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ ?</td>
<td>▪ ?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Storm Gear: Strategies for Addressing Climate Problems
Four Horsemen Antidotes

**Criticism**: Soft Start-Ups:
- Use “I” statements; express a positive need

**Contempt**: Culture of Appreciation:
- Pay attention to positive qualities and strengths

**Defensiveness**: Take Responsibility:
- Accept another perspective; apologize for mistakes

**Stonewalling**: Self-Soothing:
- Take a break and then come back; calm yourself; practice self-care

(Lisista, 2013)
NVC Strategies

(Adapted from Rosenberg, 2003, 2005)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Judgment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I felt angry</td>
<td>1. You made me mad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I would like to talk</td>
<td>2. We need to talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I don’t see the required</td>
<td>3. You ignored the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elements</td>
<td>directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I don’t understand</td>
<td>4. This doesn’t make sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My view is different</td>
<td>5. You’re wrong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Giving (More) Feedback

Advice
An opinion or suggestion for what to do.

- “You should have cited at least three sources.”
- “You should visit a tutor.”

Feedback
Information about progress toward a goal:

- “You have not yet cited the required number of sources.”
- “Tutoring services are available, if you’re interested.”
Expressing Needs

- Leave out “you”
- Be positive
- Be specific
- State what to do rather than what not to do
- Give concrete rather than vague examples

- “I need to see all of the references cited in APA to assign a passing grade” vs “You need to cite properly”
- “To assign full credit, I need the paper submitted by the due date” vs “Don’t turn in the paper late.”
- “See p. 62 of the APA manual for help with heading format” vs “Fix your citations.”
### Making requests vs demands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requests</th>
<th>Demands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emphasizes compassion</td>
<td>Emphasizes fear and obedience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows empathy for others’ needs</td>
<td>Must comply or rebel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes responsibility for own needs</td>
<td>Criticize, judge, and/or assign guilt if do not comply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering</td>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Making Requests

▪ This is what you did (Observation)
▪ This is what I feel (Feeling)
▪ This is the need, value, or desire of mine that was not met (Need)
▪ Here’s what I’d like to happen (Request)

▪ “When _____ happens I feel _____ because it really matters to me that _____.
Would you be willing to _____?”
▪ “When you don’t turn in your work I get concerned because it really matters to me that you succeed in
this course. Would you be willing to meet with me to discuss how you can get caught up?”
Showing Appreciation

- This is what I perceived happened (Observation)
- This is what I feel (Feeling)
- This is the need of mine that was met (Need)
- [leave out the request]
- “I was happy to see you use meaningful subheadings. They helped me navigate the paper.”
- “Thank you for the email. I was worried because you missed several classes, and I’m glad to know you are feeling better now.”
Responding with Empathy

Scenario: A student saying in a loud, angry voice: “Why did you give me such a bad grade on this test?! I’ve never gotten this bad of a grade before. This is going to mess up my course grade and my GPA and if that happens it’s going to mess up my scholarship. Then what am I going to do? It’s not fair…”

Your response?
Empathizing is not the same as

- **Advising:** “You should study more next time.”
- **One-upping:** “Let me tell you about the tests I’ve failed.”
- **Educating:** “Studies show that most people fail at least one test in their lifetime.”
- **Consoling:** “At least you’re passing the course.”
- **Sympathizing:** “I’m sorry you failed the test.”
- **Interrogating:** “How did you fail the test if you studied?”
- **Correcting:** “Technically, a D is passing.”
- **Empathizing:** “It sounds like you’re really disappointed about your grade.”
How do we know if empathy is working?

- Release of tension
- Flow of words halts
Additional Methods for Improving Class Climate

Regulate
Escalate
Knowing Students

- Reading about characteristics of current cohort
- Learning names & pronouns
- Information cards/posts
- Interest polls
- Ice breakers
Connection Rituals

terveryesting
Temperature Taking

Check-In Cards/Posts/Quizzes

- Complete ONE of the following sentence starters about your experiences in the course in the past couple weeks:
  - I’ve learned...
  - I was surprised...
  - I hope...
  - I liked...
  - I would like...
  - I’m still confused about...
  - I’m feeling...
  - I...
Preventing Power Struggles

Avoiding zero-tolerance policies and practices
- All needs get met
- No need for excuses
- Can be applied fairly and consistently
- E.g. late days, scaffolding, limited # of revise & resubmits

Pick your battles
- If everything is important, nothing is important
- If you’re at war with students, you’ve already lost
Using the three magic words

“Help me understand”
Practicing Self-Care

“AN EMPTY LANTERN PROVIDES NO LIGHT. SELF-CARE IS THE FUEL THAT ALLOWS YOUR LIGHT TO SHINE BRIGHTLY.”
Moving Forward
Which new strategy will you try?

You’re invited to a party!

Please bring a dish to pass!
Questions or comments?
Contact me at jcarello@edinboro.edu
References


