

Northwestern College, Iowa

NWCommons

Master's Theses & Capstone Projects

Education

Summer 2019

The Trauma Informed School: Effects on Student Success

Emily Larson

Follow this and additional works at: https://nwcommons.nwciowa.edu/education_masters



Part of the [Secondary Education Commons](#)

The Trauma Informed School: Effects on Student Success

Emily E. Larson

Northwestern College

A Literature Review Presented

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Education

August 11th, 2019

Sara Waring Tiedeman

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Review of Literature	5
Trauma	5
Types of trauma	6
Statistics of traumatized students	7
Academic levels	8
Behaviors	8
Drop-out rates	10
Trauma-informed schools	10
Becoming trauma informed	11
Support for students	12
Identifying students	13
Counseling	15
Positive relationships	16
Analysis	18
Application	20
Conclusion	23
References	26

Abstract

There is a great need in schools today for school staff to be trauma informed. Many students are coming into the classroom after having dealt with traumatic experiences. Many people assume that the only trauma they are experiencing comes from abuse. However, that is not the case. Students are experiencing a variety of trauma in their lives such as death, neglect, community disasters and nation-wide disasters. All these factors change the way that children respond to others, their behaviors in the classroom and their academic success. Because of this trend, school staff are becoming trauma informed. Staff is trained to identify trauma in students and how to help the students navigate their emotions. Rather than disciplining the students for their actions, schools are working towards teaching the students how to respond and act. Trauma informed schools and staff members create a safer environment for all students and promote teaching techniques rather than discipline to support their students.

Keywords: trauma, trauma-informed schools, trauma-informed staff, adolescents, success

The Trauma Informed School: Effects on Student Success

In education today there is much more to be a teacher than the standards within the curriculum. There is a vast amount of teaching that must be done outside of the curriculum. Not only are educators required to meet all the standards within the curriculum, but educators also feel that it is their duty to help their students become good human beings. Each year, more students are coming into the classroom with tragic experiences that teachers are not necessarily equipped to deal with. Because of the trauma that these students have experienced it is causing them to fall behind in their classes and the students are starting to struggle socially and emotionally. At the root of all these problems is the trauma that these students have experienced throughout their lives.

Trauma can be defined as any experience that causes a child unbearable psychic pain or anxiety (Dwivedi, 2010). Unfortunately, children experiencing some type of trauma is more common than one would think. According to Zacarian (2017), in the United States alone, half of the nation's total student population are students who have experienced or are experiencing trauma, violence, or chronic stress. Since all people are different and we all view pain and suffering differently, the experiences that these children endure have a vast range. Some of their experiences are specific instances of abuse and lack of love in the home and some involve instability in their lives and unpredictability (Dwivedi, 2010). Both can be traumatic for students and it is important for school staff to help students navigate their way through all types of trauma. If these students are not receiving proper intervention from counselors or staff members, their educational success could be jeopardized. At this point students may begin to lash out in class and become unmanageable to teachers (Zacarian, 2017). When this happens, teachers become frustrated and struggle with how to handle some of these students. However, if teachers

were trained in working with students who have endured trauma one may ask if this would help all students succeed? Schools are beginning to become more trauma informed to help these students be more successful in the classroom and in their lives outside of the classroom. This method is referred to as a trauma-informed school.

Throughout this literature review trauma will be defined as well as the different types of trauma that teachers may encounter in their classrooms. It will discuss the statistics of students who have encountered trauma in their lives such as behaviors in the classroom, academic levels and dropout rates. This review will also touch on the ways that schools can become trauma informed and how to support students. Lastly, this literature review will discuss strategies that can be used in schools today to be more trauma informed and answer the question: how do trauma informed schools help all students succeed.

Review of the Literature

Trauma

In education today, there is an immense need for all school staff to be trauma informed. Over half of students in schools today have experienced some type of trauma in their lives and it affects them socially, emotionally and behaviorally daily which in turn causes issues in other areas of their lives. According to Cavanaugh (2016), over 68% of children experience post-traumatic effects of their experiences. The American Psychological Association (APA) describes trauma as “an emotional response to a terrible event” (Cavanaugh, 2016, p. 41). Not only can trauma be overwhelming for adults to comprehend, but it is much more difficult for children to manage. Dwivedi (2010) describes trauma as an experience that breaks down individuals and their psychological capability to cope with the world around them. When children experience a

certain level of traumatic experiences, they are no longer able to manage their stress as people typically would.

All children develop at their own rate however, at each developmental stage in a child's life there are tasks that they begin to develop. Trauma can affect the development of these tasks such as their understanding of feelings and social-emotional cues (Dyregrov, 2010). Their efforts to manage their own stress become less effective over time because they are unable to fix the level of trauma they have reached. Much like a physical injury, the body can only manage a certain level of pain or stress until other interventions must be attempted (Dwivedi, 2010). When a child has been through a traumatic experience it changes the way, they act toward people and how they respond to certain circumstances in their lives. The stress that can come from trauma impacts a student's academics, their relationship with others and their mental health. Because of this, these students are at greater risk for delinquency, substance abuse, mental, physical and behavioral health problems and diminished educational and employment success (Dods, 2013). The trauma that students are experiencing at a young age play a major role in who they become as adults. Some students are able to grow and become greater than their traumatic experience, however, most follow in the same footsteps as their trauma simply because they did not have the resources to help them overcome it.

Types of trauma. According to Early Childhood Mental Health, there are three main types of trauma; Acute, chronic and complex. Acute trauma happens after one single incident. Chronic trauma is an event that is repeated over a long period of time such as physical or emotional abuse in the home or domestic violence. Complex trauma happens when children are exposed to multiple traumatic events. These events are not the same each time, they vary in nature. Students are coming to school with each of these types of trauma and all their

experiences are different. Within one type of trauma there may be one child who is experiencing difficulty with a family member such as abuse, or the child could have also experienced the death of a family member or someone close to them. Trauma can stem from a specific incident in a child's life such as school shootings, racism, and neglect (Cavanaugh, 2016). Children can experience trauma based on what they see in the news as well. No matter what kind of trauma a child has experienced it must be acknowledged by schools to help make the student feel safe and secure in their environment. When trauma is not acknowledged or acted on appropriately, the situation will only continue to get worse for the student.

Statistics of traumatized students. It is not rare for students to experience some type of psychological trauma in their lives. According to Dods (2013), 25-45% of all youth report having experienced traumatic events before age 16. This is an alarming statistic for the youth today and this trauma follows them into the classroom and into other aspects of their lives. Students who have experienced trauma do not enter the classroom with the same enthusiasm as students who have not experienced trauma. These students may look at school as their safe haven and a warm place where they can go to get a free meal surrounded by caring adults. Others may see it as something negative in their day and not worth their time. School may seem pointless to some of these students because their issues within their home are far greater than any math assignment that they need to complete. Although one cannot blame a student for feeling this way, it is critical that school staff catch this early on before the student starts exhibiting behaviors that can be detrimental to their own and their peers learning. Due to the trauma that these students have encountered their psychological, social and physiological development can take a toll on their learning and academic achievement (Porche, 2011) as well as their behaviors that they display in the classroom. In a study conducted by Brian Cavanaugh (2016) approximately 30% of students

who have been diagnosed with emotional behavioral disorder (EBD) have experienced some type of post-traumatic stress. It could be argued that these students were wrongfully diagnosed and are instead working through a traumatic experience. If an educators' mindset shifted from thinking that students have behavioral disorders to trying to understand their behaviors it would be interesting to see how many students would still have an EBD. This is not to say that all of these are wrongful diagnosis, but the trauma that the students have endured should be a factor in the diagnosis for this disorder.

Academic Levels. According to research conducted by Meghan Meyer (2015) trauma can have an immense impact on a child's brain therefore it also impacts their ability to learn. Because of the traumatic experiences these students have been through, they are in a constant state of fight or flight.' They are unable to stay focused enough to complete their academic tasks and unable to remain calm because of their experiences of feeling unsafe and anxious. Adolescents who have reported physical or sexual abuse or those who had violent or unstable home lives were less likely to have above average grades and rarely had post-secondary aspirations (Dods, 2013). When children are exposed to violence whether physical or sexual it inhibits parts of the brain. This causes deficits in attention, long-term memory, changes in academic performance including decreased IQ and reading ability (Meyer, 2015). Unfortunately, a lot of the students who are enduring or have endured some type of trauma in their lives do not have a stable support system at home. Studies have shown that when parents are involved in a child's life and value their education, there is a large shift in their academic achievement and their overall effort in their studies (McCormick, 2013).

Behaviors. Not only does trauma affect a student's ability to focus on their academics but it also can create an increase in negative student behavior. When a student is feeling stressed

or upset about something in class one of their first reactions may be to get up and leave the classroom. According to Dods (2013), stress reactions can lead to students' lashing out or leaving class to regain a sense of physiological control and to reduce their stress. This may be a coping mechanism for them or a way of taking a break as one may say. However, if a teacher is unaware of the trauma that the student has endured it could be perceived as disrespectful to the teacher.

Trauma was described by Dods (2013) as the nonverbal experience that a child endures and the behavior that they display later as the language that the children use to communicate their pain to others. Educators must find a way to look past these students' disruptive and lashing out behaviors and find the reason why they are acting in that manor. If a student becomes irrationally upset about a broken pencil or being asked to complete a simple task, one must ask themselves why a child is giving such an overreaction to a situation. Most of the time, teachers will find that there is far more to the story than the student being upset about the pencil or task. For students whose traumatic experiences have involved an adult or someone in a position of authority, they may struggle to make positive relationships with their teachers and take direction from them. The effects of trauma do not end at a student's academic performance or their behaviors in school. There are many long-term effects of trauma such as "personality, character development, assumptions about the world and one's existence including expectation of another catastrophe and pessimism about the future, relationships with other people, moral development, biological development, regulation of emotions, self-perception, self-confidence, coping ability, learning capacity, choice of profession, vocational functions, future capacity as a parent (Dyregrov, 2010, p. 34).

When schools are not trauma-informed and students display outbursts because of their trauma, educators do not know how to handle such behaviors. In the heat of the moment educators may feel that disciplinary action is the only thing that can be done to help these students learn a lesson. Most often, though, the students who lash out the most need more counseling and support than that of their peers. Furthermore, teachers are not able to help guide the students through their trauma if they are not trauma informed. If a teacher was trauma informed and able to provide resources and help to students, there might be less risk for some of the long-term effects of trauma later in life.

Drop-out rates. There are an alarming number of students who do not complete high school despite the amount of work their teachers put in to get them to the finish line. In a 2011 study on childhood trauma and how it correlates with school dropout rates, researchers found that 15.57% of students who suffered from trauma dropped out of high school (Porche, 2011). To educators, that statistic is disappointing as all teachers want their students to succeed. In order to reach every student and help them navigate their education to the best of their ability schools must become trauma informed. If more schools were trauma informed, their students would have a higher likelihood of feeling more safe and secure in school which would then lead to more academic success.

Trauma-Informed Schools

A trauma informed school implies that the entire school staff is dedicated and willing to be aware of traumatic events that their students are experiencing and that they work towards recognizing how that trauma affects students. In this new way of thinking, school staff are challenged to discover why students may be acting out or disengaging in school rather than engaging in an argument with the student. Bruce Perry (2017) suggests that this way of thinking

results in more understanding and helps teachers recognize that a student's behavior is shaped by their life experiences. In the same sense, this shapes a student's needs and the challenges that the student may face.

Becoming Trauma-Informed. According to the National Resilience Institute (2018), there are six ways to become a trauma informed school. This includes educating staff to help them better understand the impact that trauma has on education. The schools need to be a safe environment for students. All students should feel physically, emotionally and academically safe. Students who have experienced trauma have gone through or are currently going through constant emotions of feeling unsafe. If a school can be a safe place for those students that will help them be more successful. Schools should also consider a holistic approach meaning that the students are at the center of the decisions being made. Their well-being is thoughtfully considered, and their needs are being met. In the same sense, a feeling of community must be established in the school. Students should feel as though they can connect with the staff and as though they belong to their school. Next, the staff needs to be accountable and they need to keep students accountable. Rather than focusing on who the teachers have in their classes, all teachers should consider every student that walks into the school theirs. Lastly, staff need to be able to adapt to the changing needs of students and the different types of trauma that they endure.

Although these steps can be a huge mindset shift for all teachers but especially veteran teachers who may have been teaching for many years without this model. Once every staff member is on board with that idea the school must work toward creating very clear behavior expectations. Some schools develop committees to help determine what some of the most important expectations that they have in the school and the committee then relays those to the rest of the staff and asks for feedback. A resource that should be included in a trauma-informed

school are the appropriate people available to help students cope with trauma. Although teachers can be trauma informed, they are not professionals in dealing with trauma. Therefore, school counselors should be available for students to meet with as well as outside counseling services for students. Students need to know that they have someone that they can trust and talk to in their school and for many students a counselor could fill that need. Lastly, these ideas must be implemented by all staff members. Anyone who works in the school building, teachers, custodians, educational assistants and lunchroom staff must all be willing to implement these ideas. The behavior expectations need to be consistent across the building and students need to know what to expect.

Support for students. In a study conducted by Dyregrov (2004), a group of adolescent girls were followed through their post-traumatic journey. These girls were involved in a shipwreck where one of their classmates and a teacher died. Not to mention, all of the girl's lives were in danger during this shipwreck which is traumatizing itself. Prior to the shipwreck, these girls had above average grades in school. After the accident the scores dropped to the average level and some even below average. "It has now been well documented that traumas have an impact on the ability to learn due to disturbances in attention and memory. It is not the exposure to trauma in itself that creates the difficulties but rather the presence of symptoms that follow the event" (Dyregrov, 2004, p. 199). For these students it is important that they are understood by their teachers when going through post-traumatic stress. However, children reported feeling that teachers were not adequately reacting to their trauma or acknowledging it (Dyregrov, 2004)

In another study conducted by Meyer (2015), she found that one of the most important parts of supporting students who have been through trauma involves getting them connected within their school. Teachers can encourage this connectedness by finding activities or groups

within the school that might be of interest to the student. They can also work to simply maintain a supportive, caring and genuine relationship with their students. In this same study, teachers' perspectives on trauma were analyzed. Twenty-one teachers participated in the study and they were asked to share their experiences and perspectives on supporting students who experienced trauma. It was discovered that these teachers felt they were not knowledgeable in dealing with trauma, they struggled with their role in addressing the trauma, they struggled to find a balance between the needs of their students and their curriculum requirements lastly, they were concerned with the emotional toll that working with traumatized students would take on them (Meyer, 2015). These are realistic concerns that many teachers would not like to admit to. Although most teachers find joy in helping their students, one must also consider the emotional toll that takes on staff who may be dealing with their own trauma.

Through good times and bad, people need to have a support system cheering them on in the good times and helping them get through the bad times. Children are no exception to this. For students who have experienced trauma, their support system may need to be formed outside of their home. This is something that school staff can help with. According to Dods (2013) students perform better in an academic environment in which students believe that adults in the school care about their learning and about them as individuals. If school staff show that they genuinely care about the students, they work with they have a greater chance of becoming a trusting adult in that student's life.

Identifying students. It is important to identify students who have gone through trauma. School psychologists can be an important part of identifying them and educating teachers, school counselors, families and administrators on the impact that trauma has on those students. School psychologists can also help determine appropriate treatment and services for the students

(Meyer, 2015). School psychologists play a major role in helping a school become trauma informed because they are trained professionals in dealing with trauma and identifying those who have experienced it. It should be noted that school psychologists can work closely with the families of these students as well. When there are multiple supports in place for students there is a better chance of them succeeding despite the adversity, they have faced (Sippel, Pietrzak, Charney, Mayes, & Southwick, 2015).

In addition to training staff to identify students, there are things that staff can do within their classrooms for all students whether they have been traumatized or not. This way, even if a student has been through trauma and they have not been identified there are supports in place to automatically help them. These supports include first, creating a secure and calm classroom, second, allow the student to discuss their feelings without interruption, third, help the student identify misunderstandings, misconceptions and magical thinking. In other words, help the student stick to the facts rather than creating an even more traumatic story that may be fabricated. Fourth, avoid phrases such as “I’m sure it will be fine,” and fifth allow engaging tasks that prevent negative memories (Dyregrov, 2004 p. 101). With these supports, all students can be set up for success within the classroom. Although it can be difficult for teachers to navigate every child’s triggers, it is important that they try to learn them quickly so that there is a greater opportunity for them to succeed throughout the school year.

Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) questionnaires are useful tools that can help schools identify trauma in students. In a TED talk by Nadine Burke Harris (2015), she discussed the affects that trauma has on health. In her research she uses ACE scores to help her understand the amount of people who are impacted by trauma. The ACE questionnaire covers all scopes of trauma such as physical, emotional and sexual abuse, neglect, divorce and separation, domestic

violence, substance abuse and incarceration. For everything that a person has experienced they receive one point on their ACE score. Shockingly, ACE scores are very common in all people. In this study, 17,500 adults completed the questionnaire and 67% had an ACE score of one. Data shows that 12.6% of people had an ACE score of 4 or more on their questionnaire. Harris (2015) explained that the same adults who had ACE scores also had more medical issues than those who had a zero ACE score. This is attributed to their obstructed development in their youth. When children experience trauma repeatedly, they do not develop the same as someone who may not have the same experience. Those who are traumatized are in a constant state of fight or flight. When this state is no longer a lifesaving response but rather a habit, it can be damaging to the development of that person.

Counseling. Having counselors available for students is critical in all schools to help students navigate their feelings and emotions. However, for students who have experienced trauma, having a counselor in school is crucial in their ability to begin to heal from their trauma. Because of this, counselors today must be ready to respond to the need of students in schools. A school counselors' role is to help prepare students academically and socially so that they are ready for the next step in their lives. School counselors are trained to initiate programs and offer services that can support a child. They can also provide support, encouragement and guidance to students who need it which is what many student needs in order to be successful (Wood, 2008). The ultimate goal of the counseling program in schools is for the counselors to help students develop coping skills so that they can find success in their academics, future careers and the social experiences (Wood, 2008).

Unfortunately, if school staff, counselors and psychologists do not identify students who require help coping with their trauma, their unresolved problems can follow them into adulthood.

Even though identifying these students is imperative to their academic and life success, it can be difficult to identify all of these students because some do not show post-traumatic stress symptoms unless it has been repetitive trauma or the symptoms might not show until much later on (Cook-Cottone, Anderson & Kane, 2014). Every person handles their experiences differently and the same can be said for trauma. Therefore, every instance must be individualized by counselors and psychologists to help the student get the help that is tailored to their needs.

Positive relationships. It would be ideal that students would trust their teachers and other staff in the school and know that they can discuss their problems with them. On the other hand, as mentioned by Ginsburg (2014), it is not realistic to expect students to tell teachers personal information about their lives simply because they are professionals. Teachers need to earn that trust just like everyone else. This is something that takes time, but it is worth in the end and could be considered the foundation in creating a positive relationship with students. Supportive relationships between teachers and students encourage student learning and engagement in the classroom. When students feel as though their teachers are investing in them, the students invest in their learning.

Next to counseling, one area that all students require for success is a positive relationship with their teachers, administrators and other staff throughout the building. In a study conducted by Dods (2013), it was found that youth who experienced trauma were not looking for counseling or help from their teachers. Instead they were seeking out supportive and caring relationships with them because those relationships were not present in their lives outside of school. In this study students sought out relationships that were teacher driven, demonstrated authentic caring, were in touch with the student's emotional state and were individualized (Meyer, 2015). These four things seem awfully simple when written down on paper, but often

times teachers do not take the time to show their students all four of these qualities. Of course, this does not mean that teachers do not care about their students but sometimes when teachers are so wrapped up in their curriculum, they forget that there is more to a student's success than their test grade (Meyer, 2015).

When students have a positive relationship with their teachers' studies have shown that it is the key component of a decrease in at-risk behavior. As stated by McCormick (2013), a teacher's level of emotional support for their students directly correlates to the student's positive behaviors in school. Some teachers have been changing their classroom climates to ensure that there is emotional support, responsiveness to student needs, freedom from negativity and teachers want to make sure that their students feel safe in their classrooms (McCormick, 2013).

According to Dods (2013), when 182 students with emotional and behavioral disorders were asked what teachers' actions had been more beneficial to help them with their behaviors the students responded with answers centered around relationships, caring and respect (Dods, 2013). Dods explained that this study showed a great impact on students feeling connected to their school. Students described school connectedness as feeling as though they belong, enjoying going to school, truly believing teachers care about them, having friends at school, believing the staff is fair and having opportunities to participate in activities (Dods, 2013). The students who reported feeling connected to their school were less likely to use substances, experience emotional distress and demonstrate disruptive behavior. Woolfolk & Brooks (1985) explains that even a teacher's nonverbal cues can help with a student's behavior. Something as simple as a positive facial expression can initiate a positive relationship between a student and a teacher. The relationships students have with their teachers are long-lasting and can determine whether or not a student is invested in their education. Many students thrive off of their teaching genuinely

caring about them and their future. Even though teachers may have 30-100 students each school year, they must realize that their biggest impact comes from the relationships they build with those students rather than the standards that they teach.

Analysis

Adolescents today are exposed to an alarming amount of trauma that affects them physically, emotionally and academically. The studies have proven that this trauma impacts students in their everyday lives as well as their encounters with other people. Not only does it cause them difficulty in their studies, but it can determine whether they complete high school, attain a job later in their lives and the trauma that they once experienced can initiate issues in their future relationships. In the studies conducted by numerous researchers it is made clear that when children have experienced some type of trauma it can hinder their brain development and the way they interact with others.

On the other hand, some students who experience trauma may have a more positive classroom experience. In a study conducted by Dods, one student viewed school as a safe place, and she was motivated to graduate with impressive grades because she felt that was her only way to get out of her trauma (2013). In this case, her trauma empowered her to work for better things in her life. This would be considered the best outcome for a student who has experienced trauma. One would hope that all students would eventually grow stronger because of their experience rather than let it negatively impact them. Unfortunately, this is not the norm for many students. For most students who struggle to cope with their trauma, they may also view school as a break from their home lives however school can also bring about more anxiety in students who are not completing their work on time, who lash out when they are reminded of expectations and who may encounter similar types of trauma at school. These students are in a constant state of anxiety

without any chance of relief. The trauma that they are experiencing at home can begin to be mirrored in the school setting. At school a child could be bullied, emotionally and physically which could make their school experience even less desirable.

Fortunately, there are programs and resources available for both type of student and for the staff to get on board with handling trauma within their classrooms. Before implementing programs in schools though, it is essential for administrators to make sure that program is appropriate for those students. For example, a public school might not implement a faith-based program because it might be discriminatory to some cultures. The program needs to be age appropriate for those students. It would not be appropriate to implement an elementary program in a high school setting. In most school districts the school psychologists as well as the school counselors can work together to educate staff on the implications of trauma in the classroom and help teachers identify students who may be experiencing it in their lives. Once these students are identified teachers, counselors and psychologists can work together to teacher coping strategies and find external resources for the students and families that have been affected. For many educators this can be a difficult task to do and requires a vast amount of patience, understanding and a willingness to step outside of their curriculum books. Teachers need to accept that students are entering their classrooms with many experiences and all those experiences matter and they must not be overlooked (Dutro & Bien, 2014).

Often, teachers can view students who lash out in the classroom as “challenges” rather than considering the challenges that those students have faced in their lives (Durtro & Bien, 2014). In turn, the students recognize when they are not cared for and can pick up on a teacher’s social cues quickly which can then escalate their behaviors. One may argue that even the

teachers who have challenging students treat those students just like the other students. However, students can pick up on the nonverbal cues that teachers give and understand when they are being treated differently. In a study conducted by Woolfolk and Brooks, there were differences in wait time for some groups of students as well as the proximity to the students as they were presenting their work. When some students would participate in class activities the teacher would smile and when others would participate there was no emotion on the teachers face. Although it is hard to control one's nonverbal behaviors it is crucial that teachers are aware of how they are nonverbally communicating with their students (Woolfolk & Brooks, 1985).

Application

At specific schools in the Sioux Falls School District there is more trauma compared to other schools simply because of the boundary lines and the poverty rates in parts of the city. Because of this, some schools have an immense amount of behaviors that they experience on a daily basis compared to other schools within the district. These behaviors include office referrals, drug use, lashing out toward staff and non-compliance. Teachers in these schools are forced to discipline and handle behaviors that are vastly different than that of their fellow coworkers at other schools. These behaviors are not a reflection of the teaching staff and their lesson plans or the discipline policy. These behaviors are directly related to the trauma that these students have experienced. In the data conducted by a school administrator at a South Dakota middle school in a seventh-grade class of 350 students, 75 of those students had considered or were actively self-harming. Twenty students had considered or had already attempted suicide and 89 students were visiting with the school counselor or an outside counselor on a weekly basis to help them cope

with their trauma. With these statistics it is disturbing to think about the number of students who may need the help but have not yet come forward or have not been identified by staff.

Due to these high numbers all staff in these specific schools should be trained by their school psychologists and counselors to identify students who have experienced trauma. Not only do staff need to be trained but all staff should share the mindset that school is not about discipline, it is about learning. If a student is acting out in class or being non-compliant the staff should help teach them how they should act instead. If an entire school staff would get on board with this mindset shift, there could be an opportunity for our students to truly succeed not only academically but emotionally as well. This would also be an opportunity to make sure that students are not falling through the cracks. Unfortunately, the students who may not lash out or seem quiet in class may not be as noticeable as the ones who are obviously struggling.

The program that staff should experience is known as, Better Today's, Better Tomorrow's for Children's Mental Health (B2T2) (Jaycox, 2006). This program provides a general guideline for the signs and symptoms of trauma in youth. Training is intended to raise awareness; it encourages early intervention with students and treatment for those students. This program is appropriate for all types of schools and communities and it can include parents as well. The program targets all types of trauma and focuses most on the signs and symptoms of such trauma and the impact it has on students. The training with this program consists of a full day interactive training session that is led by employees of the Institute for Rural Health at Idaho State University (Jaycox, 2006). Within the training there are opportunities to explore their telehealth component and dive into topics such as suicide and depression in adolescents. All the materials required for the training are online and can be completed via video conference.

There have been 2,367 people who have received the B2T2 training and the survey results taken 12-18 months after the training concluded that 80% had improved their knowledge of how to seek treatment for students who have experienced trauma and 53% of people better understood the signs and symptoms of trauma in students. Overall this training was largely successful in educating staff as well as community members about trauma in students and it could be just as successful in other schools. The resources available in this program would be especially helpful during the early intervention and identification process.

In addition to receiving training in trauma, schools should administer ACE questionnaires to all students at the beginning, middle and end of each school year in order to identify as many students as possible throughout the year. Completing these questionnaires would be one more step to early intervention and might even give staff insight to students that they would have otherwise overlooked. Once the ACEs are completed, the counselors would keep the information and begin to gather resources for those students and ideally inform the staff that work with those students to be hyper-sensitive to the trauma that they have experienced. The scores would not be shared nor would the specific incidents that the students have endured simply because staff would not be trained to guide the students through their specific traumas, instead they would be trained in identifying and referring the students as well as making their classroom safe.

To go along with the plan the entire school, students included, should be educated on what trauma is, who it affects, what it looks like, and where to go if they need help. This would inform students of what their options are if they need help and let them know that they are not alone. It is nearly impossible to make sure that not one student falls through the cracks, however, if students are informed and know what to look for in themselves or their friends it could be an

effective way of finding students who may not have been identified. This could be done in a school assembly with the entire student body or in individual classrooms. Either way it is the school's responsibility to inform all students what this looks like in their own lives as well as in the lives of their peers.

As a whole, the training process ACE scores and student assembly are great steps toward becoming a trauma informed school. The main component to ensure the success of these strategies is the staff buy in. Staff must be willing to open their minds to the idea of teaching rather than disciplining. For many years, educators have been trying to figure out the most effective discipline strategy and ways to combat a student's behavior. Unfortunately, the idea of teaching was completely overlooked until recently. Teaching a student how to respond to stress and how to act in certain situations is crucial in a student's success. This does take patience but the outcome is far more positive for both the teacher and the student. They need to be accessible to their students and willing to discuss uncomfortable things but, they need to be prepared to give their training and resources a chance even if they do not show success in the first few months of school. For many, it can become frustrating when new things do not work the first time they are tried. It can be overwhelming when a student is consistently being non-compliant and disrespectful in the classroom and the strategies the teacher uses do not seem to work in that moment. However, if a strategy is tried repeatedly, the results of it working become greater because the student will learn what to expect. They will also learn how you react to uncomfortable situations. Although this can be a huge mindset shift for many teachers, especially veteran teachers, it is an important shift that needs to take place in schools today.

Conclusion

Education has been evolving throughout the years and schools are finding that the jobs of teachers have expanded far beyond the curriculum. Teachers are expected to identify students who are struggling academically, emotionally and physically and get them the help that they need to be successful. A lot of this training is not given to teachers before they graduate with their teaching degree and many teachers are entering the classrooms unaware of the experiences their students have faced and how to help them cope with those experiences. Trauma affects students of all demographics and the amount of students who are dealing with personal trauma is astounding.

There is a wide variety of trauma coming into the classroom today. Some students have experienced their parents getting divorced and some endure physical, sexual or emotional abuse on a daily basis. Though there is a wide range of trauma, it is important that students are identified quickly and are given the help that they need before falling too far behind in the classroom. The trauma that is experienced not only affects academic performance but it also hinders their social and developmental progress. Unfortunately, if teachers and other school staff are unable to identify when a student is struggling or going through challenges outside of the classroom, that student runs the risk of being another statistic in dropout rates and they could potentially repeat the same traumatic cycle with their own children someday.

Training teachers to be more aware and use every resource available to them is an important factor to helping the youth that walk through their classroom doors. Although the curriculum is important to focus on, one could argue that the mental health and well-being of students is vital in preparing students for their future. Once students are identified and given the resources that they need, behaviors in the classroom have a greater chance of decreasing which

then gives a greater learning opportunity for all students. Each year, teachers become more frustrated with the behaviors in their classrooms and they forget to look at what the true root of the issue is; Trauma. Becoming a trauma-informed school requires staff to be dedicated to being informed about the different types of trauma their students may be dealing with. It also makes an educators mindset shift from constant discipline to teaching in every instance. If teachers were better trained in these areas and all students were informed of the implications of trauma as well as the resources available to them if they were to ask for help the students would have a greater likelihood of success. This type of training would ensure that teachers are prepared to manage all types of trauma in their classroom and find the resources necessary to help students work through their trauma in a safe environment. Experiencing trauma does not have to define our students and the sooner that they are taught strategies to cope, the sooner their lives can turn into something positive.

References

- 6 Ways to Become a Trauma-Informed School. (2018). Retrieved from <https://nationalresilienceminstitute.org/2017/05/6-ways-become-trauma-informed-school/>
- Cavanaugh, B. (2016). Trauma-informed classrooms and schools. *Beyond Behavior, 25*(2), 41–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107429561602500206>
- Cole, S. F., Eisner, A., Gregory, M., & Ristuccia, J. (2013). *Helping traumatized children learn*. Boston: Massachusetts Advocates for Children.
- Cook-Cottone, C. P., Anderson, L., & Kane, L. (2014). *The elements of counseling children and adolescents*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Dods, J. (2013). Enhancing understanding of the nature of supportive school-based relationships for youth who have experienced trauma. *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue Canadienne De L'éducation, 36*(1), 71-95. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/stable/canajeducrevucan.36.1.71>
- Dutro, E., & Bien, A. (2014). Listening to the speaking wound: A trauma studies perspective on student positioning in schools. *American Educational Research Journal, 51*(1), 7-35. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/stable/24546666>
- Dwivedi, K. N., Irwin, M., & Nicholson, C. (2010). *Children and adolescents in trauma: creative therapeutic approaches*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspxdirect=true&db=nlebk&AN=339492&site=ehost-live&scope=site>
- Dyregrov, A. (2010). *Supporting traumatized children and teenagers: A guide to providing understanding and help*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. Retrieved from

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspxdirect=true&db=nlebk&AN=352880&site=ehost-ve&scope=site>

Ginsburg, K. R., American academy of pediatrics, & Kinsman, S. B. (2014). *Reaching teens:*

Strength-based communication strategies to build resilience and support healthy adolescent development. Elk Grove Village, Illinois: American Academy of Pediatrics.

Retrieved from

<http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1243670&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

Harris, N. B. (2015). How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime | Nadine Burke

Harris. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95ovIJ3dsNk>

Jaycox, L. (2006). *How schools can help students recover from traumatic experiences: A tool*

-kit for supporting long-term recovery. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

Retrieved from

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspxdirect=true&db=nlebk&AN=213917&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

McCormick, M., Cappella, E., O'Connor, E., & McClowry, S. (2013). Parent involvement,

emotional support, and behavior problems: An ecological approach. *The Elementary*

School Journal, 114(2), 277-300. doi:10.1086/673200

Meyer, Meghan M., (2015). "An action research project addressing the impact of trauma on

students in schools through building a trauma-informed school community" Doctoral

Research Project. 2. http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_drp/2

Perry, Bruce. D. (2017). Trauma informed school. Retrieved from

<https://www.traumainformedschool.us/>

- Porche, M., Fortuna, L., Lin, J., & Alegria, M. (2011). Childhood trauma and psychiatric disorders as correlates of school dropout in a national sample of young adults. *Child Development, 82*(3), 982-998. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/stable/29782885>
- Sippel, L., Pietrzak, R., Charney, D., Mayes, L., & Southwick, S. (2015). How does social support enhance resilience in the trauma-exposed individual? *Ecology and Society, 20*(4). Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/stable/26270277>
- Spilt, J., Hughes, J., Wu, J., & Kwok, O. (2012). Dynamics of teacher—student relationships: Stability and change across elementary school and the influence on children's academic success. *Child Development, 83*(4), 1180-1195. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/stable/23255687>
- Wood, C., & Moore, J. (2008). Introduction: Elementary school counseling—Interventions and programs. *The Elementary School Journal, 108*(5), 358-361. doi:10.1086/589466
- Woolfolk, A., & Brooks, D. (1985). The influence of teachers' nonverbal behaviors on students' perceptions and performance. *The Elementary School Journal, 85*(4), 513-528. Retrieved From <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.nwciowa.edu/stable/1001153>
- Zacarian, D., Alvarez-Ortiz, L., & Haynes, J. (2017). *Teaching to strengths: Supporting students living with trauma, violence, and chronic stress*. Alexandria, Virginia, USA: ASCD. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1612288&site=ehost-live&scope=site>