

Name

Professor

Class

Due Date

Students with Trauma

Schools implement reforms with the intention of solving issues or creating a more supportive foundation on which students and teachers can thrive. Urban schools have an additional task of catering to a vast number of different learners as well as understanding and developing students with trauma. Reforms like the zero-tolerance policy work to create a more structured environment that encourages students to conform to standards through punishment; ideally, this reform discourages problem behavior and only affects students that need additional guidance. However, this reform eliminates the humanity in teaching and instead negatively affects students both emotionally and academically. When teachers do not have the training or experience to handle students with trauma, the students' behavior can often be confused with laziness, aggression, or isolation. Trauma informed care practices challenge the mindset of the zero-tolerance policy by approaching education through a more empathetic perspective, building relationships with students, and getting to know what they specifically need to succeed. Districts must implement more funding and professional development geared specifically towards trauma-informed care practices so that both new and veteran teachers will be up to date on modern practices, and most importantly, all types of students will feel supported and heard through their academic journey.

The Zero Tolerance Policy enforces strict rules with specific and harsh punishments to create an uncompromising environment in which a students' sole job is following directions. The

policy initially solved the issue of problem behavior in schools, because those acting out were simply suspended or punished by other means. The plan of action suggested that, ideally, if students were punished for their actions, then they would cease problem behavior. Realistically, the zero-tolerance policy merely took away the humanity of the institution by not actually helping the students with their issues and instead just limiting their academic experiences. This policy views student behavior as the issue and targets that problem by removing it from the environment without doing anything to stop it from happening long term.

The Zero Tolerance Policy lends itself to a school to prison pipeline because it encourages the same values as those in prisons: harsh punishments, minimal sympathy, and definite bias against minorities. This solution defines the problem as cultural, through student to student violence, in addition to a lack of authority around the school. Furthermore, the policy fail[s] to increase the consistency of discipline across student groups,” which speaks to the lack of consideration to the needs of urban environment students (Farberman). This mindset creates a high stress environment that ironically induces less structure and instead promotes a culture of acting out. These types of policies tend to target minority students, and this “disproportionate discipline of students of color may be due to lack of teacher preparation in classroom management” (APA 854). The majority of research shows that the zero-tolerance policy does nothing to stop problem behavior and instead emphasizes the gap in student to teacher relationships.

Schools that implement the Zero Tolerance policy often embrace methods similar to prisons by having metal detectors at entrances and prefer an increased police presence in the school. Unfortunately, those schools also seem to have higher levels of police presence than guidance counselors, social workers, and therapists combined. These measures supposedly

prioritize student safety through increased surveillance. However, when a student walks into a school through metal detectors, they experience the phenomenon of entering a supposedly secure building while also being perceived as the threat itself. Though this may encourage less weapons in schools, it also sends a clear message to the students that they also contribute to the negative stigma surrounding the school. In theory, this problem discourages students from bringing in potential weapons to school and creates a more secure atmosphere. An increased police presence works to emphasize a sense of authority in the building in an effort to reassure students that someone will look out for their physical well-being. Heavily enforced zero tolerance policies tend to “actually increase the instances of problem behavior and dropout rates,” meaning that implementing force driven methods upon students makes them feel more insecure and unsupported (Farberman).

Harsh policies emphasize priorities of discipline over building relationships with students. Students in general will not succeed in school if they feel unsupported or insignificant. Students in urban environments are often up against biases surrounding their needs or the discipline required to maintain them on a daily basis. Heavy handed approaches offer a higher level of security but fail to humanize the students’ experiences and desires. Efforts focused on building relationships with students with trauma through working to understand them will create an environment in which both the student and teacher feel supported and heard. There is a high teacher turnover rate in schools, due in part to a lack of support and/or leadership. Urban students struggle to trust others because of the lack of consistency in their lives, so the schools should be working to keep educators around long-term. It is imperative for leaders to support both staff and students through meaningful and well-balanced standards.

The most significant practices schools should include in their curriculum, emotional support, consistency, and trust, all provide a supportive space for students in which they can truly thrive. If students with trauma are not properly supported, they will continue to fall behind in education. These students will develop undiagnosed mental health issues, decrease their self-esteem, and ultimately feel less important than their peers. It is imperative that educators prioritize purposeful practices to develop these students' motivation to perform well in school, otherwise, they contribute to the barrier that holds these students back from their full potential.

Urban schools consist of a diverse population of students that all require different methods of emotional support throughout their academic journey. It proves a challenge to support these students properly if there is not an adequate ratio of properly trained staff to students. In urban schools specifically, the teacher turnover rate is significantly higher than that of suburban districts because of the higher percentage of students with trauma in the schools in comparison to properly prepared staff. Brain Cavanaugh's "Trauma-Informed Classrooms" explores how complex trauma is and how it does not look the same per student; ultimately, any form of trauma will affect a student's academic perspective, so it is imperative to provide them with the best resources possible. Research has shown that as many as "68 percent of children experience at least some form of trauma event"; this reality exposes that trauma is significantly more common than generally assumed and highlights the necessity of trauma-informed teachers (Cavanaugh 41). If staff is not consistently training through sufficient professional development, their teaching and perspective will never meet the needs of those students that require a different type of learning.

The Treatment and Services Adaptation Center claims that trauma “disrupts youth’s ability to relate to others and successfully manage emotions,” which means that their acting out stems from a developing lack of empathy because they cannot handle themselves, let alone manage others’ feelings (Treatment and Services Adaptation Center). Bobbie Downs writes “Understanding How Trauma Affects Students” to further explore how trauma impacts youth brain development. Children that undergo multiple forms of trauma are significantly more likely to “be labelled with a learning disability or behavioral problem”; this idea suggests that there are not enough resources to support these children, and instead of taking those steps, experts just put a label on them and expect them to cope over time (Downs). Students with trauma often develop trust issues with peers and/or adults. This means that the student will require a patience and expertise that can only arise with consistent and deliberate trauma-informed care professional development. Downs presents a reform known as ABCD: accumulate knowledge about trauma, become an advocate for trauma sensitivity, create trauma-informed classrooms, and develop resilience in children. This reform suggests a gradual development of trauma-informed care through long term implication, which would ideally create longer lasting results than short term punishment. The base for developing student behavior lies in the foundation of how their brain functions and how that impacts the students’ abilities for the rest of their lives.

Children’s brains are very fluid in that they are constantly growing, developing, and improving. An experience with trauma interrupts this flow and instead develops more emergency-prepared solutions to issues that present as behavioral issues or learning disabilities. Mary Flannery’s “How Trauma is Changing Children’s Brains” exposes the short- and long-term

impact of trauma on the brain and how it could affect learning or motivation. While undergoing trauma, a child's brain will activate the fight or flight response and prioritize that over areas of the brain that influence learning; when this happens repeatedly, the brain structure changes forever (Flannery). In addition to a halt in processing new information well, the brain's memory will also suffer; students struggle to recall information learned the day[s] before, despite any level of engagement they experienced in class (Flannery).

When students live with a constant fear, they are more likely to act out aggressively as a form of self-defense, which can generally present as a behavioral issue. Trauma-informed care must be implemented in urban districts because the levels of trauma tend to increase in city schools based on circumstances and general lifestyles. Instead of punishing children for acting out, educators should be questioning why that student might be acting out or what supports they may need to succeed. If a teacher does not have access to that mindset because they were not trained to handle it, then they may assume that the child is simply a bad kid or does not care. Despite popular belief against behavioral issue students, kids genuinely care about fitting in, and continuing to punish them for behavior instead of trying to help them heal will only further isolate them from their peers.

Trauma-sensitive educators understand the importance of creating an environment that supports all types of learners, which may include alternative seating, time allotted for brain breaks, or simply an availability to listen to students if they need to talk. Schools must humanize the way in which they deal with student trauma, because otherwise, students will continue to be isolated in their experiences and suffer both emotionally and academically. In "Psychological Trauma on the Developing Brain", Phyllis Stien notes that "experiences can change the function of our brain and alter its structure," which highlights how a student that is consistently exposed

to trauma will think much differently than their peers, and ultimately requires different support from the school (Stien 13). Tom Brunzell's study further confirms this through his study in which he explains that trauma "severely compound the [student's] ability to self-regulate and sustain healthy relationships" and that trauma make take the form of "attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder," etc. (Brunzell). These results parallel with the notion that when a student undergoes a traumatic experience, their underdeveloped brain physically cannot handle it and therefore 'acts out' through what teachers view as behavioral issues. If a teacher were unaware of trauma's effect on the brain, they may think that the student simply does not care or is a bad student, and ultimately punish them further.

Schools must ultimately enforce a more collaborative approach to learning instead of viewing the students as the problem, because otherwise they risk isolating the student further and discourage student and teacher relationships. When teachers have the proper training to excel in their classroom management as well as meaningfully interacting with students with trauma, then the students as a whole will feel more consistently supported in their needs. In "Enhancing Student Achievement", Charlotte Danielson argues that "educators would be arrogant to believe that their study of teaching is complete," suggesting that only the most committed educators work to develop their practice even after years in the field (Danielson). The student dynamic is constantly changing, and students' needs are quite fluid, so teachers must experience consistent professional development so that they can more ethically manage their classrooms and deal with problem behavior in a more empathetic manner.

Modern education requires a type of enthusiasm in the classroom so that students stay engaged while learning. Classroom management proves a feat for new teachers because of the assumption that they must be mean or strict, and this often gets them into power struggles with

students. Brandi Simonsen writes “The Effects of Targeted Professional Development on Teachers’ Use of Empirically Supported Classroom Management Practices” to promote the values of a healthily functioning classroom while also keeping in mind the challenges of urban education. Rather than setting strict rules and punishing students that do not conform, teachers should be “providing prompts and pre-corrections to cue appropriate behaviors, delivering high quality and rates of opportunities to respond, giving specific praise contingent on appropriate behavior, and maintaining a favorable ratio of positive to corrective feedback” while also keeping in mind that students will need time to adjust to changes (Simonsen). Studies show that consistent, multilayered professional development support helps teachers succeed both faster and more meaningfully (Simonsen). However, it can be difficult to have such support on hand for lower-income schools; this is where the strong leadership would create a foundation for the teachers on which they could rely if they felt insecure about their development process.

Targeted professional development confronts any insecurities about progress because it addresses a specific teacher’s needs in the classroom. Brandi Simonsen’s “Effects of Targeted Professional Development on Teacher’s Specific Praise Rates” further emphasizes how a multitiered approach to development, “which includes direct training, coaching, and performance feedback” increases management behaviors and self-confidence of the teacher overall (Simonsen). The research shows that reinforcement of positive behaviors, like hand raising, provide more encouragement for the students than punishment. When students are praised for positive behavior, they indirectly learn what is expected of them and are more likely to continue that behavior in the future. By promoting a more optimistic atmosphere, teachers create a safe space in which students feel more confident and ultimately act out less over time.

Trauma-informed teaching parallels with the ideals of a supportive classroom because both stimulate a culture of safety and support. Trauma-informed teaching modifies curriculum and perspective to better understand the needs of students with trauma and provides ways to connect students and teachers. Alex Venet's "The How and Why of Trauma Informed Teaching" elaborates the significance of the practice and how it affects students. Venet claims that educators should operate under the assumption that all of their students have experienced some type of trauma, since its effects can vary so greatly, and it is often difficult to tell. By utilizing social emotional learning, or the practice of managing emotions, teachers can create a safe space for students to express themselves and hopefully feel comfortable enough to better express what they need (Venet). Trauma-informed teaching means going beyond the textbook to better assess student need and apply it to the daily curriculum with the intention of positively affecting students as much as possible.

Teachers must take into account that urban schools hold students of different abilities, backgrounds, and experiences; curriculum and discipline should therefore reflect the needs of the students rather than maintaining the biases against them. Trauma-informed care looks different in urban schools vs suburban schools due to the dynamic of the student body. Popular belief advises a strong hand in discipline for urban schools because of the biases that claim that urban students are rowdy, not well behaved, and generally aggressive. This reform in urban schools would focus more on developing a sense of safety in classrooms as well as prioritizing positive and healthy relationships built on trust and mutual respect. Students will not learn from teachers they do not like, but building trust takes time; trauma-informed practices will not happen overnight for urban schools because of the years of intolerance that students have faced prior. It is imperative that, beyond everything else, teachers are patient and consistent in their methods so

that students can slowly learn the new standards and high expectations for behavior and self-care.

Models of trauma-informed teaching offer different perspectives on how to approach this perspective while also maintaining careful boundaries. The Sanctuary Model, developed by a professor at Drexel University, “develop[s] an organizational culture where staff model and clients build skills in key areas such as safety, emotional management, self-control, and conflict resolution” in order to better help the students understand and model the method themselves in a safe environment (McInerney 6). This model has been implemented in several schools throughout the United States, and those schools reported general success as far as student knowledge on trauma and ways in which they could get help during times of distress (McInerney 8). Distress can assume various forms throughout childhood, whether physically, mentally, or emotionally, and without acknowledging this distinction, no change will occur. Oftentimes, students do not have the means through which they can express what they require or feel in order to obtain the help they need to succeed in school. As their brains are still developing, they often cope with this trauma through behavior that is generally associated with acting out. This reality suggests that many students go undiagnosed despite having symptoms of trauma, including but not limited to anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Without addressing trauma’s impact on education, students will continue to struggle in school, develop mental health disorders, and have a lower self-confidence than their peers.

Kristina Hulvershorn’s study, “Restorative practices and the integration of social emotional learning as a path to positive school climates” indicates how effective those reforms can be if implemented properly. Social emotional learning (SEL), or the practice in which people identify behaviors about themselves and set positive goals for the future, exists as a branch off of

trauma-informed teaching because it is a method that teachers may use to help students identify their own problem behaviors and work to correct them. Hulvenshorn's study found that the combination of restorative practices, along with SEL, gave educators the opportunity to be aware of issues surrounding "race, gender, disability, and other aspects of diversity," which ultimately allowed them to have more productive lessons and a deeper sense of security in the classroom (Hulvenshorn). The study stresses that the combination of restorative practices and SEL "became a vehicle to develop students' SEL skills, which includes communication skills, kindness, empathy, and caring" (Hulvenshorn). This perspective coincides with the ideals of trauma-informed care because the reform truly accentuates the benefits of the humanity in teaching and building relationships. Students, according to Hulvenshorn, are better set up to succeed in the classroom when they are given the tools to improve as people as well.

On the other hand, schools could benefit from proactive strategies, rather than damage control after the fact. Katherine Geerart's "The Impact of Trauma on Learning and the Value of Trauma-Informed Practices in Education" exposes that there may be fewer issues overall if schools are willing to implement proactive trauma-informed teaching plans as early as possible. The study believes that early implemented practices can "mitigate the effects of trauma on the youth and maximize student success," which would help both students and teachers navigate the complexities of dealing with trauma in a healthy, supportive manner (Geerart). These practices focused on creating a predictable environment that taught emotional management and self-regulation; it was through this different approach to learning that students found themselves identifying their own problem behavior and handling it with the help of the teacher (Geerart). A collaborative approach to learning emphasizes the relationship between student and teacher and

ultimately allows the student to take control of their own outcomes while knowing that they have the support of the teacher along the way.

Plenty of schools implement trauma-informed teaching practices without actually knowing about the reform, which insinuates the success levels of implementing them in schools deliberately. Denver public schools was one of the districts in which teachers identified these practices prior to knowing about reformatory care. This reform is simply a “shift from punitive to restorative responses,” which directly challenges the methods of the zero-tolerance policy and its harsh procedures towards students (Taylor). Zero-tolerance policy perspectives tend to simply exacerbate negativity, whereas building resilient and lasting relationships can only benefit the student, both academically and emotionally (Taylor). Denver’s experiences with trauma-sensitive teaching led to students being calmer and trusting of teachers, which also gave teachers the opportunity to improve their classroom management. Their most effective method was encouraging students to read silently about specific stories in order to help them learn empathy, compassion, love, etc. through the characters of the books. They found that “reading for six minutes can decrease stress levels by 70%,” which can help to regain order and also encourage the student to gain some perspective on their situation (Taylor).

There are a plethora of trauma-informed practices that school districts can implement in classrooms, and they all may be applied at different speeds to best fit the need of the students. Applying short term solutions through zero-tolerance policies only blames the students while not actually helping them work through their problems. It is imperative that schools utilize the short- and long-term benefits of trauma-informed care practices by funding professional development opportunities for the teachers to constantly improve. When a teacher has access to the most modern practices, receives consistent support, and collaborates with a strong leader, then their

students will benefit deeply in the long run. Trauma-informed care focuses on the student rather than the behavior, which can impact how a teacher interacts with that student and ultimately how that student views their academic experience. In order to create lasting change in schools, districts must employ positive reforms that focus on safety and stability, rather than harsh punishment. Trauma-informed care is the future of classrooms because it puts relationships first and requires a kind of compassion that punishments simply cannot deliver.

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