

Emotional Wellness: Consciousness is Under the Rubble

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Introduction

This essay highlights how we can approach emotional awareness to address challenges as an individual (internal lens) and in the role as an educator (external lens) by working as a community taking a holistic approach. We end with inviting you, the reader, to join us in continuing the discussion of “what next?”

It is important for us to continue to gain a better understanding of emotional awareness. It allows us to have an improved state of consciousness seen through an internal and external lens. From an internal lens, we have a better understanding of self and how past experiences contributed to the person who exists today. From an external lens, it allows us to support others in our learning environment and community to remove obstacles to achieve success. Taking this approach of using both lenses is important as an educator who must take a holistic approach to empower others including our students and colleagues to achieve personal and professional goals.

Our conversations with others and our emotional wellness have become more strained as we wrestle with the aftermath of a pandemic, political turmoil, and escalated global conflict. How do we make a safe space for ourselves and our students while still maintaining a global consciousness?

We need a basic start to understanding our emotions by having a beginners guide that offers critical steps we can take to move forward safely. In our book, *Consciousness is Under the Rubble* (2022), we provide the steps, referred to as ARMS, which stands for Assess, Reflect, Manage, and Support to start the discussion about emotional awareness and the opportunity for continued growth toward emotional wellness based on our research and areas of expertise. ARMS provides the critical steps to start the process toward understanding and supporting others toward emotional awareness that could lead to emotional wellness.

Current Society Issues

“Improving emotional well-being, social connectedness, and resiliency through research-based health promotion and prevention programs is critical to population health” (CDC, <https://www.cdc.gov/populationhealth/well-being/index.htm>). It is important for us to continue to gain a better understanding of emotional awareness. It allows us to have an improved state of consciousness from an internal and external lens. From an internal lens, we have a better understanding of self and how past experiences contributed to the person who exists today. From an external lens, it allows us to support others in our learning environment and community to remove obstacles to achieve success. Taking this approach using both lenses is important as an

educator who must take a holistic approach to empower others including our students and colleagues to achieve personal and professional goals.

The current learning environment continues to face challenges related to well-being as the historical learning environment continues to change at an accelerated rate. “There is no consensus around a single definition of well-being, but there is general agreement that at minimum, well-being includes the presence of positive emotions and moods (e.g., contentment, happiness), the absence of negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety), satisfaction with life, fulfillment and positive functioning” (CDC, <https://www.cdc.gov/populationhealth/well-being/index.htm>). Students not only face challenges in a physical environment, but also in a virtual environment.

Research and educational institutions focus on social media continues to grow as a direct result between social media and bullying continues to increase each year. It is to the extent that educational institutions are starting to ban social media applications from being on campus. This challenge further exacerbates the lack of emotional awareness and how we support emotional wellness. There are steps we can take to increase the presence of emotional awareness to lead and maintain emotional wellness. This article provides one way to approach emotional wellness by covering the following:

- Internal Lens - Challenges on Educators
- External Lens - Role of an Adult Educator
- Community of Support by Taking a Holistic Approach
- ARMS: How to Move Forward and How to Maintain Awareness
- What Next?

Internal - Challenges on Educators

We are all works in progress and there is not one individual alive that wouldn't benefit from a better understanding of emotional awareness. It allows us to have an improved state of consciousness and reconnect with our soul. In addition, it allows us to support others in our learning environment and community to remove obstacles to achieve success.

Our conversations with others have become more strained as we wrestle with the aftermath of a pandemic, political turmoil, and escalated global conflict. As our emotional wellness suffers, how do we make a safe space for ourselves and our students while still maintaining a global consciousness? The concept of looking inward and doing work introspectively may be the last thing that comes to mind within the busyness of life, however, it certainly can be one of the most beneficial. Turning towards ourselves for answers more often than seeking them out from external sources can bring a person into a more balanced and empowered state of being. Internal reflection allows us to question our actions in the present and connect their existence to indoctrination of the past. The ability to unlock core root causation allows for shifts in perspectives and strengthens an individual's ability to decipher the personal beliefs which were once seen as perceived truths from the reality of fact based truths.

We also empower ourselves to become more understanding of the way all things unfold in life and our role in humanity from the lens of the soul versus the ego persona. The measure of the depth of our own individual understanding of personal emotional wellness drives or divides all humanity. Strengthening the connection with ourselves and prioritizing the relationship we have with ourselves is one of the most important things we can do.

Emotional self-awareness is not an innate human characteristic. Most of it is shaped by the experiences of our youth. During these years we are expected to learn how to manage our own emotions, including our interactions within society equally, creating internal balance. However, one cannot teach what one doesn't know. In cases when these concepts are not explained or discussed in the safety of a supporting home environment, that void is filled with anxiety. The repressed emotions of pain, fear and confusion will serve to lower the level of emotional connection we feel with ourselves and others. As we progress in life without high levels of emotional self-awareness and lacking the proper instruction and tools to manage emotions in real time, anxiety increases leading to dysfunction and depression.

This makes a deep dive introspectively in adulthood vital. One advantage of putting yourself first is setting yourself up for success. Clear focus on your own needs at the start of the day is empowering, otherwise you are left at the effect of everyone around you and likely to find yourself spinning in anxiety. The more emotionally self-aware, the more emotionally stable and mindful throughout the day. This decreases levels of anxiety and depression. The ability to properly and confidently manage emotions lessens the need for control. Those who desperately seek control externally are generally lacking the solid platform of an internal connection, thus becoming disconnected from their own empathy, compassion, consciousness and are their own humanity.

We are humans first before we are educators. Taking this approach informs us on how we maintain our own emotional wellness and how we support others in our discipline. As an educator, it is very important to effectively support those who seek academic success and have a space to maintain emotional wellness.

External - Role of an Adult Educator

Often educators are perceived as individuals with a balanced life. Educators have little opportunity to share emotional challenges except in private spaces. This type of existence can provide two different challenges, the lack of demonstrating how to be true to emotions and the lack of a support system to process emotions to maintain emotional wellness. We need a basic start to understanding our emotions by having a beginners guide that offers critical steps we can take to move forward safely.

"Consciousness is Under the Rubble" provides the steps, referred to as ARMS, to start the discussion about emotional awareness and the opportunity for continued growth toward emotional wellness based on research and areas of expertise. ARMS is an acronym that stands for Assess, Reflection, Manage, and Support. The four components are defined as the following.

- Assess - Assess where you are now (Payton & Wiggins, p.92).
- Reflect - Reflect on the things you've considered the most important in life thus far as one's starting point to note one's current priorities in life. Self-reflection is an extremely valuable tool as we travel toward emotional awareness (Payton & Wiggins, p. 99).
- Manage - Managing one's emotional awareness is important in maintaining one's progress and continuing down the road toward emotional intelligence and a conscious lifestyle. (Payton & Wiggins, p. 110)
- Support - It is important to intentionally create and maintain a support system that includes safe spaces (Payton & Wiggins, p. 119).

As an educator, it is important to understand these components to maintain emotional wellness that is an important foundation as we support our students.

In providing support for students, it is important to look at the suggested ARMS approach by providing a supportive objective approach. As educators, one needs to encourage students to be self-directed in achieving life goals; this includes maintaining emotional wellness. Self-directed learning is an intentional partnership between students and educators to support students in achieving short term and long term goals (Grow, G; Guglielmino, L.; Knowles, M.). In the role as an educator, it is stressed to make sure to value the student's voice and their values and empower them to succeed. Those same key elements are even more important when supporting students in the journey of emotional awareness. The first step of assessment is important and often used in an education environment which makes this step easier for students to understand and for educators to implement. The student must learn how to self-assess and the educator must be supportive and only directive when needed (Grow, G.). It is important for the educator to ensure one is participating as an active listener, free of internal distractions.

Community of Support by Taking a Holistic Approach

An important component of emotional wellness is taking a holistic approach in supporting an emotionally healthy community environment. Individual emotional self-awareness can be viewed on the scale of ego driven to conscious mindful lifestyle. Educators stress the importance of a holistic experience in learning. It provides the opportunity for the students to be empowered and seen in the learning environment. In addition, it allows the educator to understand the importance of relating and supporting the student's entire needs and not just focus on the content that is taught in the classroom. Taking this approach is even more important as educators understand the basic needs of students must be supported prior to students having the capability to learn the new content presented to them in the learning environment.

There are several basic needs that are identified to support students in a learning environment. Historically, research has identified and continues to identify the basic needs to support student's academic success. One of the previous basic needs identified by research is that students need a healthy meal to support learning. As a result, several institutions provide free lunch programs to support the students who are enrolled in their school. Recently institutions have increasingly provided wellness support as the need is identified to support students' academic success. Emotional wellness is one of the core components that should be considered when implementing a wellness plan. Including emotional awareness in a wellness plan would provide a community of support to students, faculty, and staff. In addition to increasing support to each individual, the plan should include an external lens to ensure educators and staff provide a positive interaction when supporting the emotional awareness of the students.

ARMS: How to Move Forward and How to Maintain Awareness

ARMS provides the critical steps to start the process toward understanding and supporting others toward emotional awareness that could lead to emotional wellness. ARMS is an acronym for assess, reflect, maintain, and support. The acronym highlights the key aspects to increase emotional awareness and maintain that awareness. In addition, the acronym approaches emotional wellness from an internal perspective and an external perspective as described in the previous

sections of this article. There are various approaches to continually improve and expand the work around emotional awareness.

One of the approaches to maintaining emotional wellness is being an Emotional Awareness Advocate. An Emotional Awareness Advocate intentionally takes on the internal lens of continuing to do the self-reflection work to maintain emotional wellness for self so that they can take on the external lens related to emotional awareness. The external lens in the role of an Emotional Awareness Advocate includes advocating for the resources to support emotional awareness in education and provide support to students in starting a self-directed path toward emotional well-being.

Conclusion: What Next?

It's important to note that internal personal growth is an ongoing endeavor, especially in results driven environments. For this reason, we've created a simple guide that offers a big picture view of the most powerful steps we can take to move forward safely. This guide provides the tools needed to address challenges as an individual (internal lens) and in the role as an educator (external lens) by working as a community taking a holistic approach.

To effectively start the journey, we suggest starting with your internal lens by understanding your emotions. This approach will allow you to understand how you can show for yourself and those around us. There are two free resources available to you and your students to start this journey.

- Evaluate your level and your students level of emotional self-awareness by completing the survey at www.unpackingemotionalbaggage.com.
- Complete the free course that is an introduction into understanding the statement of your emotions and what to do next in the journey of emotional wellness. The course is located at the following link: www.unpackingemotionalbaggage.com.

In addition, "Consciousness is Under the Rubble" provides guiding questions that can support this journey as you take on the following challenges:

- Priority Challenge
- Change or Gain Challenge
- Money Challenge
- Passion Project Challenge
- Big Hug Challenge
- Emotional Self-Awareness Challenge

(Payton & Wiggins, p. 151- 152)

We end with inviting you to join us on www.unpackingemotionalbaggage.com in continuing the discussion of "what next?". Together we can take a deeper look at the cause and effect of the past decades of generation trauma, the decline of emotional self-awareness and its importance to our future.

References

- Payton, P., & Wiggins, V.(2022). *Consciousness is Under the Rubble: A Guide to Unpacking Childhood Trauma and Unleashing Your Inner Power*. ISBN 979-8838428837
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (2022). National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotions. Division of Population Health.
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