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**Building the Bridge to Healing and Learning Website Leading to
Creating a Therapeutic School Experience for Students with
Adverse Childhood Experiences, Developmental Trauma, and
Mental Illness**

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Abstract

[TeachTheraBridge](#) is the domain name for the website I created called Bridge to Healing and Learning. The purpose of the website is to share my big idea about creating a therapeutic school experience for children and youth with adverse childhood experiences, developmental trauma, and mental illness”.

I have asked the question, “What would happen if we combined school and therapy using a Reggio Emilia approach in specialized local classrooms and/or in a comprehensive day treatment center?” The website explores this question and goes into depth about the Reggio approach and about therapies to integrate into the school day. The website exposes some of the problems in the current system and shares information about trauma-informed education.

With exposure to the website, I hope to find individuals that will collaborate to test the idea in a pilot class. I hypothesize that by using a Reggio Emilia approach, we can integrate therapy and school to get better results for students with mental health concerns. Essentially my project is to sell others on the benefits of another project. I want to encourage more conversation about the idea.

Keywords: Developmental trauma, Emotional Disturbance, Adverse Childhood Experiences, Alternative Education, Reggio Emilia, Therapy

Building the Bridge to Healing Website

On the website, I share a personal story about standing on a walking bridge with the owner of a treatment center. In reflecting on the struggle we had with the therapy I said to the owner, “You know, this program is great, but there is just no bridge to it for my kids. They are right here, but they cannot access it because it doesn't feel safe, there is no bridge that they can cross to get there.” This experience refined the idea and led to the title of the website. You can read more about me and my family on the website.

History of the Idea

In 2011 we adopted a sibling group from foster care. Within a few years of adopting my boys, I began to create the list of problems in education and therapy included on the problems page of the website. An idea started forming that combining school and therapy using a Reggio Emilia approach would make both schooling and therapy more efficient and especially more effective due to the ability to reduce student resistance and increase therapeutic dosing. (Perry) As inspiration crystallized, I would keep adding to the idea. This eventually turned into a white paper that I started sending to as many people in education administration that I could find. I thought that someone would grasp the idea with the power to make it happen. Instead, I was invited to sit as a stakeholder on committees for the development of the YES, Youth Empowerment System, with Idaho Health and Welfare. I did that for several years and learned more about the need for mid-level services such as this kind of day treatment center. I invite you to learn more about the history of the project on the website under the history tab to understand how the idea developed.

Why use a website?

I have been searching for ways to get the word out about the idea and was happy to use this capstone project to do that. I chose to build a website to communicate the big idea because of the way a website can persuade readers. Websites organize content based on its importance to the reader. If well designed, a website can be easy to scroll through, capturing an overview of an idea, and the reader can dive deeper into content if desired. I wanted to create buzz about the idea.

Organizing the Website

How? What platform is best for a website?

My first step in this project was deciding on a tool to use. I considered Wix, WordPress, HostGator, and Squarespace. I downloaded a free version of WordPress and found it difficult to use. In the end, I landed on Google sites which I had used for another project. The motivation for finding another site builder was to find a better way to collect feedback. With Google sites, the feedback goes to a Google sheet that has to be formatted to fit. I decided to be satisfied with that. Eventually, I can learn how to use Google analytics to manage more data. For now, the sheet is fine.

Problem: A big collection of information

Over the years, I have collected information about therapies, approaches to parenting, school ideas, research, and pieces of training. I knew that I needed to find a way to share just the most important ideas. Not many people are exposed to the Reggio Emilia approach so I knew I would need to go into detail about it and why the approach could integrate well with therapies. I also knew that I needed to share information about empirically based therapies without leaving out new research that is currently leading to new therapy options that are particularly well suited

to this population. I pulled information from my past writing, websites, and books. I generated new content as well.

Solution: Different pages and collapsible text boxes

Websites are designed with different pages of information. This allows the creator to organize information, and for the reader to select the items most interesting to them. I was excited to see how I could connect the Bridge theme across all of the pages, making each page both connected and unique.

The ability to use collapsible text boxes on the pages allowed me to organize the information in easy-to-read ways while still going into detail. I was able to share a great deal of information both accessed from other websites and my own content. I was able to incorporate pictures to tell the story and promote the Bridge theme.

Keeping my cool

Over the last few years in the BAS program, we have been learning the importance of emotional intelligence (EQ). I used my EQ skills to manage frustration with the technology learning curve, as well as re-living hard times as I wrote the history of the project and the information about myself. They say what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. I can say that I am stronger because of taking on this challenge. I have needed to learn to step towards the frustration instead of away, knowing that the frustration will pass and solutions will be found. I am preparing for the larger project of creating a new school model. I can see that this project has helped me build the skills that I will need to make that happen

Collecting Feedback

The use of a feedback mechanism was important for measuring the impact of the website. I was able to use Google forms to accomplish this. It sends the data to a Google spreadsheet. I

would have liked to have a way for the feedback to be published automatically on the website, however, solutions to this problem were either expensive or time and talent-consuming. I can manually publish the feedback if I wish.

Having put the website together, I started sending invites to stakeholders to view and make comments. I sent over 40 emails and posted links on Facebook, and Mighty Networks, which is the location of a national parent group that I am a member of organized by Robyn Gobbell LCSW. (Gobbel)

Results

Within a day my email and social media started lighting up. I received 13 responses to the feedback mechanism on the site, 6 responses on Facebook, 9 on Robyn Gobel's parenting network, and received 3 emails from parents I was working with in the past on the idea.

(Appendix)

Positive Feedback

I received the most positive comments from parents who share the same struggles. From one parent I heard;

“The website design was esthetically pleasing. The concept of combining therapy within the school is an incredible idea. As a mother with a special needs child, who is currently in grade school, I would find this incredibly beneficial. Learning about the Reggio Emilia approach in the way that Linda provided on her website was highly understandable, as well as easy to follow. Overall, all I can say is that if this was currently a real option I would be signing up my child”

Another response was; “I learned something new that helps me understand my granddaughter a little more” and, “Well researched and emphasized a true need within our community.” also, “I am not alone in dreaming about a TBRI school/classroom for traumatized kids AND their families!” and “So detailed, spoke to my heart as a parent and past school social worker. Very well put together.” (to protect privacy all commenters will be unnamed)

All of the positive feedback helps me know that the idea itself is on the right track.

Constructive feedback

Site Navigation

I needed to gather ideas that move me forward to make improvements to the site. One commenter shared that after reading the “hook”, or the story about the bridge, he wished he could get to the information about the rest of my story quicker. It was an easy thing to put a button in that spot to take folks there with ease. I realized that I had intentionally buried the information about myself, thinking that my story would be less important. This feedback was valuable.

Site Content

Two commenters mentioned a detail I had included about restraint and seclusion. They both thought it best to stay away from that controversy. One person shared a farm-to-table project that I had hinted at in the white paper but had not included on the website. One person thanked me for including a warning at the beginning that the school did not exist yet. Many wished it did exist.

Other Programs

From the national network of parents, I learned that something similar does exist elsewhere. This was enlightening. I can reach out to this person and learn more. I include it in constructive feedback because of the 3 hours she needs to drive every day.

“My son goes to a gen-ed school that offers a fabulous learning center with a 4:1 teaching experience. We drive 3 hours every day to get him there. He has dyslexia and dysgraphia. BECAUSE the integration is stellar, he feels like a normal kid, not stupid. He feels it is a total non-thing to be in that program.”

In the history section on the website, I shared feedback from Dr. Charlie Sylva, the Director of Special Education with the Department of Education, who reminded us how important it is to create a model that can be duplicated in local schools. This comment reinforced that this is an idea I must hold onto.

Funding

Another person jumped right to sharing information about Bloom funding. Many commenters worried about funding and rightly so. It is seen as the biggest hangup. But I wonder about that. I think that with the right minds on the problem, a funding solution can be worked out.

Changes to the site in response to feedback

I added a page to share my ideas about funding. I added a farm-to-table element on the therapy page. A button was added to the home page to take viewers to the about me page. A controversial comment about restraint and seclusion was removed from the Trauma-Responsive page under the section about reacting to behavior. A page was added to talk about parental involvement with schools.

Conclusion

What would I do differently?

There are some things I would do differently now that I have feedback and have finished the first wave of website building. I was hoping that feedback would keep trickling in but it has slowed considerably. That is a little disappointing. I did not receive any feedback from K-12 educators, even those that responded to the white paper. That is concerning. Maybe I should have contacted them personally instead of via mass email. That can be done moving forward.

I am not satisfied with the feedback mechanism. I can look into google analytics. I can also investigate how to create a blog on the site to which people can subscribe, then figure out a way for subscribers to be notified automatically when there are updates. I plan to make updates.

Plans for the next steps

My thought now is that the next step for the project is to find a local school that will be willing to pilot the idea. Next semester I start work on my Masters in Social Work. I am anticipating that there will be opportunities to share the idea with networks I encounter there. I need to find a school, and I also need to find a social worker who wants to try it out. I am hoping the clinical supervisor for our training will have some ideas.

Thoughts about the impact of my project

The impact of this project remains to be seen. Can I increase awareness of this problem of early childhood trauma and its effects on learning? Can I influence others to join in the cause of creating a new model? For now, I am encouraged by the positive comments about the idea, and at least for the current impact, I am glad that at least one grandparent felt that they understood their granddaughter better. I think it is worth it just for that.

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Appendix

Link to the Bridge to Healing and Learning website and link to feedback

Bridge to Healing and Learning website, <https://www.teachtherabridge.com/home>

Copy of Bridge to Healing Website Feedback Responses (identifying information redacted)

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/19PCO29vsKwjGyILkTjWAZLRcg6m-sOq-o2qQWFMXTLI/edit?usp=sharing>