



# Resilience and Learning Minds

Gina Rae Foster, PhD

Director, John Jay Teaching and Learning Center

John Jay College of Criminal Justice



# Welcome and Introductions (in the chat)

- Name (what you want us to call you and how to pronounce)
- Pronouns (they/she/he etc.)
- Affiliation (where you work and in what roles)
- Today's primary learning goal in 1-2 words



# Today's Learning Objectives

1. We will understand the basics of **how minds learn** in ideal circumstances.
2. We will compare **resilient and traumatized learning minds** in four areas: attention, memory, production, and performance.
3. We will consider **the Resiliency Principles** and their applications to learning minds.
4. We will discuss **the STAR Dynamics** and their applications to assignments and student communications.



# Our Students, Systemic Oppression & Trauma

Many of our students live with

- **food insecurity**
- **housing insecurity**
- **contingent, underpaid jobs (below poverty level)**
- **family and others dependent on their income and labor**
- **physical and mental health issues**
- **experiences of active and passive racism, misogyny, religious and gender bias**
- **inadequate K-12 education foundations**

\*Please keep in mind that we do have students who identify with economic, racial, religious, and gender privileges: the list on this slide speaks to many and by no mean ALL of our students.



# How Can Any of Us Think?

In the midst of trauma, disruption, illness, and scarcity, how can we think?

1. We want to **focus** our attention. We are frequently interrupted.
2. We want to **remember**. We have difficulty retaining information.
3. We want to **connect** our knowledge. We mistrust what we know.
4. We want to **present** ourselves well. We believe we are imposters.



# Learning Minds in Action

1. We **encounter** a new stimulus or challenge.
2. We **evaluate** the stimulus as too easy, too hard, or worth learning.
3. We **take in** information about the stimulus.
4. We **practice** replicating this information until we can repeat it when asked.
5. We **connect** multiple pieces of repeatable information into chunks.
6. We **connect** multiple chunks of information to create the solution to the stimulus.
7. At every step, we **fail** to function perfectly or effectively.
8. After each failure, we either make effective or ineffective **adjustments** to align ourselves with what is successful.
9. **Selection, practice, connection, failure,** and **adjustment** are the mind's steps toward learning.





# Disruptions to Learning Minds

When our minds experience trauma, mental health challenges, and systemic oppression, in any combination, we tend to experience learning mind disruptions as well:

- imbalances to our sympathetic and parasympathetic **regulation** (easily triggered, numb)
- Imbalances to our **attention** (easily distracted, obsessive focus)
- imbalances to short term and long term **memory formation** (unable to repeat information accurately, unable to identify connections between memorized knowledge and skills)

There are more expressions of learning mind interruptions, and these help us understand how easily the processes of learning can be disrupted for a single task as well as an entire course.

# Minds at Work: Comparisons

## Minds at Work

Traumatized Mind	Working Mind	Learning Mind
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• difficulty filtering stimuli (distraction)</li> <li>• inconsistent focus</li> </ul>	Attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• actively filters stimuli</li> <li>• actively maintains focus</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• difficulty retaining information</li> <li>• difficulty organizing information, even with practice</li> </ul>	Memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• actively retains information</li> <li>• actively organizes information with practice</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• difficulty connecting ideas and skills</li> <li>• difficulty understanding contexts</li> <li>• difficulty creating coherent projects for external audiences</li> </ul>	Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• actively connects ideas and skills</li> <li>• actively sees contexts</li> <li>• actively creates coherent projects for external audiences</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• difficulty identifying appropriate external audiences</li> <li>• difficulty communicating projects appropriately or coherently to external audiences</li> <li>• difficulty distinguishing between performance/presentation and personal life</li> </ul>	Performance/presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• actively identifies appropriate external audiences</li> <li>• actively communicates projects appropriately or coherently to external audiences</li> <li>• actively distinguishes between performance/presentation and personal life</li> </ul>

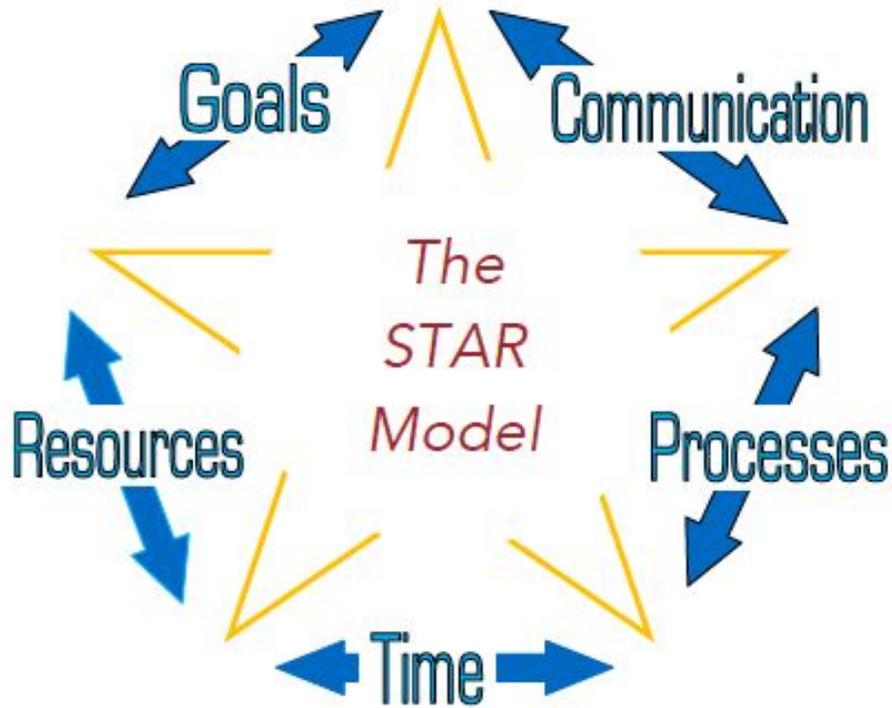
# The Resiliency Principles: Diagnosing Learning Challenges



# Finding the Center in Resiliency



# The STAR Dynamics: Designing Learning Interventions



# Where Do We Start?

In designing learning interventions, **it's helpful to identify the Resiliency Principles and the STAR Dynamics most at risk** in what we observe

- For example, **consistent late work** may indicate issues with TIME and with either STABILITY or CAPACITY (no stable routines, not enough time). Asking students to create time management plans when they receive an assignment may help. Asking students to create time “budgets” to help them “spend” the time they have to best effect is another strategy.
- Another example are **discussion posts and responses that do not address the topic or question**. This may indicate issues with GOALS and FLEXIBILITY (not understanding the purpose of the prompt or question, not being able to shift from one line of thought or expectation to another). Asking students to name or rephrase the purpose of the question before answering may improve students' focus. We might also try asking students to name what they were thinking about before answering the prompt and to make a connection between this to the purpose of the discussion. (caveat: we are not always thinking about topics that feel safe or appropriate to share).



# What Are the Wins?

There are substantial wins for both instructors and students in designing learning for traumatized minds.

1. **Nearly all students will benefit** from assignments and activities that reflect attention to the Resiliency Principles and the STAR Dynamics.
2. Realizing that students are frequently learning with traumatized encourages us to **address the needs of learning minds** rather than our expectations that all minds are ready to learn effectively and easily.
3. Embracing **the functionality of failure** in learning takes pressure off of ourselves and our students, once again shifting our attention to making learning effective rather than stopping the necessary processes of adjustment that help us grow.

and more!!!



# Thank You!

## **Gina Rae Foster, PhD**

Director, John Jay Teaching and Learning Center

John Jay College of Criminal Justice

Email: [gifoster@jjay.cuny.edu](mailto:gifoster@jjay.cuny.edu)

X: @GRFTeachLearn, @gina\_bird

Threads: @graebird68

Website: [ginaraefoster.com](http://ginaraefoster.com)