

Giving Hope to Others

How can we as teachers best help students who are affected by trauma, and how should we approach their different learning difficulties?

That was one of the many thoughtful questions I was asked by a group of education majors as they transitioned back to their college classes after their first weeks of practice teaching.

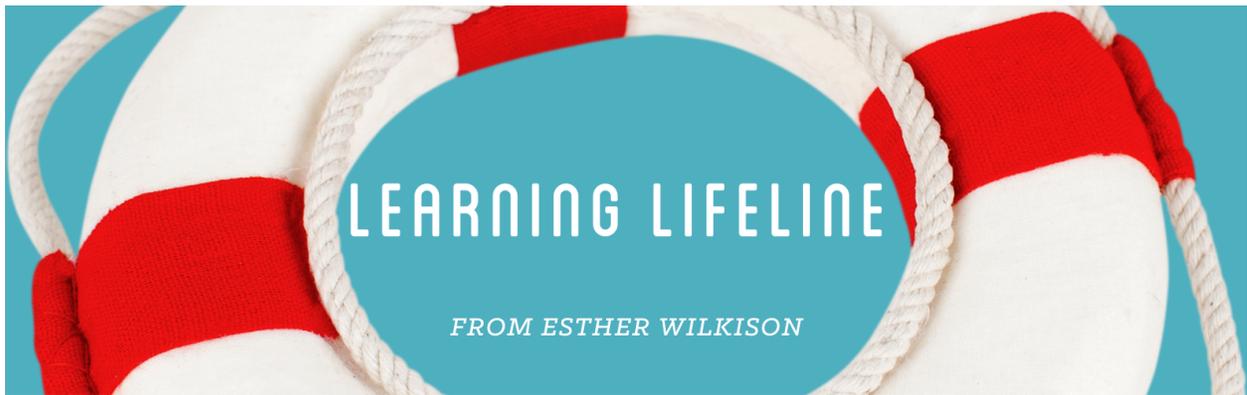
As I pondered the question, I thought of one of the many times I was a student affected by trauma and how a teacher gave me hope and helped me with my learning difficulties.

I don't know if my tenth-grade Typing 1 teacher knew I had failed Typing 1 the year before at my school in California, but she quickly realized I was failing her class. We had large, loud electric typewriters. The goal was perfection while moving at inhuman speeds and correcting errors with white correction fluid or an annoying invention called correction tape. What little skill I developed completely disappeared under the pressure of every timed test.

My grade was based on how many correct letters I could duplicate from the typing book onto the page during a speed test. When faced with the time pressure and frantic clicking from the typewriters of all my successful classmates—I could only freeze up and fight back tears (I lost a lot of those fights).

My teacher could have insisted the fearful, tearful one should drop her class—instead, she found out where I lived and offered to pick me up at 7:15 every morning. With just two of us in the typing room, she gave me timed tests over and over until I passed them. With each timed test I passed, my confidence grew. Finally, my fingers could find the letters they were supposed to hit. My weeks of solo sessions developed the automaticity I needed. Eventually, my early morning success spilled over into how I typed during typing class.

My typing teacher taught me one of the most foundational truths about learning: *Success builds success*. Instead of writing me off as incapable, she met me where I was. She removed the distractions that were causing me to panic. She set up conditions where I could succeed. Then she let success build on success. The neurons in my brain had been wired to connect timed tests with panic and failure. She took time to rewire my thinking with regular, achievable success.



That teacher reminds me so much of Jesus, who was always moving toward the one who clearly needed help. Like Christ, my teacher saw I needed help and found a way to help me. Oh, for more teachers who want to help students affected by trauma and who are creative and kind in helping us find success in learning!

Is there a teacher you know who has this kind of heart to help a hurting student? I'd love for you to respond to this email and let me know what you have learned from how that teacher approached students with learning difficulties.

NOTE: *The story I share here is an excerpt from the memoir I'm writing. Some of you know this has been a multi-year labor of love. While we are getting close, it is still a work in progress. I know there are many waiting to read this book. Will you pray with me for God to provide funds for the art, layout, and printing costs? Thank you for caring about those whose lives will be touched. I can't wait to share the finished product with you.*