The "Crazy" Thing We Are Missing in School
By Sakura Kato

Eating disorders, anxiety and depression are common amongst girls as a means of fitting unrealistic beauty expectations (Tuttle, 2011) Boys are not expected to talk about their emotions or deal with them in healthy ways (Zakrzewski, 2014). Trans youth are routinely discriminated against, and this manifests in school dropout rates that are disproportionately high - not to mention the suicide rates (Ettachfini, 2016).

It is clear that depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues are rising amongst children, but most children do not have adequate outlets to express this knowledge or process it. This, amongst other factors of meaninglessness and powerlessness, can result in a sense of disengagement and disenfranchisement (Webb, 2011). As such, how can we expect students to learn, to grow, and to develop emotionally and mentally in healthy ways?

Our school system does not often provide much of an outlet for this discussion on needs, and many schools do not have mental health services (Anderson & Cordoza, 2016). We are vastly missing licensed professionals to help diagnose students, to help them, to help them to process and cope with traumatic events in their lives. There is an incongruity with the supply and demand, and many students are falling through the cracks because of it. Dropout rates are exceedingly high, suicide rates are unnervingly high, mass shooting rates are unsettlingly high, many students do not feel engaged and supportive of schools (just look at the media depictions of students across decades of negative representation), and mental health services and teacher pay are exceedingly low.

The discussions about schools in this country seem to be centered around a lack of politics (while segregating schools by "district" and by race, funneling girls out of STEM, having the school-to-prison pipeline, banning transgender students from using bathrooms, and doing nothing about school shooters), and not talking about the effect that can have on students. The discussion around teachers seems to have an expectation that we hold them to high teaching and babysitting standards, but think they are lazy and need to work another job to sustain themselves. The discussion around mental health, especially in schools, seems to be irrelevant and nonexistent. The development of students mentally seems to be based in a type of social darwinism; if they can behave well and test well and learn well, they might be able to succeed, but if not, tough.

We seem to have no intention of empowering students and equipping them with tools to succeed, especially those who are more marginalized, yet there is a desire to "invest in future generations." Perhaps if we truly wanted to do this, we would ensure that students can learn, and that their needs as complex beings are met. Our conceptualization students as vessels to impart

knowledge on, void of race, gender, socio-economic class, trauma, mental health, disability, sexual orientation, citizenship status, family dynamics, and so on is simply harmful.

We cannot picture students as beings without needs, and we cannot continue to assume that they can continue to have those needs met elsewhere. We need to provide them with mental health services. We need to provide them with adequate teaching practices to help them understand the world around them. We need to expand our services beyond the scope of anxiety and depression to include dissociative identity disorders, eating disorders, PTSD, grief, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, psychosis, and so on. We need to be sure that we are taking learning disorders into account with our services and our curricula. We need to ensure that we have enough counselors and therapists and psychologists, and that they are well-suited to help students, and be certain that students can feel safe and validated and understood in these spaces (rather than loathe going to them because of cultural illiteracies). And most importantly, because students are mandated to receive schooling, we need to be certain that students can enjoy going to school and can function to their best potential there, and there are currently a lot of things inhibiting that.

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