

# **Trauma and Transformation in the Classroom (Transcript)**

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**Teaching with Compassion**

**Teachers on Teaching**

**Mendocino Community College**

**March 4, 2023**

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

trauma, students, classroom, teachers, window tolerance, nervous system, hypoarousal, hyperarousal, personal trauma, vicarious trauma, developmental trauma, collective and intergenerational trauma, moral injury

# Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Outline of Lecture	3
The Pause: What Do You Want For Yourself?	4
Introduction to the Neuropsychobiology of Trauma For Educators	5
Forms of Trauma	10
Individual Trauma	10
Collective Trauma	10
Cultural and Transgenerational Trauma	11
Moral Injury	11
Racism as Individual, Collective, Cultural and Moral Injury Trauma	12
Racial Trauma in the Classroom	14
Transformation	14
The Teacher as Transformational Leader	15
Presencing Trauma	15
Techniques of Working With Trauma	16
Conclusion	16

# Introduction

So now that we're in our seats, and getting settled, I want to share just a little bit about me in two minutes or less.

This is a conversation about trauma. And so in my introduction, it feels important to talk a little bit about how trauma shaped my own life and my work in the world. What you're seeing on the screen here is what I call my before and after moment. In both of these pictures, I was a nine years old. The pictures are separated by just six months. But something dramatic happened in between before and after, and that is that my mother died. That was the biggest traumatic moment in my life, as you can imagine. The reverberations of that have stayed with me throughout my life. But when I was nine, when that was all happening, somehow, some way, what rose up for me was the sense of injustice. No one I knew had a dead mother. So why should I? Why should I have to go through this pain? Why should I have to go through this experience?

At the time, the only people I knew who dealt with unjust things were called lawyers. So I remember telling my father in that moment that I was going to be a lawyer. In fact, what I told him was, I was going to be the next international Thurgood Marshall. You all, I'm sure, know Thurgood Marshall as the first African American Supreme Court justice. Before that he was a lawyer for the NAACP, and he desegregated schools all over the south, including law schools, including elementary schools. His work had a direct impact on my life, my ability to go to school in a fully integrated, fully free experience in the 70s. And so that's where I wanted to be. If I could not save myself from my own traumatic experience, at least I could save others from the injustice of the experience. And of course, as a nine year old, I did not have the language of trauma, but I did have the language of that's not fair. And so I wanted to go off and help construct a more fair and more just world.

My career followed the trajectory I set for myself when I was nine. And it also followed a kind of before and after path that is punctuated by trauma. In my before experience, I followed a path that my law school training set out for me. NYU is a top five law school, and we were told that if you're smart and bright and with it, you're gonna go off to a major law firm and do amazing things. Sure enough, I went to Big Law. After that, I was a lawyer for the Clinton White House where I drafted treaties and negotiated with foreign countries and disputed cases before the World Trade Organization--all before I was 30. I was traveling all over the world having the time of my life. Then I went on to the Department of Commerce, training and teaching

developing countries on trade issues. I was an international consultant. And finally I became a professor and full time full tenured professor. And that, of course, is the moment where things changed.

One day, it was maybe two years into my teaching experience, a student, an African American woman walked into my office. She just burst out crying. She was just devastated at how traumatic the law school experience was. And I remember she said that she felt like she no longer had the language to speak with the people in her life. They all said to her that she doesn't sound the same, she doesn't act the same. And yet, she still didn't see herself as a lawyer. To be perfectly honest with you, the hallmark of being a lawyer, as far as I was concerned, was to have no emotion. So having a student in my classroom, crying and emoting all over the place was just more than I could bear. So the best I could do for her is to say, "Let's talk about the changes in contracts law."

I cringe when I think about that now. When she walked out of my office that day, I thought to myself, something in me had to change. It didn't happen in an instant. I was on a path. I had a goal: I was going to become a full tenured professor, I couldn't stop and change and do all of that. But at some point, once all of those goals were met, I came to recognize this distance that I had between myself -- my higher Self -- and who I was in the world. Sure, I was successful, but I was disconnected from my emotions. As I said, law school trained me to be that way. And I was training my students to be that way. And finally, finally, I thought, it's time to do something about it.

I would go on to earn a master's in Jungian psychology. And if you ever want to get really close to your emotions, my goodness, do Jungian psychology. Or maybe don't. It's hell! But it's also incredibly liberating. You get to meet all of the parts of yourself, including the shadow self. And now I'm currently completing a PhD in human development, and specifically looking at trauma and transformation in graduate students, I still work as a law professor. The legal community will always be my community. So I work at UC Davis part time. And then I've launched my own business, the Blackbird trauma training company, where I work with universities, colleges, and corporations on creating trauma informed workplaces and classrooms, so that our students can learn and our employees can prosper in ways that don't require them to hang their emotions on a hook by the front door. And in my spare time, I write legal thrillers. So if you're ever excited about reading about a late latest legal thriller, look me up. So that's a little bit about me. I like to imagine that somehow in some way, I have a little bit of Thurgood Marshall still left in me.

## Outline of Lecture

Our talk for today then centers around what it means to be a teacher and educator in the classroom. This is a painting by Norman Rockwell. It's based on his real life experience of having a teacher who so touched his life by her willingness to prompt him in his art and his talent that all of these years later he remembered her and he painted this painting of her and that experience. It's called "Happy Birthday, Mrs. Jones."

Norman Rockwell has a reputation of being you know, that painter of bucolic moments-- of a time that has gone by. And this is a pretty picture. If I could paraphrase Garrison Keillor, for a moment, everyone looks above average. Everyone also looks very happy. And everyone looks white and homogenous. But as I look at this painting, my eye is immediately drawn to what's out of place. And that to me is out of place. As a storyteller, I started engaging with what happened there. Was it one of those "acting out" kids? You might have them in your classroom? The class clown or even the class bully who might have thrown the chalk on the board or something. There's a little story there, There's something that's not quite perfect. That tells me that the so called bygone era was no more perfect than the era we are living in right now. There's always trauma and the possibility of transformation in every moment. And I'm reminded Norman Rockwell also painted this painting.

They knocked on the door. My parents opened the door. And I remember standing there and seeing these four very tall white men. I remember them saying that we're federal marshals. We've been sent by the President of the United States. And we are here to escort you and your daughter to school today. I found myself in the car, driving this very short drive to this new school. And the minute we turn the corner, I saw what I thought was Mardi Gras. There were so many people standing out in the middle of the street. And they were screaming and shouting and throwing things.

This was the same bucolic era as the last painting. And this is what was happening, right? And so you heard the voice of the protesters say, "We're white people, we don't want to go to school with the N word." What that says to me is that trauma and transformation is upon us in every particular moment. We're just living a different kind of trauma and transformation. And that's what I want to talk to you about today.

So our talk will focus on trauma, right? And the essential question that I want to ask in my talk for today is: How does trauma show up in our classrooms in the 21st century? And embedded in that question, of course, are all sorts of additional questions like, What is trauma? How does it operate in our bodies and in our psyches? How does it impact our students and their learning -- their capacity to learn and their ways of knowing? And how does it impact us as educators standing in the front of the room?

And then, of course, I want to talk about transformation. This is not a story about hopelessness and helplessness. This is a story about how we can transform. So the other question that I'm going to be asking is, How can we as educators play a role in focusing on resilience and transformation. And this particular quote by Carl Jung will guide our way. What it tells us is we are not what happened to us. We are what we wish to become. Transformation is a process of becoming. And we as the transformational leaders in the classroom, can assist our students in becoming something other than a traumatic story.

## **The Pause: What Do You Want For Yourself?**

So I'm going to pause here for a moment. Already I've said a lot, and already that might have stirred some things in you because there's a certain ugliness that attaches to trauma. And the question that I want you to take in right now in this pause -- also take a moment to take a deep breath and feel gets on the exhale because that's when real relaxation is upon us -- I want you to ask yourself, What do you want for yourself in our time here today? Particular questions that might help guide you are: What do you hope to learn? What would you like to experience? And how do you want to feel? All of those things are important. So go ahead. I'll give you one minute. If you get done very quickly, feel free to just Breathe.

Okay, here we are. We're gonna stop my share for a moment. And then I'm going to invite my group that is on Zoom, just share some words in the chat. And for my team, who is in the classroom, share some words on a piece of paper. And Minerva, if you could organize for me or Janet, so that we can take the pulse of the folks in the room as well. Minerva, Janet, you can just maybe help guide them when I call for it. Help us understand what's in the room.

Okay, beautiful. So some of the experiences are trickling in. Someone said, "I want to deepen my knowledge. I want to learn more about your perspective. I want to experience connectedness and safety, and feel calm and joy and a beautiful balance between empathy

and academic expectations." Oh, I hear that! I teach law school. And the word that grates on me is when people talk about rigor, right? As if the only rigor that's possible is when we're harming our students. Maybe there's more available to us.

Others have said, "Deepen the internal and external perspective. Strategies for helping younger children deal with trauma in the classroom. Oh, that's brilliant. I confess to you, I am a law professor. I teach students who are around 25 years old, right? And we know that the experience is very different. But perhaps for those of you who teach younger children, we have more in common than you think. Because emotion is a dirty word in law school. And so we will definitely try to bring in some of the distinctions between older and younger students.

Janet, I wonder if you can just ask maybe three people in the room to share what's true for them.

[Audience]: The words I came up with were "give hope, preserve and intend beautiful." Someone else want to share? Be brave.

You're letting the Zoom Room people show you up now

"Encouraged, assist, care. "

"I wrote, empathize, individualize and reflect."

Wonderful, wonderful. Thank you so much. We can start to feel what the Jugians call the temenos. The container in the room is starting to kind of sizzle a little bit. I am a storyteller, and I know that moment where people start to engage a little bit more. The room is warming up. It doesn't mean I can plunge in the deep end of the ocean, but it does mean that we can go a little bit deeper. And a little bit deeper is always good.

## **Introduction to the Neuropsychobiology of Trauma For Educators**

So let's talk about what's going to be our theme for today. Not surprisingly, it's about trauma. We're going to start out by focusing on the neuropsychobiology of trauma. I like to start with focusing in on understanding the window of tolerance. And we'll talk a little bit more about what that is, right. It's essentially about how we get dysregulated -- how we go beyond our

capacity to take in anything more. And how we become re-regulated. How we come back to ourselves.

The window of tolerance is a term coined by psychiatrists and educator, Dr. Dan Siegel. He defines it as something like this: When we exist inside this window of tolerance, we're in our regulated state. We function at our optimal best, we relate well to ourselves and others and we learn effectively. So imagine if you opened up a window and you saw a mermaid swimming by you could wave to her not scream and cry, and imagine the end of the world is coming because this foreign thing has interrupted what you're used to. We can take in new events. But what happens when we find ourselves outside of this window?

So here we are within our window of tolerance, all is well. And then an event happens. And then all hell breaks loose because we're below our window of tolerance. One possibility is we fall into what's called hypo arousal, which is a state of freeze or collapse, right. And it's defined as when one has little affect -- not much emotional resonance, right? Some people would call it going blank, like this poor dog here who just has no energy. And that affect is due to an overloaded parasympathetic nervous system. Some of us, when we're overloaded, simply collapse on ourselves. We want to be invisible.

Some of the issues that arise from this hypo arousal state include sleep issues. So your student might be sleeping in the room while you're talking. Eating issues. It's an emotional numbness. A way of not feeling anything. Socially withdrawn. So that student in the back of the room who's not even looking at you when you're engaging with the rest of the class. And difficulty in self expression. Going over and asking someone in hypo arousal, "Hey, what's wrong?" is not going to get you very far. They're lost. They're deep in that collapsed state, and they cannot tell you with words what's going on.

Then, of course, there's high hyper arousal. [We might call it] The Crazy Cat syndrome. And in there, what you have is this heightened activation state. It's the sense the nervous system kicks into overdrive. The problem with that is one can seem almost manic, and you're in the state of high alertness, even when danger is not present. Something has triggered your nervous system. And you are so engaged in whatever that something is that you're unable to recall that you're in the here- -and-now. You're in Connie's classroom in this moment. Instead, you're wherever the trauma was. And certain kinds of states that arise out of this hyper arousal can be fear, panic, you know, and, of course, anger. So as you can imagine, cat runs after dog and [all hell breaks loose]

Now, we're not the Buddha. None of us is capable of remaining within our window of tolerance 100% of the time. That's not the goal. The aim is to learn self regulation. How do we bring ourselves back within our window of tolerance? And how do we help our students to do the same? That's what's important so that the disruptions in the classroom aren't [continuous], and suddenly we're just completely unable to teach and students are unable to learn anything. I'm going to play a short video for you because I want you to see what the window of tolerance actually looks like. And I'm going to play this experiment it's one of the most reproduce experiments in psychology it's called the still face experiment. And as we watch it, I want you to ask yourself, Can you identify when the baby became dysregulated? That is when the her window of tolerance was reached, and she couldn't take anymore? And how did the baby return to its regulated state? In other words, how do you know what happened? Let's play the video.

[VIDEO:] Babies this young are extremely responsive to the emotions and the reactivity and the social interaction that they get from the world around them. This is something that we started studying 34 years ago when people didn't think that infants could engage in social interaction. And this still face experiment what the mother did was she sits down and she's playing with her baby who's about a year of age. And she gives a greeting to the baby, the baby gives a greeting back to her. Yeah, this baby starts pointing at different places in the world and the mother is trying to engage her and play with her.

They're working to coordinate their emotions and their intentions what they want to do in the world and that's really what the baby is used to. And then we asked the mother to not respond to the baby. The baby very quickly picks up on this. And then she uses all of her abilities to try and get the mother back. She smiles at the mother. She points because she's used to the mother looking where she points. The baby puts both hands up in front of her and says, what's happening here? Oh, she makes that screechie sound at the mother, like, Come on, why aren't we doing this? Even in this two minutes, when they don't get the normal reaction, they react with negative emotions, they turn away, they feel the stress of it, they actually may lose control of their posture because of the stress that they're experiencing.

It's a little like, The Good, the Bad, and The Ugly. The good is that normal stuff that goes on that we all do with our kids. The bad is when something bad happens but the

infant can overcome it. After all, when you stop the still face, the mother and the baby start to play again. The ugly is when you don't give the child any chance to get back to the good. There is no reparation, and they're stuck in that really ugly situation.

Great, thank you so much, you can stop now. That will never not be heart wrenching. I know there must be a lot of parents in the room who feel the same. First of all, what a brave mother for having that experiment. I don't know that I could do it with my own child. And we might think that that is just about the Mother--Child bond. But actually, that also holds true outside of the mother--child bond. Particularly in younger children, teachers play such an integral role. And what we know is our nervous system is regulated through relationships with others. And so if we are constantly feeling like we're never being met by the people in our lives, including the teachers in our lives, we feel that sense of dysregulation.

I know Dena did a great talk about empathy in her session. And that is part of what we're getting at here. That we as teachers, when our students walk in, and they're completely traumatized. They're either in hypo arousal, or hyper arousal, and we're simply not attuning to that at all. We're just saying, hey, you know, the session for today is on the War of 1812. There's something missing, and one can feel completely disconnected from that. You might wonder, then what separates those of us who have a higher window of tolerance? Why are we able to take in more versus those [who can't]? And the answer, of course, is trauma. For those who have been traumatized--and right now you're all traumatized; we're living in this collective traumatic experience known as COVID-19 and its aftermath. But some of us have layers of trauma on top of that. And so our window of tolerance decreases as a result.

So the primary question we have to ask ourselves is what is trauma? The American Psychiatric Association has the definition for that. They define trauma as an event that is outside the range of normal human experience, and it involves exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, sexual violence, etc, etc.

But one of the preeminent scholar practitioners of the field of trauma, Peter Levine takes issue with this definition. What Dr. Levine says is, people don't need a definition of trauma, we need an experience of how it feels. Why? Because trauma is an embodied and phenomenological experience. That is, each of us experiences it differently based on our prior experiences or prior life path.

Levine argues that taking the APA definition at face value, it can be over- or under-inclusive. So for example, accidents, illnesses and surgeries are generally regarded as falling within the range of human experience. Yet we know that those experiences can be traumatizing. They can lead to PTSD and worse in some people, particularly in young children. Right? Premies, for example--though they don't know as older children or even adults that they had had this difficult experience in childhood -- can still suffer from its impacts. And Levine also points out the definition can be over-inclusive. So, for example, some people live in war zones where certain traumatic experiences, including sexual violence, is an everyday occurrence. But it remains traumatic no matter how often it happens. And so what Levine calls for is for us to understand that trauma is unique to us [as individuals], to our own psyche, our own soma, or bodies, our own lived experience.

And here I want to share with you a little part of my research. I asked one of my law students to explain her experience of trauma in the classroom. In law school, we teach by the Socratic method. Students are called on to give us a recitation of the case or to explain a legal reasoning. Our students are constantly on tetherhooks, not knowing when [we] are going to strike. Our students are concerned about the fear of looking stupid in front of their friends, the fear of not knowing. And so my student explained her experience of law school classroom trauma in this way. What does trauma feel like for her? She says, fear of the Socratic methods feels like the walls closing in the room shrinking the sense of overwhelm, right. And the entire room is spotlighted and focused on her. Everyone else disappears. And most importantly, "I can no longer hear what the professor is saying." Just this high pitched ringing whine and her heart beating. And she's cold in a very hot room.

Now, most of you probably don't use the Socratic method. But remember, trauma is personal. And I guarantee you there are moments in your own classroom where this experience is happening for your students. What's important to grab -- first of all, my student is a brilliant writer -- but the point that hits most particularly for me is when she says "I can no longer hear what the professor is saying." The Socratic method is a dialogue in which I'm asking ever more intense questions. If she can't even hear me, what is she learning? How are we moving forward?

And so similarly for you, if you're not engaging, if you're not aware where your student is, in the moment, nothing is getting through. The window of tolerance has been reached, and no learning is happening right now. So good luck talking. I can say this to this group, because maybe we have a shared cultural knowledge: it's like watching Snoopy and Charlie Brown.

Remember the voice of that teacher? Wah, wah wah. Exactly, Lisa. Exactly. It's like that. That's what our students are hearing from us.

## Forms of Trauma

I want to talk a little bit about the various forms of trauma that can show up in your classroom. Certainly, there are way more traumas than this, but this is like a guidepost to help you engage along the way. I saw a question will I be providing my notes? Absolutely. So you'll have these for your benefit.

### Individual Trauma

One [form of trauma] that we know very well in an individualistic society like the United States is individual trauma. The traumatic event happened to you. And if it's a one-off traumatic event that your body and your psyche interprets as trauma, it's considered shock, like a car accident, a mugging, a rape. You could also have developmental trauma, which is, you know, a series of events happening over the course of the developmental stages of your life, like childhood sexual abuse. And as you can imagine, those experiences are very different. They're treated very differently in the therapist's office, and they'll have different ramifications in the classroom. Another form of individual trauma is vicarious trauma. That is, for those of us who attend to the needs of the traumatized victim, who hear their stories, we too can become traumatized. Second hand. By virtue of hearing [about the trauma. We as human beings, our nervous systems are correlated to one another. And we too, if we're not careful, can experience secondary or vicarious trauma by virtue of hearing the experiences of another. And by the way, this includes teachers, first responders, doctors, all of that.

### Collective Trauma

A second form of trauma is collective trauma, which is not about the individual. It's where we as a collective experience the same event: COVID [for example]. And even though COVID might have different individual impacts, if your mother or your father died, it's a very different experience from someone like me who didn't have that. But we also have a shared collective experience of what it means to have gone through this. And one scholar calls collective trauma "a blow to the basic tissue of life." It damages our social bonds, and it produces disordered feelings and behaviors in the populace. Even if your student never got COVID, even if your

student never had somebody die from COVID in their family, it is part of the Zeitgeist. It is in the air at this point. And it impacts who we are and how we behave. I'm sure you've seen the videos on Twitter, right? About the ways in which we no longer seem to be able to engage with one another as human beings. And fighting and the coarseness of our culture -- that is part of the collective trauma we're experiencing.

## **Cultural and Transgenerational Trauma**

And then the third possibility is cultural and transgenerational trauma. I know that for most of you in Mendocino County, you're dealing with a Native American population that has a different form of cultural history than, say, African Americans or Black people across the diaspora, which is my work with. But cultural and transgenerational trauma, holds true no matter what. It is about when the group has been subjected to a traumatic experience. And it leaves an indelible mark on group consciousness. It becomes part of our collective narratives, the stories we tell ourselves. We live and breathe this right. And it can show up at macro and micro levels--whether individual families, say through alcoholism. Or across nation. And the trauma impacts the stories we tell ourselves the institutions and political conflicts, right. And guess what we also know that that is inherited. Right? Through are a series of studies on mice and rats. For example. one fascinating one was where scientists trained one generation of mice to be fearful of a particular smell by exposing them to that smell and giving them a shock. Seven generations later, the great great great great great grandchildren of that original generation still fears the smell, though they have had no direct connection. They've never been shocked, but they still feel and have that experience [to the smell]. They have never been shocked. So trauma can be inherited.

## **Moral Injury**

And then the fourth and final form of trauma I want to discuss with you is moral injury. And that is a form of trauma that is [relatively] new in the discussion on trauma. But it's important for us particularly as teachers to be aware of because we've been failed by our institutions. Moral injury occurs in response to either witnessing acting or failing to act when we see behavior that goes against our values or moral beliefs. Or the individual experiences of betrayal from peers or leadership or others in positions of power. [For example]: Teachers being forced to work in a classroom settings where the air is not good, where children do not have what they need, where sick children are allowed to come and engage, and where the leadership simply is not

doing what they need to do to keep us all safe. One who suffers from moral injury feels that distressing psychological, behavioral and social impact of the moral injury trauma.

I want to pause for a moment and just check for time. Minerva, or Janet, can you give me an update? How much time do we have? We started a bit late. 15 minutes? Yes. Okay, perfect. Thank you so much.

## **Racism as Individual, Collective, Cultural and Moral Injury Trauma**

Out of the exigencies of time, I want to use just one example to explore the range of traumas [that can show up in the classroom]. So I want to talk about racism as personal, collective, and cultural trauma. So all of it in one go. And in this next section, I'd like to provide you with a content warning. A constant warning just gives you a little bit of an overview about what's coming up. Here, I'm going to share with you a short animated clip that I've done, which is about a series of true stories. In them are racist language, depictions of violence, and in particular, the sound of gunfire. I want you to carefully calibrate your window tolerance, and do what you need to do to take care of yourself in the moment. So with that caveat, let's get going. And as I said, these are true stories.

[Animated short playing]

Wait, that's not right. I promise to tell you a true story.

Yeah, that's better. That's what's true.

It was a beautiful June day. The birds were chirping, and the air smelled like Jasmine. It was the kind of day where, if you were a kid living in California, you'd probably call it a beach day. But you know how adults are. We wake up on days like that and say to ourselves: I better get to the grocery shopping. So off you go to the grocery store. And then this happens.

Sir, there's a line behind I hate rude black hoes. Black people deserve to be blown up. It says so in the Bible.

It was another beautiful summer day-- this time in Buffalo, New York. Some of the adults of that city also decided to go grocery shopping. What they didn't know was that there would be a 19-year-old white supremacist waiting for them. He spent a lot of his time watching Fox News and growing angrier that Black people, who make up 13% the

US population, were going to "replace him." Also, he wanted to go to prison. You see, he had a dental problem. And all the dentists in his rich suburban land couldn't seem to fix it. So our white supremacist decided he'd get some of that sweet state-of-the-art medical attention that Tucker Carlson told him all US prisoners receive.

So that's the setup. And then this happened.

Wait! Did you think it was over? No, he kept shooting, and more people died. I just couldn't bear the sound of that assault rifle anymore. It's beyond my window of tolerance. But I also can't look away. I can't forget the six more who died and the three who were seriously injured. So this is what we're going to do.

Let me stop here for a moment and ask you to breathe with me. So let's just take three deep breaths and let them out.

So I know the story is true because it happened to me. I went to my grocery store in California, I was accosted by that White man. I had the experience of being surrounded by people, but everything fell away. And when the men threatened me, claiming Black people should be, blown up, it says so in the Bible there was no one available to step in. And the experience was personal trauma. It was cultural trauma. It was collective trauma. It was all of those things. It was personal in the sense that I had the somatic experience in my body, that sense of everything falling away, and me falling into hypo arousal. What are you even supposed to do in a moment like this? I'm not sure I remembered to breathe even. It was certainly cultural and collective trauma. I was very aware of what had happened in Buffalo just three weeks earlier.

The impact of the experience of what happened to me was that within six weeks, I was on a plane, and I had left the country. I went to St. Croix, a majority black space in the US Virgin Islands, because I needed to feel safe. And now I'm in Mexico. My wife is actually in the Zoom Room, and she can attest to reality. What it means to have separated our family--to be away from my spouse, my daughter, and my dogs. It was essential for me to be in a place where my nervous system could be repaired. And the United States, all of it, the millions of acres of it, simply did not feel safe to me. And that is an example of how a single experience is capable of being [all of those forms of trauma].

## **Racial Trauma in the Classroom**

So let's walk this experience into a classroom. Because guess what? When that happened to me, I was a professor, and a PhD student -- as well as a mom, a business owner. I can tell you that my experience as a student, I had two very different experiences. In one class that I was taking, the professor was incredibly empathic and engaged. We had a relationship. She happened to be French, and I'm Francophone. I'm Haitian American. And so we were very connected in that way. And I felt her hold the space for me. And I was able to engage even as I was packing and doing all of those things, I prepared a beautiful paper for her because I felt very connected in my other class. Not so with my other class and professors. It was such a terrible experience when I explained [to them] what had happened to me. [I did not feel empathy from them]. I simply had to take an incomplete in that class. And so I have to pay the cost of taking the class again. Part of the problem was the relationship wasn't there [with those professors]. Now, I needed recovery, and no amount of like talking was going to do everything that I needed. But in one class I was able to finish with flying colors (Okay, I got an A minus instead of my usual A plus). In the other class I had to make do with an incomplete This is how powerful teachers can be for for these kinds of traumatic experiences.

And in the time we have remaining together, I just want to round out the discussion by talking about transformation. As I said earlier, this is not a story about hopelessness, and helplessness. And I want to share a little bit about what we can do as teachers in this moment. I do have a little fact pattern that I would have otherwise shared with you as a case profile. But you'll have it and can read it do it later on. Time does not permit us to do it together, unfortunately.

## **Transformation**

So here we are, in this discussion, then of transformation. Where do we go from here? What do we do from here? I want you to know that all is not lost because of resilience. We have the capacity to nurture resilience in our students. There's so much that we can talk about here, but the three key tools that I want to explore today are: the teacher as transformational leader, presencing, trauma, and techniques of working with trauma. All of those are capable of creating and constructing the resilience that we want for our students.

## **The Teacher as Transformational Leader**

So the teacher as transformational leader, I know you've all heard this before, and I'm going to say to you again: First, take care of yourself. On the plane, we're trained to put that oxygen mask on ourselves first so that we can help others. It's the same with being a teacher. If you're suffering from some forms of burnout, or trauma, vicarious trauma, moral injury, those need to be tended to. I had to leave the country. Nothing else was possible. And if you're not tending to yourself, if you're just using band aids, right, then all you're doing is making yourself more capable of holding up unjust systems.

So for me, though I am engaging in mindfulness training and I have a spiritual life, and I have all of these tools and resources available to me. Doing all of that work in the United States was simply upholding a system that was unjust. I had to pull back. I had to say no, and then come back later? I'm not gone forever. But this is what I needed, first and foremost, to repair all of the ranges of injury, including moral injury, including the failure of leadership that I see, that led to what happened to me. And what happened to those victims in Buffalo. Those traumas must be attended to first.

## **Presencing Trauma**

Second is presencing trauma. How many times has trauma showed up in our students? We've heard George Floyd incident. There are so many incidents after that. [Tyre] Nichols [incident] just happened the other day. We can barely keep up. If you're just pretending that these things are not happening, never talking about them in the room, you're simply forcing your students to swallow them whole.

What the studies have demonstrated is, for example, your African American students, your Native American students, are impacted differently than White students. What researchers have discovered is that police violence against innocent unarmed black people impact pregnant African American mothers and their babies. It has impact on African American schoolchildren, but not White ones. So you might think everything is fine. The class is fine. I assure you, the community suffering collective and cultural trauma is not fine. One of the things that you could do is simply presence trauma, learn how to hold deep, difficult conversations.

## Techniques of Working With Trauma

And then finally, there are so many techniques of working with trauma. One of the things that I do--which I did here-- is pause and breathe. Another option, which you might find this strange, but I do this in my law school classroom: It's called laughter yoga. And yes, if you've never heard of it, it exists. And sometimes I force my law students to laugh for 60 seconds, nonstop. And yes, they feel foolish. But you know, it often leads to real laughter. And even if it doesn't, our nervous system knows no different. We're replicating the sense of wholeness, the breath work that says we're doing okay. Try that. If I can try it in the law school classroom, you can try it in your classrooms, right?

Another little techniques, for hypoarousal is holding something that has texture to it. When your student is in collapse, you could give them something to hold on to. For me, I find holding onto a hot cup of tea can help bring me back into myself. So when I have to teach very difficult material, like what I had to do now, I have my cup available. There's something about heat and cold that brings us back.

With hyperarousal, with a student bouncing all over the place, you must become the calm point. Because again, our nervous systems, we co regulate each other. And if you can do that for your student, often, you can bring them back to a place of serenity.

## Conclusion

Obviously, those are just a handful of techniques. But I know we're organizing something for you in April. So hopefully some of you will be back in the room together, and we can talk about it more.

For now. I want to end with this quote by the Jungian analyst Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estes, because it beautifully tells us who we need to be in this moment. And it goes something like this.

My friends, we were made for these times. That's why we're here. That's why we're in the classroom. And so take heart. Have heart. We are needed in this moment. Thank you so much