

The Post-Traumatic Growth Experience

42nd Annual National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology

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ABSTRACT

- There are significant barriers while learning inside the prison walls
- Research indicates that incarcerated individuals strongly benefit from educational opportunities
→ Shown by significantly lower recidivism rates
- Students, faculty, and currently incarcerated men collaborated to create and implement a psycho-educational curriculum on trauma, PTSD, and post-traumatic growth and soul wounds/moral injury
- Summer 2019: Team developed the curriculum
- Fall 2019: Team implemented the curriculum
- Goal: To innovate the educational pedagogy to help those incarcerated understand, cope with, and grow from trauma
- Curriculum design: An 8-week, 1.5-hour format, following a macro to micro approach
- Intention: To expand the curriculum to other settings of incarceration

KEY TERMS

- Post-traumatic Growth (PTG): A theory that explains the transformation people who endure psychological trauma have, allowing them to experience positive growth afterward (APA, 2019)
- Moral Injury/Soul Wounds: “the damage done to one’s conscience or moral compass when that person perpetrates, witnesses, or fails to prevent acts that transgress one’s own moral beliefs, values, or ethical codes of conduct” (Moral Injury Project)
- Trauma: “an emotional response to a terrible event” (APA, 2019)

8-WEEK CURRICULUM

SESSION 1: OPENING

- Introduce everyone and complete icebreakers
- Perform skits that encompass all of the topics
- Go over key terms
- Write “Letters to My Future Self”

SESSION 2: COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL TRAUMA

- Define community and environmental trauma
- Discuss the difference and the effects
- Perform the four corners activity and discuss

SESSION 3: PEER PRESSURE

- Define peer pressure (positive vs. negative)
- Read case scenarios: What would you do?

SESSION 4: RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS/SMALL WORLD EFFECT

- Review healthy vs. unhealthy relationships
- Discuss boundaries
- Discuss the Small World Effect: Snowball exercise

SESSION 5: SELF-WORTH/SELF-ESTEEM

- Turn a negative into a positive (exercise)
- Discuss healthy self-worth and self-esteem practices
- Perform the compliment exercise

SESSION 6: IDENTIFYING AND RECOGNIZING TRIGGERS

- Define internal triggers and external triggers
- Discuss coping strategies

SESSION 7: REINVENTING YOURSELF/ MOVING BEYOND STUCK

- Review what was learned
- Identify steps moving forward
- Open “Letters to My Future Self” and evaluate progress

SESSION 8: CLOSING

- Tie together loose ends regarding curriculum
- Reflect, discuss, and deliver closing remarks
- Say farewells

MOVING FORWARD

- Review of the curriculum
 - Exit-surveys
- Schedule changes
- Faculty changes
- Larger group of facilitators
- Larger group of participants
- Continue to research the topics surrounding post-traumatic growth
 - Continue to refine the curriculum
- Present at more conferences
 - Make connections and learn from others
 - Spread information
 - Expand our impact

Citations

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There are significant barriers to learning inside prison walls. The research indicates that incarcerated individuals strongly benefit from educational opportunities as exemplified by their significantly lower recidivism rates. The value of education can foster a greater sense of self-esteem as well as facilitate successful re-entry into the community. The goal of this research is to help enlighten prisoners' minds through education and assist them in growing from their trauma. Students, faculty, and men currently incarcerated in a state medium security prison collaborated to design and implement a psycho-educational curriculum on trauma, PTSD, and review recent research on post-traumatic growth and soul wounds/moral injury. The research team developed the curriculum that was implemented in the fall of 2019. The team is innovating the educational pedagogy to help those incarcerated to understand, cope with, and grow from the trauma they have experienced. The curriculum is designed to be delivered in an 8-week, 1.5-hour format that fits well within the prison schedule. The curriculum fits a macro to micro level approach. The topics covered during the eight-week program include community and environmental trauma, peer pressure, relationships with others, self-worth/self-esteem, identifying and recognizing triggers, and reinventing yourself/moving beyond stuck. The goal of this curriculum is to reduce the educational barriers often faced when incarcerated and to help those currently incarcerated experience post-traumatic growth, allowing them to grow from their trauma. Following the first training in the fall of 2019, exit interviews were used to refine the curriculum as needed. The plan is to continue with new training groups each semester. Sharing the curriculum with other institutions of incarceration, as well as addressing the need for more trauma education in criminal justice systems, remains central to our ongoing work.

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