

Some takeaways from:**Hartford Performs Professional Learning Workshop for Teaching Artists
“Establishing a Restorative Environment Using a Trauma-Informed Approach”****November 12, 2019, with follow up on December 5, 2019****Presenter: Candace Chester, HPS Assistant Director for Student Engagement & Behavior Support***These notes supplement Candace’s excellent PowerPoint presentation.*

Thoughts on sharing circles:

- We’re all on equal ground; we all have equal voice.
- Your participation creates what our experience is together.
- Creates a sense of community.
- Brings everyone together to resolve, rebuild, restore.
- Circles are a common practice among many indigenous communities.
- Include a centerpiece of things that identify you as a community.
- Begin with a very low-level, low-risk check in, such as name and one favorite thing.
- Make it clear that anyone is allowed to take a pass.
- Include a mindfulness minute to clear our minds. We can miss something important if we’re always on to the next thing.

When working with children (or anyone, for that matter), don’t confuse the roles someone plays or the things they do, with their core self or true self. The outside of an oyster may be rough, but inside, at its core, is a smooth, beautiful pearl.

Hartford Public Schools’ policy is to value everything about the student. The goal is to support each student unconditionally, not based on their behavior.

You need to know yourself before you know your students. Ask yourself: What is your bias? Figure out what in you makes it difficult to be nonjudgmental with students.

One key indicator of success for students is to have positive relationships with caring adults. As a teaching artist who interacts with students only briefly, it’s unlikely that you’ll form a strong relationship with a student but remember that even one encounter with a caring adult can have a positive result for a child.

Be aware that behavior you see from students might result from Transference. If someone in a yellow sweater just yelled at them, and you walk in wearing a yellow sweater, the student might react to you based on their feelings about the person who just yelled at them. Don’t take it personally. Try to understand the student’s perspective. Don’t lower your expectations, make space for whatever the student might be experiencing inside.

Think about what your response needs to be in a situation, rather than what your reaction to it is.

Just because a student learns differently doesn’t mean that student doesn’t learn. As a teaching artist who interacts with each class for a short period of time, you won’t know each student’s circumstances. You might ask the teacher in advance about any exceptionalities they might anticipate in the classroom so you can be prepared. On the plus side, though, being able to come in fresh with no preconceived notions may be helpful; often the students who are the most challenged thrive when presented with the opportunity to be creative.

Be aware that any student – not just those from Hartford – might have experienced one or more of the kinds of trauma described in slide 14. Then try to approach every student as if they were experiencing one of those types of trauma. How much more grace would each of us have if we did that?

Any kind of household disruption can be an ACE: Adverse Childhood Experience. But: people react differently to the same situation. What one child finds traumatic, another may not. It's the perception and emotional interpretation of a situation that makes something traumatic or not. So don't over-pathologize students who have experiences that are different from your own.

A fight or flight response isn't necessarily a bad thing. Try reframing it as a positive: fighting or fleeing can be a sign that the student is doing something about what is causing them trauma.

Pay attention to nonverbal responses. To reduce stress, decrease your proximity to the student. Limit physical contact.

As artists, we tend to like to like to surprise our audience with "the reveal." Keep in mind that not everyone does well with surprises, and that surprises can be triggering for children who are dealing with trauma. Talk with the teacher in advance about known triggers. Explain to the students in advance what's going to happen. Try to do things in groups, rather than with individual students. Try to engage everyone, but don't push it, especially in a one-visit situation.

It's important to give students a clear understanding of what's coming next – because, sometimes, students are in uncertain situations.

Provide options for students. Not everyone is going to respond the way we anticipate. Have teachers help you with some of the decision-making in the moment. For instance, have the teacher decide which students are going to perform some aspect of your program (demonstrating a move, reading a line, etc.).

Remember that people show appreciation in different ways. Everyone might not always applaud. In some cases, a child just sitting and watching is a big win.

To de-escalate a situation, Connect before you Correct. As long as safety allows, emphasize the relationship with the student over getting the student to comply. Be particularly mindful of your posture and body language in these situations.

Listen to what students are saying and affirm what they say, even if you can't answer their question.

Try this suggested 5-minute protocol as the start for every program:

- Gather the class (in a circle if possible). Include the teacher.
- Ask the teacher what the classroom rules are.
- Show students that you're in agreement with those rules.
- If you have any additional rules or expectations for the program, say what they are.
- Ask the teacher and students to voice acceptance of those.
- Briefly review the agenda for the program (that you will have brought with you on chart paper).

Model the behavior you want students to adopt. For instance, in an unexpected or difficult situation, acknowledge what happened ("That sound startled me. Did it startle you, too?") then get back to work. Say that problems happen and that we make adjustments.

Teaching artists and teachers should model good behavior – communication, problem solving – by how they deal with each other in the classroom.

Hartford Public Schools has said it will be a restorative district, and is educating teachers, paras and others about how to bring that about.

Restorative practice is based on community. If some harm happens in a community, it needs to be restored. We all are responsible for our community. Community needs to be a safe place for everyone in it: we may not all be friends, but in this space, this is what we need to have happen for everyone to feel safe. Sharing builds community. Being respectful builds community. Punishment does not restore community.

Restorative practice is not a quick fix. It takes time. But if we don't repair what has been breached, we are just covering up the problem.

Recognize that a student's behavior is separate from who that student is. Instead of thinking "that's a troublesome student," consider that the student just didn't have the skill to manage the emotion.

Punishment is isolation or separation from the community. It does not teach the student better skills to manage the problem. Likewise, if we give rewards to one student, we may be punishing a student who hasn't developed a particular skill yet.

The use of consequences is different from punishment. Students need to understand the consequences of their actions. Teach the "why," not just "don't do this."

Discipline is a decision for action that comes from inside the individual. Teaching students to be disciplined is very different from imposing discipline on them.

If students value a person or activity, they can take responsibility for it. A student's first impression of who you are establishes the tone and relationship. If it's positive, the student can be accountable for respecting it.

We can't repair harm in a space that people don't feel connected to and value.

Sometimes, if a student's behavior is disruptive to the group, they might need a minute outside of the group to get themselves together. Then, be sure to invite and welcome them back into the community when they're ready.

Remember to "build the we" – create the community.