

**Outline Summary of UFT Counselors Keynote by Misha Thomas**  
Saturday 20 March 2021

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**School Counselors: The Voice and Soul of our Community**

- Celebrate and strengths and hopes by embodying it.
- But also acknowledge loss, pain, hurts, and the past difficult year.
- Finding and modeling this balance for our students.

Last year, we focused on counselors as the creators of positive change and we continue to need that this year as well. This year, with Covid and near countless calamities – and I mean calamities – we are right to expect a theme that will help rally us with some wisdom around how to meet our students and staff at the brink of what we hope to be a receding pandemic tide to meet the a resurgent normality.

And so we want to look at trauma in education.

And we want to look toward the clinical savvy and insights and support that is you – our school counselors to know how to we tend to what must be the trauma of this Covid crisis upon our young people. Whatever and however this crisis affects our young people, it is the school counselors, it is you and it is I, that must find our voice to be their voice and our soul to be their soul – the soul of the students, the soul of the school and the soul in deed, we may as well say of our wider society and world.

***[May we see the first slide please]***

Representing other people's voices is not an easy task. But the art of it starts to peek through within the core traits of a counselor's ability for attunement, active listening, and reflective responses – in short a kind of channeling. These skills and techniques of the heart and mind are really rather our way of channeling the students, in this sense, the way an actor studies a character before the play or film, we become the students. It is a matter of imagination and extrapolation. When you let yourself be what from your imagination must be the position and interest of the student...something close to you finding their voice in you emerges.

Let's test it out.

I imagine that if the students knew of us gathering together in conference trying to figure out how to deal with the trauma of Covid and returning to schools some of them at least might say something like this:

***Are you kidding me!? Why don't you try working out the traumas of an entire educational system that does nothing about the traumas we've been dealing with before Covid!***

Oh, now that you adults feel the crisis, you're now interested in our trauma! Your late to this game.

Maybe Covid exposed how obsolete school methods have become. Maybe you all need to figure out how to upgrade and evolve schools from your leftover 1950s leave it to Beaver fantasy to the modern world that we're living in – and world where the adults don't seem to have a clue how to prepare us for collapsed economies and workforce, cultural trauma amongst the adults, political divisions that go way back before we were even born the debt of all that rage, racism sexism and classism left for us to pay with no clue on how to do it.

So Covid, give us a break!

But maybe I over state things. I don't know. Or maybe I am projecting my own adult reflections about an educational system of the 70s and 80s, that while I am delighted that I fell in love with and got to diagram all those sentences \_- I really am ya'll I am not joking here – I don't recall any of my years of education, and I actually loved school – being prepared for the lack of love, lack of social emotional capacity, the over playing of both misinterpreted applications of individualism and identity-politics mixed with the lust of victimization....

All this I have to figure out on my own with the real pedagogical brilliance of adversity. Adversity still teaches, Adversity still humbles and awakens and molds the best innovation availability.

But whatever this imagined voice is of the student – it isn't enough. Finding the actual voice of the students will in great measure have to come from counselors.

Even my own reflection on my own childhood education, saying this now, I didn't know how to say it when I was in school. I wasn't fully aware of it. I only discovered the lack of it now as an adult looking back.

And this is where we as the counselor and adults come in – we must give voice for the needs of cultural change within our schools for those who cant yet articulate it.

***[May we see the next slide please -- Soul. ]***

Sweep of slides.

In the late Dr. Nathaniel Branden's work *The Six Pillars of Self Esteem*, he said that *we must become what we wish to teach.*

This captures the way in which the students' struggles must become our struggles; their path of learning must become our task, challenge, and path for learning. We ust develop ourselves as process for developing them.

From Cornell's Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for Schools, we have a few core concepts that can only really be achieved within the context of our ongoing self care and self work. Let's have a look.

The concept of Developmental relationships – this means that the student's development is nurtured by way of their relationship with us. We intentionally use ourselves as impetus for their growth and journey.

[See the slide]

The four characteristics of developmental relationships:

- Attachment
- Reciprocity
- Progressive complexity
- Balance of power

The Intentional Use of Self:

- Self regulation
- Self awareness
- Relationship Skills & Attunement
- Self Care

Close with my testimony of depression during Covid, taking action for self care – eating well, drinking plenty of water, exercise, writing commitment with writing partner, reading, meditation.

Our self care is foundational to developmental relationships with our schools, our systems, and the students we serve.

In this way, we cultivate becoming voice and soul of the system by cultivating the process within our selves.