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TEACHING



TUESDAYS

Welcome to Teaching Tuesdays and our first Wellness Day of the semester. In this issue you'll find no news, nothing to think about or plan for – just thoughts about wellness and self-care. I hope you're taking the day to relax (and not grade). Enjoy this thoughtful and resource-packed column from Michelle Rodino-Colocino about how we can embrace wellness today (and every day).

Teaching Tuesdays - Michelle's Teaching Tips on Wellness

By Michelle Rodino-Colocino, associate professor of film production and media studies

First, I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss wellness for my colleagues. Thank you, Denise for this space. Thinking about wellness is first an act of taking care of oneself. Doing so publicly may inspire others to do the same. So, thank you! [Giving thanks](#) is also a step you can take to promote your own wellness, as doing so releases dopamine and serotonin and can help reduce inflammation, speed healing, and more good stuff.

Second, definitions: What the heck is wellness? Meriam-Webster defines [wellness](#) as “the quality or state of being in good health especially as an actively sought goal.” I want to emphasize that wellness is a verb. The idea of “actively” seeking or pursuing is key in institutes of wellness like the [Global Wellness Institute](#). Also, note that the idea of “seeking” wellness is the key activity here (not necessarily an end state), more on that later.

Before we go any further, I also want to share that wellness has also been constituted by, well, **whiteness**.

As Charisma Madarang, an editor in the health and wellness industry, puts it in a [recent essay](#), she's often been the only Person of Color in her team meetings, and only one of a handful at international conferences. It is good to know that Penn State is asking students and faculty to prioritize wellness in response to the psychological, physical, and economic stress that many of us are dealing with under the pandemic. To my white colleagues: we should also heed Madarang's call to realize that today's physical, mental, psychological, and economic crisis is adding onto centuries of systemic racism for our BIPOC colleagues.

Thus, I contend that in addition to practicing individual wellness, we practice community wellness and wellness for the common good. That means working to end systemic white supremacy and how plays out in

smaller ways. What would that look like? Paying attention to the language we use and adding “healing,” “resilience” and “self-care” to our “wellness” searches is a start. These concepts seem to be more inclusive than “wellness,” a term that targets white cis het folks without disabilities.



[The Rochester Racial Justice Institute Toolkit](#) includes a section on Healing, Self-Care and Joy for people of color. There are also many helpful resources that Black Lives Matter ([Healing in Action](#)) and Me Too ([Survivor Healing Series](#)) have been sharing, along with activities and events on Zoom. These resources will be helpful to folks engaged in activism for Black Liberation, against sexual harassment and assault, for survivors, and even for folks who do not identify as activists and survivors. (I’ve attended Me Too’s Survivor Healing Series events online and they’ve been great. Hopefully they will do more. You can watch [past sessions here.](#)) [GLADD](#) also has resources for self-care and healing for LGBTQ folks. Also, see this essay on [queer self-care during a pandemic](#). Radical [self-care for people with disabilities](#) and finding “[wholeness without healing](#)” also share helpful insights you might want to practice or share with your students. [Madgrang shares resources](#) and ideas for (white) folks who want to learn more about white privilege, intersectional feminism, and how to be an antiracist, and take action to end systems of oppression and make our communities caring ones for everyone. [Taking steps to make the world a better place, getting involved in a movement for social justice can also be good for your wellbeing.](#)

Where to begin: Do you want to practice wellness, healing, resilience, or self-care on one of the upcoming PSU Wellness Days and share knowledge with your students? As a faculty member who has been teaching and sharing practices about self-care essential to teaching to advance critical thinking, social justice, and as a participant and organizer in social justice movements, I can say that these practices are indeed essential during and beyond the pandemic.

First step: Lower your expectations. Be OK feeling awkward “practicing” wellness/self-care/healing. There are so many things you can do. In actions big and small, just do something. Feel OK if it doesn’t feel like you’re doing a lot. Many of us have been under so much stress for so long, the pandemic is just another brick in the wall. We may even feel additional stress to be more productive now that some people seem to be perfecting their sourdough loaves for all to see on social media. Don’t buy into the “[myth of pandemic productivity.](#)” [Practice self-compassion](#) and realize how hard the hill is you are climbing. Embrace a growth mindset about it all so that if you do not manage to do a single thing for your own care/health/wellness on Feb 9, you can have a “not yet” attitude and consider trying again.

Second Step: Here’s that callback you’ve been waiting for: [embracing a growth mindset also means embracing the process](#) (trademark, my mom). Seeking, trying, showing up for yourself to practice, that is good enough. Good enough is good enough. For now. Always for now. In fact, embracing a growth mindset, that even embraces failure puts us in a frame of mind to learn! To take risks and try new stuff! To change!

(Students who embrace a growth mindset also perform better because they actually learn more than those with a fixed mindset/ in a fixed mindset classroom –check out the Ted Talk by Carol Dwek in that last link!) Encouraging your students to embrace a growth mindset can also help them overcome, or at least confront, performance anxiety and focus on process and growth rather than “excellence,” a word that we might want to rethink as a means to measure success while we are at it.



Try one of the many wellness/healing/resilience/self-care practices suggested here or elsewhere. Here are a few more resources to check out and try on your own, share with students, maybe even try in the classroom (I’ve assigned the following in classes and practice these myself, so I am walking the talk :):

What is [mindfulness](#)? How did we not discuss mindfulness yet? A wonderful healing practice to try. It helps you be in the present and reduce anxiety. Also, most anxiety spells pass within 7 minutes, so even if you are not “reducing anxiety,” know it too will pass.

[Headspace](#) There’s an app for that –mindfulness (and a website too). My daughter and I do a Headspace activity every day and find lots of joy in this.

[Empathy](#) is your most important skill. How did we not discuss empathy yet? It’s good too!

Difference between [growth and fixed mindset](#). You science buffs are gonna love this!

[Yes, And](#) is how we learn, grow.

[How Improv Can Open Up the Mind to Learning](#) in the classroom and beyond. I love the yes, and. More on that in the future...

Last thoughts and an offer to connect about wellness/self-care/healing/resilience:

I just can’t emphasize Ana White’s point enough: Do not buy into the myth of pandemic productivity. I worry that I just assigned a massive amount of homework, adding to the stress of already overworked friends here in the Bellisario College. I just want to be one voice to say, “It’s OK if you feel like an absolute mess!” Take time to rest. To stare at a blank wall, the sky, the inside of your eyelids when you sleep longer or more often than you think you should. You also don’t have to do this alone. There are people who want to help you –call your supportive friends, family and just reach out. Or seek the help of professionals on the phone or on Zoom. Here’s some more resources for you, your family, your students:

Therapists nearby: There are a lot of therapists in the State College area who take insurance. Two of the

best therapists I've ever worked with are right here in State College (they see families too):

[Dr. D'Andre Wilson](#).

[Dr. Claudia Hutchinson](#).

If you or someone you know is thinking of hurting themselves, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800) 273- 8255

The lifeline also serves [several communities here](#).

Find [more crisis and helplines here](#).

[Lifelines for queer youth](#) from the It Gets Better Project.

Doing this work is hard. As I was gathering sources for this essay, an ad popped up for double-caffeinated blonde roast coffee pods. Ummmm, no. We do not need double strength coffee that's blonde. We just need to breathe in the good, out the bad, and try to make the world a better place for the people we share it with so we can promote each other's wellbeing. Just try one thing. And forgive yourself for messing up. Or for being a mess. Call me to talk more about any of this! 814-777-6965. You can text me there too! I am sending you all good energy.

Sincerely,

Michelle

Hope you enjoyed this issue. Keep an eye out for Teaching Tuesdays every Tuesday this semester. Want to read an earlier issue? You can find it in the Faculty/Staff Resources: <https://www.bellisario.psu.edu/faculty-staff-resources/teaching-tuesdays>

TEACHING TUESDAYS – Issue #19

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