Possibilities and Problems in Trauma-Based and Social Emotional Learning Programs

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Introduction

Issue 43: Possibilities and Problems in Trauma-Based and Social Emotional Learning Programs

Tracey Pyscher and Anne Crampton

Social, emotional, and affective experiences are impossible to separate from thinking, doing, and being in the world. Increasingly, schools and community-based organizations are recognizing this truth through the adoption of programs that focus on the emotional lives of children and youth, especially when emotions are fraught, and lives have been difficult. Programs such as social emotional learning (SEL) frameworks and trauma-informed practices (TIP) are not only popular, they are deemed "essential" in almost every corner of the social services sector.

Advocates for these programs claim that SEL and TIP create a necessary foundation for greater self-awareness, better relationships, and improved learning capacities for children and youth. We, along with other authors in this issue, suggest that these programs often focus on those who are marginalized through race, class, and/or experiences of violence, including family violence, while ignoring the social conditions that create marginalization and its effects, and neglecting the many strengths and strategies deployed by these children and youth. This focus can lead to labeling and/or silencing legitimate expressions of resistance and difference in a quest to elicit specific types of behavioral and cultural conformity for students to be deemed "learning ready" (e.g., Crampton, Pyscher & Robinson, 2018; Pyscher, 2019).

Issue #43 of the Bank Street *Occasional Paper Series* explores the sometimes troubling beliefs and assumptions at work in popular social and emotional learning and trauma-informed pedagogies as well as some of the impacts of this new attention. In this issue, we seek to critically examine both the problems and possibilities raised by the adoption of these efforts. Most SEL and TIP research has focused on claims to "improve" the social and emotional responses of children and youth. While we are encouraged to see the ways researchers, educators, and other practitioners position social and emotional dimensions as worthy of attention, we are apprehensive about the way this research routinely positions children and youth as somehow in need of correction, "healing," or fixing. We ask what happens when expressions of emotion are categorized as desirable or not desirable, without regard to the context and cultural make-up of children and the adults working with them, and especially when children and youth who have experienced traumas (e.g., racism, poverty, domestic violence) continue to be viewed as damaged, even down to their DNA (*ACES Connection*, 2015).

We are also concerned with how SEL and TIP have become commodified and packaged in ways that lead practitioners away from some important original intentions. In the case of SEL, this includes supporting the whole child through building skills in emotional intelligence and conflict resolution (*Edutopia*, 2011). More recently, in its commodified form (e.g., CASEL, 2019), SEL appears mainly concerned with pro-social emotional expression. We argue that this emphasis promotes conformity and compliance and is often devoid of expectations that teachers reflect upon their relationships with children and youth, especially when interactions are difficult (Lewis & Crampton, 2015; Pyscher & Lozenski, 2017).

TIP emerged from a need to understand and address the dramatic impact of domestic violence on communities, including the way it drained social service resources. Virtually all TIP initiatives are built on findings from the CDC's Kaiser Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study from 1995-1997 (*Centers for Disease Control and Convention*), and although this landmark study is now over two decades old, little has

changed. The astonishing annual financial cost of addressing the impact of domestic violence within the U.S. is $9.3 billion (*Institute for Women's Policy Research*, 2017). The human cost is also disturbing. On average, an estimated 50 women are killed each month in situations of domestic violence (Snyder, 2019) and over 10 million children are reported as experiencing ongoing familial domestic violence (*Research Center on Domestic Violence*, 2011).

The need to address domestic violence is urgent. And it follows that there is a pressing need to honor all children's social and emotional lives in school and social service settings, with special attention for children who have experienced or are experiencing trauma. However, as many of the articles in this special issue argue, there is a problematic assumption that difficult or resistant behavior indicates a deficit of social-emotional learning or intelligence. This in turn gets diagnosed as originating from "trauma" and subsequently treated with trauma-informed practices, which too often ignore childrens' cultural and communicative repertoires (Guttierez & Rogoff, 2003) such as expressions of resistance (Pyscher, 2018). Several authors in this issue describe how SEL and TIP flatten the complex experiences of children's social, emotional, and psychic lives in what proves to be an ineffective cycle that can be damaging for students and demoralizing for practitioners.

In this call, we invited educators, practitioners, therapists, curriculum planners, and curriculum theorists to report on non-pathologizing approaches to working with and for children targeted as in need of services within SEL and trauma-informed practices. We sought articles that offer critical, humanizing perspectives with a goal of re-envisioning possibilities for the social and emotional well-being of children and youth. Inquiries included:

- How might trauma or social-emotional frameworks and/or programming shape educators, practitioners, therapists, and curriculum planners' beliefs and create damaging and/or positive effects on the children and youth they serve? How do we cast light on these complicated, troubling, and hopeful effects?

- What kinds of frameworks, professional development programs, pedagogies, and community programs are being implemented that show promise and innovation in supporting the social and emotional lives of children and youth from marginalized communities, especially those with histories of violence, both intergenerational and systemic, and familial (domestic)?

- In what ways might SEL and trauma-based pedagogies perpetuate inequities or function to pathologize difference?

We encouraged authors to take a critical stance and identify the struggles and limitations of SEL and TIP as well as the successes of these approaches within a range of contexts. The articles in this issue include personal, educational, and community-based narratives, multimodal representations, as well as research studies. We believe the authors in this special issue help to paint a more complex picture of how children, youth, families, teachers, community-based educators, and researchers experience and view SEL and TIP.

This special issue begins with five articles that describe how implementations of SEL and TIP shape not only the systems they are set in, but the lives of children and youth who are served within them. While the pieces by (1) Foster, (2) Stearns, (3) Winninghoff, (4) Khasnabis and Goldin, and (5) Mahfouz and Anthony-Stevens demonstrate the need for improved ways of thinking about and enacting SEL and TIP, the subsequent six articles move toward envisioning how educators and practitioners can rethink this work with and for the children and youth who are most profoundly impacted by SEL and TIP frameworks. Articles by (6)

Golden, (7) Wilson and Richardson, (8) Koplow, Dean, and Blachly, (9) Gibbs and Papoi, (10) Payne, Adair, and Sachdeva, and (11) Her, Hermann, and Parker offer hopeful and even transformative practices and beliefs that advocate for different approaches in supporting the social, emotional, and psychic well-being of children and youth and the community of adults that surround them.

1. **Looking for Trouble and Causing Trauma**

   Marquita Foster, a former pre-K principal, opens this special issue. She offers a poignant and powerful retelling of her experience trying to navigate teachers to challenge the deficit discourses of SEL and TIP shaping the lives of the marginalized (racialized) children they are charged to educate. She offers painful analysis from a systemic level, yet presents important glimpses of transformative possibilities through an alternative, culturally sustaining practice of "othermothering," a West African tradition (Collins, 2000).

2. **Let Them Get Mad: Using the Psychoanalytic Frame to Rethink SEL and Trauma-Informed Practice**

   Clio Stearns shares research from a year spent in a third-grade classroom with a teacher who made space for a broad range of affective expressions, including anger. Noting that "in the name of trauma-informed practice, schools are over-simplifying the nature of trauma and misappropriating emotional life in the name of teaching compliance," Stearns argues that we would do better to examine emotion rather than attempt to regulate and control it. She recognizes that one strength of TIP has been to bring awareness to teachers about the complexity of children's lives, but cautions that TIP is a quick fix (and not really a fix at all).

3. **Trauma by Numbers: Warnings Against the Use of ACE Scores in Trauma-Informed Schools**

   Alex Winninghoff examines the role that ACE scores have come to play in trauma-informed schools, and raises an alarm about how the well-intentioned trauma-informed practice of asking, "What happened to you?" instead of "What's wrong with you?" actually sends educators and students the message that something is wrong with traumatized students because something happened to them. Winninghoff uses questions and data from the ACE framework, as well as a reading of a scene from the movie *Paper Tigers* to ground this thoughtful critique.

4. **Don't Be Fooled, Trauma Is a Systemic Problem: Trauma as a Case of Weaponized Educational Innovation**

   Debi Khasnabis and Simona Goldin argue that teachers, especially during their most fraught interactions with students, find themselves seeking solutions based on problematic causes that often lead them to "re-traumatize and re-stigmatize the children they serve." Set in the context of the professional development they lead with teachers, they suggest that teachers need to engage differently to interrogate their own beliefs and actions related to TIP and to engage in what they call a "systemically trauma-informed practice." In turn, the analysis and tools they offer open opportunities for a more humane approach to working with marginalized children.

5. **Why Trouble SEL? The Need for Cultural Relevance in SEL**

   In this article, Julia Mahfouz and Vanessa Anthony-Stevens offer a critical and generative critique of the SEL model and its use when working with marginalized, minoritized, and/or historically under-resourced students in a kindergarten classroom in a sovereign tribal nation in Idaho. They

question SEL's use and argue that its implementation is void of what they call a "cultured context of social interaction and school learning." They recommend that schools adopt an interdisciplinary lens, integrating culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) into SEL programs to create conditions for student well-being and academic achievement across contexts.

6. **Importance of Narrative: Moving Towards Sociocultural Understandings of Trauma-Informed Praxis**

Noah Golden describes how the effects of trauma are framed in terms of biomedical damage, leading to the "fixed approach" of many TIP programs. Instead, Golden proposes a sociocultural view that enlists children and youth who have experienced trauma in trauma-informed praxis. Golden draws on data from a study in a TIP school to make a case for praxis emerging from strong relationships with schools, faculty, and peers that sets the stage for youth to engage in powerful meaning-making of their past and present experiences and allows them to imagine visions of the future.

7. **All I Really Want to Say Is They Don't Really Care About Us: Creating and Maintaining Healing Centered Collective Care in Hostile Times**

Asif Wilson and Wytress Richardson move away from Western conceptualizations of TIP and offer two powerful case studies in what they call "healing centered collective care—a fugitive framework of care for caregivers." Extending Ginwright's (2018) healing centered engagement, they describe their work with each other in higher education and with volunteers working with a girls' group in a Chicago-based after-school library program. Their tools and practices are rooted in kinship relationships, helping to create spaces that expose structures of oppression and are grounded in asset-based explorations of well-being.

8. **Emotionally Responsive Practice as Trauma-Informed Care: Parallel Process to Support Teacher Capacity to Hold Children with Traumatic History**

Coming from the field of social work, Lesley Koplow, Noelle Dean, and Margaret Blachly offer a description of what Emotionally Responsive Practice (ERP)—an approach created at Bank Street College—offers to teachers and caregivers who work with children who have experienced trauma. ERP suggests that teachers' and practitioners' own experiences must be consciously acknowledged in order for them to see and hear the children in their care. The article presents narratives from teachers who were learning about ERP from the authors and highlights the technique as effective and humanizing for adults and children.

9. **Threading the Needle: On Balancing Trauma and Critical Teaching**

Brian Gibbs and Kristin Papoi explore how teachers can engage learners in difficult content, with the example of three case studies. They offer teachers persuasive and concrete strategies for developing more critical and transformative examples of TIP within the contexts of what they call "teaching hard histories." These include teaching social justice topics in unjust school spaces, teaching about war to the children of soldiers, and teaching about lynching in schools near historic lynching sites. They make a powerful argument that the imposition of SEL can work to silence teachers' confidence, often positioning them to avoid discussions related to tough topics because it might "traumatize" students. Rather, they suggest that engaging in tough discussions is its own form of healing.

10. **Creating Classroom Community to Welcome Children Experiencing Trauma**

In this piece, Katherina Payne, Jennifer Keys Adair, and Shubhi Sachdeva share their findings from a year-long study in a South Texas Head Start program. Their moving description of classroom practices that welcomed individual students experiencing trauma (such as homelessness) into a shared community offers a model of SEL and TIP that is a powerful example of civic education for early childhood settings and beyond.

11. **Interrupting Trauma with Hope, Kindness, Art, and Healing**

Told through compelling perspectives of community-based educators, Christine Her, Yvette Hermann, and Emma Parker close this issue with an inspiring window into a community-based art organization. ArtForce Iowa is dedicated to supporting marginalized young people to understand and engage in self-healing from trauma through a variety of art mediums. The youths' stories and art demonstrate the power of self-healing through alternative approaches and offer culturally sustaining possibilities in and out of school contexts. We recommend that readers especially take time to listen to and view the multimedia art created by the young people who are involved in artmaking/healing at ArtForce Iowa. Their art can be found in live links within this article.

In Closing

We want to thank all the authors in this special issue. We deeply appreciate their contributions and insights. We are also grateful to the reviewers and the Bank Street editors and board. It was an honor to serve as guest editors in the support of this work and in service to the Bank Street *Occasional Paper Series*. We would love to hear how this effort towards justice impacts the work you do.

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Looking for Trouble and Causing Trauma

Marquita D. Foster

When I became an elementary assistant principal in 2013, I was intrigued when the principal explained that she had assigned me to handle discipline for pre-K through second grade because of my calm demeanor. "The little ones do quirky things," she said. "Quirky things" sounded innocuous. I would soon learn that "quirky things" was a mild euphemism for pathological behavior.

I wasn't prepared for the occasionally cruel manner in which school policy expected me to handle quirkiness, especially in four-year-olds. I didn't agree with the labeling of these children because, as some labeling theories maintained, it could result in children internalizing the teachers' perceptions of them (Ferguson, 2010).

Ironically, labeling children resulted from one of my major responsibilities as assistant principal—training teachers every August before school started on Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports or PBIS, "which is the only approach to addressing behavior mentioned in [school] law" (National Education Association, 2014). PBIS is a three-tiered approach in which teachers utilize universal, targeted, and individualized strategies to prevent misbehavior in the classroom and common areas within the school (e.g., the hallways).

I struggled because I realized that the training cultivated my teachers' deficit thinking about Black children. Deficit thinking is operationalized in the policies and practices of many school systems, to substantiate stereotypes, justify attitudes, and to exact zero tolerance for Black children and children of color learning and behaving outside of the norm (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

In addition to PBIS, I had to present my teachers with other options to address the behavior of some children. Besides the traditional discipline methods, there was Response to Intervention (RtI), another three-tiered approach that was problematic because it also pathologized children's behavior by evaluating it as a disability. Finally, I considered social and emotional learning (SEL), but an examination of SEL revealed that it came with several challenges that our campus couldn't undertake.

This article recounts and reflects on my most challenging year as an assistant principal in a Texas public school. I provide the community and school context, describe how quirkiness became pathologized, share my struggles to find solutions to address behavior, and conclude by making a case for "othermothering" as an effective approach to SEL. I believe othermothering would have been a benefit to our school because it retains Afrocentric family values, supports the well-being of all Black children, and sustains a collaborative relationship between the Black family unit and the school.

Community and School

In the five-mile drive between home and school Monday through Friday, I enjoyed a splendid Venn diagram of urban, suburban, and rural landscapes navigated by almost 38,000 people. My school lay in a neighborhood that had aspects of all three: it was one street over from a major highway that brought urban busyness. It was tucked behind moderately priced apartment complexes and houses. It was a block away from a goat farm that also had chickens and a horse. Since the early 1980s, the community had noticeably flipped from mostly White to predominantly Black. Hispanics became the second largest minority group when they began moving into the area in the early 2000s.

My campus offered grades Pre-Kindergarten Age 4 (Pre-K4) through fifth grade and had over 500 students. Ninety percent were Black and approximately 6 percent were Hispanic. The faculty was comprised of 30 Black teachers and one Hispanic teacher. Ninety percent of our children were economically disadvantaged, with 51 percent considered at risk of dropping out, based on state-defined criteria such as unsatisfactory performance on readiness or state assessments or placement in an alternative education program (Texas Education Agency, 2019).

To support academic readiness, district leadership placed heavy emphasis on growing the pre-kindergarten program. Boasting the highest rate of enrolment in Dallas County, the school district offered free, full-day pre-K4 on all seven elementary campuses for eligible four-year-olds and partnered with Head Start of Greater Dallas to provide nutritional and health-related services. The district also promoted a balanced literacy initiative alongside science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education for pre-K4 classrooms.

August Tears

Wailing, shrieking, full-on tug-of-war between mother and child, promises to return, bribes for good behavior, sincere-then-harsh demands to stop crying, parents inching away and sneaking out down the hall behind screams of terror. Our students punctually arrived in brand-new school uniforms unaware that their moms, dads, and grandmothers would shortly hand them over to absolute strangers.

My four pre-K teachers spoke calmly as they gathered up their children and ushered them toward wonderfully bright, print-rich classrooms. They looked like they were counting the children. Class sizes over 18 were taxing, even with the assistance of paraprofessionals. I usually brought up the rear, nervously smiling and grabbing little hands and directing tiny feet. Each year, they seemed to get smaller and more infantile, too fragile to navigate the incredibly scheduled, factory-paced public school setting. By ten o'clock, the crying and pleas to go home crested and troughed. Sobbing was contagious. Every kind word, every act of comfort, every test of patience was repeated like the celebrated plot of the movie *Groundhog Day*. Late August chaos, the beginning of "real" school for some four-year-olds.

Crying in October Means Something's Wrong

Mid-September was the first "behavior benchmark." We understood that the children's emotional outbursts over perceived abandonment were signs of stress. Crying was natural, even healthy. If, within a few weeks of school, most children stopped crying and could keep their hands to themselves and a bubble in their mouths, we credited the teachers' ability to help them adapt to the school's expectations of socially acceptable behavior. To develop students' self-control, teachers' efforts were buttressed by the implementation of "token economies," as recommended by Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). A token economy is a system of rewards that schools utilize to encourage and reinforce good behavior. For example, students receive a token such a ticket or chip for adhering to their teachers' expectations (e.g., being quiet in the hallway or cleaning up their desks). Students then exchange their tokens for rewards or privileges, such as treats or extra time at recess. Token economies are very popular with students, and research indicates that such positive behavior reinforcement techniques are effective in reducing inappropriate behaviors in elementary classrooms (Filcheck, McNeil, Greco, & Bernard, 2004). Within my first year, I discovered through teacher feedback that PBIS worked but lost effectiveness after the first six weeks of school. I now realize that the mid-September behavior benchmark signaled the downside of token economies. That is, the value of positive behavior supports tended to decrease as the shine of extrinsic rewards wore off.

However, if some children were still crying in October, there was concern. On our campus, October was usually when teachers' frustrations with repetitive behaviors began to show and office referrals increased. If their use of PBIS strategies couldn't improve behaviors, then the teachers sought my assistance. So in early October, teachers started sending me emails, dropping by my office, or stopping me in the hallway to express their concerns. True to deficit thinking, something was wrong with one or two of their children.

One veteran teacher, seemingly adept at evaluating behaviors on sight, caught me walking out of the building one afternoon and gave me her diagnoses. "Some of these kids aren't well. They just cry too much. Noise bothers them. How can there not be noise in a pre-K classroom? And I can't even touch some of them. I'm pretty sure that's because half of them are autistic. But then again, in this neighborhood, they could be drug babies."

My teachers appeared to say, without saying, that "the neighborhood" (coded language) played out significantly in their children's lives. This perception was evident after I called an after-school meeting with the pre-K faculty. The teachers talked about how much of their time and energy was occupied with addressing the disruptive behaviors of a few children. They had contacted parents several times and consistently provided rewards and consequences, but the increasing incidents of defiance, insubordination, profanity, sexual acting out, and garden variety misconduct left them unsure about what to do.

"I don't mean any disrespect because I love these children, but poverty is the problem here. Poverty is trauma. And poor people have behaviors that don't align with what we do at school. I know how that sounds but it's true," a fifth-year pre-K teacher said. Heads nodded and "yes" echoed throughout the room. The unanimous agreement with this teacher's comments bothered me but I wasn't surprised, even though this was Black teachers discussing Black children. This statement does not intend to express an indictment of Black teachers but allows me to offer a criticism of the school system in which Black teachers have to work.

After over 20 years in education as a Black educator, I realized that there was something specious about school systems and their expectations of us as Black teachers. On one hand, we are highly sought after because of the cultural understanding and advocacy that we bring to the classroom. The research on student-teacher racial matching or the role model effect has shown that Black children academically benefit from having at least one Black teacher during their educational careers (Dee, 2004, p. 58).

On the other hand, the school systems also expect teachers, regardless of race and ethnicity, to help children conform to Western, middle-class standards of achievement and civility because these are societal expectations (Kentli, 2009; Noguera, 2003). Over time, teachers (and administrators) develop organizational thinking and internalize the systemic biases reflected in schools' policies and practices, such as discipline policies (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). For Black teachers, this expectation can also lead to role entrapment (Madsen & Mabokela, 2000), where we find ourselves being seen as experts on how to "fix" Black children.

The expectation and adherence to school practices can cause Black teachers to form what W.E.B. DuBois (1903/2005) called a double consciousness:

> this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body (p. 9).

So I understood the underpinnings in the pre-K teachers' attitudes and actions. As their discipline administrator, I shouldered the responsibility for executing punishments beyond their authority. Harsher, more punitive consequences sometimes worked to reduce or eliminate misbehavior, but suspending disruptive pre-K through second grade students was no longer allowed. Texas had just passed House Bill 674, which stated that "a student enrolled in a grade level below grade three is prohibited from being placed in out-of-school suspension" except in cases where weapons or drugs were involved (Texas 85th Legislature, 2017).

This law required districts to create positive behavior programs with disciplinary alternatives. We already had PBIS, so we needed to look for causes. Was poverty responsible? If not, then what?

Poverty as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)

According to the National Health Policy Forum (2004), 72 percent of children and youth will suffer one adverse childhood experience (ACE) before they are 18 years old. The most common ACE in America is poverty. Not all children who live in poverty experience it in the same manner, but enduring long-term poverty can translate into behavior issues in some children.

Data show that a staggering number of Black children endure poverty. The Children's Defense Fund (2018) states that while the child poverty rate for Blacks is declining, it is still significantly high. Blacks only represent 13 percent of the U.S. population, but about one in three Black children under 5 years of age is poor and nearly one in five Black children is extremely poor. Using census data from 1980-2010, Firebaugh and Acciai (2016) analyzed 57,370 metropolitan neighborhoods. Looking at Black neighborhood disadvantage, they found that Blacks, more than any other Americans, continue to live in poorer communities and neighborhoods.

Children living in poverty are clearly affected by their circumstances, but children can be resilient in the presence of a strong family unit. However, I found it difficult to change the teachers' deficit thinking about poverty, even when there were positive aspects such a strong family unit to consider. In our community, the extended Black family unit with blood relatives and "adopted" non-blood members showed support for the children's education. Grounded in African heritage, this extended network was devoted to the service of children, providing them guidance, and seeing to their well-being (Wolf, 1983).

Even though family involvement is encouraged in schools, research shows that some schools do not make Black parents feel welcomed or valued (Koonce & Harper, 2011). We often blame Black parents, particularly mothers, for their children's circumstances (Cooper, 2009). In our school, our deficit beliefs were covertly sent, in the coded language of PTA meetings and newsletters. For example, we provided "tips" for Black parents on how to help their children care about their education. Because of these kinds of school practices, my teachers focused on the evidence and expression of poverty in the neighborhood instead of on the assets within the family unit.

Hunger and Behavior

As we continued to meet and seek solutions, issues of hunger arose, which I did not dismiss. Based on my experience, hunger was one of the last things considered when assessing the cause of students' behavior. In 2018, Texans Care for Children released the report, "Keeping Kids in Class." Its findings, referenced in House Bill 674, focused on the causes of school suspensions. Among the reasons listed was unmet basic needs. The report stated, "Behaviors stemming from hunger, developmental disorders, trauma, and similar causes can be addressed effectively but cannot be 'disciplined away'" (Texans Care for Children, 2018, p. 7).

It is important to note that while many studies conclude that hungry children appear more likely to show behavioral and academic problems, these studies cannot prove that there is a causal relationship between hunger and behavioral problems. There may be another variable that correlates more than hunger, and hunger may be the effect and not the cause (Kleinman, et al., 1998).

Even so, the American educational system has made efforts to assuage the effects of hunger in school-aged children since the mid-twentieth century. The National School Lunch Act of 1946 ensured per-meal cash reimbursements to schools that provided healthy lunches to poor children (United States Department of Agriculture, 2013). The 1966 Child Nutrition Act, acknowledging the link between food, nutrition, and children's capacity to develop and learn, extended measures to special milk and breakfast programs (Social Security Administration, 2019).

Our district leadership ensured that our schools remained vital food sources, especially in the summertime. In addition to free and reduced-cost lunch, schools offered breakfast in the classroom and summer feeding programs, which addressed how food insecurity in childhood negatively impacted cognitive, behavioral, and socio-emotional development (Jyoti, Frongillo, & Jones, 2005).

Additionally, all our schools implemented the Food 4 Kids North Texas Food Bank program to tackle the issue of weekend hunger. Our counselors were charged with providing teachers with referral forms for students whom they witnessed exhibiting signs of hunger, such as asking for more food or hoarding food (Feeding America, 2019). Based on teacher observations, students were referred to the counselors, who ensured that they received a backpack of nutritious snacks every Friday after school.

These initiatives to fight hunger seem to disrupt the notion that hunger was the problem in pre-K. What my investigation of hunger on campus did prove was that we were remiss in treating hunger with the Food 4 Kids program. First, it was possible to misidentify students as food-insecure purely based on signs of hunger. Misidentification meant some students received extra food, whether or not they needed it.

Second, it was also likely that food-insecure students were overlooked because they did not exhibit hunger behaviors and were not getting into a lot of trouble. They would have had to stand out some other way, such as in their hygiene, personal appearance, or clothing. Still, these conditions could have been related to access to personal care products rather than signs of food insecurity.

Third, our counselor limited our teachers to six food referrals for the school year. This had not been my experience on other campuses where the number of food referrals was limitless. I do not know why there was a difference. But the limitations on referrals meant that our teachers had to select students who demonstrated the severest and/or most obvious signs of hunger, probably missing some students who needed the Food 4 Kids program.

I could not prove that hunger was contributing to misbehavior, and some pre-K teachers believed that just giving students more food would not have solved their problems anyway. Our discipline statistics still suggested that there was "something" going on with our four-year-olds. According to the school's behavior management database, our pre-K students, from October to January, had as many reported incidences of classroom disruptions as our third graders. They were "sent home" as often as students in grades 3-5 combined.

We were now seriously considering some of our students' mental health. My teachers did not feel as though they were equipped to handle mental health behaviors, so they requested training. The prevailing notion was that poverty caused trauma and trauma affected mental health. It was hard not to make such

connections because talk of poverty, trauma, and social-emotional learning was everywhere—on the news and internet and in academic literature.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

During a principals' meeting in the fall of 2017, a group of behavior specialists presented district data about the increase of behavior problems tied to confirmed mental health diagnoses. The specialists distributed a handout outlining the signs of social-emotional disorders that principals and teachers should be looking for in students. They also provided a packet of mental health resources for principals and counselors to share with parents in need of community-based services. They urged all campus leadership to discuss social and emotional learning (SEL) in future staff developments, and they proposed attending staff meetings to provide support. I took them up on their offer. I knew very little about social and emotional learning at the time.

In the last two decades, SEL has been deemed promising in developing children's healthy responses to stress because it teaches them to become self-aware, self-regulate their emotions, and make sound decisions (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Durlak, 2017). According to Zins and Elias (2006), SEL evolved from prevention and resilience research by the Consortium of the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence (1994). The publication of Howard Gardner's *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* in 1983 and Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence* in 1998 helped spark interest in SEL in the late 1990s.

In the introduction to *Emotional Intelligence*, Goleman (2005) said he hoped SEL would become standard practice in every school; he noted that the many benefits of acquiring emotional intelligence (EI) had gone to privileged children in private schools. He stated that many children from marginalized neighborhoods also benefited if their schools implemented social and emotional learning practices.

Since the 1990s, education-related companies, working in concert with schools, have assumed the sense of urgency to provide social-emotional learning training and resources. For example, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), perhaps the most well-known organization contributing to this restorative movement, maintains on its website that its social and emotional interventions have increased academic achievement and improved behavior in pre-K through high school since 1997. CASEL (2019b) refers to "an extensive body of rigorous research" that authenticates the long-term impact of social and emotional learning on equity, poverty, and life outcomes (e.g., education and employment). Current research on adverse childhood experiences has strengthened the narrative about how SEL can positively impact children's learning and behavior.

Jumping on the SEL Bandwagon

In preparation for my staff meeting to discuss social and emotional learning (SEL), I explored twenty "reputable and secure" SEL organization websites. They promoted familiar strategies such as creating a safe learning environment, cultivating positive relationships, elevating cultural identity, and rejecting whitestreaming of the curriculum.

Many of the websites, such as that of the Wallace Foundation (2019), referenced CASEL and cited similar results and long-term outcomes: improved attitudes and behaviors, fewer negative behaviors, and reduced emotional distress. Some websites provided a link to a meta-analysis of 213 different studies of schools that implemented SEL programs and reported an 11-percentile point gain in the academic achievement of students participating in SEL (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).

As I searched for information, I found the saturation of SEL information dizzying. A few critiques suggested SEL had been developed so quickly by so many different organizations that there needed to be ongoing evaluations of the claims of effectiveness and success, and that programs varied widely in what they offered and emphasized as social and emotional learning (Bear, Whitcomb, Elias, & Blank, 2015).

Being an SEL School Comes with a Price

Nonetheless, I pushed forward. The behavior specialists arrived and presented the same PowerPoint as they had at the principals' meeting. They provided teachers with behavior checklists and restorative strategies. Their presentation was helpful, my teachers said. Their resources were good, but my teachers wanted and needed more. "Like a program, I suppose," I suggested. Some of the teachers responded, "Yes!"

After I researched the costs to implement an SEL program, it was clear that we would have to rely on our behavior specialists whose expenses were already covered in the district's budget. The SEL programs were expensive. For instance, to implement Blueprints' Positive Action program with fidelity, schools would have to pay $9,859 for the first year. Ongoing implementation and monitoring support would cost an additional $3000 per day plus travel for on-site training, $300 for an ongoing training workshop kit, and $300 per hour for optional technical assistance (Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development, 2019).

CASEL (2019a) provides a cost calculator because its programs are tailored to school district needs. In its financial sustainability toolkit, four models from different school districts are presented to help other districts estimate the costs of implementing and staffing CASEL's programs.

In the Austin Model, 14,234 students were served at a cost of $49 per student, totaling $697,466 for the first year. In the Chicago Model, which reflected different needs, 9,000 students were served at a cost of $700 per student, totaling $6,300,000 for the first year. The Washoe and Wheaton Warrenville Models were less costly, at $217,134 and $40,500, respectively.

In my opinion, there were two major potential problems with the direction SEL was heading. First, how would under-resourced school districts begin to pay for such expensive programs? I didn't doubt the positive testimonials of participating schools, but I agreed with the summary in *The Economic Value of Social and Emotional Learning*, which stated:

> The benefits of an educational investment do not necessarily justify the costs. For some interventions, the benefits will exceed the costs. But in others the investment is not found to be compensated by its returns: even if an intervention is effective, it may be too expensive to implement. (Belfield, Bowen, Klapp, Lenin, Shand, & Zander, 2015, p. 3)

I knew that Title I funds could be used for such interventions and probably were, in most cases. Title I is a part of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) that provides funds to schools with high numbers of children from economically diverse families to help the children meet state academic standards. I had worked with three principals at three different schools who could have utilized Title I funds for SEL training, but they chose to use the funds to hire additional instructional support staff (e.g., interventionists) in order to improve reading and math scores on the state assessments. They relied instead on PBIS methods that cost little to no money at all.

Secondly, SEL ran the risk of being ruined by the efficiency model and reduced to a predetermined set of worksheets. For example, Austin Independent School District used School-Connect (2019) lessons based on CASEL's SEL competencies or abilities: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship

skills, and decision-making. Within each competency, there were at least three student learning objectives and over 20 individual lessons that were used, in some cases, in other competencies, depending on the student learning objective. There was practically a lesson for everything, from cultivating curiosity and grit to writing a college essay. When and how could my teachers use all these lessons?

Research addressing teachers' concerns about losing instructional time to implement SEL recommends integrating academic and SEL standards in the lesson cycle. Teachers are often expected to integrate curriculum initiatives, including digital technologies, with ineffective or infrequent follow-up support. Integration is complicated because state assessments are not going away and curriculum standards are not becoming less rigorous. School districts must address this contextual issue or run the risk of invalidating teachers' concerns about how to effectively use instructional time for SEL and meet the expectations of teaching the standards (Kress, Norris, Schoenholz, Elias, & Seigle, 2004).

Response to Intervention (RtI)

We had considered poverty and hunger. Our schools could not afford to purchase a full year of SEL training and materials. Our PBIS program was faltering because disruptive behaviors and suspensions continued to rise. We had another option—Response to Intervention (RtI), in which we would identify students' academic and/or behavioral needs, provide intensive interventions, and access those interventions' effectiveness by routinely collecting data. Our RtI implementation was already in full swing for our academic struggles. I now had to ask teachers to consider it for behavior. The request was not met with enthusiasm.

Pre-K teachers already felt overworked. The RtI process would be adding another tremendous commitment. Our school had one interventionist whose time was spread thin providing academic support to at-risk K-2 students and third-to-fifth grade students taking state assessments in late spring. This situation meant that most teachers would be responsible for designing their own RtI plans—in some cases, for more than one child.

Before any evaluations were scheduled with the diagnosticians, the teachers had to work their RtI plans for six to nine weeks. Some of my pre-K teachers felt this process was pointless. Four-year-olds were deemed too young to be diagnosed with specific behavior disorders, but they did what they could with the RtI process and focused their energies on instruction.

In the cases where other grade level teachers implemented the behavior RtI through the entire nine-week cycle, I still felt that we were looking for trouble and calling it trauma. I felt the despair of mothers and fathers who sat in initial RtI meetings and were told something was wrong with their children. I agonized over whether RtI folders, full of documented behaviors related to broken school rules, would result in Black children being further violated in evaluations for emotional disturbance. I felt that we were causing trauma in parents, who expressed dismay and shame at failing their babies.

Crying As a Sign of Frustration, Not a Quirky Thing

Admittedly, I was convinced that crying in October was a sign of trouble, but in hindsight, I believe we saw tears of frustration. In this district, the pre-K curriculum was as rigorous as the kindergarten curriculum. I knew that one year made a difference in whether children could latch onto reading and math concepts in order to demonstrate comprehension and mastery on certain testing benchmarks.

The original intent of early childhood programs had been overtaken by draconian, heavy-handed initiatives to produce a generation of early readers. I was concerned that the "rush to reading" movement, initiated by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation and requiring children to become independent readers in pre-K and kindergarten, could do more harm than good if we did not take into consideration the children's developmental levels. Young children being forced to read when they are not developmentally ready could cause frustration, anxiety, and stress. NCLB also impacted recess by emphasizing the importance of more time for academic achievement and less time for social-emotional development (Pellegrini & Bohn-Gettler, 2013).

In addition to implementing a rigorous curriculum, my pre-K teachers were required to test their children three times a year using a digital progress monitoring tool called Circle Assessment, which assessed such skills as syllabication, rhyming words, rapid letter naming, onset rime, alliteration, and shape discrimination. If children performed poorly on such assessments, they were given more interventions, including required time on the I-station program. We knew the students were enduring too much, but we did not consider the curriculum or the testing to be the problem.

In *The Politics of Reality,* Marilyn Frye (1983) used the analogy of the birdcage to illustrate oppression, and this metaphor could be used to describe the overbearing classroom environment in which my pre-K students found themselves on a daily basis. Their birdcage was lined with the demands of academic initiatives, behavior expectations, assessments, and benchmarks. It seemed that the "quirky things" were triggered by protocols and standards.

Cultural Empowerment and Othermothering

I failed miserably in my efforts to solve my pre-K teachers' concerns with behavior. I now realize that I was overlooking othermothering as a cultural approach. Othermothering is a West African tradition in which other women assist blood-mothers with sharing mothering responsibilities (Collins, 2000). The literature regarding culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies was there to back it up. Too often, we fail to access students' culture in meaningful ways in the classroom. We reject the funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzales, 1992) that children bring from their culture, choosing to cherry-pick the parts of culture that we want to acknowledge such as foods, holidays, and important historical figures.

I wish I could have centered on the vital functions of the Black family unit. Black children cannot be separated from their familial, cultural practices when they are being educated and cared for. It is an integral part of what forms their identities and girds them with survival mechanisms. The Black family unit has very rich support, especially due to the nurturing and empowering influence of othermothers.

In America, "mothering others' children in slave communities was a necessity, as children were often orphaned by the sale or death of their mothers" (Guiffrida, 2005, p. 716). Thus, othermothers have historical significance, as providers of Black children's social and emotional needs as well as defenders protecting Black children from the psychological harm of enslavement. After slavery and into the era of Jim Crow segregation, othermothers assumed the role of teachers in Black schools (Guiffrida, 2005).

Othermothering has the potential to empower not only Black children but Black teachers. It frees Black teachers from internalizing as well as participating in the curricular and disciplinary violence of school policies and practices. Othermothering raises their consciousness from surveilling and punishing Black bodies and minds to nurturing and guiding them. The potentiality is rooted in Afrocentric motherhood's explicit capacity to uplift the Black social condition complicated by the structural racism and classism of the school system and society.

The teacher as othermother is more intuitive than the traditional teacher-student relationship that centers the schools' needs (e.g., high test scores). If schools want to be successful at improving Black children's academic achievement, they have to attend to their psychoeducational needs (Case, 1997). If schools continue to create policies that foster traditional relationships, the teachers may only see trouble and even trauma. They must make space for teachers as othermothers, emboldened strategists for change, and agents of empowerment.

Had we applied othermothering practices on our campus, I believe many incidents would have been handled differently. The role of my teachers would have changed from isolated classroom managers to a network of othermothers sharing in the care of all children. This shift alone would have affected how they viewed and addressed behavior, such as responding to crying with empathy and the compulsion to nurture. Without disregarding the existence of poverty, they would view feeding all children as a part of caring for their bodies and minds. Without downplaying disruptive behaviors, they would have collaborated with families to find culturally meaningful consequences that supported both the values of the school and the home. Without disputing the importance of academic initiatives, they would have served as the voices for the children, advocating on their behalf to protect them from harmful school practices.

In the end, it was beyond unfortunate that our attempts to address our children's needs led us to look for trouble and to cause trauma. We genuinely wanted to use the potential good in SEL and the other approaches to create positive learning environments where children felt safe and cared for, where their cultural assets were recognized and utilized, and where their families were welcomed as a part of our school family. In this article, I hope to bring attention to the pathologizing and labeling of Black children that occurs so often in public schools, though possibly unintended by well-meaning adults, in order to illustrate how cultural practices such as othermothering can enhance Black children's well-being and academic achievement.

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About the Author

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Let Them Get Mad: Using the Psychoanalytic Frame to Rethink Social-Emotional Learning and Trauma-Informed Practice

Clio Stearns

> *The children in Ms. Martin's third grade class seem restless as they make their way in from art class. "Put your things away," Ms. Martin says, "and sit in your assigned seats."*
>
> *Jaziel slides over to me and asks, "Have you even ate breakfast?"*
>
> *I smile at him and nod, then gesture toward the rug where Ms. Martin is sitting in her teaching chair. "It's time for read-aloud," she announces, "so when I call your number, come to your rug square."*
>
> *"I never get breakfast," Jaziel continues, edging closer. He points to a cardboard box in the corner of the room. The box is labeled, "Breakfast" in permanent marker. "I didn't get time," he tells me.*
>
> *"This is your second chance!" Ms. Martin's voice gets louder. "We're silent now. If I have to talk again, you'll owe me recess. So give me a voice level zero."*
>
> *At the word "recess," most of the kids seem to settle. Jaziel walks to the rug circuitously, peering into the Breakfast box on his way. Once he sits to listen to the story, which Ms. Martin reads from her iphone, I walk over to peek in the box as well. It is filled with French toast sticks, cinnamon-flavored, in grab'n'go bags. Jaziel is watching me, I notice, so I sit down and try to tune in to the book, too.*

The role of emotions in the lives of schoolchildren has garnered increasing attention in public discussions of curriculum and instruction. Hess (2019) describes the recent release of national recommendations to ensure that children's emotions are at the fore of their experiences in school. The report, Hess explains, echoes a growing national sense that "it's a big deal to observe that children learn better when they feel valued, respected, supported and safe." The rise of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is documented by the numbers of states adopting comprehensive standards for students' emotional learning and well-being; the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2019) shows that "fourteen states have k-12 SEL competencies/standards, up from 1 in 2011" and "21 states have SEL-related web pages that provide guidance and resources."

I argue that the turn toward SEL must be seen in historical context, in part as an extension of neoliberal demands that children's lives be surveilled and managed. Previously, I have shown how SEL makes demands of regulation and positive affect that are unrealistic in the developmental and human context of childhood and education (Stearns, 2019). This research led me to ask: What kinds of emotional education and affective expression occur in the margins, outside of programmatic SEL structures, and unseen because of a growing and already heavy emphasis on SEL and its codified goals?

Recently, I spent time observing in Ms. Martin's classroom, in an urban New England K-8 school. Ms. Martin is a new teacher in a school that has not yet adopted an SEL mandate, though most of the other schools in the district have. This is largely because the school, which is in receivership, has been the target of so many interventions and mandates that they are struggling to keep up. The academic strictures are rigid as

the administration works methodically to improve test scores and keep up with state requirements. The teachers, like so many public school teachers today, are subject to rigorous surveillance and give regular academic assessments, attend "data meetings," and implement one intervention after another in pursuit of a rather ephemeral vision of success.

Next year, Ms. Martin's school will join others in the district in their approach to SEL. This district has adopted the Second Step program for SEL (Committee for Children, 2016) in combination with extensive professional development on "trauma-informed practice" (e.g., Desai, 2018) and the CHAMPS program for "Classwide Positive Behavior Support" (Sprick, 2019). There will be a mandated once-a-week "SEL block," which will seek to respond to what is seen as the behavior and dysregulated emotions of a comprehensively traumatized population. The goal, as with most SEL, is to teach regulatory strategies and explicit, predetermined relationship skills in pursuit of greater academic success (Stearns, 2019).

This essay explores the possibility that in the context of traumatic life experience *as well as* the trauma that is normative to development (e.g., Freud, 1922), the classroom should not be seen as a venue for recovery of positive affect or regulation of the self. My observations take place in the absence of reified SEL, though the discourse of "trauma-informed practice" is certainly in the background. I make no claims that Ms. Martin's students are emotionally "well," but I do wonder, alongside others, about the legitimacy of that concept, in childhood and in human life overall (Farley, 2019)..

Instead, I propose a vision of the classroom as a "frame" (Bleger, 1967) or "the totality of the phenomena included in the… relationship" among teachers and students. I wonder if we could envision "trauma-informed practice" differently if we theorized an educational frame as a place where children can enact a wide range of emotions, grow alongside their teacher in sometimes unpredictable ways, and experience discomforts openly together—without rushing to perform a specific version of overall wellness.

It is easy to feel empathy toward Jaziel in the opening vignette. He is hungry, in both the literal and figurative senses. His teacher, the principal, and most of the people involved with the children at his school see Jaziel and his classmates as traumatized. "We get a lot of talks about trauma-informed practice," the principal told me in an interview. "These kids have rough home lives and they've seen a lot. But sometimes, I do think they just need to see who is in charge."

When I asked about the "rough home lives," the principal shrugged, vaguely citing parents struggling with poverty and anxiety about deportation, but emphasizing the fact that "the parents just don't want to come to school, they don't value education that much." The idea that parents of color or those living in poverty "don't value education" has been widely debunked (Ladson-Billings, 2006), but it remains prevalent among teachers and school administrators, undermining potential for an open and trusting relationship.

Jaziel's teacher often feels despairing about the behaviors her students show, "throwing chairs, desks, getting more and more aggressive with (me)." She said in one interview, "These kids should be coming to school and learning and being happy and they're not. I can't even keep the basic promise to keep them safe."

Like many schools across the country, this one is about to respond to children's difficult, sometimes violent behaviors by subscribing to curricula, professional development, and programming oriented toward the basic precepts of SEL, teaching children and adults to "understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (CASEL, 2019).

The CHAMPS program the school will soon use aims for children to "feel empowered and happy to be in the classroom" and "motivate students to put forth their best efforts" (Sprick, 2019). From a psychodynamic perspective, these demands are disruptive to the basic human needs to be seen and heard. In the name of "trauma-informed practice," schools are oversimplifying the nature of trauma and misappropriating emotional life. SEL might inscribe a layer of regulation defined explicitly in terms of compliance, "self-management... impulse control and stress management... discipline, goal setting, and organizational skills" (New England DESE, 2011, p. 2).

Yet this bears little relation to emotional education, which early childhood educators in particular have long argued is part and parcel of any educational encounter (Silin, 2019, Tobin, 2007). Looking at a few scenes from Ms. Martin's classroom helps me posit something called the "educational frame," wherein emotions related to traumatized experience are not resolved, but are put on display relationally, with the ultimate, gradual possibility of "working through" (Freud, 1914). How can a teacher make space for a broad range of affective expression in the classroom while honoring the complex constructs of physical and emotional safety? What can a teacher in a school today do to push back against trauma-informed practice that oversimplifies trauma, healing, and working through?

Understanding the Frame

The frame is a psychoanalytic construct, and any analogy between a psychoanalytic encounter and an educational one can only be partial. Psychoanalysis is usually a therapeutic exploration undertaken between one analyst and one analysand, and education takes place in interactions among many people. Psychoanalysis is usually elective, and education is compulsory.

Yet as Britzman (2009) points out, "The educator was once a child with frustrated thoughts and fears over loss of love and is now in the position to frustrate others with an offer of love." She completes the analogy with a question: "Could it be that education, like psychoanalysis, is an attempt to cure by love?" (p. 17). In other words, Britzman and other like-minded theorists maintain that the emotionality and relationality of every educational encounter is central, and for this reason, theories used to understand the psychoanalytic encounter can be drawn on productively to help understand what goes on unnoticed, and sometimes unconsciously, in education.

In psychoanalysis, the frame is generally understood as the location and conditions of the ongoing relationship between clinician and patient. Jose Bleger, who contributed most substantially to the theorization of the frame, explained that any institutionalized way of being, or set of prescriptions for behavior, becomes "part of the individual's personality" (1967, p. 239). What becomes most intuitive about an institution—unnamed and sometimes even un-thought—is precisely what comprises its frame. The unspoken ideas about how a person acts in school are, of course, multitudinous, for teachers as well as for children. There can also be conflicts between how people understand these expectations, which are mediated, as most teachers know, by culture, class, gender, age, ability, geography, and other less definable factors.

There are a lot of different frames co-existing in an educational setting. For instance, the teacher might propose and enact one frame without articulating it, but simply via behavior; the students or even just a few of them might enact an entirely different one. Often, little by little and without mentioning it, students and teachers begin to meet each other's expectations for communication, behavior, and coexistence, although sometimes this does not happen and the ensuing conflicts are more disruptive.

As Bleger describes it, each person's frame is their most primitive and ostensibly automated way of existing, and it can only be moved by being gradually rendered conscious, taken seriously, and then disrupted (p. 241). Teachers might, for instance, notice their students' responses, ways of being, and habits; they might describe these, incorporate them into curriculum, play, art, and classroom routines; they might talk together about how these frames do and do not jibe with those of the institution of school or the expectations of institutional life more broadly. Conversely, teachers may take their observations about students' affective habits and use them to make sense of our own expectations for behavior, where they come from, and whether or not they are constructive and reasonable.

As a codified construct, SEL works within very specific boundaries for behavior, thought, and emotion, and encourages the development of these phenomena in children—by the teacher, who is assumed to be absent of trauma and to understand and expertly embody disparate skills associated with social and emotional life. Can a person really be regulated, though, by telling them how important it is for them to regulate? Should trauma be addressed by the pedagogy of deep breaths and good cheer? Does learning mean settling down and taking up the discourse of "best efforts" or even healing and recovery? What might it mean to question these undertheorized premises and develop an understanding of the educational frame: a place where children can exist within their trauma and feel themselves seen and heard, their ways of being understood and sometimes questioned, alongside the adults in their lives, and only then, and only so slowly, moved.

Methods

The empirical data for this paper comes from observations over the course of one school year in Ms. Martin's third grade classroom. Ms. Martin teaches in an urban public school with a high level of poverty. The K-8 school is historically low-performing and has gone through extensive administrative and teacher turnover over the last 10 years. The principal and Ms. Martin are both new to the school.

I observed Ms. Martin's class 10 times, taking running records of students' language, gestures, and movements over the course of each hour-long session. I conducted one interview with the school's principal and three interviews with Ms. Martin, very loosely following Seidman's (2013) protocols for phenomenological interviews. The observations were focused largely on understanding behavior management and responses to affective outbursts in the classroom. Following each interview, I coded my notes according to Charmaz's (2006) grounded theory approach, trying to discern categories for understanding and responding to my catalyzing questions.

Teachers Get Angry

> Ms. Martin is introducing a math activity to her students. She wants them to work in centers, rotating through so that each group is doing a slightly different activity.

> As she explains the structure of the work, Briana begins giggling. She taps the students on either side of her, and they join in her giggle. Hakim starts to cough and laugh at the same time, and Ms. Martin throws her hands in the air. "I didn't say anything funny so I'm not sure why you're laughing!" she says. The children begin laughing harder.

> Ms. Martin's voice grows louder, presumably to drown out the laughter. She finishes giving the instructions, ignoring the disruption, and sends the kids off to centers. Immediately on arriving at their center, Alina and Hakim begin to argue. "This is dumb," says Hakim.

> "You're dumb," Alina says. Hakim grabs her work and rips it into pieces. Ms. Martin, who has convened a

work group at the rug, looks up sharply, "This is a level two of noise!" she yells. Then she approaches the children and notices what has happened. "Look what you did!" she tells them., "I'm trying to help you, to help you learn… but now I'm frustrated, really frustrated."

Ms. Martin puts her fingers to her temples and takes a deep, exasperated breath. Both kids are staring at her, eyes wide, rapt. Hakim moves closer to her body and lifts his head. When she opens her eyes again, she looks calmer, "I'm not sure," she says coldly, "that was the right thing to do." Hakim throws the shredded pieces into the air and storms out of the room.

"I'm really angry, Hakim!" she yells after him, before turning to Alina and asking her to help clean up the mess. Presumably, Hakim will be intercepted by one of the many security personnel who patrol the hallways of this elementary school. I don't see him again until my next observation.

Difficult, disruptive behaviors from students elicit all sorts of emotional responses. "Best practice" discourse on SEL and trauma-informed practice recommends that the teacher remain calm and outwardly regulated in the face of child misbehavior (Elias & Weissberg, 2000). Teachers are meant to model "SEL skills" such as regulation and calm (Morcom, 2014). Teachers' emotional competency and regulation leads to the establishment of a "prosocial classroom" (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009) where problem behaviors are minimized.

By these metrics, Ms. Martin requires additional education and intervention. She frequently gets angry at her students. She tells them directly she is angry, and she sometimes shows it with expressions and body language. What I often observed, though, and what is demonstrated in the anecdote above, is that her outward expressions of anger can reflect her students' emotions. They represent the fact that their projected intense emotionality and extreme frustrations with their situations are actually heard and taken in, even taken on. This happens on an unconscious level, as is often the case with projection, and Ms. Martin feels that she ought not express her anger so explicitly. However, again and again, it is precisely when she subverts her own intense emotions—closes her eyes, takes deep breaths, and calms her voice—that she loses her students; they storm out of a room where their own emotions cannot be tolerated or mirrored.

In his explanations of how people can relate to the important objects, or others, in their lives, Bleger points out that a "symbiotic quality" is usually present (1967, p. 73). It is natural for the object of anger, upset, and outrage to grow angry. "Symbiosis," explains Bleger, "is a close interdependence between two or more persons who complement each other in order to keep the needs of the more immature parts of the personality controlled, immobilized, and in some measure satisfied" (p. 79).

The most difficult of feelings—extreme anger, confusion, ambivalence, and intolerable physicality of emotion—are inevitably projected onto the other. The teacher might feel consciously angry at the student, but on an unconscious level, this signifies an introjection of, identification with and, ultimately, empathy toward the student's anger. Perhaps this helps account for why Ms. Martin's anger draws Hakim's attention, where her calm and more regulated attitude sends him away. One implication might be that rather than surveil teacher language and behavior with the goal of glossing over difficult emotion, it could be helpful to encourage teachers to attend to their affective responses and take them seriously as both cognitive and emotional cues that could help with attuning to students.

As Moore (2018) has pointed out, the affective needs of teachers are largely ignored in the broader context of accountability discourse. However, this does not mean that teachers can proceed as emotionally neutral people, untinged by humanity. What if Ms. Martin had not felt compelled to carefully "school" her anger?

What if, instead, she were allowed to stay with it and encouraged to contemplate what it could show her about Hakim's internal world? It seems that Hakim might have been more responsive then, stayed closer, and possibly become more open to developing an ongoing educational relationship.

In the context of an individual school, teachers might address their own emotionality by gathering in supportive groups where they can discuss their emotional responses to student behaviors and provocations. Teachers can help each other identify their own frames and the ways these might be conflicting with students' frames, and can develop an inter-classroom culture of examining—rather than schooling, controlling, or teaching—emotion. Gradually, teachers can build the trust it takes to identify emotional patterns in themselves and their pedagogical responses, but even in the short term, groups can alleviate the pressure that comes with an assumption that teachers are experts on emotional existence, and help them function as people in very difficult circumstances.

Students Get Angry

"Come to the front of the room for uniform check," says Ms. Martin. I am startled; this is the first time I have visited the class so early in the day, so perhaps I'm about to witness a new routine. The students somewhat reluctantly line up in front of their teacher.

I notice that there are fewer students in the room than the usual thirty. Later, I learn that this is because of the weather. It's been very cold lately, and many families have been keeping their kids home. Moreover, it is flu season. Many children are out sick or staying home, presumably to avoid getting the flu. Ms. Martin and the principal are despairing over their attendance statistics, sending regular letters home in English and Spanish stressing the importance of coming to school.

Ms. Martin is holding a clipboard with her class list affixed to it. As each child approaches, she checks their uniforms: pale blue shirt, navy pants or skirt, and appropriately colored socks and shoes. If they are dressed "right," she gives them a check and a little sticker to put on their shirt. If not, she puts an X in the box and withholds the sticker.

Cynthia is the only child in the class who is not wearing any part of the uniform; she is dressed in ordinary street clothes. "They're in the laundry, my mom says...," she tells her teacher. Ms. Martin tells her that this is a third offense and she will have to miss recess. "Then can I get a sticker?" Cynthia says.

Ms. Martin tells her no and sends her off to do a grammar worksheet, but Cynthia digs in her heels. "That's not right," she yells. Ms. Martin grimaces, "Cynthia..."

"If I got to miss recess I need to get a sticker!" she yells. Other children look up from their worksheets or from their place in the line. "Yeah," murmur their collective voices. "It's in the laundry!" Cynthia yells, kicking the leg of a table.

"Cynthia! We don't kick!" Ms. Martin looks nervous and confused.

Cynthia looks down at her foot. "Come on," she says, voice getting loud again. Ms. Martin glances at me, and I wonder if she's nervous about my judgment. She gives Cynthia a sticker. "Next time, remember your uniform," she says half-heartedly. Cynthia beams at her and returns to her desk.

Common parlance about the "trauma-informed school" indicates the importance of rules, routines, structure, and compliance. Kaufman (2019) says that a "trauma-informed school" must include "an environment with

clear behavior expectations for everyone." He explains, "Trauma-exposed individuals benefit from clearly defined expectations" with the idea that clear rules and policies help traumatized students to feel safer and more secure.

Carello and Butler (2015) confirm that this sort of structure and routine allows for more of a sense of safety in the classroom. In general, SEL and trauma-informed discourses do not explicitly define safety, but they imply that safety is an affective sensibility that emerges from ongoing compliance. While SEL-oriented approaches are rarely directly punitive in nature, they do rely on the sense that discipline, routinization, and consistency are key in working with children in emotionally responsive ways (e.g., Responsive Classroom, 2011).

Children sometimes get very angry. Adults who are objects of this anger may be frightened, exhausted, put off, threatened, or angry in return. It is possible that responding to anger with rigidity can provide a child with a sense of containment and holding (e.g., Winnicott, 1962). It is also possible, however, that anger and its expression might be seen as what Sedgwick (2011) describes as a performative representation of what is ultimately a political experience. If we look at the vignette through this lens, then we could say Cynthia staged a minor protest when she grew angry, even aggressive. What's more, her protest was successful; she engaged support from her collective, and in the end, she got what she wanted. Her frame—her way of being—was in sync with that of her classmates, and her teacher grudgingly acquiesced, arguably to Cynthia's, and everyone's, emotional benefit.

It is possible to read Ms. Martin's acquiescence to Cynthia's demand as an outgrowth of her exhaustion, which, to be sure, is substantial. From the perspective of most codified SEL programs and disciplinary codes, she committed a faux pas. In fact, I saw Ms. Martin behave in this way many times. Her students get angry a lot, and they really are angry, because their lives are hard, because being a child is hard, because being in third grade can be demanding, because their clothes are expensive and hard to come by, and because they have to line up to get surveilled for checkmarks and stickers every single day.

This kind of angry outburst is hard to tolerate, and I maintain that a great deal of SEL and even trauma-informed practice is put in place to protect the adult world from the extremely uncomfortable feelings, including guilt, engendered by the protest of the angry child. If we look at Cynthia from the perspective of the educational frame, though, what happened is not a slip-up in consistency. Rather, it is the experience of her protest being heard and legitimized, of the outrageous external conditions of her life and circumstance being recognized, and of her bravery in expressing her extreme, taboo emotion being rewarded. Her reality becomes the reality of her class; they are in one frame, together.

It can be hard to figure out ways to make space for anger, and for a range of emotional experience and expression, while maintaining physical and emotional safety for most kids. Some expressions are overwhelming, and others are simply confusing. It is the exploration of these questions mutually in a classroom that can help with the establishment of a useful, ever more conscious, and meaningful frame.

What really happens when Cynthia has an outburst? Where do the rest of the students file the lessons they take away from these episodes? Children and teachers can talk about these triggering experiences together, make responsive art together, explore the historical and sociopolitical implications of deeply angry protest, make use of what emotions and affective life can teach us as part of an ongoing, emergent, and responsive childhood curriculum. But this cannot be determined in advance or reduced to a poster on a classroom wall.

Certainly, staying with anger is difficult for some students, and the feelings that come with it deserve attention and containment. But to imagine that external demands for regulation will somehow relieve students of this

burden is false; instead, in the context of a more regimented classroom life, hard feelings go undiscussed and their taboo nature becomes embedded in a less conscious frame.

Adjusting the Frame

SEL and trauma-informed practice both come from ethical intentions in relation to children, perhaps particularly children living in difficult circumstances. These intentions exist on a conscious level and, as such, are laudable. Unconsciously, though, these same intentions actually mask a set of sociocultural desires in relation to children that are communicated subtly via the rigid proscriptions put forth about what kinds of affect and emotion are acceptable.

The concept of the frame is a fruitful way of understanding that emotional education cannot happen immediately. It is not quick. It is also something that happens on a less conscious level than any codified curriculum can make space for. The frame is the situation of the educational encounter, the setting in which constant transactions occur between children and teacher, and among children. The frame is how children and teachers figure out how they will function together, which aspects of themselves they will not compromise, and which they will compromise as a way of honoring the other. It cannot be predetermined by a teacher, a school, or a clearly articulated set of "best practices." Rather, the frame (and its disruptions) should be attended to, read, and occasionally adjusted.

One of the many things that gets lost in the context of "trauma-informed discourse" and SEL is the longevity and the utility of negative affect. Ms. Martin and her students are not formally part of a school where SEL is mandated, though it is making gestures in that direction and will soon undergo a mandate. In part because there is no formal SEL curriculum, and in part precisely because Ms. Martin is a novice teacher and overwhelmed, her classroom makes more space than many for expression of the negative (e.g., Stearns, 2019). Many observers might see this as problematic. Ms. Martin certainly struggles, she worries that her students are "out of control" and do not feel "happy" in school. In fact, the most consistent feedback she gets from her administrators is that she should adopt more regulatory strategies, aligned with much of SEL discourse research on trauma-informed schools.

The feeling in the classroom is chaotic and even scary at times. Yet Ms. Martin's students connect with her. They approach her to talk about their home lives. They lean into her as she talks, reads, and explains. They want to know about her puppy, her house, where she celebrates the holidays. In addition, they show themselves to her. It might mean avoiding externally mandated work, but the children draw pictures of their pets, interrupt her lessons to tell stories about going to the mall, and yell out when their clothes are in the laundry. Ms. Martin cannot recognize any of these phenomena as helpful or positive, and it is hard to say how meaningful any of it is in the long run. But education is at least in part about relationality (Biesta, 2015), about moral encounters with the other (Todd, 2003), and about what Levinas (2003) has positioned prominently as the "recognition of the humanism of the other."

I propose that the concept of trauma-informed practice is helpful as a transitional phenomenon, in that it reminds the educational community that some children are living in complicated and disturbing situations that must be held in mind. However, the constructs that have grown out of this understanding can be excessively rigid, repressive, and dehumanizing. Re-framing the conversation, in terms of the construction and reading of what exists anyway as emotional classroom life, might make more space for children and teachers to feel, experience, and live within a fully comprehensible anger. In time, this might allow for a deeper humanization of the educational experience, one in which children and teachers are mutually engaged, attuned with one another, and—to a limited extent, of course—known.

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Trauma by Numbers: Warnings Against the Use of ACE Scores in Trauma-Informed Schools

Alex Winninghoff

Over the last ten years, the original Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study (Felitti et al., 1998) has informed education policy and has influenced and justified the need for "trauma-informed" (TI) frameworks in schools across the nation. The ACE study and related research on "toxic stress" from the Harvard Center on the Developing Child (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012) has justified and underpinned the demand for trauma-informed professional education and frameworks and has enabled new ways for school professionals to conceptualize students' lives and behaviors. Over the decade or more since TI schools were first advocated for and developed (Oehlberg, 2008; Ko et al., 2008), they have frequently been described as a "paradigm shift" in school approaches and cultures.

ACE and TI frameworks often seem to validate the struggles that many teachers witness in the lives of their students. There are elements that can hardly be argued with: TI frameworks recognize that students face significant hardships during childhood. They institutionally validate kindness, compassion, and flexible responses to student behaviors. They also establish a unifying message of hope and offer strategies to building student "resilience." These elements appear positive and aligned with social justice goals and ideologies, but there are also elements of TI frameworks that warrant critical consideration. There are, for instance, ethical concerns relating to requests for ACE disclosures from students, developing school ACE screening practices, or attaching individual ACE scores that have been reported to schools from an outside agency or clinic.

TI frameworks are relatively new, and professionals in many TI schools are just beginning to consider the ethical implications of using ACE frameworks. The application of ACE concepts, ACE scores, and the identification of students who face the impacts of "toxic stress" is a topic that has become more relevant for educators. There have been calls to universally screen students nationwide for ACEs in schools (Pataky, Báez, & Renshaw, 2019, p. 657; American Heart Association, 2019).

It has also become especially relevant to educators in California, where a state budget has been allocated to begin universal ACE screenings for those on MediCal (California Budget & Policy Center, 2019). As of January 1, 2020, California has began paying pediatricians for screening Medi-Cal enrolled children for ACEs, and California Surgeon General Nadine Burke is advocating for schools to have access to ACE information that would identify those who are suffering from "toxic stress." She argues that making this information available to schools will improve support through wrap-around services (Gaines, 2019).

California is the first state to make such moves, but it establishes a precedence that could be adopted by other states. For these reasons, it is essential that educators critically analyze the ways ACE frameworks are entering schools, and specifically consider the risks of requesting students' disclosures of ACEs and the ethics of screening for ACEs or using individual ACE scores in schools.

ACEs from Theory to Practice

ACE scores are a foundational concept of the original ACE study (Felitti et al., 1998, p. 250). They describe a 1 to 10 integer count that represents the number of reported ACE categories, which relate broadly to forms of abuse and household dysfunction, and which are outlined below. ACE scores were developed in order to recognize and evaluate the "co-occurrence [of] adversities," which had "repeatedly shown a positive graded

relationship to a wide variety of health and social problems" (Anda, Butchart, Felitti, & Brown, 2009, p. 93). In short, the study demonstrated that the higher a person's 1 to 10 ACE score, the greater their likelihood of having negative outcomes across physical, psychological, social, and cognitive domains.

ACEs also correlate or have a significant "bidirectional" relationship with impoverishment (Anda et al., 2009, p. 95). Given the ways structural, social, cultural, and institutional inequities promote adversity, this would seem to make sense and even appear to be scientific validation of these forms of oppression. However, this validation problematically reframes impoverished communities as biologically, psychologically, socially, and cognitively deficient, and in need of intervention to respond to these conditions with more "resilience."

The leading international researchers who are critiquing substantive and methodological elements of the original and subsequent ACE studies—Sue White, University of Sheffield; Rosalind Edwards, University of Southampton; Val Gillies, University of Westminster; and David Wastell, University of Nottingham—recognize the strategic detachment of poverty from the ACE framework:

> The absence of poverty in the ACE framework does not stem from a neutral scientific calculation, nor accidental omission. Rather it is decentred by design. Poverty is separated out from other childhood adversities and reframed as a symptom of a damaged brain and body.... From this perspective, poverty is viewed merely as a symptom of dysfunctional development. Thus, the solution is perceived to lie not in raising household incomes but in breaking intergenerational "cycles of deprivation." According to the ACE model, problems reside in the quality of the individual rather than the lack of resources available to them. Regardless of all the authoritative-sounding references to neuro-biological pathways this remains a value-laden position (White et al., 2019, pp. 462-463).

The ACE framework applies the very broad and subjective concept of adversity and uses it as an umbrella term for a vast range of hardships and potentially traumatizing events. ACE research cannot easily disentangle the correlative negative outcomes from social factors such as increasing wealth gaps, inadequate access to health care and mental health services, lack of access to nutritious food, inequities in education, or the injustices woven into the U.S. mass incarceration system. The ACE framework, according to White and colleagues, ultimately centers the solution in building resilience to inequities rather than advocating for increased social supports that insulate families from significant adversities (2019, p. 458).

There has been increasing advocacy for schools to implement regular and targeted trauma screenings (Eklund & Rossen, 2018) and universal ACE screenings in schools (American Heart Association, 2018; Pataky, Báez, & Renshaw, 2019). ACE and "toxic stress" curriculums have entered classrooms (Redford, Pritzker, Norwood, & Boekelheide, 2015), and have been cited as trauma-informed school interventions (Sporleder & Forbes, 2016).

The Seminal ACE study

The original ACE study was developed by co-principal investigators Robert Anda of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Victor Felitti of Kaiser Permanente Health Appraisal Center (KP) in 1994. Data collection for the ACE study was taken between January 1995 and March 1996 from KP patients who had received care in San Diego, California (Felitti et al., 1998). Eligible participants for the study first underwent a KP health appraisal, which included a physical examination, lab result analysis, and collection of personal and medical information by a medical care provider. Included in the visit was a questionnaire, which spanned questions relating to family histories, previous diagnoses, demographic information, and

what were broadly considered "biopsychosocial" factors (Felitti et al., 1998, p. 245). Health-related inquiries were wide-ranging, and included questions about medication use, heart health, skin problems, broken bones, liver disorders, and seizure histories. Questions also included:

[Are you] troubled as a result of being more sensitive than most people?

[Have you] had reason to fear your anger getting out of control?

[Do you] have trouble refusing requests or saying "No"?

How far have you gone in school?

Have you been raped or sexually molested as a child?

[Are you] satisfied with your sex life?

Are you now having serious or disturbing problems with your: marriage? family? drug usage? job? financial matters? (Health Appraisal Questionnaire Male Version, 1998; Health Appraisal Questionnaire Female Version, 1998)

After completion of the appraisal, participants were eligible for participation in the ACE study (Felitti et al. 1998, p. 246).

The ACE concept has proven flexible over the past two decades, but in general there are ten that are consistently recognized in the U.S.: 1) physical abuse, 2) sexual abuse, 3) emotional abuse, 4) physical neglect, 5) emotional neglect, 6) witnessing domestic violence, 7) living with a family member who had a mental health problem, 8) living with a family member who was an alcoholic, 9) parental divorce or separation, and 10) having a household member who is incarcerated. The number of categories reported by participants constitutes their "ACE score" (Felitti et al., 1998, p. 250).

What is Measured?

Measuring for ACEs gets quick results, but it does not give us data on the impacts. Rather it offers data on the occurrence of events that may result in traumatizing impacts (Eklund & Rossen, 2018, p. 7). It also doesn't distinguish between adversities that occurred in the past and those that are ongoing, which would necessitate different responses and interventions. The fact that ongoing ACEs are not recognized within ACE frameworks (Purewal et al., 2016, p. 12) has been identified as an intentional feature so as not to require disclosures that require mandatory reporting by practitioners in trauma-informed systems (Finkelhor, 2018, p. 175). This raises questions about the goal of the ACE project. If a lack of specificity is a feature of ACE screenings, and if they measure events rather than responses, impacts, and lived experiences that result from these events, then how can they inform appropriate and individual responses?

Legislative Action Supporting the ACE Movement

Since the first ACE study publication in 1998, ACEs and childhood trauma have been recognized as an essential area of focus in public health. Advocacy and lobbying efforts for ACE training and universal screening, particularly in compulsory settings that work predominantly in impoverished communities, have gained significant social and legislative support. This includes federal and state-level bipartisan support to implement ACE frameworks across social and health services and a range of bureaucratic and institutional settings.

States have enacted policies and allocated funds for screening and services to work with minoritized and impoverished populations. For instance, Utah H.C.R. 10 Concurrent Resolution requires those working with vulnerable populations to "become informed regarding the effects of trauma on the human brain and available screening and assessment tools and treatment interventions" (2017). And it is claimed in California Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 155 that ACEs "literally shape the physical architecture of a child's developing brain and establish either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for all the learning, health, and behavior that follow" (2013-2014).

The ACE Movement in Education

The ACE campaign significantly underpins the school trauma-informed movement. ACE research has justified the necessity of TI frameworks in schools, especially research relating to learning, cognition, and behavior. High numbers on ACE scores have been correlated with lower cognitive function in the domains of special working memory, "attentional performance," and sustained attention (Park et al., 2014, p. 250); abstract reasoning (Barrera, Calderón, & Bell, 2013, p. 630), "reduced ability to inhibit automatic responses" and "reduction in cognitive inhibition" (Barrera et al., 2013, p. 625); reduced language acquisition (Graham-Bermann, Howell, Miller, Kwek, & Lilly, 2010, p. 387; Saltzman, Weems, & Carrion, 2006, p. 271); and intelligence by the problematic measure of IQ (Bücker et al., 2012).

The relationship between ACEs and negative social and behavioral outcomes has been a focus for researchers across fields of education, neurobiology, economics, social work, and criminology. The ACE claims most relevant to schools state that high ACE scores correlate with "learning problems, lower grades, need for special education, less attendance, increases in problem behavior, increased suspensions/expulsions (Perfect, Turley, Carlson, Yohannan, & Gilles, 2016, p. 9), and aggression and violent behavior (Levenson, 2014).

Concerns about correlations between ACEs and crime is part of the media messaging that supports arguments for ACE interventions. This is exemplified by an opening scene of the popular film *Paper Tiger* (Redford et al., 2015), in text that reads "a person with 4 or more Adverse Childhood Experiences is seven times more likely to end up in prison, has double the risk of cancer and stroke, and is twelve times more likely to commit suicide" (Redford, Pritzker, Norwood, & Boekelheide, 2015, 7:12-7:20). The relationship between crime and ACEs has become a recent focus of research. DeLisi and colleagues note that "[criminologists] have recently utilized adverse childhood experiences as an organizing research framework and shown that adverse childhood experiences are associated with delinquency, violence, and more chronic/severe criminal careers" (2017, p. 1); others argue that ACEs significantly increase individuals' likelihood of being incarcerated (Baglivio, Wolff, Epps, & Nelson, 2017; Freeze, 2019).

There are many reasons why educators who are concerned about justice, equity, and profiling should be aware of how the ACE framework is being applied in the field of criminology. Findings relating to tendencies toward violence and crime may influence teachers and school professionals and support dangerous biases.

An Example of Teaching ACEs

The feature film *Paper Tigers* documented Lincoln High School in Walla Walla, Washington, during the first year of development of their trauma-informed model. It introduces ACE research, overviews significant claims and statistics, and shows a high school classroom of students who take the ACE score screening as a part of their lesson. A five-minute clip is **available here.**

The scene opens with a teacher giving a lesson on the ACE study and the effects of "toxic stress" to a group

of seventeen high school students. He places two images of Positron Emission Tomography (PET) brain scans side by side on a slide titled, "Effects of stress on the brain." One is listed as a "healthy brain," the other is an "abused brain." Here is the text from the slideshow:
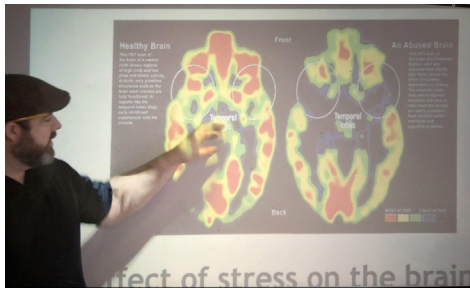
Healthy brain: The PET scan of the brain of a normal child shows regions of high (red) and low (blue and black) activity. At birth, only primitive structures such as the brain stem (center) are fully functional; in regions like the temporal lobes (top), early childhood experience wire the circuits.

Abused brain: The PET scan of the brain of a Romanian orphan, who was institutionalized shortly after birth, shows the effects of extreme deprivation in infancy. The temporal lobes (top) which regulate emotions and receive input from the senses are nearly [word obscured].... such children suffer emotional and cognitive problems (7:12-7:20).

During the lesson, the teacher places the ten ACE questions on his presentation and gives students interactive clickers to record their responses. He tells the students that their responses are anonymous. As they record their answers, they learn their ACE score, and once they are finished, classroom data from their collective ACE scores appear on the presentation. The teacher goes through their data and points out that more than half of them recorded five or more ACEs, and that four of the students have eight. He asks, "What does that mean, you guys? What does that mean? That tells me that there are a lot of brains in here that are wired for survival… and that might be emotionally on edge."

He then moves to the next slide, which reads, "How are you going to be different?" Before turning to address the class for responses, a student says, "I'm not going to be different; I like the person that I am." The teacher begins to respond and explains, "That's not what I was going to ask." This makes the viewer wonder why that question is posed on the slide. Before he continues, a student sitting next to her interrupts, "You know, you don't want to be like how your family is, you know? Like that kind of—like that kind of different." The first student responds, "Well, I'm already different." The teacher jumps in to bring the whole class back and explains that he wants to tell them why this is important. "This is heavy," he says, and continues:

> I don't always want to say this. You ready for this? Because this is the part that is super heavy, sometimes I don't even want to say it cause I think it's that heavy. Are you ready for heavy? Twenty years ago, those adults would have been sitting here in this room saying I'm so different. There's no way I'm going to create a life of stress for my kids. The cycle's going to stop with me. So how do you sit here now and say the same thing they said and have it actually turn out differently (5:13-9:42)?

The bell rings, and class is dismissed.

What Was Learned From This Example?

What occurred in this lesson and what did students learn about themselves and each other? First, the teacher insinuated by showing the brain images that students who reported ACEs could have similar damage, and he demonstrated assumptions that their families were the primary source of that dysfunction. Rather than recognizing their parents as potential sources of support, belonging, or strength, he presents them as cautionary tales and sources of adversity that students need to recover from. The teacher does not address social realities and factors such as multigenerational impoverishment, and instead places ownership on the

students to somehow "break the cycle," never mentioning that it is entrenched in complex social realities that are largely beyond students' and families control. Students in the class learned that something was wrong with them because something had happened to them, and unless they were resilient enough to reverse the impacts of these adversities, they and their future children were likely to face dismal trajectories.

The brain scan images that were used in this lesson come from Bruce Perry, who is a globally prolific researcher on neurobiology, stress, and the birth-to-three neuro interventions. He has responded to controversy over these images, and when asked about their oversimplification of complex science and the reductive nature of their claims, Perry said that he had "concern about how politicians were oversimplifying and distorting neglect or family breakdown [or claims that it] could lead to changes in brain size and development" (Macvarish, 2016, p. 21). Here we can see Perry's concerns played out in the context of a classroom lesson to influence students' self-perceptions. The image of the brain scan from the child who was orphaned and institutionalized shortly after birth is potent. Students are left to make the association that ACEs can lead to substantial brain damage. They are given no solutions, and the struggles they and their families face are framed only through deficiency and dysfunction. The teacher in the film does not consider that they may be important sources of strength to students in the midst of social and systemic factors that are beyond their control.

The Lincoln High School example demonstrates how the broader pedagogies of the ACE campaign form perspectives about students. It also demonstrates how the ACE framework can lead a teacher toward negative assumptions and presuppositions, and how students can be led to accept messages of their likely deficiencies and negative life outcomes. There were no solutions for students, and there was no message of hope.

Risks of ACE Disclosures in Schools

With advocacy from authoritative sources to accept the ACE framework and data from ACE scores, it would be reasonable for an untrained provider to conclude that engaging students in disclosure through formal or informal use of the ACE questionnaires would at least be benign, and that within a trauma-informed system that aims to increase the sense of social support of the students it serves, it would contribute to rather than threaten their safety. This would be a rational conclusion, specifically given the support of organizations such as the National Child Traumatic Stress Network's (NCTSN) advocacy for universal screening by a broad range of professions. The network claims that "with proper training, professionals or paraprofessionals from various child-serving systems—healthcare, schools, home visiting programs, and domestic violence shelters—can administer the screening" (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2019).

This runs counter to an abundance of clinical literature that trauma screening outside of a therapeutic context can significantly harm individuals who are experiencing trauma (Cole, Eisner, Gregory, & Ristuccia, 2013, p. 54). But in the context of ongoing warnings against and advocacy for institutional screening for ACEs, there is no current best standard of practice. In the formation of such a practice, it is strongly recommended that rigorous consideration be given to how requesting disclosure may endanger individuals and that schools and teachers defer to clinical recommendations of best practices for trauma screening and disclosure. Cole and colleagues argue that screenings reinforce the common notion that trauma interventions need to center on individuals, rather than the policies, school practices, and system-wide changes that reduce adversity (2013, p. 54).

Assumptions and Bias of the ACE Framework

The ten ACE categories are both limited and equally weighted. This means that there is no distinction

between an ACE score of one that is the result of an amicable divorce between two stable parents and an ACE score of one that is the result of years of ongoing childhood physical abuse. Finkelhor and colleagues underscore the problem by pointing to the weak association between poor outcomes in a contemporary youth population and separation or divorce of parents (Finkelhor et al., 2018, p. 175).

Wade, Shea, Rubin, and Wood recognize there are higher instances of ACEs among minoritized communities (2014). But it is also important to recognize that the selected categories ensure an overrepresentation of ACEs among minoritized communities. One could respond to this overrepresentation by pointing out that those who are impoverished and who experience oppressions from multiple intersections are simply more likely to face adversity. White, Edwards, Gillies, and Wastell recognize that under the ACE framework, "poverty is separated out from other childhood adversities and reframed as a symptom of a damaged brain and body. From this perspective, poverty is viewed merely as a symptom of dysfunctional development" (2019, pp. 461-462).

The ACE project does not recognize all adversities. Important factors such as cultural, structural, and systemic forms of oppression are not explicitly recognized as ACEs. The ten ACE categories that were selected were chosen by lead study investigators prior to data collection, and they primarily reflect interfamilial problems. They do not reflect categories that participants themselves identified as adversities (Felitti et al., 1998, p. 248). Given that an overarching claim is that high ACEs correlate with low cognition and biopsychosocial deficiency, the potential biases exemplified by predetermined categories deserves critical consideration. Is this a validation of systemic oppressions or an act of systemic oppression? If a social movement begins with the development of a new hierarchy which deems some less fit, then it does not align with social justice ideologies.

Negative Trajectories Without Viable Solutions

Though painting a dismal future for our students runs counter to the desires and values of educators, policymakers, and researchers, foundational elements of the trauma-informed movement and ACE implementation explicitly and implicitly teach students that if they have experienced significant adversity, then they can anticipate a continuation of their hardship. It scientifically validates deficiency with no regard for the complex factors that contribute to how young people experience, respond to, navigate, or work through significant hardship.

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, whose research is foundational to trauma-informed and ACE frameworks, establishes this biologically deterministic statement about young people in poverty:

> [I]n some cases, the cumulative burden of multiple risk factors early in life may limit the effectiveness of later interventions, thereby making it impossible to completely reverse the neurobiological and health consequences of growing up poor (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012, p. 2255).

These claims are authoritative, but as Kasia Tolwinski from McGill University explains, they are also controversial within and beyond the field of neurobiology. She says that in the face of criticism that the Center on the Developing Child's work is deterministic, their researchers use what she calls "'plasticity talk' as a corrective measure, hoping to rescue their reputations and research programs," and "to challenge the notion that biology is innate and unchanging." They argue that "the brain and body are highly malleable, so no experience determines development and ensures a particular life course" (2019, p. 144).

The ACE movement is not firmly deterministic, though key neurobiological research can be communicated

in a manner that does establish narratives that are deterministic, as is reflected in the statement from Shonkoff and colleagues, who claim that there could be irreversible "consequences of growing up poor" (2009, p. 2255). Neurobiological findings are often presented as unbiased, but they can be contradictory, and they support a manner of thought that presumes pathology of the poor. White and colleagues explain that we cannot foresee the "impact it will have for adults to identify themselves by their ACE score or for children to be categorised in this way. There is little reason to think that seeing oneself as determined by past experiences is at all helpful in finding a way out of current difficulties" (2019, p. 464).

When these messages are communicated by those who have institutional authority, they stand to reify the very adversities that the trauma-informed movement aims to negate. Reinforcing stereotypes and low expectations that may be held by those who serve individuals from minoritized communities has material and psychological consequences, and through direct and insidious means, the framework of ACEs, which is neither class nor race neutral, enables disturbing narratives and ways of thinking.

It is often claimed that the trauma-informed movement should move school discipline away from a message to students that "there is something wrong with them" to a message that "something happened to them." But the underlying logic and practices of ACE frameworks and scores contribute to a continuation of social narratives that tell students there is something wrong with them because something happened to them. With critical analysis of the trauma-informed movement and the enthusiasm it has generated, we can continue to highlight the need for flexibility, kindness, and understanding. We can also critically examine the narratives ACE frameworks produce and reach toward more humanistic messages. We can insist that there is nothing wrong with our students. And with the knowledge that the majority of them likely face realities and adversities that may make elements of life at school difficult, we can agree that it is the job of schools to build effective environments and services. We don't need the contingency of ACE research to know that students face tremendous adversity and trauma, and we don't need data in order for us to operate with warmth, compassion, and a drive toward structural change and advocacy.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences campaign has moved in a capillary-like form into social and health settings. No single field of research, area of policy, or application in practice tells the larger story about its reach and rationale across agencies and settings, or the ways it is being used to reshape institutional cultures by shifting narratives away from broken social systems and toward normalizing ideas of "brokenness" belonging to the individual. And that is most frequently the individual who is impoverished and who is positioned at multiple points of cultural, social, systemic, and institutional forms of socioeconomic oppression, racism, and xenophobia. When we scale out beyond individual trauma and the school or social system our students are a part of, we see ACEs as a network of bureaucratic systems operating through research, legislation, practice, and as a movement. We can see that though its manifestations often appear benevolent, the ACE campaign reinforces familiar deficit beliefs about those who have been historically marginalized in the United States.

Trauma-informed frameworks often appear progressive, and elements of their practices align with social justice goals and ideologies. If we look more closely at the claims of the original ACE study and some of the expectations and predictions they establish, we can also see how they enable ways of thinking that begin from a position of assumed pathology and deficiency. The ACE framework reasserts hierarchies that maintain minoritized communities and pathologize the poor.

Critical Analysis and Engagement

This overview of the ACE campaign aims to support critical analysis of the role of ACE applications in

schools, and specifically warns against ACE screening and using ACE scores in education settings. It asks teachers to consider the ways ACE claims can negatively shape students' perceptions of their families, peers, and themselves. The ways we perceive our students and anticipate their futures informs their motivation and potential trajectories. As educators, it is our goal to open up possibilities for our students, not foreclose on them. We should be critical of a framework that reasserts oppressive hierarchies and narratives of those who cannot "pull themselves up by the bootstraps" and overcome a vast range of continuous social and systemic forms of disadvantage by simply becoming more "resilient." Students and families need compassion and kindness, but they also need material and lasting resources. TI advocacy work should first focus on system rather than individual deficiencies.

The ACE framework does not offer students a message of hope. It sends them a message that there is something wrong with them because something happened to them, and if they fail to change they will likely face a dismal future. As educators, when we project a future for our students, we are also contributing to limiting and shaping it. It is this level of influence that puts us as educators in a powerful position to change deficiency-based narratives, and to critically analyze the growing ACE movement within and beyond school settings.

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About the Author

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Don't Be Fooled, Trauma Is a Systemic Problem: Trauma as a Case of Weaponized Educational Innovation

Debi Khasnabis and Simona Goldin

> *There is always an easy solution to every human problem—neat, plausible, and wrong.*
>
> –H. L. Mencken (1917)

What follows is a handful of snapshots of classroom incidents that educators have shared with us as examples of the impact of trauma in schools:

- A third grader flips over a table and throws his pencil at the teacher when a peer takes his toy.
- A kindergartener retreats to hiding under a table when told to put away her materials and line up for music class.
- A middle school student yells and swears when a staff member insists that he change his blood-stained shirt, soiled from an injury.

These incidents present great challenges instructionally. Educators ask us: How should teachers respond? Should they allow swearing in the classroom if a child is triggered? Certainly, the child is troubled, but if there is no punitive consequence, are we not condoning the misbehavior? How can we stop and attend to one child, when 25 others are ready to learn? And we hear again and again, if we stop and attend to one child, won't we lose "control" of the others?

These questions seem reasonable. The educators are right—they need guidance in order to see and support the students they are responsible for. Yet in looking at these "problems" and the solutions they engender, the cause is often obscured. Our argument here and in the professional development (PD) that we lead is that these questions direct attention to the wrong target, and thus might lead educators to re-traumatize and re-stigmatize the children they serve. While some practitioners are indeed attentive to this tension, we have observed that a stigmatizing stance toward children and families who experience trauma is quite pervasive. Thus, we advocate for asking questions that attend more broadly to the contexts within which the problems occur. For example, what are the *systems* in my school that are re-traumatizing this child? Why am I holding the child responsible for the trauma they have faced? How do I focus my energies on the child's assets and capabilities rather than on their failures and deficits?

This orientation to reading systemic problems at the individual level is nothing new and, we believe, is linked to broader educational patterns. In seemingly cyclic fashion, our leaders, educators, policymakers, and communities have wrung their hands at the crisis of public education, in search of a solution to the many problems that plague our schools. But more often than not, instead of looking to interrogate the root causes of problems, we have gravitated to easy (or easier) solutions (Love, 2019).

One set of solutions takes specific aim at the tremendous inequality that defines and dogs United States schools. These solutions aim to address inequality, most often "focusing" on individual behavior and learning outcomes, more and more frequently measured by standardized tests. There is no question

that attention to inequality is needed, and desperately so. The school-to-prison nexus has expanded to include infancy and the preschool years (Edelman, 2007). Children of color lag behind White students on all academic outcomes (Hanushek, Peterson, Talpey, & Woessman, 2019). And college attendance racial gaps persist (Jaquette, Curs, & Posselt, 2016).

It would seem logical then for schools to hunt for urgent solutions to urgent problems. We argue that the combination of the search for easy solutions with this state of urgency only magnifies the potential damage, which can have significant and violent effects on children and their communities. It is for this reason that we see the mis-use of innovation as, oftentimes, the weaponization of design and innovation against the very communities the innovations were meant to support. As such, we argue for *systemically trauma-informed practice*—practice that manages prejudicial tendencies and supports educators to unlearn them (Goldin & Khasnabis, 2020).

Equity Projects and the Propensity for Blame

In this article we investigate a particular type of implementation failure—what can and often does go wrong when schools and educators take aim at the deep inequalities of U.S. public schooling. These solutions are often expensive and time-consuming. And too often, they fail (e.g., Payne, 2008; Sarason, 1990; Mehta, 2015; Cohen and Moffitt, 2010). We highlight a recurring set of pathologies associated with these innovations—one with dangerous consequences. When educational innovations that seek to address inequality fail, we often blame teachers and students. Kumashiro (2012) examines the "bad teacher" trope, noting that we regularly hear politicians exhorting "we need to get the lazy, incompetent teachers out of the classroom" (xi). In our newspapers, in our leaders' speeches, and in school board meetings, it is common to hear complaints that teachers don't "adopt" with fidelity, they're not committed to their students and their communities, they don't collaborate, or perhaps they collaborate too much.

Trauma-informed practice—increasingly promoted as an answer to equity-related problems that surface in schools—is particularly susceptible to these pathologies. It is founded in understandings of trauma that were born in the medical field as doctors searched for explanations for differential health outcomes (Felitti et al., 1998; Felitti et al., 2019). Understandings that adverse childhood life experiences impacted a wide range of lifelong health outcomes motivated professionals across many disciplines to design interventions that would support victims of trauma not only to survive but to thrive. Trauma-informed practice extended from these origins becomes a set of principles and practices that support individuals to heal from trauma and to grow and thrive across settings, including classrooms and schools.

These origins of trauma-informed practice are substantive, and have the potential to be of great use. However, it is within the context of urgency that its danger lies—a danger of ending in the blaming of teachers, students, and families. When trauma-informed practice does not work and performance measures continue to plummet, teachers may be held responsible. Teachers, then, are likely to hold children and families responsible. We have heard terrible things said of children and their communities when they experience trauma, including, "The parents here don't know how to parent. They just need us to teach them."

As teacher educators who often support educators in underserved schools, we are regularly confronted with this problem: How can teachers and schools support students who have lived with and through trauma, without resorting to a "blame the victim" mentality? We have observed again and again that this problem is met with *individual-level* solutions, solutions that often obscure or ignore structural racism, White supremacy, and inequality in U.S. society and schools. These individual-level solutions do little to tackle the systemic causes of trauma.

The educators we work with are concerned about the well-being of their individual students. Often, they are desperate for strategies, approaches, and methods. Most see the individual children in their classrooms as deserving of love, resources, safety, and learning opportunities. But when those children are hurting, deeply in pain because of the various forms of trauma they have experienced, teachers often see the behaviors that result from the individual pain and not the systems that construct and contextualize that individual trauma—systemic racism, deep poverty, and inequality. As a result we ask: What can we do to help teachers learn to see and account for systemic racism in their classroom and construct their teaching practice?

But who are we, and how are our identities and positionalities at play here? We are both teacher educators, and together we have constructed and enacted PD for schools and districts, focusing on multicultural education and anti-racist pedagogy. While we have enacted PD in schools with varying student demographics, the teachers and administrators we work with have been predominantly White. The first author is an Indian American woman and the second author is a White Jewish woman.

We have found our different racial identities to be great resources for the co-implementation of PD. We are, perhaps obviously, viewed differently in these spaces. Even more, we see and are entrusted with different information, which might be related to our different racial identities. Our different identities mean that we have had vastly different cultural, racial, ethnic, life experiences and traumas. Together, as a whole, this pool of collective experiences helps us understand our participants' perspectives and their trauma. Enacting PD together allows us to splice these different frames together, enabling a more expansive and more complete understanding of what it is participants know and are learning and allowing us to tailor our work with them accordingly.

Shifting the Focus to the System Level

Systemically trauma-informed practice is founded upon the awareness that trauma is a systemic problem and must be addressed at the systemic level in addition to the individual level. Treating trauma as *only* an individual-level problem, when it is not, has the unfortunate and perhaps somewhat predictable effect of blaming children and families for challenges they did not cause. Ironically, although teachers often bring significant privilege to the work that they do, they themselves operate in systems that demoralize them, that exert perverse incentives, and that weigh on them.

One administrator who works in a district in which we delivered and designed PD reminded us of the system within which teachers do their work. He lamented especially the heavy focus on children's achievement and teachers' effectiveness, as measured by test scores, which has "devastated" the relationship between teachers and their students, and eroded trust between teachers and administrators. He pointed out that the focus is now on the product, not on the whole child.

This focus on product also transfers to teachers. Describing the pressure on teachers and students to perform, he said, "When we meet for a teacher evaluation, we tend to ask, 'How do we get your data up?' We are not asking, 'What are your needs? How are you feeling? Are you experiencing secondary trauma?' Things like morale, they don't matter in the current environment." The very system that blames children and families also blames teachers.

Scholars have suggested that racism itself is trauma, pointing to the systemic nature of *racial trauma*. We agree. Racial trauma (Comas-Díaz, 2016), or repeated and accumulating exposure to discrimination, points to the systemic nature of trauma. Myriad examples abound. A 2011 study found that "Arab male applicant[s] needed to send two résumés to every one résumé sent by a white male applicant to receive a callback for an interview by the hiring personnel" (Widner & Chicoine, 2011, p. 806). Pierson and colleagues (2019)

found that across the country, Black drivers are 20 percent more likely than White drivers to be pulled over. Students of color are disproportionately disciplined in schools for subjectively interpreted transgressions, such as defiance (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002).

Demeaning moments like this can have severe consequences for children who are repeatedly marginalized in schools and can contribute to a school-to-prison nexus for students of color (Winn & Winn, 2016). Experiencing these patterns themselves constitute trauma—racial trauma that is baked into the *systems* of our society, including educational systems, judicial systems, and employment systems.

We argue that in addition to racial trauma, *all* trauma is nested within a racist world. Consider the 1995 Kaiser Permanente study, which initially documented the widespread existence of adverse childhood life experiences (ACES), including abuse, neglect, and household challenges such as domestic violence, substance abuse, or parental separation. Two-thirds of the population were found to have experienced at least one ACE (Felitti et al., 1998, Felitti et al., 2019).

This widespread trauma is nested within an inherently unequal society, where oppressive forces such as racism permeate all parts of society, including communities, schools, and classrooms where educators and students interact (see Figure 1). In other words, any particular ACE, such as child abuse, may not itself be an example of racial trauma; but the occurrence of child abuse is nested within a racist society, and is at risk for being interpreted in racist ways. For example, one study found that doctors are more likely to report Black children's injuries as suspected child abuse, than those of White children with identical injuries (Lane, Rubin, & Monteith, 2002). This discriminatory reporting pattern, not disproportionate rates of abuse, could explain higher rates of Black children's removal from their parents.
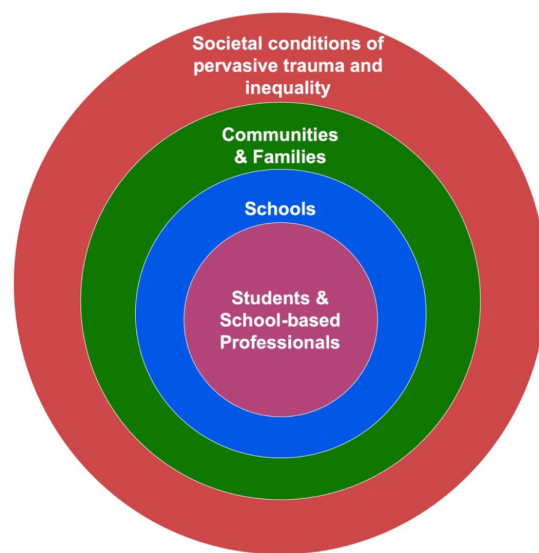
Figure 1. Nestedness of trauma in an unequal society of conditions that promote trauma, TeachersStudents

Our work in schools with children and teachers leads us to conclude that this same phenomenon occurs in classrooms. While trauma may affect all children, the trauma that children of color experience is likely to be hyper-visible. An eye-tracking study conducted by Walter Gilliam and colleagues (2016) found that teachers were more likely to surveil Black boys when looking for behavior problems. In an NPR podcast,

Gilliam explained, "If you look for something in one place, that's the only place you can typically find it" (see Turner, 2016). Our experience in schools suggests that Black children and families are also more likely to be seen for their trauma, even when trauma is not present.

An added complication is associated with class, and unequal access to resources such as health care, child-care, housing, and food for families and communities living in poverty. A range of protective factors can buffer children from trauma or support them in developing resilience in the face of trauma. When families lack access to resources, however, rising above trauma proves challenging. Add the association of class with race and the potential for racist interpretation only increases. Thus, the nestedness of trauma within a racist society sets up an unfortunate reality—where trauma is likely to be over-identified with people of color, and especially poor people of color. This association is dangerous, because it can result in deficits being assigned to those who have experienced trauma, or to entire communities.

There is a dangerous corollary to this pattern. Complementary to the pathology of overemphasizing trauma in underserved communities is the worry that trauma experienced by children in privileged communities may be unseen. A former student illustrated this phenomenon when describing the impact of her father's physical abuse: "I lived with my mom. She understandably took to alcohol to self-medicate, and for the most part ignored me and my brother...Because of our wealth, I looked really well-off. But really, I wasn't." In both contexts—privileged children with unseen trauma and marginalized children who are perceived largely *for* their trauma—the relative visibility of hardship is a systemic phenomenon demanding system-level solutions.

Toward a Pedagogy for *Systemically* Trauma-Informed Practice

The hunger for work on trauma-informed practice in schools is clear. When we engage with teachers about their current needs with regard to trauma-informed practice, we are asked questions such as the following:

- "We already know our kids have trauma! What should we do about it?"
- "We've already learned about what trauma is. But no one is giving us enough information on how to manage the crises happening in our classrooms! What do I do about the kid having a meltdown?"
- "Tell us what to do to get the parents to listen. They are making it worse!"

Statements like these strike us as insensitive and impatient, and sometimes as racially unaware; however, we remember that teachers are themselves in crisis. They have been asked to take on the task of managing and even solving the effects of societal dysfunction, an example of which is differential access to resources in their classrooms. We work to bring both compassion and nuance to our response so that we can support the transformation of their practice.

We respond to this frustration by teaching about trauma. For example, we show the documentary film, *Resilience: The Biology of Stress and the Science of Hope* (Pritzer & Redford, 2017), which provides an orientation to the topic of ACEs and the ways that professionals across fields support people who have experienced trauma. We also teach methods for interacting with children productively, including, for example, reflective listening techniques. But while there is value in developing understandings of trauma-informed practice, this approach to practice must be developed in tandem with understandings of the way that racism informs perception. Educators must recognize that they are always at risk of reproducing racist ideologies because they work within a racist society.

Given the systemic nature of trauma, how and in what way do we support teachers in practicing in *systemically trauma-informed ways*—ways that challenge prejudicial tendencies and support educators to unlearn them? Educators must first be supported to recognize and contend with racist lenses through which trauma is frequently interpreted and weaponized to injure, blame, and pathologize, in particular, poor children and families of color who may struggle to thrive. And then, they must be supported to recognize the ways that systemic racism obscures the assets of communities of color that teachers are purportedly meant to support. Finally, we work with learners to develop their practice, to embed this knowledge into the design and enactment of their work with their students, seeking to support individual students but also seeking to understand and interrupt systemic dysfunctions that are either causing or exacerbating trauma for them and their families.

The Isaiah Lamb Learning Sequence

A key pedagogical tool we use to engage teachers in these understandings is counter-story (Goldin, Khasnabis, & Atkins, 2018;   Goldin, Khasnabis, O'Connor, & Hearn, 2019; Khasnabis & Goldin, 2016; Khasnabis, Goldin, Perouse-Harvey, & Hanna, 2019), offering educators practice-based opportunities to engage with stories of strength, where they may have expected stories of weakness. This orientation has been an effective exercise for prompting educators to recognize presumed deficit narratives, often due to racial bias, that they hold about students.

One of our instructional sequences centers on a young Black athlete, Isaiah Lamb, a basketball player who faced homelessness as a high school student. He was featured in a cover story of *Sports Illustrated* (Wertheim & Rodriguez, 2014). After the story was published, Lamb went on to attend and play basketball at Marist College, where he had received a scholarship. Lamb and his mother were also featured in a *Sports Illustrated* film titled *Young, Gifted and Homeless.* The film makes clear that Lamb is exceptionally talented, relentlessly hard-working, and poignantly hopeful and positive—embodying the very concept of resilience. Lamb's mother adds perspective, describing her own immense challenge in providing for her son and the sadness she experienced living out of her car, coupled with the joy she felt when they finally found housing. Lamb's story is an authentic story of trauma as well as a story of significant strength, the kind of strength that is frequently overlooked in the everyday life of schools.

Using Lamb's story, we engage educators in an opportunity to contend with their expectations. As such, we define what we mean by deficit and asset frames. We provide the following definitions:

- Deficit perspective: Describing a child/family/community by either explicitly or implicitly emphasizing their challenges, limitations, constraints, and/or pathologies. Often based on assumptions or *assumed intentions.*

- Strengths-based perspective/Asset perspective: Describing a child/family/community either explicitly or implicitly by emphasizing their strengths, assets, competencies, capabilities, and/or potential. Often rooted in viewing *with generosity.*

Examining these is useful, but we know that simply learning new terms and understanding them doesn't, by fiat, change practice. Instead, we scaffold teachers' abilities to put these understandings into practice. We constructed a fictitious narrative that integrated imagined ways that Lamb may have been perceived by high school educators who were neither trauma-aware nor racially sensitive. It is told from the view of a hypothetical teacher, and embodies racially biased perspectives that we have often heard to describe students of color. This narrative and the questions we ask teachers to support their analysis are captured in Figure 2.

Directions: Review the case as a narrative for critique.

Isaiah Lamb is an 11th grade student in your fourth hour English class. He is on the basketball team, and his grades have been slipping over the course of the year. You notice that he is tired in class, rarely raises his hand to participate, and regularly falls asleep in class. It is clear that he is not completing the readings that you have assigned. You are considering reporting his poor progress to the basketball coach as it may not be possible for him to continue to be on the team, given his poor academic progress.

Your colleague who was his 10th grade English teacher has informed you that last year Isaiah started the year well but then struggled for most of the rest of the year. She said that she had made many efforts to reach out to Isaiah's welfare-dependent mother to help support her son in school, but most of her calls were unanswered. Once, his mother returned a phone call, but she seemed agitated when your colleague voiced her concern about his tiredness and distraction and didn't acknowledge the issue. Ultimately your colleague said that she felt Isaiah's mother was unwilling to support her son.

Question Set 1 (to be completed after reading narrative)
- What are your reactions to this narrative?
- What questions do you have?
- Propose an alternative hypothesis than that depicted in the text.
- What would your next steps be as Isaiah's teacher?

Question Set 2 (to be completed after viewing film)
- What thoughts do you have given your more contextualized understanding of who Isaiah is?
- Given what you've learned about Isaiah, what would your next steps be as his teacher?
- Critique the case depiction itself: What about it was useful? What about it are you critical of?

Figure 2. The Isaiah Lamb Fictitious Narrative and Learning Sequence

After educators read the fictitious narrative, we prompt them to journal their reflections in response to Question Set 1. Teachers typically react to the scenario with many substantive questions, wondering for example what efforts have been made to help Isaiah get the rest he needs. Frequently, teachers are insistent that a next step would be to talk to Isaiah himself and to consult with his coach. Coaches who we have worked with share that their relationships with students are less constrained by academics and thus provide an opportunity to know students more holistically; they encourage their colleagues to reach out to them in cases like Isaiah's. These responses illustrate the way that educators typically respond with compassion for Isaiah and a desire to help him.

By asking participants to propose an alternative hypothesis, we aim to push educators past a space of compassion alone to begin to consider that the conclusions portrayed in the narrative could be false. In response to this prompt, participants note that attempts to connect with Isaiah's mother do not appear substantive, and in fact, she may not have received the teacher's calls or messages. Developing participants' ability and their commitments to consistently and persistently look for alternative hypotheses is a key practice we seek to nurture in educators, and has proven particularly useful in enabling them to bring

knowledge into practice, and to interrupt and dismantle the ways that teaching practice can, so often, re-traumatize students.

We then show the film, which includes Isaiah's voice, as well as his mother's and coach's voices, as they are interviewed, stretching educators to reexamine their jottings and serving as a "counter-story" to the deficit-laden fictitious narrative with which they were first presented. Figure 3 highlights some of the richness of what we learn about Isaiah Lamb's *actual* life and his many assets. These quotes capture Lamb more holistically—portraying him not as a student who is falling behind and "at risk," but as a hard-working young man with dreams and talents, a mother who is devoted to him, and a coach who believes deeply in him.

Isaiah Lamb
- "My teammates know me as the good basketball player who has the perfect life. But they never knew what I went home to."
- "For about three years, a parking lot like this was my home. Just sit in the corner in the car and sleep there for the night."
- "My mother was always on me about getting good grades and going to college. Do what you love in order to get your mind off of what's going on."
- "I would definitely like to get a full academic scholarship."

Isaiah's Mother: Valerie Lamb
- "When we was coming up it was always believed that the dinner table... you sit down at the dinner table and the children tell you everything. But what if you don't have a dinner table?"
- "Isaiah is so tall he would be crunched up in the back. Many nights I would just cry looking at him because he was so crunched up in the back."
- "I had a good life when I was younger. And I wanted that for my children. But it didn't work out that way."
- "I never know he had it in him... he was such a good basketball player!"

Isaiah's Coach: Matt Lochte
- "He's one of the best athletes in the Baltimore area. And I say that with no hesitation...his maturity as a young man allows him to be that leader that we need."
- "Isaiah's courage comes from his upbringing. Some of the things he's been exposed to, some of the things he's seen."
- "Some players that are gonna go to college with or without basketball maybe sometimes aren't as focused as the ones that know basketball becomes an opportunity."
- "Right now he officially has six Division 1 basketball scholarship offers. You know, he's athletic enough to play high-level basketball in college and potentially from there open up some other basketball opportunities."

Figure 3. Quotes from Isaiah Lamb, his mother, and coach in the film counterstory

The film pushes educators to realize that the information they were told by their fictitious colleague, "the 10th grade English teacher" was incomplete. Even more, it illuminates the erasure of the challenges that Lamb has faced and the many assets he and his mother possess, as well as the deep and important relationship he has with his coach.

We ask educators to journal their reflections a second time, but in response to Question Set 2. By responding to these questions and engaging in discussion about the case, educators often come to the realization that not only were they given biased information, but that they themselves were influenced by bias. For examples, educators now understand there were logical reasons for Isaiah's fatigue. Typically a participant will point to the way that Isaiah's mother was misunderstood. She was facing severe challenges, but she had in fact been trying to support her son.

Participants often remark on situations they have experienced as teachers where their students were experiencing homelessness. We then report to the group that we ourselves wrote the case to represent a biased set of statements that we often hear spoken about children in schools—and further, that while the case narrative was fictitious, Isaiah Lamb is a real person. Without fail, this prompts participants to begin researching Isaiah Lamb on their phones and a murmur of appreciation for Lamb spreads across the room as participants realize that he is a real young man who has faced homelessness and who now attends Marist College, where he plays on their Division 1 basketball team. We allow time for participants to learn about Lamb.

Five years after the launch of the *Sports Illustrated* video, Lamb devotes his time not only to basketball and academics, but also to service and innovation, regularly mentoring young athletes and designing equipment for his new fitness brand LoLamb, which was inspired by his recovery from ACL injuries (Bjarnar, 2019). It is clear that Lamb is a man characterized by insight, integrity, intellectual curiosity, and innovation—who also could have been overlooked by his teachers, or worse, mischaracterized and unsupported, his exhaustion misread as lack of motivation and ability. Given the over-representation of students of color in lower track classes and in special education (Ferri & Connor, 2005) and the school-to-prison nexus (Winn & Winn, 2016), the dangers are real and significant.

We then facilitate a discussion around the educators' reactions to the case, aiming to support participants to recognize that the case depiction of Isaiah and his mother is deeply biased, racist, classist, and inflammatory. We remind participants that we wrote the case using language that we regularly hear in schools, and ask them to share any language they found problematic. With this prompt, educators open up, expressing their concerns about the case. In particular the 10th grade teacher's characterization is riddled with racist, classist, and sexist language, dog-whistles aimed at Black mothers, in particular. Describing Isaiah's mother as "welfare-dependent" invokes classist and racist tropes long used in the U.S. in biased and stereotypical ways (e.g., the 1965 Moynihan Report and the trope of the "welfare queen"), here invoked as the singular description of Isaiah's' mother, Valerie Lamb. The teacher's description of Ms. Lamb as "unwilling" erases her commitment, love, and dedication to her son, recasting her as detached and unavailable, another stereotype leveraged at Black mothers. The term "agitated" itself trades on dangerous and essentializing stereotypes. Each of these stereotypes is embedded in intersectional biases, and grows out of longstanding biases directed, in particular, at Black mothers (Rosenthal & Lobel, 2016). Our goal here is to illuminate that the language used to describe Isaiah initially was biased, false and, in fact, violent; and moreover that these pervasive biases are systemic. Within school contexts, educators commonly perpetuate these tropes throughout the system, biasing one another to the detriment of students' learning.

By opening up this discussion, we also illuminate the way that Isaiah has been described as a function of *deficits*. We challenge educators to name Isaiah's many assets highlighted in the film and assess the different instructional response that is opened up when we build from those assets rather than emphasize the deficits that were noted in the narrative. Participants report, for example, that Isaiah is talented, he is motivated, he has both academic and athletic goals, he has a mother who is devoted to him, he is

courageous. Figure 4 presents the artful musings of an educator as she engaged in our PD, taking in these intersecting goals of grappling with the danger of deficit language and the opportunities associated with asset stances. Also conveyed in her artwork is a recognition that it is worth taking our time to do substantive work.
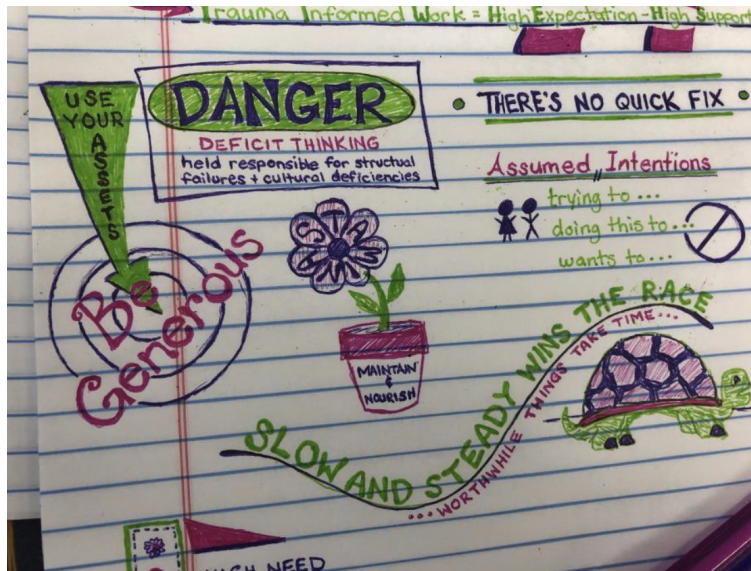

Figure 4. Educator participant's notes during PD

A related goal is to show what Gorski (2016) has powerfully stated: "No set of curricular or pedagogical strategies can turn a classroom led by a teacher with a deficit view of families experiencing poverty into an equitable learning space for those families" (381). We believe this to be true about trauma-informed practice and Isaiah Lamb. In fact, we worry that trauma-informed practice can be used against students like Isaiah Lamb and others experiencing trauma if they are ascribed deficits and not seen for their strengths. They are pitied and/or pathologized, rather than seen for the strengths they bring. Seeing Isaiah for his assets would likely motivate a teacher to find ways to build upon those assets while simultaneously addressing some of the real challenges Isaiah was facing in his life.

Drawing Attention to Individuals and Systems

Once participants have begun to recognize the biases present in the Isaiah Lamb fictitious narrative, they also begin to recognize that, in fact, these biases are prevalent throughout schools. When we work with educators for an extended amount of time, we present them with many case narratives depicting classroom incidents that involve students who have experienced trauma. The cases show how *deficit-speak* is ubiquitous in schools, and that often it is indicative and derived from bias; even more, *deficit-speak* can lead to practice and actions that delimit students' opportunities to learn and thrive. The pervasiveness of such language is indicative of a systemic issue—one that requires systemic attention. Thus, we promote systemically trauma-informed practice to support schools to think both individually and systemically about these issues in the following ways.

1. Work at the individual level.

   On the one hand, we have repeatedly argued that trauma is a systemic issue and so it must be addressed systemically. However, this does not mean that we should ignore individuals. We

wholeheartedly support the work of school-based, trauma-focused programming, which has been shown to be very effective (Herrehnkohl, Hong, & Verbrugge, 2019) — for example, in areas such as building relationships, helping students to monitor their socioemotional needs, and offering mental health supports when needed. Teachers are critical in this work and can be powerfully impactful, supporting students' resilience. We work to develop and enrich teachers' capabilities in these realms, knowing their importance.

2. See, recognize, and name the systems that contribute to trauma.

   If we only see individual-level trauma, then we risk holding individuals responsible for problems they did not cause. Thus, we support educators to think about the larger systemic issues at play and we ask educators to recognize that they themselves co-construct a system, the institution of a school. We push on this, because we find that educators often feel overwhelmed by the task of confronting systemic injustice. But if they recognize that they, themselves, construct systems, then deconstructing systemic injustice feels more plausible to them.

3. Work in concert within the school to mount systemic responses to trauma.

   Finally, we push educators to devise systemic approaches, within the power of the school system, to support children experiencing trauma. For example, if children are experiencing food insecurity, schools can look for community-based partners to ensure food accessibility for students and their families. Sometimes systemic issues are invisible to educators. For example, many families experiencing trauma do not reach out to schools for help. We encourage schools to consider why this might be.

What power dynamics may be getting in the way of authentic communication and relationships between educators and families? What legacies of distrust exist between schools and communities, and how may schools perpetuate and construct that distrust? We support educators in examining their policies and practices to uncover the real reasons that families may not trust their children's schools, and may suffer through trauma without reaching out. Significant attention must go into this, including family engagement activities and critical community- and relationship-building between educators and families.

Interrupting the Weaponization of Trauma-Informed Practice

We argue here for enriching individualized trauma-informed practice with *systemically trauma-informed practice*, accompanied by support of teacher learning that will substantively manage and interrupt prejudicial tendencies. For this to happen, educators must be supported to recognize and challenge racist frames through which trauma is frequently interpreted and weaponized to injure, blame, and pathologize, in particular, poor children and families of color.

We push against singular responses that encourage only simplistic, easy (or easier) solutions that tell our students to simply breathe, for example, or our teachers that all they need to do is to create a calm corner. Perhaps breathing and a calm corner get us somewhere, but in no way are these solutions adequate to the scale of the problem, nor do these target the systemic racism and inequality in U.S. society and the ways that they seep into our schools and classrooms.

To be clear, individual children need individual-level support. Teachers can and must bring support and attentive practice to serve the individual children in their classrooms as they see and come to understand the ways that behaviors are linked to and emanate from experiences of trauma. But this cannot be all that

we do. Instead, because trauma is systemically produced, and is embedded in and manufactured by racist structures and systemic inequality, seeing and supporting the individual child must only be one of a series of reparative steps.

We know that teaching is social justice, and that effective teachers can do great good in the world. If teachers come to understand the systemic nature of trauma, and embed this understanding in systemically trauma-informed teaching practice, then they stand a chance not just of serving the students in their classrooms, but interrupting and addressing the effects of trauma that hound so many of the students we serve.

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Why Trouble SEL? The Need for Cultural Relevance in SEL

Julia Mahfouz and Vanessa Anthony-Stevens

Recently, one of the authors sat in a kindergarten classroom in a public school in a sovereign tribal nation in Idaho, alongside a half-dozen in-service and pre-service teachers. During this early morning professional development session, committed, hardworking, and well-meaning teachers assessed students' literacy benchmarks and social and emotional needs. In addition to mapping the curriculum, the teachers (who were not members of the Indigenous[1] community they served) shared how their young students need to learn "the basics" in academic skills, such as how to hold a pencil or write letters from left to right. A lack of social and emotional stability in households was described as an obstacle that students must overcome in order to achieve "normal" school performance. These conversations, while undoubtedly well-intentioned, reflected deficit views of "culturally different" people and those impacted by poverty, a phenomenon deeply embedded in the Eurocentric bias of foundational theories of learning and successful school performance (Delpit, 2006).

The professional development goals of many K-12 schools in Idaho include attending to social and emotional learning (SEL) in the classroom. Teachers justify this goal with statements that attempt to recognize social and emotional stress in the lives of children, such as: "Our students are coming to school with so much trauma," "They come to school with few skills," or "Our job as teachers is to help these kids become more resilient." Classroom features such as soft lighting, yoga balls, and neatly decorated Pinterest-inspired word walls with statements like "You are beautiful" or "Believe in yourself" are marked displays of teachers attempting to adopt SEL strategies to minimize stress and anxiety and elevate self-perception among youth in school.

In Idaho's Indian Country,[2] teachers serving the state's five federally recognized tribes serve some of the region's most economically and socially marginalized communities. High rates of poverty, significant disparities between Indigenous students and their non-Indigenous peers on standardized achievement tests, and experiences of discrimination paint an urgent picture of inequity and deprivation (Dearien, 2016). For example, Indigenous youth are 2.5 times more likely to experience trauma than their non-Indigenous peers (National Indian Child Welfare Association, 2014). Poverty, family member incarceration, and high rates of substance abuse are disproportionately relevant in Indian Country. These contemporary traumas are not accidental and cannot be isolated from colonialist policies of cultural and linguistic genocide, forced family separation, boarding schools, and the physical incarceration and violent relocation of Indigenous peoples from their homelands. Nearly 250 years of intergenerational state-sanctioned violence against Indigenous peoples has played out in schools (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006).

These statistics are but a few of many reasons why there is an urgent need for educators to understand the social and emotional needs of Indigenous youth and their historical roots. Although narratives of Indigenous trauma and school failure are widely available (Tuck, 2009), there is a relative silence in schools

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1   The terms Indigenous and Native are used interchangeably to refer to individuals and communities identifying as originating in the Americas. These terms recognize the unique political and cultural relationships between Indigenous peoples and their homelands prior to colonization and in contemporary settler occupation.

2   Indian Country is a term used in the United States to refer to lands, communities, and allotments recognized as held in trust for Indian tribes through treaty and other intergovernmental agreements, by the federal government. See 18 U.S.C. § 1151 and 40 C.F.R. § 171.3. The term is also commonly used when discussing policy and practice within the jurisdiction of sovereign tribal lands.

about ongoing colonial injustices and deprivations maintained in state policy toward Indigenous peoples. Economic displacement, continued land encroachment, and the undermining of Indigenous sovereignty in education policy (Sabzalian, 2019) contribute to a deficit narrative of Indigenous youth in "need of intervention." This deep-seated structural racism is often silenced by the soft glow of lights, soothing colors on the walls, and well-intentioned caring embedded in the design and delivery of social welfare improvement schemes (Castagno, 2019; Dhillon, 2019).

As we contemplate the complexities of these urgent needs, we ask: Although many teachers care deeply about the social and emotional needs of their students, are they able to recognize the strengths and knowledges Indigenous and other minoritized youth bring with them to schools? In what ways do teachers understand the unique know-how of Indigenous communities developed through centuries-long relationships with specific lands? Can teachers identify the sources of well-being and knowledge practiced in specific cultural and linguistic ways of knowing? How often is contemporary tribal knowledge incorporated into curricula and school policies?

We believe lessons from Indian Country demonstrate that it is worth pausing to consider whether SEL is effective without situating educational programming within historical and political contexts. Can social and emotional well-being be appropriately understood without attending to context and cultural ways of knowing, particularly in communities that have been minoritized and marginalized by Eurocentric educational and welfare policies?

Zooming out to consider diverse contexts and cultured ways of learning (Rogoff, 2003), we recognize that inequities based on race, socioeconomic status, and location significantly impact student learning and well-being. Diverse student populations are commonly associated with urban areas; however, in the Inland Northwest (Eastern Washington, Eastern Oregon, and Idaho), a quarter to a third of public schools are located in rural regions (Showalter et al., 2017) and serve large populations of culturally or linguistically minoritized students, including Latinx and American Indian youth (Barley & Wegner, 2010).

The proportion of rural English language learners (ELLS) in Idaho and Washington is 3.5 percent above the national average (Showalter et al., 2017). In Idaho, 18 percent of the public school population identifies as Latinx, and enrollment for this group increased by 42 percent between 2011 and 2016 (The Hispanic Profile, 2016).

Consistent with national trends, rural schools with many students of color and ELLs serve communities with higher than average rates of poverty and lower than average rates of academic achievement (Barley & Wegner, 2010). Rural students comprise roughly 20 percent of the U.S. K-12 public school population (Showalter et al., 2017), and nearly half live at or below the poverty line (Showalter et al., 2017). Teachers who aim to support SEL among rural students, especially Indigenous youth, need to develop capacities to recognize the potential impacts of these factors on student learning.

SEL programs create opportunities for schools to recognize and serve young people exposed to trauma, both contemporary and historic. However, we are concerned that uncritical discussions of social and emotional well-being may pathologize trauma or mark marginalized youth as "damaged," without consideration of the complex cognitive, political, and social ecologies dominated by Eurocentric bias. To confront these limitations, we propose adopting an interdisciplinary lens to integrate culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogy into SEL programs for marginalized and minoritized students.

As teacher-researchers with backgrounds in classroom teaching (second author) and school leadership (first author), both in pluri-cultural and multilingual contexts of learning, our own experiences support the notion that all learning is cultured. And as faculty members of a public university in the rural Inland Northwest situated on the traditional homelands of Indigenous peoples, we see that the diversities of our context are frequently silenced. Our work in curriculum and instruction and educational leadership attempts to navigate ways to achieve educational equity in diverse communities.

What is SEL?

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is the capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish positive relationships with others. In the mid-1990s, research on prevention and resilience showed the positive impacts of SEL programs in schools. Since then, a growing number of educators, policymakers, and researchers have supported the implementation of school-based SEL programs (Jones & Kahn, 2017) to help build competencies essential for student success.

SEL targets a combination of behaviors, cognitions, and emotions. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2019) defines SEL as: acquiring and effectively applying the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to recognize and manage emotions; developing caring and concern for others; making responsible decisions; establishing positive relationships; and handling challenging situations capably. CASEL's (2019) SEL framework is based on five core social-emotional competencies (SECs): self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Students are encouraged to learn, practice, and apply social-emotional skills by engaging in positive activities both inside and outside the classroom.

Many SEL programs have been developed over the last two decades; increasing research evidence shows that such programs can support development of the whole child and lead to improved academic achievement, employment, health, and well-being. However, because student learning and identity are shaped by cultural practice(s), situated life experiences, and many other variables converging in any context of social interaction (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003), the development and expression of social-emotional skills are affected by factors such as social-historic context, including epistemic beliefs (i.e., about the nature of knowledge) and power dynamics (Bang & Medin, 2010).

This raises the question: Do the guiding frameworks of SEL programs adequately promote the well-being of diverse youth in an inequitable society such as the United States? Although evidence shows SEL programs yield benefits in multiple domains in the United States and elsewhere, most programs are based on monolithic approaches (Watts & Abdul-Adil, 1998) that typically do not consider dynamics of power and oppression in social structures. Furthermore, such approaches silence nuanced cultural, social, political, and geographic diversities relevant to different ways of knowing the world and the ways different communities support intergenerational learning (Romero-Little, 2010). Although many view SEL as the "missing piece" in education because it addresses important aspects of student learning and offers significant skills for navigating complex worlds (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013), we believe it is important to recognize that any SEL curriculum that does not deeply consider culture as the central framework through which learning occurs likely perpetuates inequity. SEL programs need to call attention to how complex social-historical landscapes influence learning and SEL implementation.

To effectively incorporate culture into SEL frameworks, we propose adopting an interdisciplinary lens—specifically, culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2014) and culturally sustaining

pedagogy (CSP) (Paris & Alim, 2014). A deep cultural analysis can illuminate why standard approaches to SEL are not sufficiently differentiated to address students' diverse needs (Castro-Olivo, Preciado, Marciante, & Garcia, 2018), especially those minoritized on the basis of race and socioeconomic status. SEL programs must create spaces for teachers and school leaders to engage in discussions of deep cultural analysis (Pollock, 2008) that include the development of sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Approaching SEL as a Cultured Practice

As Indigenous education scholars point out, "all curricula and pedagogy are culturally based. The real question is, whose cultural knowledge and practices are they based on?" (Lipka, Sharp, Brenner, Yanez, & Sharp, 2005, p. 369). Sociocultural analysis of learning—for example, seeing culture as a practice situated in social interaction (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005)—enables schooling to be seen as a space of human interaction laden with sociocultural beliefs, situated meaning, and power relations. Changing the lens through which educators assess culturally sustaining interactions is an essential practice for supporting educational equity.

In the pursuit of educational equity, we believe biases must be acknowledged and inequitable practices must be eliminated; only then can school environments cultivate the interests and talents of students from diverse backgrounds. While helping students develop SECs may seem like a useful way to counteract some of the effects of deficit models of education, many SEL programs are delivered via a classroom-based instruction format that reinforces rather than challenges the deficit paradigm by privileging ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving embraced by the dominant culture.

Because psychological norms and constructs are frequently presented as universal, the field of psychology is plagued by ethnocentric biases, many of which go unrecognized (Dudgeon & Walker, 2015). Substantial evidence associating differences in social and emotional development with cultural structures, functions, and processes has called this assumption of universality into question (Hecht & Shin, 2015).

Among the many psychological constructs shaped by cultural assumptions, "how the self is defined" is the most fundamental (Hecht & Shin, 2015, p. 52; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). For example, whereas individualist notions of self are pervasive in anglophone and other Eurocentric societies, kinship structures in Indigenous societies support collectivist notions of self that are "inseparable from, and embedded within, family and community" (Gee, Dudgeon, Schultz, Hart, & Kelly, 2014, p. 57). One's sense of self may also be shaped by connections to land, cultural heritage, and language (Gee et al., 2014; LeGrande et al., 2017). In many Indigenous communities, for example, oral stories, experiential learning, and multi-age ceremonies are mechanisms of knowledge transfer that frame understandings of the self in relation to others, both human and non-human communities (Poroch et al., 2009; Romero-Little, 2010).

Cultural differences emerge as a result of fundamentally different understandings of the self, influenced by specific practices of social engagement and communication. Thus, it is critically important to consider cultural differences when developing and implementing SEL programs for marginalized students. Hecht and Shin (2015) showed how culturally different understandings of the self affect all five of the SEL competencies promoted by CASEL (2019). Jager, Randall-Garner, and Ausdal (2018) anchored the five SEL competences in a cultural equity lens, elaborating how each competency could be utilized to promote equity. Theories of situated cognition and learning consider the influence of socially contextualized practices (Wortham, 2001), interactions influenced by larger political and historical contexts. These theories place individuals and learning within contexts of participation in socially situated practices (Wortham, 2001),

to which we can also add are shaped by political and historical contexts. Studies of social interaction and learning find students' identities and attitudes toward schools to be co-created through interactions with peers, institutions, policies, and discourses. What occurs at schools, both academic and non-academic interactions, play critical roles in youth identity formation.

Despite significant efforts to recognize the value of diverse cultural perspectives, "whiteness" continues to be the lens through which educational goals and initiatives are refracted. Here, the term "whiteness" refers to both a socially constructed racialized category and a system of privileges based on racial dominance (Leonardo & Grubb, 2018). Whiteness is pervasive in mainstream institutions and often justifies domination over others as being in the collective best interest (Castagno, 2013). Although psychologists have found a strong cultural and ethnic identity to be associated with emotional well-being (Dobia & Roffey, 2017), whiteness and the structural racism it produces negates these benefits for students of color (Paradies & Cunningham, 2012).

Language and socialization research reveals that children begin participating in racializing processes and hierarchies at a young age, and that school settings are significant reinforcers of racial inequities through situational cues, discourses, and curricular inclusion/omission (Fontenella-Nothom, 2019). The implications of whiteness are significant, not only for students' educational outcomes but for their social-emotional well-being. Systemic deficit thinking about Black female students, for example, lowers expectations, motivation, self-efficacy and self-worth, all of which typically lead to negative emotions and behaviors (Watson, 2018).

Moreover, when teachers who work with marginalized students fail to consider cultural differences in the rules governing social interaction, miscommunication and conflicting behavioral expectations may cause some actions to be interpreted as willful misconduct or lack of cooperation, meriting punitive measures (Yeatman, 2000). All too often, a lack of cultural understanding and the failure to place learning models—including SEL practices—within their historical and political contexts fuel inequitable or discriminatory practices that disproportionately affect marginalized students.

Culturally Relevant and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Educational anthropologist Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995, 2014) sparked a multi-decade conversation on how to transform teacher pedagogy away from framing students of color, multilingual youth, and/or students impacted by poverty as deficient, at-risk, or culturally disadvantaged. Like others before her, Ladson-Billings flipped the script on the culture of poverty by examining the strengths minoritized youth bring to school to support learning and by studying contexts in which teachers experienced pedagogical success with marginalized youth.

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) shifts pedagogical orientations away from pathologizing minoritized students as deficient versions of dominant youth, and instead focuses on recognizing and building upon the assets and strengths of working-class and multilingual individuals and people of color (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Teachers who practice CRP: (a) support students' intellectual growth through relevant classroom instruction and learning experiences; (b) help students appreciate and celebrate their cultures of origin while gaining knowledge of and fluency in at least one other culture; and (c) practice sociopolitical consciousness by using school knowledge and skills to identify, analyze, and solve real world problems (Ladson-Billings, 2014). When educational pedagogies and programs fail to deeply consider culture, the situation is often overgeneralized and misapplied to explain "problem" behaviors and school failure (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Paris (2012) pushed educators to deeply conceptualize how relevance is determined, and to what end education should be relevant. For her, learning environments must support or sustain students' cultural and linguistic repertoires and relationships to be "relevant" (Paris, 2012). Such environments strive to maintain and "value cultural and linguistic sharing across difference, to sustain and support bi- and multilingualism and bi- and multiculturalism" (Paris, 2012, p.95). Developing pedagogies and programs that support children and youth in sustaining their own cultural and linguistic competencies while offering access to dominant cultural competencies is a complex task, to say the least. We believe this task to be fundamental to social-emotional well-being.

In the psychology field, many researchers have begun to draw attention to the importance of integrating a culturally relevant paradigm to SEL programs and grounding SEL in a focus on equity (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Borowski, 2018; Simmons, Brackett, & Adler, 2018). For example, Kuperminc and colleagues (2009) proposed a cultural-ecological-transactional model for studying resilience among Latinx and other ethnic minority groups in the United States. Jagers and colleagues (2018) described how SEL programs reflect a prevention science approach that usually does not take into consideration students' cultural assets in these programs and called for cultural adaptations of SEL programs to foster optimal growth among African-American youth. CASEL has released several reports and briefs that apply an equity lens to social, emotional, and academic development and aim to help educators leverage SEL to promote equity. The reports highlight the need to support cultural competence development for teachers (Jagers et al., 2018).

A few SEL programs have been adapted to attend to specific groups of students. An Aboriginal Girls Circle initiative yielded tangible positive outcomes by increasing social connection, participation, and self-confidence among Aboriginal girls attending secondary schools (Dobia & Roffey, 2017). However, a systematic review showed that only 12.5 percent of all SEL interventions had been culturally adapted (DeLuca, Kelman, & Waelde, 2018). In addition, "adaptation" may not be enough to account for the factors that contribute to healthy and/or problem behaviors in non-dominant communities, or to cultivate and sustain healthy social, cultural, and linguistic interactions. Again, we advocate using a culturally and socially situated lens to assess student interactions within wider social structures, such as institutions, policies, and economies. Drawing from the framework of culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogy, we are acutely aware that SEL's widespread appeal for supporting student needs must interface with socially situated cultural paradigms of wellness.

Cultural, Contextual, Social, and Emotional Learning

For many Indigenous communities in the United States, schools have been sites of struggle and resistance in the face of missionary and government attempts to "civilize," assimilate, and Americanize Native life, ways, and languages through physical violence and intellectual warfare (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Schachner, 2019; Sarivaara, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2019). The direct effects of colonization and persistent settler colonial structures stymie the well-being of many Indigenous communities, and contribute to the denial of linguistic and cultural inclusion in schools.

Indigenous students in K-12 schools rarely have access to Indigenous teachers and frequently experience low teacher expectations, inappropriate tracking into special education, and unfair disciplinary practices (McCarty & Lee, 2014). The misalignment of teacher experience and perspective limits opportunities for Indigenous youth to experience success in K-12 and postsecondary education (Brayboy & Maaka, 2015). SEL programs are growing in schools with high Indigenous populations and are intended to address critical

social-emotional needs and the impacts of intergenerational trauma. However, these programs struggle to address the complexity of historical-political processes that contribute to contemporary struggles.

Applying a cultural lens enables educators to recognize that the social-emotional needs of Indigenous youth are intertwined with social-historical context and require community collaboration. Culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy (CSRP) constitutes a specific approach to supporting the unique social and political needs of Indigenous youth (McCarty & Lee, 2014). It is an expression of sovereignty that prioritizes local communities' expressed interests, resources, and needs and embraces community-driven Indigenous language and culture education practices. CSRP is also an applied framework for instructional design, curriculum, and student/family services that recognizes "asymmetrical power relations and legacies of colonization" (McCarty & Lee, 2014, p. 8).

Critical examination of ethno-historic contexts reveals how school discourses pathologize the emotional well-being and physical and social behaviors of Indigenous youth and communities (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). Deep attention to cultural practice, at both the micro and macro levels, enables educators to develop a better understanding of the nuances of Indigenous cultural and linguistic practices (which have been tied to the land for centuries) and to center Indigenous knowledge as sources of well-being and healing. This requires recognition of the distinct epistemologies and histories that define our differences and equitable partnership with Indigenous educators and leaders.

Similarly, educators and school leaders must seek to understand the diversities of cultural practice within geographies by adopting lenses and pedagogies that critically attend to space and place. In the Inland Northwest, contemplating well-being in relationship to space and place helps educators to challenge deep-seated either/or binaries that position place and identity as static categories, such as rural or urban, White or cultural "other." These common identity tropes oversimplify diverse identities within geographies and the social and emotional needs of students with them.

Anthony-Stevens and Langford (2019) proposed the concept of "diverse ruralities" in an attempt to highlight the intersectional inequities with and across rural communities and schools. To effect change, teachers and school leaders must examine their assumptions and beliefs to purposefully attend to rural students' social, emotional, and academic needs (Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, & Soodak, 2006). Attending to social and emotional well-being is dynamic and should be approached with an ability to recognize students' cultural and linguistic repertoires and value cultural and linguistic sharing across difference (Paris, 2012). Just as CSRP encourages pedagogies to sustain and revitalize Indigenous lifeways through schooling, culturally responsive and sustaining approaches to the social and academic needs of students in rurality should consider practices unique to rural communities in intersectional and social justice-oriented ways.

Placing SEL in Dialogue With CRP and CSP

A growing body of evidence reveals that cultural identity plays a critically important role in the social-emotional well-being of marginalized students (Gee et al., 2014). Thus, effectively engaging SEL in diverse contexts requires interrogating the cultural assumptions that underpin psychoeducational practices. As suggested, applying a cultural lens to SEL will "produce richer theory and practice" (Hecht & Shin, 2015, p. 62). Here are some pathways to explore the cross-pollination of culturally revitalizing pedagogy (CRP) and culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) with SEL programs.

Anti-Colonial Stances

Ethnocentric biases and damaging deficit orientations can be traced to societal arrangements established during colonization and maintained by settler colonialism. Calling out the historical structures that created hierarches of privilege and oppression are necessary to reimagine relationships within and beyond classrooms and schools (Patel, 2014). Critical, culturally conscious approaches that affirm the histories, experiences, and distinctive cultural values of those whose needs are being served must replace traditional (e.g., colonial) approaches rooted in whiteness (Dudgeon & Walker, 2015). Furthermore, educator's need pre-service and in-service spaces to identify, reflect, and unpack their own stereotypes, biases, microagressions, etc. and where these ideas come from.

The myth of universal behaviors must be challenged. Any assumptions of superiority or attempts to establish authoritarian dominance must be examined and decentered in efforts to support diverse communities, especially those marginalized by race, class, and language. In addition to increasing inclusivity in classrooms and schools, entrenched issues of race and ethnicity must be explicitly considered in the development and delivery of SEL programs to truly address systemic inequities in the education system. SEL program developers must dedicate material resources to supporting a critically culturally conscious approach to student learning.

Cultural Integration

Achieving cultural integration requires implementing culturally responsive teaching and a CRP. These two practices are rooted in sociocultural strategies that emphasize constituent involvement by connecting academic concepts with students' cultural knowledge, creating space for students to reflect on their own lives and society on their terms, supporting cultural competence by investing time and resources to support students to learn about their own and other cultures, and pursuing social justice through critiques of discourses of oppression.

Many studies reveal how educators can employ culturally relevant education across academic content areas. Thus, SECs need to be intertwined with cultural competencies in order to be able to address the SEL of the whole child. In addition, culturally relevant approaches involve tailoring SEL delivery to the cultural norms of local communities and families, the current generation of youth, specific races/ethnicities, and the social/political climate. Paradoxically, scholars have consistently recommended taking a non-differentiated approach to SEL program implementation. This needs to change if SEL programs are to effectively address the social-emotional needs of marginalized students. More youth benefit when school professionals integrate SEL in culturally relevant ways.

Implementing SEL Programs for Teachers and School Leaders

The SECs of teachers and school leaders play a pivotal role in advancing transformative SEL programs in schools. Recent evidence shows that teachers and their students both derive benefits from mindfulness interventions (Elreda, Jennings, DeMauro, Mischenko, & Brown, 2019; Jennings, 2015). However, these benefits might be limited by teachers' lack of cultural awareness and their culture- and class-related assumptions and preferences; often, teachers have less productive relationships with lower-income students and students of color than with White students from better-resourced backgrounds. As such, teachers' cultural awareness and sensibilities warrant systematic attention. Such awareness would help

prevent teachers from embracing false notions of color-blindness, power-blindness, and humanist-caring that obscure sociopolitical realities. We assume that these competencies would support equitable practices and facilitate empowerment among marginalized students. Pre- and in-service training activities (e.g., home visits, service learning) that reflect authentic interest in students' lived experiences best support the development of cultural awareness.

Adopting a Critically Conscious Approach

Students can learn to recognize how social and political contexts may contribute to their marginalization in the education system. Critically conscious principles can be applied to develop different types of SEL interventions aimed at changing school practices. Students and parents could engage in small group discussions about how race-, class-, and gender-related issues affect their school experiences. For example, to contextualize violence, curricula should uncover the histories and policies that contribute to poverty and marginalization in students' communities. Understanding these histories enables students to reflect on their reactions to circumstances and to recognize violence as perpetuating oppression and lack of well-being across generations. School professionals could intentionally dialogue with students to identify specific strengths and resources that enable them to remain engaged in the educational system despite significant oppression and obstacles.

SEL Informed by Students' Lived Experiences

Transforming the educational system is an endeavor that requires persistent collective effort over the long haul. Teachers and school administrators can determine how the implementation of SEL at their schools is informed by the lived experiences of their students. Returning to the situation in the opening vignette, educators in Idaho's Indian Country could better serve Indigenous youth by being willing to conceptualize social and emotional well-being from the cultural and historical perspective of tribal communities. This would include consideration of the complexity of sociopolitical and economic terrains and structures that warrant the modification of SEL approaches.

Educators must have the courage to engage in honest self-reflection about personal biases, which may elicit uncomfortable emotions about inequity. When implementing SEL programs, the historical legacy of racism and exclusion in our public education system must be acknowledged. An equity lens must be applied to our collective work; we must question our fundamental assumptions about educational practices. Although the path forward may be challenging, the potential to create inclusive, joyful, liberating learning environments in which *all* students can thrive and discover their unique gifts and talents is tremendous.

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The Importance of Narrative: Moving Towards Sociocultural Understandings of Trauma-Informed Praxis

Noah Asher Golden

When asked what it meant to her that her educational program was trauma-informed, Violet, age 20, responded, "It means that just here [the teachers] are prepared for, like, when someone is suicidal or, like, going into problems." Her peer, Carlos, also 20, chimed in, "Or child abuse or... these teachers here are trained for that." When asked to elaborate, Violet explained that each student in the program "has a story but some stories are way deeper than others." Carlos said that everyone "is here at Huerta [nickname for their school] for a reason... they ditched school for a reason... there's something behind that. Whereas other schools don't see that." Later in this focus group conversation, Violet said, "Here they hear both sides of the story, and over there [her old school], it was like, 'no, you're a bad kid, no.'"

"Trauma-informed" seems to be the latest educational buzzword for politicians, policymakers, administrators, teacher educators, and teachers. This newfound attention is perhaps a reaction to decades of policy and practice grounding formal education in cognitive learning targets and standards-aligned skills. Realizing that social and emotional dimensions have long been ignored, there is now, finally, attention paid to broader conceptions of young people's lived experience. But how does this work understand trauma and the role of pedagogy in mitigating it? What are the affordances and limitations of different framings of trauma-informed pedagogy, and how might teachers' pedagogies respond to young people's stories and experiences?

While the goals of programs grounded in such a model are clearly well-intentioned, there are reasons to view this dominant framing of trauma-informed pedagogy with a critical eye. In this article, I review the rationale for the dominant framing of trauma-informed pedagogy and critique the approach with knowledge generated from a study in which I am observing trauma-informed practice and interviewing small groups of adolescent scholars to discuss their lives and learning experiences. I argue that trauma-informed pedagogy cannot be reduced to a fixed approach grounded solely in a biomedical understanding of trauma, but must be related to environmental and systemic factors and value the meaning-making processes of the youth. I conclude with considerations for researchers investigating these growing pedagogical practices and thoughts for educators seeking to implement trauma-informed approaches to teaching and learning.

Trauma-Informed Pedagogy

The dominant framing of trauma-informed pedagogy uses a reductive biomedical model that suggests that trauma is the locus of unequal outcomes. Trauma can "include both large-scale, collectively felt events... and small-scale, personal experiences—of loss, violence, displacement, and oppression" (Dutro, 2017, p. 327). According to one measure, 40 percent of students in the United States experience trauma (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2014, as cited in Brunzell, Waters, & Stokes, 2015a). Trauma, though, is often reduced to the physiological. Whether causes are emotional, physical, or environmental, it is understood to lead to physiological responses (e.g., "traumatic stress" or "toxic stress"), and can engender a "fight or flight" mindset that interrupts the learning process (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012; Shonkoff, et. al., 2009; Waldfogel, Craigie, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010).

The ability to navigate trauma is understood as a cognitive function (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2015a; Crosby, 2015). Within this framing, a trauma-informed approach "positions self-regulation as a core developmental strength for children" (Brunzell, Waters, & Stokes, 2015a, p.4). To successfully support young learners who have experienced overwhelming incidents, schooling must prepare them to be developmentally prepared "in domains such as regulatory capacities and relational abilities—domains that research shows have been compromised" (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2015b, p.79). Examples include "behavior management systems" that incorporate strategies like speaking to students in a low voice or enacting a predictable routine for students (Downing, n. d., p. 17). Strategies such as these are suggested because these children are understood to be unable to regulate their emotions on their own and "may need adults who are willing to co-regulate with them when their emotions run wild" (Bath, 2008, p. 20).

Critiques of the Dominant Frame

The reductive biomedical model locates the problem to be solved within the learners themselves. It is imperative to understand this approach as one possible framing, considering that the way a problem or issue is framed delineates a range of possible solutions (Golden, 2017a; Yanow, 2000). The thinking flowing from this framing goes something like this: Children who do not succeed in school fail as a result of the traumas they have experienced; if educators pay attention to trauma and self-regulation, children will excel and achieve. Dorado and colleagues (2016), for example, suggest that a trauma-informed pedagogical lens can interrupt what has come to be known as the school-to-prison-pipeline, and offer necessary support to young students experiencing violence in under-resourced communities. Within this framing, the "problem behaviors" of students can be adapted into more positive coping mechanisms, and this focus on self-regulation will lead to academic and social success (Dorado, Martinez, McArthur, & Leibovitz, 2016, p.164). While some advocates of this simplistic framing claim to eschew deficit-laden approaches to trauma-informed pedagogy and call for a strengths-based approach (e.g., Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2015b), this framing overwhelmingly locates the problem in the students and pathologizes them.

Further, this approach assumes a static, culture-free, and ahistorical understanding of normative behavior. That is, what is considered an appropriate way of being or a valid response to a challenging situation is not seen as socially or culturally mediated. Yet racial, gendered, or class bias, among others, shape what behaviors are deemed appropriate (or for whom they are warranted or permitted), leading scholars (e.g., Blitz, Anderson, & Saastamoinen, 2016) to call for culturally responsive trauma-informed pedagogies.

Other scholars go further, calling out the simplistic framing as a process that engenders a "disordered other... an objectified deficit identity" (Pyscher, 2015, p. 4). Within this deeper critique, resistance to cultural imperialism is discounted as "problem behavior," and "used to rationalize acts of disposal and containment of youth who do not fall in line with the logics of efficiency" (Pyscher & Lozenski, 2014, p. 532). These critiques maintain that trauma-informed pedagogies can reinscribe hegemonies and work to further marginalize some youth. This possibility raises the question of how young people can be expected to feel safe and valued in schools when the schools themselves may be the site of current (or past) traumas (Gaffney, 2019), or when schools' cultural practices minoritize students by devaluing their strengths and funds of knowledge (Petrone, in press).

Understanding Trauma as Ecological

Trauma-informed approaches may have the potential to offer generative and supportive learning opportunities for minoritized youth *when grounded in environmental issues and sociocultural understandings of trauma, its causes, and its effects*. I argue that there must be renewed attention paid to sociocultural factors,

particularly through a focus on young people's meaning-making around traumas they have experienced as well as their experiences of enacted trauma-informed pedagogies. As language instantiates culture and narratives are shared within and shaped by cultural contexts, a focus on young people's narratives can help shift trauma-informed pedagogy from a focus on a deficit-laden individual learner to a focus on young people's experiences and ecologies.

Ecology is "the study of the interrelationship of organisms and their environments" and "applied to cultural phenomena… is the interrelationship of an area of human activity and its environment" (Barton, 2002, p. 138). How, then, might trauma "[influence] and be influenced by the environment" (p. 138)? Rather than understanding trauma solely as the biomedical responses of an individual, we might ask larger questions: While all people experience trauma (to widely varying degrees), for what kinds of people are traumas expected? For whom are privileges expected, and for whom are injustices a daily experience? How do cultural stories work to normalize these differences in our society?

To explore these questions, and to reflect on how they might shape trauma-informed practices in specific environments, Crosby (2015) argues:

> Helping traumatized students to be successful requires a departure from the status quo, where all staff are knowledgeable about trauma and effective ways to address it. It also requires school practitioners to consider their impact on students' ecologies, and the potential for trauma-informed practices in improving these ecologies. This ensures that traumatized youths are not simply discarded as nuisances to the school setting but are embraced and cultivated into individuals who can build for themselves a better future. (p. 229)

Moving beyond the simplistic biomedical model and the pedagogical practices thought to be effective in mitigating the "fight or flight" response, educators "should recognize their positioning in their students' ecosystems… [and that] schools may only represent one microsystem in the lives of their students" (Crosby, 2015, p. 227). Within an ecological model, "all school staff should strive to understand how their interactions with youths may affect other systems" (p. 227). As noted above, these interactions in the microsystem of schools may intensify rather than ameliorate ongoing traumas.

Systems beyond school also have an impact on youth and their experiences of trauma. Social systems may produce a real or perceived safety for some while it dispossesses others of necessary resources (e.g., housing, health care, education). Weis and Fine (2012) argue that "dispossession stories are always situated within a political economy, usually in the context of swelling inequality gaps," impacting "health outcomes, psychological well-being, civic engagements, economics, and involvement with the criminal justice system" (p.187). For this reason, scholars and practitioners should not think of trauma as solely a biomedical response or process, but as produced through a broader ecology and taking on meanings through relationships with cultural stories. Without this sociocultural framing, the ability to navigate or process traumatic experiences will be understood only at the individual unit of analysis, locating deficits within individual learners and drawing our attention away from problematic social systems (Golden, 2017b).

Care networks and possibilities for healing and support can also be understood as ecological. Building knowledge on young people's understandings of their worlds illuminates how *they* see "the material, emotional and collective practices through which children and adults together create and recreate daily life" (Luttrell, 2013, p. 295). Understanding the challenges that individual people face as "personal problems… often lead[s] researchers to emphasize individual interventions" (Goodkind, Hess, Gorman, & Parker, 2014, p. 1021). Moving to an ecological model unlocks deeper understandings of the social production of individual

challenges, building knowledge of "not only social suffering but also how narratives about trauma and social suffering are constructed... [N]arratives can open up productive possibilities for healing" (p. 1021). In this sense, trauma and care networks can be understood to be cultural and socio-historical in addition to biological and individual.

Valuing young people's narratives can broaden our understandings of generative trauma-informed pedagogies, deepening knowledge of both the social processes that lead to trauma and the care networks that may mitigate its effects. Pedagogical processes have the potential to contribute to students' care networks or to intensify minoritization, and a focus on students' narratives can inform how particular practices enacted by educators are taken up by young people in specific contexts.

A Focus on Meaning-Making

The valuing of young people's meanings has begun to take root in recent scholarship and educator praxis. Ellison (2014) argues that "trauma narratives are relevant for the way they are told and received" (p.13). To be clear: trauma itself cannot be reduced to a narrative, but narratives are how people engage in retrospective meaning-making of their traumatic experiences. This retrospective meaning-making can be an important site of healing and can engender networks of care and support. Stories of past experience can lead to catharsis (Wissman & Wiseman, 2011), and classrooms can be important sites of testimony and witness (Dutro, 2009).

Within this body of recent scholarship, trauma-informed pedagogies shift from a set of practices in response to the fight or flight biological phenomenon and may include a need for teachers' vunerability, or personal connections that move beyond standards-driven learning targets. Dutro (2011) calls for a pedagogy of "critical witness" that can "explode...boundaries" by "connect[ing] deeply to students' experiences and be[ing] highly cognizant of the differing consequences they bear" (p. 208). This vulnerability, connection, and the act of critical witnessing can strenghten pedagogical processes and relationships in learning spaces, broadening our understanding of trauma-informed practice.

Building New Understandings Through Trauma Discourse

Violet and Carlos, the young people introduced above, are students in the Conexiónes program. Situated within the Dolores Huerta Alternative Learning Complex (DHALC), the Conexiónes program is a "second-chance" continuation school run by the San Sebastián Unified School District. The program is grounded in an ethos of trauma-informed pedagogy in which educators strive to keep past and current struggles in mind while supporting their students.

Learners seeking a secondary diploma in the Conexiónes program live in the west coast city of San Sebastián.[1] They are primarily Mexican-American, mostly working class or experiencing poverty, and either second-generation or generation 1.5 (those who immigrate to a new country before or during their early teens) immigrants. Learners come to the Conexiónes program at DHALC for a range of reasons, but all have become "over-age/under-credited students" at their initial high school. The school views its trauma-informed approach as a form of humanizing pedagogy. In the words of the founding principal, Mr. E., the ethos of the program is "more than just about academics. It really is about the holistic view of a person and humanity and the kid and how they are going to impact the world." This holistic view is grounded in a network of support for both students and teachers, one that Mr. E. refers to as a "therapeutic web."

What this means to individual students, of course, varies. The following narrative data were collected in

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1   The name of the program, learning complex, district, and city are pseudonyms.

one of a series of after-school focus group sessions during the first two years of a three-year study, and were shared with me, as the principal investigator, a white-identified researcher, and teacher educator. In these sessions, the students were asked about and shared their learning and life experiences and reflected on instructional practice and learning processes in the Conexiónes program. What they shared illuminates what trauma-informed practice meant for them, and how the program supported them as they worked towards their goals of high school graduation and post-secondary life paths.

Violet and Carlos define themselves as Chicana and Chicano, respectively, and were raised in a working-class area of San Sebastián. They were about to graduate from the Conexiónes program at the time they shared in a focus group why they had been successful there. They attribute their success in the Conexiónes program to their teachers being prepared to hear their stories and to honor the experiences that brought them to the "second-chance" alternative learning program. Their previous schools were sites of trauma in which they were positioned as "bad kids." At Conexiónes, they are not bad kids, but young scholars in challenging circumstances that may have impacted their ability to succeed in and through school. Once they attended an educational program where teachers were trained to hear and honor their stories, they were able to accomplish their academic goals.

Violet shared an example of this: In her previous school, she would get anxiety attacks, something she experiences with regularity. She would ask to step out of the classroom for a few minutes, but her teachers would not let her do this. At Conexiónes, though, Violet said that her teacher had a different approach. Ms. Santos, a Filipino-American who worked to build strong relationships with her students, understood that Violet "was going through some things and … let me step outside and really calm down and breathe and I know everything is going to be okay, but back in the old high school… I would have had to stay in the classroom." Carlos said:

> [W]hen I got in a fight that one time, like, my other high school would have taken it like I would have gotten arrested right there and then but here they talk to me, like, 'What triggered you to react that way?' or 'What happened?' They actually heard the story before they judged what was going to happen. Then when they found out that I didn't start it, like, they took the load off me and then they heard what I had to say, but at my other high school they would've been like, 'Oh no, you can't, you're a certain age, you're going to jail, you're done, get out of here.'

Violet concurred, comparing her current and former schools: "It's like, it's like I said before, um, here they hear both sides of the story and over there it was like, "no, you're a bad kid, no."

In their previous educational programs, Violet and Carlos had been positioned as bad kids, as young people with entrenched negativities. These were cultural stories that Violet and Carlos had to try to work against as they attempted to earn their educations. At the DHALC Conexiónes program, there was a discourse of trauma and education, one that framed negative experiences as things that may have happened to individual young people but did not define them.[2] This sort of positioning, along with a care network that included their teacher, Ms. Santos, was integral to their academic success. Contrasting the DHALC Conexiónes program with her previous school, Violet said:

> Something that would never happen [at DHALC] would be that people did not see the potential that every kid has. They [educators at her previous school] only focus on honors students or average students and they give more, I feel like in my opinion, they give more opportunities to

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2   In Violet's and Carlos' shared experiences, this was seen as a positive, though it is important to recognize that such an approach can lead to people "splitting" their identities into "good" and "bad" senses of themselves in problematic ways. For more on this, see Luttrell (2003).

those kids. And I feel like that's how I started not believing in myself. I feel like I was less than I was…

Violet's and Carlos' previous schools were sites of negative positioning in which there were assumptions about who they were and who they could become. When given opportunities to share their stories and to experience these stories as important, they were invited into care networks by people like Ms. Santos who worked with them to help them accomplish their educational goals.

Reflections and Implications

For these young scholars, "trauma-informed" is synonymous with a humanizing pedagogy, one in which they are not automatically assumed to be "bad kids. Within this ethos, young people can define themselves and make mistakes without their errors being seen as entrenched dispositions or commentaries on their possible life trajectories. It is a pedagogy grounded in relationships in which they are known as promising young people who have been through difficult circumstances or experiences.

Within these narratives and reflections, trauma-informed has nothing to do with self-regulation or executive function. For these adolescent scholars, what matters is whether the educators they see every day are part of their care network or people who exacerbate tensions or challenges in other areas of their lives. This approach—in contrast to the biomedical framing of trauma, which locates the "problem" and "solution" within the individual— illuminates networks of care and positionings, including those that stem from educators working within an entrenched deficit model. In particular, an ecological framing can illuminate networks of care that need to be tended, supported, and expanded for minoritized adolescent scholars to achieve their goals in and beyond formal education. Indeed, this discourse on trauma provides building blocks for young people to construct counter-narratives that can challenge other cultural stories of entrenched individual deficiencies. Finally, a sociocultural framing can retain a focus on the ways deep gaps in social systems are experienced by individuals, making it clear that it is these severe inequities that we need to fix, and not "bad" or "broken" people.

To ascertain whether or not a trauma-informed pedagogical practice is debilitating for learners, we need to pay our attention to youth voices, understandings, and narratives of lived experience. Further, teachers need to work to build relationships with young people so that these young people can trust their teachers and choose how and when to share these narratives. This necessitates educational environments in which teachers are able to build these strong relationships. With sociocultural understandings of both trauma and care, young people can draw on a broad array of resources to better understand the challenges they have experienced, and generate and receive care and support that goes far beyond their individual cognitive powers of self-regulation.

Researchers would do well to focus on the meanings young people make or take up as they work to make sense of their past experience, current realities, and future possibilities. Educators would do well to eschew biomedical framings that locate these issues at the individual level and instead work to build trust and value framings that illuminate ecologies of privilege, dispossession, and care. We ignore young people's meaning-making possibilities to our detriment as we work to theorize, research, and enact what a culturally responsive and strength-based trauma-informed pedagogy might look like in any given context.

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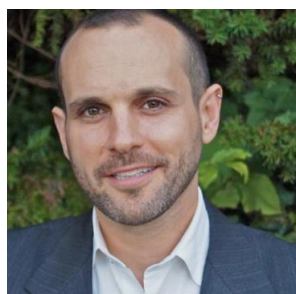
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All I Want to Say Is That They Don't Really Care About Us: Creating and Maintaining Healing-Centered Collective Care in Hostile Times

Asif Wilson and Wytress Richardson

The world we live in is bound by systems of power and oppression, what hooks calls "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (Sully, 2018). Seen through the lens of critical race theory, these often invisible structures of oppression are endemic to U.S. society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2017) and to the institutions that educators work in (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Educators must navigate the complexities of these toxic settings of schooling, as must their students, while also supporting their students' survival under these conditions. While there is a growing field of research related to trauma-informed care (Bath, 2008; Ko et al., 2008), little of it focuses on the practices and frameworks that guide care for the caregivers[1] who provide it.

Through two case studies, this paper unveils a framework for what we call *healing-centered collective care* in trauma-informed educational settings. The oppressive structures that exist in the world are also present in educational institutions. These structures create harmful conditions for all members of those communities, including those charged with supporting students. Whether out of disinterest or ignorance, little trauma-informed care is provided for caregivers in educational institutions other than in the spaces caregivers themselves create outside of their work responsibilities.

Drs. Asif Wilson and Wytress Richardson both currently hold positions in higher education and experience firsthand the trauma caregivers are experiencing. Faculty and staff members seem to share a common attitude that reflects the same sentiment: "They Don't Really Care About Us." The culture of higher education offers very little support for caregivers who provide services for students. Our model of care may support institutions in transforming into more inclusive, healthier, and happier environments for all stakeholders. We hope that both case studies provide context-specific examples for other caregivers and educational stakeholders to imagine and actualize the conditions needed to foster well-being for all members of our campus communities.

Extending Trauma-Informed Care Into Healing-Centered Engagement

While trauma-informed care (Bath, 2008; Ko et al., 2008) offers some support to caregivers working alongside survivors of trauma, it is limited in that "current formulations of trauma-informed care presume that the trauma is an individual experience, rather than a collective one" (Ginwright, 2018, para. 7). In addition, trauma-informed care "provides little insight into how we might address the root causes of trauma" (Ginwright, 2018, para. 8) and "runs the risk of focusing on the treatment of pathology (trauma), rather than fostering the possibility [of well-being]" (Ginwright, 2018, para. 9).

Ginwright's (2018) framework for healing-centered engagement offers an extension of trauma-informed care that may be useful in addressing the limitations of current approaches to supporting healing. The framework includes four "key elements" (Ginwright, 2018, para. 12):

1. Healing-centered engagement views trauma and healing from a political perspective, not a clinical one. Ginwright (2018) writes "healing from trauma is found in an awareness [of] and actions

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1   We will use the term "caregiver" from now on, in lieu of educator.

that address the conditions that created the trauma in the first place" (para. 13). When viewing trauma with a healing-centered lens, the work of healing moves away from better coping with the environmental conditions that cause pain (resilience) to an analysis of the oppressive structures, systems, and practices in place that are the root causes of pain.

2. Healing-centered engagement is cultural and makes explicit the connection between healing and identity. It "uses culture as a way to ground young people in a solid sense of meaning, self-perception, and purpose" (Ginwright, 2018, para. 14). Healing-centered engagement is not just viewed through the lens of western medicine; it "incorporates culturally grounded rituals, and activities to restore well-being" (Ginwright, 2018, para. 14).

3. Healing-centered engagement is an asset-based framework that utilizes strengths and "acknowledges that...people are much more than the worst things that happen to them" (Ginwright, 2018, para. 15). Healing-centered engagement builds healing spaces rooted in peoples' "experiences, knowledge, skills and curiosity as positive traits to be enhanced" (Ginwright, 2018, para. 14). Here, healing-centered engagement is seen as a tool of community and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), where the deficit veils that oftentimes exist are lifted to reveal the strengths that all communities hold.

4. Healing-centered engagement supports adult "providers" (Ginwright, 2018, para. 15) in providing their own healing. Ginwright (2018) reminds us that "we cannot presume that adulthood is a final, 'trauma-free destination'" (para. 16). He builds on previous studies to claim that "the well-being of the adult youth worker is also a critical factor in supporting young peoples' well-being...Healing centered engagement has an explicit focus on restoring, and sustaining the adults who attempt to heal youth" (Ginwright, 2018, para. 16).

We use Ginwright's (2018) healing-centered engagement framework as a guiding structure for healing-centered collective care for caregivers. While Ginwright's fourth key element is the only one that explicitly names healing for adult providers, we employ the entire framework as a pedagogical and epistemological medium that adults can use to engage in collective care.

We recognize that to better pour into students, we, as trauma-informed and healing-centered caregivers, must also create and maintain space to name our pain, communicate it to others, and begin creating collective processes that allow us to move closer to healing. Care, in this sense, is a political response to the oppressive conditions found in the world and in the school spaces we work in. We see caring for the caregivers as a political, communal, and fugitive (Campt, 2017) act of resistance. Care is fugitive because it creates the conditions for well-being, conditions that institutions of higher education (structurally) have yet to create and maintain. This act of resistance embodies the same refusal that Campt (2017) discusses:

> Practicing refusal means embracing a state of black fugitivity, albeit not as a "fugitive" on the run or seeking escape. It is not a simple act of opposition or resistance. It is neither a relinquishing of possibility nor a capitulation to negation. It is a fundamental renunciation of the terms imposed upon black subjects that reduce black life to always already suspect...It is a quotidian practice of refusing the terms of impossibility that define the black subject in the...logic of racial subordination (p. 113).

Two Examples of Healing-Centered Collective Care

The following two case studies provide examples of healing-centered collective care. We hope that readers

extract what is relevant for them, taking back concepts, practices, and questions to their communities in support of creating and maintaining their own collective care spaces. T.E.A.M. is told through the testimonio of Dr. Wilson and Girls of Grace is told through the testimonio of Dr. Richardson. Data from T.E.A.M. was collected over two years at a community college in a major urban city. Data from Girls of Grace was collected over a two-year span at an inner-city library that allocated private space for the youth center. In both sites, observations, reflective artifacts including written reflections and meeting minutes, and our testimonios served as data. They were collected, organized, and coded for their generative themes.

Both authors of this study work in institutions of higher education, and one of us runs a nonprofit organization where we have engaged in the scholarship and practice of well-being, trauma, and healing. Over the years, we have come to see the need for educational institutions and organizations—especially those interacting with (teaching, advising, tutoring, coaching, mentoring, etc.) students—to create and maintain structures of care for all. We came to know each other through a number of trauma-informed networks in Chicago. The studies presented here should be seen as complementary, supporting a more complex understanding of healing-centered collective care.

We arrive at this research as both insiders and outsiders. Because of our close relationship to each study as participants we invoke the testimonio (Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012) here as an additional source of data. Testimonio in this sense not only "challenges dominant notions of who can construct knowledge," but is also "a text…to theorize oppression, resistance, and subjectivity" (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012, p. 366).

T.E.A.M.

Transitional Education through Affective Methodologies (T.E.A.M.) started as a monthly space for approximately 19 participants—faculty, wellness center staff, advisors, tutors, and students from an urban community college—to develop a better understanding of asset-based pedagogies (Yosso, 2005), build relationships across our siloed departments, and better serve our developmental education students. We received a small grant to study our developmental education efforts.

The initial explorations of Yosso's (2005) community and cultural wealth framework led us to an investigation of the oftentimes invisible structures of oppression, what hooks termed "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (Sully, 2018). Collective discussion of these structural conditions helped us to develop a systematic analysis of the oppression people experience in the world, relating that oppression to larger structures in society and in our school.

After we spent nearly a year together, our work took a turn. It was the end of the spring semester and, as we always did, we opened up our meeting with check-ins—a ritual where every individual in the space could share their personal reflections related to how they were feeling physically, intellectually, and emotionally, and also express any needs they hoped the group could meet. During this particular check-in, almost every T.E.A.M. member shared a story of exhaustion, pain, and burn-out.

As I heard the narratives of my colleagues, I thought about colleagues at other institutions, mostly faculty and administrators of color who have lost their lives over the years due to stress and fatigue. I thought about my own stress and growing health concerns related to my long work hours, racial battle fatigue, and commitment to serving our students at the expense of my own health. I proposed to the group that we shift our attention the following academic year, when T.E.A.M. reconvened. I said, "We need to figure out how we are going to care for each other…because this place will chew us up and spit us out on the street" (field notes, April 18, 2018).

Our collective experiences made it clear that the structures and processes of our school were not developed nor maintained to care for us. Here we extend Campt's (2017) definition of fugitivity to capture the dialectical nature of T.E.A.M. On the one hand, T.E.A.M. was a space that the institution was not going to create on its own. On the other hand, T.E.A.M. was an imaginative space where we could celebrate each other and envision what was needed for us to thrive. T.E.A.M. was attempting to create the conditions and contexts for us to "reflect on the strategies and expressions of...survival, perseverance, and sociability in an anti-black world" (Von Gleich, 2017, p. 210). Furthermore, as educators committed to changing the oppressive conditions of our school, we knew the future in store for us was not the one we were dreaming of during this critical time together.

For one year, about 12 of the original 19 members of T.E.A.M. dedicated two hours every other week, to the group. During our time together, we focused on three areas related to collective care: breaking bread, engaging in healing practices, and political education. These acts of collective care represent "an extended family, where members are intimately connected and routinely perform acts of compassion on behalf of one another" (Dockray, 2019, para. 12). Before every session, T.E.A.M. members would sign up to facilitate one of the areas. This supported a more equal distribution of responsibility and, more importantly, of authority within T.E.A.M. Each one of us had knowledge and power. T.E.A.M. put Ginwright's (2018) framework into practice.

Breaking Bread: A Time to Be

Because most of us (the members of T.E.A.M.) were so busy with our daily work responsibilities, we rarely created time in our schedules to eat and nourish our bodies. While eating is certainly important to our physical survival, eating together as a collective within a fugitive space meant much more.

The spatial context created through eating food in a collective, familial-like setting was both collaborative and imaginative. hooks and West (2017) elaborate on this very notion, saying:

> Breaking bread...has to do with a critical recovery and a critical revision of one's past, of one's tradition, of one's history, of one's heritage...Breaking bread...could lead toward our critical understanding of the past and present and our transformation of the present into a better future (p. 2).

Rarely are there occasions structured in the school day for faculty, staff, and administration to *be* with each other. It was in the *being* that T.E.A.M members were able to reflect on the current moment, look forward, and know that we were not alone in our work. At the end of the fall semester, a T.E.A.M. member wrote:

> The bi-weekly TEAM meetings have shown me that I am not alone in my quest for a more liberatory educational institute. Many of us are engaged in transformational and justice work—we sometimes don't realize it and this work oftentimes occurs in silos. If we can engage across disciplines, as we did with TEAM—getting advisors, students, faculty, tutors, and admin in a room learning, discussing, and reflecting together—lots can be accomplished (end of the semester reflection, December 2018).

Because the U.S. school system is structured by output, defined and operationalized as the production of "things" for the advancement of the institution in a competitive market (Harvey, 2005; Lipman, 2011), intellectual time to *be* is often under siege from pressures to achieve better results. Starting T.E.A.M. meetings with food, and more importantly, the time to *be*, created a fracture in the conditions set forth by the institution (an act of fugitivity). As one T.E.A.M member noted:

To be honest, since my first meeting sitting in with T.E.A.M. I knew I found "my people." It's an atmosphere of inclusiveness with folks who share my beliefs and also challenge me to think further and be more intentional with the students here from an education-based perspective...There is no one moment that defines the impact T.E.A.M. has on me, but I can tell you I look forward to the meetings because it helps me through another two weeks of serving my community here (end of the semester reflection, May 2019).

Healing-Centered Practices

Empathy, imagination, critical reflection, and loving action were critical components of T.E.A.M.'s praxis. We use the term *healing-centered practices* to demonstrate, more pragmatically, how T.E.A.M. was a space of healing. Healing-centered practices were engaged through a number of collective acts both during and outside of T.E.A.M. These practices were reflected in the group's attention to practicing care for each other. Our healing practices varied from meeting to meeting. On one occasion, we practiced chair yoga, on others, we wrote affirmations to each other and shared them, on other occasions we engaged in guided meditations.[2] During the last meeting of the fall semester, one T.E.A.M. member stated:

I didn't know what this team was about, or what we were doing. This is my third meeting but it's something that I've never experienced in this building, nor in a corporate setting. I've never done affirmations before...I appreciate the team, being here. And I am ready for next year (field notes, December 10, 2018).

Here we get a glimpse into the fugitive nature and healing potential of T.E.A.M. From Mel's[3] saying, "I am ready for next year," we may be able to draw the connection between T.E.A.M.'s affirming practices and healing. Ginwright's (2018) healing-centered framework "has an explicit focus on restoring and sustaining the adults who attempt to heal youth" (Ginwright, 2018, para. 16). Being appreciative of the collaboration and ready for the future exemplify the restorative practices of T.E.A.M.'s healing-centered engagement (Ginwright, 2018).

In reflecting on their experience with the check-ins that every T.E.A.M. meeting started with, one T.E.A.M. member stated

The meetings provided a group of people for me to check in on and who can check in on me. This was a group of people who were genuinely glad to see each other every two weeks. I think it created unity that epitomizes a "family." We are like a group of cousins who get together to plan and work and laugh and cry (end of semester reflection, May 2018).

Our check-ins, among other healing-centered practices, reflected the familial kinship relationships T.E.A.M. members held with one another. Through the deep connections we built, we knew we could depend on one another and collectively imagine and temporarily enact the sort of world we hoped to live in.

Political Education

Political education was a crucial component of our collective care efforts. Without a strong understanding of the structures of oppression in our lives and our school, we may have continued to blame ourselves for the pain we were experiencing. Furthermore, without constant affirmations of our existence and fugitive

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2   This list is not exhaustive.
3   Pseudonym

work, we may have continued to reproduce oppressive conditions for our students, even under the guise of trauma-informed care. One T.E.A.M. member wrote

> By way of T.E.A.M. I was enlightened by the definition of trauma and subsequently the impact it has on our students and on the employees. Unpacking...trauma and the inability to talk about it... forced us to look at our students with a little more compassion and start to address the wellness of our entire community (end of semester reflection, May 2019).

During our time together in T.E.A.M., we read articles, watched videos, and listened to narratives that validated our existence and our decolonial praxis and helped us to develop the vocabulary and conceptualizations of the work we were engaged in. Political education in T.E.A.M. cultivated the group's understanding of justice, equity, liberation, and agency. Ginwright (2018) reminds us that "building an awareness of justice and inequality, combined with social action...contribute to overall wellbeing, hopefulness, and optimism" (para. 13). Here, political education represents an awareness of the structures of oppression and the motivations for liberation. Both of these themes provide meaningful examples and road maps to learn from.

Reflecting on the value of T.E.A.M.'s political education, one T.E.A.M. member wrote, "The educational pieces are always my favorite because I love reading radical work in different areas that relate to education and how it can make us better and more effective instructors for students" (end of the semester reflection, May 2019). T.E.A.M. members studied a wide variety of scholars and scholarship including, but not limited to, trauma and trauma-informed care (Bath, 2008; Ko et al., 2008), epigenetics (Bowers & Yehuda, 2016; DeGruy, 2005), dominator culture (hooks, 2003), healing-centered engagement (Ginwright, 2018), and culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2017).

Freire (1970/2007) reminds us that "apart from inquiry, apart from praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (p. 72). The political education we engaged in during T.E.A.M. not only increased our knowledge of various concepts, but also supported our interactions with students. For us, political education was often absent in our day-to-day responsibilities; I frequently hear that there is no time to engage in intellectual work. T.E.A.M., as a fugitive space, intentionally created the intellectual context for us to better understand ourselves and the world we were engaging in with students.

T.E.A.M. Turning Inward

T.E.A.M.'s shift to put more effort into care for ourselves, the caregivers, seemed to be a critical move. The group used an asset-based approach that built upon the members' "experiences, knowledge, skills and curiosity" (Ginwright, 2018, para. 15) as opposed to our deficits. This positioning of ourselves and each other provided T.E.A.M. members a space to be, a space to learn together, and a space to heal together. When asked about the shift, participants agreed that it was necessary. One person said, "I believe it was a good move. During our check-in it showed that this was needed at the time for the group" (end of semester reflection, May 2019). Another T.E.A.M. member wrote, "It definitely helped with identifying peer support systems and in building authentic relationships with colleagues in a manner that usually doesn't happen in typical 'work meetings' (end of semester reflection, May 2019).

While these healing-centered collective care efforts were used for our own well-being, they also seemed to impact how we interacted with students, supporting this paper's claim that if we care for each other

more we will, as a result, have a stronger capacity to care better for our students. At the conclusion of T.E.A.M., one member wrote, "Students come to us (as we may come to work) with many life experiences, both positive and negative, that shape their learning and development. T.E.A.M. allowed us to learn about how to support students and provide them a space to name and frame their experiences" (end of semester reflection, May 2019). Here we see the symbiotic nature of T.E.A.M.—a space for us to focus on ourselves while also focusing on our students.

Girls of Grace

The genesis of Girls of Grace came after I continually experienced encounters with girls who seemed to lack confidence, self-respect, self-esteem, an awareness of their culture, and an ability to make adequate decisions. After observing social and physical scarcities in the lives of middle-school and teenaged girls in the Ashburn neighborhood of Chicago, I created a safe space for young girls to learn the life skills necessary to increase their opportunity for holistic growth and development. What began as a small in-home life skills group expanded to a formal program. In May of 2007, I founded the Girls of Grace Youth Center, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Through a volunteer-driven model, Girls of Grace dedicated all its efforts to the holistic development of girls between the ages of 10 and 18. The Girls of Grace Youth Center focused on three core program components: healthy self-development, leadership development, and mentoring. The ultimate goal was to create a safe space; provide a variety of tools for the girls; help them break the cycle of unhealthy behaviors and lifestyle choices by mirroring effective practices, speaking life, and doing the work required to support them in shifting their thoughts, actions, and behaviors; and expose them to a different way of life.

I quickly realized the social and emotional needs of some of the volunteers as well as the constant need to pour into them. I started noticing that some of the volunteers' interactions with the youth were curt and abrasive. After having discussions with the caregivers, I came to understand that they were dealing with high levels of stress in their lives. They wanted to help, but their approaches and techniques were not appropriate or conducive to the safe haven we were building. I created intentional time with the volunteers. Our time together was in a circle, fellowshipping over food and building healthy friendships that went beyond just working together. As we connected, shared intimate stories of our lives, and sometimes even cried together when in-depth personal information was being disclosed, we were brought closer to each other. It was evident that healing was occurring and that deep connections were being made. Girls of Grace shifted its purpose. While we were there to service the girls, we also needed to better understand and respond to our own pain.

Ginwright's (2018) healing-centered engagement framework calls for an explicit relationship between healing and identity. Girls of Grace principles were constructed from Ginwright's theory. We welcomed and valued each individual as they were and made a conscious effort to build relationships that recognized and used everyone's strengths. Through our work, we developed four principles that embody the essence of our organization. These principles are practiced with both the caregivers and the girls.

Girls of Grace Principles

- We create a space for open dialogue with caregivers to stay connected.
- We work toward developing relationships with one another collectively and individually.
- We promote growth and affirm the significance and worth of girls of color.
- We develop caregivers to effectively mentor and support youth.

Since developing and incorporating these practices, Girls of Grace has transformed into a healing-centered organization that has become beneficial to all members of the community, including the caregivers.

Soul Connections

To initiate the new direction of Girls of Grace, I incorporated Ginwright's (2018) healing-centered engagement, which builds healing spaces rooted in peoples' experiences, into our work. I established listening circles that took place twice a month; the first occurred a month after we launched the program. I had found it necessary to create listening circles after I observed caregivers having encounters with the girls that lacked compassion. I hoped the listening circles could transform our interactions with the youth if we focused on naming and responding to our own lived experiences.

During our first circle, I shared how we had a responsibility to behave as if we loved and cared for the girls. I impressed upon the caregivers that we could not react to the youth negatively. That seemed to go over well and resonated with everyone. Eventually, our discussion began to get deeper. I shared an experience I had growing up, where I felt as though I was being treated unkindly, judged by adults who perceived something I did as inappropriate. I was talked down to, which made me feel less than. That sparked multiple women sharing similar experiences. One educator cried when talking about her situation. She expressed how she was always called "fast" and told that she was "boy crazy." She went on to describe how such experiences with adults negatively impacted her life.

Each subsequent circle became more intimate. We felt comfortable with one another and connected with each other through story-telling our lived experiences; we call these connections bound by shared experiences *soul connections*. We shared the good times and bad times, our disappointment and pain. The listening circles created contexts for everyone to share their experiences and express their hopes, dreams, and life expectations.

This circle process supported our soul connections. It allowed me to hear the hearts of everyone and connect with them on a personal and professional level. Through these shared experiences, soul connections were made that would not have developed without the circle process. Over time, trust, patience, and understanding manifested and relationships flourished. Also, a sense of belonging emerged that felt comforting, safe, and natural. These shared experiences aided in bonding us together in a loving and caring way.

Ginwright (2018) states, "healing from trauma is found in awareness and actions that address the conditions that created the trauma in the first place" (para. 13). Our circles allowed for authenticity that was critical for the well-being of all. We empowered ourselves and collectively joined together to create a space that supported our needs and propelled us to better care for the youth we were working with.

Sankofa

Another foundational principle we incorporated in Girls of Grace was Sankofa. Sankofa is a word that means "go back and get what is at risk of being left behind" (Temple, 2010). It serves as the call to action to go back to one's culture to generate power and the essence of the spirit. This is symbolic and traces back to the Twi language of Ghana. During our work in the circles and through our shared experiences, I realized that many of the women lacked pride in their Blackness and the natural beauty they possessed. During one meeting, one woman made it very clear that she hated her "nappy" hair. Another woman was disgusted with her full hips and cried because of the maltreatment that she experienced from being teased and taunted growing up. Many of the women disliked at least one feature of their bodies. This negative identity was

being reproduced with the youth. Incorporating culture into our time together, so that the women had to go back and learn the history which aligned with who we truly are, was transformational. Over time this created a paradigm shift, as the women grew to understand the historical context of their experiences.

As Girls of Grace caregivers, we considered that this charge of going back to capture the foundation of what identifies us and our experiences highlighted the need to collectively care not just for the youth we were serving but for one another (the caregivers) together. Many of the women lacked a genuine connection with their African heritage. Sankofa served as a principle that helped us explore our culture from a historical perspective. Reaching and reflecting to build on our original foundation provided the strength-based perspective whereby we empowered others and combated the deficit-based climate we were working in.

Moving Toward Healing-Centered Collective Care

It has become evident that the stressful conditions that currently exist in classrooms and institutions today need to change. Caregivers cannot pour into the lives of others if we are mentally unfocused and physically and emotionally drained. If caregivers are expected to support the well-being of others, it is crucial that institutions develop and maintain healing-centered collective care practices for the caregivers.

This paper presented a framework for what we call healing-centered collective care. We extended Ginwright's (2018) healing-centered engagement to conceptualize a model of collective care for caregivers engaged in trauma-informed care both in school settings and outside of them. The two case studies presented here are not intended to be replicated and scaled—we hope that readers will take the emergent themes back to their own spaces and contextualize the work in ways that are useful to their communities. We conclude with a set of suggestions we offer to readers as starting points toward creating and maintaining their own healing-centered collective care spaces:

- Kinship relationships: Without deep kinship relationships, or what we call soul connections, collective care initiatives will likely result in inauthentic and individualistic spaces. T.E.A.M. and Girls of Grace could not have engaged in healing-centered collective care without trust and political understandings of the members' bonding inextricably to one another. Healing-centered collective care requires kinship relationships among the members.

- Political education and fugitivity: Without an analysis of dominator culture (hooks, 2003), we run the risk of blaming individuals for the pain caused by white supremacist, capitalist, and patriarchal structures in society and schools. Long-term political education, as described through the work of T.E.A.M., may provide other caregivers with an understanding of the structures and systems of oppression embedded into society and our educational spaces. A systemic analysis of these very structures also illuminates the fugitive nature of healing-centered collective care. The fugitive spaces created were meaningful, but only temporary solutions. More structural approaches to healing-centered collective care should be considered. Until then, harmed people will continue to find ways to survive, using fugitivity as a tool to create the conditions of love, care, and compassion.

- Asset-based approaches to collective care: Asset-based approaches to healing-centered collective care de-center pain and focus on well-being. Through this focus, educators may be able to better imagine and create the conditions that foster joy, as opposed to reacting to the painful conditions of our lives.

As mentioned throughout this article, educators working with students must consider how to create and maintain healing-centered communities of care. When we create the conditions that allow us to "do more

than survive" (Love, 2019), we are also creating the conditions for the world we want to live in one day. We hope that oppressed people can someday live in a world where we do not have to create fugitive spaces for our own well-being. However, in this moment we must do what we can to (re)appropriate institutional spaces, allowing us the freedom to imagine and enact (within the fugitive spaces we create) that world.

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Emotionally Responsive Practice as Trauma Informed Care: Parallel Process to Support Teacher Capacity to Hold Children with Traumatic History

Lesley Koplow, Noelle Dean, and Margaret Blachly

"If you hadn't heard him and brought his comment to my attention, I wouldn't have even heard his voice."
—A pre-K teacher

Emotionally Responsive Practice (ERP) is a trauma-informed approach to supporting social and emotional well-being in schools (Koplow, 2002, 2007, 2009, 2014). Developed at Bank Street College of Education, ERP teaches adults to understand children by looking through the lens of child development as well as through the lens of life experience. While ERP includes many child-focused therapeutic techniques[1], its focus on adults is an equally powerful feature of the approach. Essentially, ERP engages teachers[2] in a *parallel process,* giving them felt experience with the emotionally responsive techniques that can be useful in the classroom throughout the day. When teachers feel validated, seen, and heard, they are much more likely to be able to hear and see the children they work with. In this way, ERP strengthens teachers' foundation for integrating an empathic approach into their work with children with traumatic history.

This article will focus on the aspects of ERP related to work with teachers and administrators with their own traumatic histories. While most trauma-informed programs in schools primarily focus on teaching adults to recognize and understand trauma in children, ERP presupposes that the *way that adults in schools respond* to reactive behaviors associated with trauma such as fight or flight is in part influenced by the *adults' own histories.* ERP work acknowledges that both children and adults bring their life stories into the classroom. Without a parallel focus on the adults' experiences, their stories might interfere on an unconscious level with the best intentions of adult members of the school community. It is necessary to simultaneously give teachers, along with children, room to express, reflect on, and heal from their own traumatic experiences, within a safe community as witness.

Our work with teachers and administrators often begins with remembering. Through intentionally planned activities, teachers are invited to recall what it was like to be little. This can be a quiet, reflective time, often aided by an art or journaling activity to represent the remembered experience. We begin with remembering for a few reasons. The primary reason is that if teachers can remember what life was like from the perspective of a child, they can more readily access empathy for and insight into the children with whom they spend their days.

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1   ERP's child-focused techniques include use of emotionally responsive literacy, intentional use of transitional objects in classrooms in and beyond early childhood, and invitations for creative play and use of metaphor to hold difficult experience and traumatic events. ERP's conceptual framework for classroom practice involves offering a learning environment that features a balance of invitations for self-expression and exploration *within* containing, dependable, predictable routines and structures (see "Over the Hills and Far Away," Occasional Papers, # 39).

        ERP is not an age-specific SEL approach; it has been implemented in infant-toddler centers, early childhood programs, elementary schools, and middle schools, as the conceptual framework and supportive techniques can be adapted to the developmental levels of the children present.

2   Throughout this paper, we will often use the word *teachers* to refer to the many adults we work with in schools and center-based programs, including head teachers, assistant teachers, paraprofessionals, aides, specialists, and administrators.

Working with young children may bring up memories of one's own childhood. If teachers are aware of this, they are more likely to be able to make conscious choices about how to respond to children who trigger those memories. Conversely, when memories are engendered on the unconscious level, teachers are more likely to respond reactively and without a sense of agency. Often teachers talk about how some children in their classrooms remind them of themselves as a child. As author and sociologist Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) writes, "They discover that their relationships with individual students—their overidentification with one, their unfettered admiration of another—are often the result of seeing their own childhoods mirrored in their students" (p. 5).

Connecting to childhood memories can be difficult. The brain has many mechanisms in place to keep trauma at bay, among them the defense mechanisms of dissociation and splitting (Cori, 2008; van der Kolk, 2014). The result is that many people have internalized the ways in which adults saw them as children, rather than staying connected to their own childhood feelings. People who spend many hours a day in classrooms with traumatized children may become overwhelmed by children's traumatic affect. When teachers can't remember their own childhood feelings, it can be incredibly lonely and potentially scary for the children in their classrooms who also have traumatic history, since their teachers may be unable to tolerate the children's needs. When teachers can find compassion for their childhood selves in relation to traumatic experiences, they are likely to become a powerfully nurturing and connecting resource for children.

Stories of Parallel Process[3]

"I Wouldn't Have Even Heard His Voice."

A group of three-and-a-half-year-olds sat listening to their teacher read a story. The story included a picture of a firetruck in front of a house with smoke coming from the window. When the teacher showed that picture, a little boy spoke up.

"My kitty cat died when a fire came to my house," he said in a clear voice. The teacher kept reading.

Again, the child spoke up. "My kitty cat died when a fire came in my house!" he said. The teacher kept reading.

Tatiana, an ERP consultant in the room at the time, moved closer to where the little boy was sitting in the circle and gave him an empathic look.

"Ana," she called to the teacher, "Miguel is telling us something important. He said that his kitty died in a fire at his house."

Ana, looked up, startled. "I'm sorry, Miguel," she said. "I didn't hear you." Flustered, she then went back to reading the story.

Tatiana asked Miguel if he wanted to say more about losing his kitty or about the fire. He shook his head. She offered him an opportunity to draw about his story after the read-aloud. Miguel nodded eagerly.

During choice time, Tatiana sat with Miguel, who drew a picture of a very large cat. He showed

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3   The anecdotes related in this paper have been recreated from field notes and memories of actual sessions. While the essence of each story keeps its original integrity, actual quotes and details have been put into narrative language by the authors to increase readability and to communicate concepts effectively. Names of individuals and schools have been changed to protect privacy.

his picture to Ana and they put it up on the bulletin board where children could display artwork that they wanted to share.

Later, when the children were out in the play yard with their assistant teacher, Ana came back to the classroom to talk with Tatiana.

"I remembered something," she said, sounding incredulous. "I had a fire in my apartment when I was very little. I don't even know how old I was! I remember we had to leave the building and couldn't go back for a long time. We stayed with my aunt. When we came back, I kept asking my mother where our dog was, but she would never answer me. It was so confusing!"

"It sounds like Miguel's story brought that memory back. At first, your story was too traumatic to remember," Tatiana said with empathy.

"I swear I didn't even hear Miguel say anything! If you hadn't heard him and brought his comment to my attention, I wouldn't have even heard his voice."

Tatiana was present in Ana's classroom to help facilitate the development of an emotionally responsive classroom community. ERP classrooms often use emotionally responsive literature that reflects children's issues to invite children to share their own life experiences within the containing routine of story time that can then begin to "hold" the stories that have been invited.

On this morning, Tatiana had suggested the book for the read-aloud, a popular children's story about hope and recovery called *A Chair for My Mother* (Williams, 1982). The story includes an apartment fire. Tatiana suggested the book because another child in the class had recently been relocated to a shelter after a fire destroyed her home and the homes of her neighbors. Knowing that enhancing connection around adverse events and decreasing emotional isolation is a protective factor for vulnerable children, Tatiana thought the book might be helpful.

Tatiana hadn't known about Miguel's experience of loss from a fire, and neither had she known what this story might bring up for Miguel's teacher, Ana. Tatiana's presence in the classroom allowed her to bear witness to Miguel's experience of trauma and loss and hold those experiences *with him* when Ana was unable to hear his voice. In turn, Tatiana's ability to hear and acknowledge Miguel's voice allowed Ana to *hear* her own voice of trauma and loss within the supportive teacher-consultant relationship. The support that Tatiana was able to offer Ana *within the classroom* helped to build Ana's capacity to be more receptive over time to the traumatic stories that the children brought into the room. After a while, Ana could invite and hear these stories instead of tuning them out or being trapped in the room with behavioral evidence of children's distress but without a connection to its source.

Eight years after our work in Ana's school was finished, our office received a package containing a teacher-made book, beautifully written and illustrated by Ana. The story featured a girl who lived with her grandmother and had never known her mother or father who lived in another country. The note accompanying the book explained that Ana had written it to reflect the experience of many children in her room over the last few years who had been separated from their parents. The teacher who was once not able to hear a child's traumatic story was now writing for children based on the worries and fears that she heard in the classroom every day.

The Support Group Process: Finding the Lonely Kid

The two stories below describe the use of parallel process in the context of support groups for teachers. In both cases, remembering and gaining empathy for the "little self" allows for the potential for shifts in teacher practice.

Laura's Story:

In a recent support group, teachers talked about feelings that arise in children toward the end of the school year. A teacher named Laura talked about wanting her four- and five-year-old students to be as independent as possible during the last weeks before summer vacation. She emphasized that her sense of having succeeded as a teacher rested almost solely in her observations of children being able to solve problems on their own and to work independently.

In a writing activity, the teachers were invited to remember what the end of the school year meant to them as a child. Laura shared that she had never felt fully comfortable at school as a young child and that the end of the school year always came as a relief—"freedom," she called it. She shared that her family had immigrated from Venezuela when she was a young child. For her, school became an unsafe place as teachers' overt and implicit biases communicated to her that she did not belong. Her story carried in it the trauma of both racism and xenophobia (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2017). In an effort to keep Laura protected, Laura's mother taught her to never trust adults outside of her family. With her mother's voice in her ears and recollections of painful experiences of invalidation from teachers in her mind, Laura remembered that her days at school had been lonely and that her strength had come from her ability to be independent.

As the teachers in our support group listened and then shared about the children in their classroom who had come to mean so much to them and who had already begun to express deep sadness at the impending ending of their time together at school, Laura began to shift her thinking about herself as a teacher and how she was measuring her own success. She thought about the nurturing ways in which she interacts with the children in her classroom and the reflective essence of her child-teacher interactions. In a soft voice, she described how she often asks children if they would like a hug, offers them an opportunity to find comfort in the cozy corner, and gives them opportunities to express themselves by letting them move their name on the classroom feelings chart.

She had become a teacher who validates children's feelings and life experiences, unlike the teachers she had as a child. Though independence had been a wise survival mechanism for her when she was young, children in her classroom were thriving because of the relationships and connection she had facilitated. By understanding the roots of her emphasis on independence and bringing her memories to the forefront of her consciousness, she could have more agency over how she chose to assess the well-being of the children in her room. Laura left the support group with a wider lens through which she would view the final weeks of school in June. Perhaps independence would be a part of how she measured growth, but not the sum total of it.

Danny's Story:

Danny was part of a support group for assistant teachers. The group met monthly over the course of the school year, for a total of 10 meetings. Our first meeting began like most, with remembering our little selves.

Danny introduced his little self as one of the "bad" kids who was always getting in trouble. He told the group about having to be picked up at school by his mother on a regular basis and how he would be beaten when they arrived home. He shared, in some heartbreaking detail, what he recalled of the beatings, but ended with a joke and laughed about how he must have deserved it. I interpreted his laughter as a form of self-protection from the painful experience.

When the group laughed alongside Danny, it felt as if they were allowing him to remain protected by giving him emotional shelter. Support groups, like any kind of therapeutic experience, must respect where each person is and allow them to travel their journey at the pace they choose.

In our following monthly meetings, the teachers thought together about places and people who kept them safe as children, and they created quilt squares depicting intimate safe spaces like a living room couch from their childhood, a backyard with a tree, a counselor's office at school, and a grandma's house. As they shared what they made, they talked about what made those spaces feel safe. Mostly they spoke of being able to be themselves, being understood, and being seen.

ERP facilitators help teachers make bridges between the memories conjured up during the group meetings and their classroom work as teachers. We ask, "Where are places in your classrooms where children feel safe?" "What worries or scares the children in your classroom?" Teachers move back and forth in their minds between their memories of needing to feel safe as a child and their everyday teacher practice and emotional safety in their classroom. They come to group, and then they return to their classrooms and their lives. It is a process of slowly integrating their often-fragmented selves.

Just as Danny had spoken of himself as a "bad" kid, he often used the same binary of "good" and "bad" when he talked about the kids in his class. One day, a few months into our work together, we talked about children who "act out" in order to receive attention from the adults in the classroom. Group members shared stories about children who are often on their own when they are home, sitting in front of an iPad while their parent is lost in the world of the Internet on their phone. They talked about having a sense of why kids "act out" in order to be noticed. Danny listened, and then he shared that he was thinking about how his mother rarely paid attention to him except for when he was "bad" and needed to be disciplined. He remembered that his mother never hugged him and that getting in trouble and hit by her was actually the only way he felt noticed by her. Then he wondered out loud if perhaps the reason he had acted out was to get the attention he so desperately sought from his mother. He wondered if maybe he wasn't really a bad kid, but instead, a lonely kid.

Though our group came to an end and I was not able to keep in touch with Danny, my hope is that his ability to empathize with his child self will impact his practice as a teacher. When Danny next responds to a child who is dysregulated or disruptive, instead of thinking "he's a bad kid just like I was," he may stop in his tracks and take a moment to wonder about the meaning behind the child's behavior because he had rediscovered his own behavior's meaning (Jacobson, 2019).

A School Leader in a Flooded School

Mrs. Coriander's school on the tip of Coney Island is within walking distance of the water. Ninety-eight percent of the families in this little pre-K to second-grade charter school receive free or reduced-fee lunch. Many of them live in the housing projects surrounding the building. There is also a homeless shelter nearby

that houses some of the students and their families. In addition, there are newly arrived, undocumented families who come to school anxiously looking over their shoulders. Mrs. Coriander's building was "flooded" with trauma that children and adults brought into the building each day. The trauma and the chaos that it created overpowered the school's ineffective, authoritarian attempts to contain them. Residual trauma spilled out of the classrooms into the hallways and was felt immediately upon entering the building.

Mrs. Coriander had been the assistant principal at the charter school for four years. The school had had five principals in as many years, giving Mrs. Coriander authority in the building. She was drawn to the children, yet overwhelmed by their difficult behavior. She often vacillated between an affectionate demeanor and a scolding, demeaning voice. She became impatient and highly stressed by children's extreme acting out, but was even more intolerant of teachers who felt as overwhelmed by the trauma around them as she did.

Then came Hurricane Sandy. Hurricane Sandy *literally* flooded the school and closed it down for weeks. The school reopened to a traumatized community of children, teachers, and school leaders. Many families in the school community, including staff families, had lost homes, been isolated in buildings that were dark and freezing with no elevator service, or seen fires consume their living space. Because communities affected by natural disasters eventually receive relief funds, after Hurricane Sandy the state offered some of the trauma-focused support that the school had needed for years.

Before introducing the process of trauma-focused ERP to the children in this school, ERP's onsite consultant, Alana, went through a *parallel process* of Teddy Bear[4]-focused, trauma-informed work with teachers and school leaders. In this way, she hoped to offer the adults the felt experience of having a safe space and a source of comfort in the midst of tragedy. In so doing, she also hoped the teachers would be able to allow a similar process to unfold in their own classrooms and that school leaders would be able to give teachers permission to do this.

In between support groups and classroom work, Alana checked in with Mrs. Coriander at least one of the two times weekly that she came to work at the school. Mrs. Coriander always seemed grateful to have another adult to talk to. Alana was able to reflect the reality of how much trauma was in the building before the hurricane as well as the reality of the whole-community trauma that was the result of the hurricane. While she acknowledged these realities, she also expressed hope that the school could become strong enough to hold that trauma and could become a safer place for the children and the staff. Both during office check-ins and through the weekly support group process, Alana created a safe space for Mrs. Coriander.

During the initial month of group process, each teacher and school leader was given a square of felt to make a comfort object to hold when they were feeling afraid. Many materials were provided so that participants could decorate their objects with imagery of something that would make them feel safer when they were remembering scary parts of the hurricane. One of the teachers shared that for years, the ocean had been her most reliable source of comfort. In the wake of the hurricane, what had been a comforting presence suddenly felt like a threat. She wasn't sure what felt safe and what felt dangerous anymore.

Mrs. Coriander confided, "I lived by the water my whole childhood and never learned to swim. I was terrified as a child that I might fall into the ocean and never come out. I still don't know how to swim!" A teacher offered to teach her. Teachers and Mrs. Coriander were beginning to empathize with one another through this initial trauma-focused process. Alana reflected with them upon how scary things can be for children who feel unsafe.

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4   Trauma-focused ERP for children involves the use of individual Teddy Bears who "sometimes remember" the traumatic event and need someone to be with them and provide comfort. The bears become an important symbol of teacher-child connection and a source of self-comfort for children.

Soon thereafter, during an office check-in, Mrs. Coriander told Alana that her grandfather had been a raging alcoholic. She grew up with her grandparents but never felt safe as a child unless her grandmother was in the house. As Alana continued doing ERP work at the school, determining how to help children feel safer at school became a joint mission for her and Mrs. Coriander.

At the beginning of the second school year of our trauma-focused intervention, Mrs. Coriander told Alana that she had enrolled the school's first graders in swim classes at a nearby community center. Alana wondered aloud if that was connected to Mrs. Coriander's own childhood experience. Mrs. Coriander's reply was affirming; "I want these children to feel safer."

Little by little, Mrs. Coriander started to create other administrative policies and practices with emotional safety in mind. This first manifested when she began to refer distressed teachers to Alana's support groups or directed Alana to provide coaching in those teachers' classrooms. Instead of feeling alone and overwhelmed by the teachers' distress and reacting to it in a demeaning, authoritarian manner, Mrs. Coriander knew that she had a partner who could help her hold that distress, which allowed her to slowly develop a more stable presence in the building.

After 18 months of receiving hurricane-related funding, Mrs. Coriander found other ways to support the ERP work in her building. Over time, working in relationship with Alana, she began to support continuity of relationships within the school. She did this by having one-on-one aides follow the children they were assigned to support not just for one year, but throughout the grades, when possible. She also encouraged teachers to loop with their classes, so that children with traumatic history were known more deeply by their teachers. Although the school continues to serve children who carry trauma into the building, now when children and adults enter the school, they can often breathe a sigh of relief.

While several of ERP's child-focused, parent-focused, and teacher-focused interventions played a role in the school's recovery from the storm, without this parallel process work done with Mrs. Coriander there would have been a missing brick in the school's foundation for recovery.

Relationship Building

The act of intentionally building trust and relationships with the adults who work with children is a parallel process that we consider essential to the long-term efficacy of ERP. In the anecdotes above, we have offered several examples of adults' parallel process with ERP consultants. These stories from the field demonstrate the power of parallel process to open adults' minds to an empathy-based perspective when they consider the behaviors and needs of children in their care. It is essential to note that these developments were possible because the ERP practitioners intentionally approached their work using a relationship-based model, where the teachers felt seen, known, and valued. Without the supportive relationship work, the teachers in the anecdotes would have been unlikely to share such intimate stories and even less likely to make the connection to their own work with children.

The relationship-building process in and of itself requires us to use several ERP techniques, including *inviting* adults' authentic selves and stories into the group space and *containing* those selves and stories through the structure of the activity presented (for example, making time for adults to engage in creative art expression activities, such as drawings, collages, quilts, models, and homemade books). ERP practitioners also use something we call *reflective technique* to ensure that the adults we are working with know that their stories, their perspectives, and their experiences are important to us and are valid—even when the adults initially express resistance to our model, or even voice ideas that run against the ERP core concepts.

These techniques play out both in group settings and in our one-to-one debrief sessions with teachers and administrators.

Consider the narrative below written by Madeline, an administrator who had been in ERP support groups for administrators and had also received individual support from an ERP consultant for four years. In both individual and group support sessions, our work included invitations to share both positive and negative experiences from participants' own childhoods. Initially, Madeline seemed hesitant to connect to her own childhood, but as trusting relationships with ERP consultants grew, she began to speak about it tearfully.

Recently, Madeline wrote to us about how she had chosen to relate to a child in a moment of crisis:

> In tears, a 7th grade child came to me to share that there was no value in living as no one seemed to appreciate her presence nor desired to spend genuine quality time with her. Nor were they embracing the better person that she was trying to be. Then the child said, 'All I want is a hug sometimes or to be invited to lie down in bed with my adopted mother, but I'm never considered unless I'm needed to do a chore.'

> Refusing to hold back my only maternal instincts any longer, I embraced and enveloped the child in my arms and we stayed like that for approximately two minutes—-the child sobbing and I embracing. When we managed to pull ourselves away from each other, I shared my story. I shared that I too went through a period of time when I didn't want to live and when I felt unloved and uncared for. I shared how I spent some years in the foster care system. I shared how when I went to live with my birth father he was arrested and incarcerated for a brief stint. I shared how I became physically and mentally ill because of my situation. And then, I ended by pointing to the gallery of family pictures on my wall of my happy period in life and shared, "It will get better!" With that, the child eyed me and the photos on my wall and gained some composure. We then continued to talk about the possibilities of the future and discussed how being adopted illustrates that life is already heading in a better direction....

> The child's nonverbal and physical moves (straightened posture, fixed eye contact, and the desire to linger) in that moment signaled that a sense of hope was sparked for the future. After countless intentionally ignored phone calls and knocks at my office door, we were able to calmly and respectfully get back to the matter at hand with our pride and integrity intact.

Madeline's ability to have compassion for her "childhood" self and her courage to share her story enabled her own trauma to be a healing resource for children with traumatic histories. She was a good mirror for the student who confided in her, and she offered the message that the student could move beyond surviving her trauma and into thriving with strength, joy, and a sense of belonging. In this way, Madeline naturally put into practice what Ginwright (2018) refers to as "healing-centered engagement:"

> A healing-centered approach views trauma not simply as an individual isolated experience, but rather highlights the ways in which trauma and healing are experienced collectively. The term *healing-centered engagement* expands how we think about responses to trauma and offers [a] more holistic approach to fostering well-being ...(para. 10)

> A healing-centered approach to addressing trauma requires a different question that moves beyond "what happened to you" to "what's right with you" and views those exposed to trauma as agents in the creation of their own well- being rather than victims of traumatic events (para. 12).

Because of Madeline's own healing process, she was able to recognize and validate the child's expression of emotions, connecting with her around her own story from a place of strength and hope, much as Ginwright (2018) suggests.

Conclusion

Emotionally Responsive Practice at Bank Street is a preventive mental health program that is often called upon to partner with school communities where there are large numbers of children who have experienced trauma. Trauma in childhood is no longer considered a low incidence problem. Recent studies on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) find that 45%-47% of children in the United States have experienced at least one adverse experience, with 10%-17% experiencing three or more (Sacks & Murphy, 2018). While studies show that the occurrence of ACEs is higher than anticipated throughout the income spectrum, the highest incidence of multiple ACEs and childhood trauma often occurs in high-poverty neighborhoods where families and communities may have less access to support (Bruner, 2017).

Research on neuroplasticity has shed light on the restorative power and necessity of nurturing, trauma-informed care (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010a, 2010b, 2014). Studies have found that *consistent and supportive relationships with adults* provide the *buffering* that allows children to develop social, emotional, physical, and cognitive strengths even when highly stressed (Sege & Browne, 2017). Teachers and childcare providers are one source of potentially consistent, supportive relationships in the lives of all children. Given the power of the teacher-child relationship, *supporting teacher mental health* becomes a critical component of trauma-informed care. Studies reveal a high incidence of ACES in the histories of teachers and caregivers. A recent small study of early childhood teachers including both an urban and a rural sample found that 75% of participants identified one or more adverse experiences in childhood (Brickley & Guyton, 2016). In addition, teachers who work in high-pressured school environments serving large numbers of children with traumatic history are vulnerable to vicarious traumatization, sometimes causing teacher mental health issues that lead to high staff turnover and create a cycle of disruption and discontinuity in the lives of fragile children.

Acknowledging that adverse experiences and trauma may be factors in classroom and school dynamics among children, teachers, and administrators can allow for a buffering response when schools and districts organize around this reality. Where trauma is present but unacknowledged, policies and practices may be antithetical to the social and emotional well-being of children and teachers. When traumatic history is a part of children's or teachers' life experience, traumatic affects and reactions can invade the classroom and leave everyone feeling unsafe. Trauma-focused ERP can help by diminishing the risk of retraumatization in schools. It does this, in part, through parallel process work. Creating a safe, holding environment for stressed adults in the building makes it possible to enhance teacher and administrator capacity to create safe holding environments for children.

The stories shared in this article illustrate the power of this essential component of ERP's trauma- focused work. Investing staff time in emotional partnering with teachers and encouraging *reflection on both the positive and negative aspects of classroom life within a community process* heightens connections between staff members, diminishes the isolation that occurs when teachers are alone with highly stressed children for many hours each day, and can interrupt the cycle of retraumatization as adults develop more empathy for themselves as well as for the children in their care. When teachers are in the presence of a "good mirror," they are better able to see, hear, and respond to the voices of children and better able to provide that mirror in their own classroom practice.

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Threading the Needle: On Balancing Trauma and Critical Teaching

Brian Gibbs and Kristin Papoi

Introduction

"I used to teach a six-week unit on slavery," a friend of mine, Ms. Jane, [1] told me. "It was the only unit during the entire year in which my students were visible," she continued. "I didn't realize," she confessed, "that I did more damage with that unit than the racism they experienced in the real world." Tears were streaming from her red eyes down her long cheeks. "I've only recently realized... I never taught resistance. In the absence of resistance... all they learned is that their ancestors were oppressed and destroyed."

Ms. Jane was describing her teaching in a high school in South Central Los Angeles in the mid 1990s. All her students were Black, but the curriculum was decidedly Eurocentric. Feeling pressure to conform to a United States history curriculum that largely provided a narrative of American triumphalism (Epstein, 2009), she attempted to apply a critical lens by expanding a unit on slavery in the American South. The unit, as she told me, was in-depth and brutal. She wanted her students to know the truth in all its unvarnished horror. Ms. Jane felt it was her duty to help students come to understand some of the foundational elements of racial violence in the United States, and slavery was the vehicle for developing that knowledge.

Still a teacher and still teaching in a predominantly Black community, Ms. Jane continues to address the histories of racial violence and slavery, but now with a significant difference. She also strives to apply the lessons of the past to the racism that continues today. Rather than solely focusing on the horror of slavery, she also thoroughly teaches the resistance to it, what actions resisters took, and what more could have been done. "It is still difficult... it's hard going, students wrestle with the content, get emotional. They need to know this information, they need to know about racism and violence, but they need examples of how to not take it, how to fight back. *It's a difficult needle to thread* and I don't know if I'm doing it."

By threading the needle in this way, Ms. Jane's goal is to enable students to know and understand the history of slavery, including the resistance to it, and to gain agency from those stories (Gillen, 2014) while simultaneously protecting her students from socio-emotional trauma or damage. Nonetheless, according to the trauma-informed framework adopted by her school, as translated by her principal, she is harming her students emotionally, and she is therefore encouraged to reformulate her instructional unit. Ms. Jane fears that in doing so, much would be lost, and that her students would continue to experience trauma without being able to name it, or that they would learn about slavery in greater detail later in life and be alone, without support, when they experience the resulting pain.

Driven by the question, "How can teachers thread the needle, balancing between critical teaching and trauma-informed teaching?," this article explores the challenges and complexity of teaching difficult and often ugly histories dealing with issues of race, class, power, gender, sexuality, and resistance within a trauma-informed framework. The data from which the findings in this paper are based emerge from three qualitative studies about three seemingly divergent topics—teaching for social justice in unjust school spaces, teaching about war to the children of soldiers, and teaching about lynching in schools near historic lynching sites. The studies, conducted independently of one another by Gibbs, coalesced around the overarching theme, identified by both authors, that threading the needle of teaching hard histories is made more difficult by an overly generalized definition of trauma-informed teaching, shortsighted professional development on

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the topic, and too little direction on trauma-informed pedagogy.

Theoretical Framework

Critical pedagogy assumes that racism, classism, homophobia, and misogyny not only exist but are also part of the fabric of schools and classrooms (Anyon, 1981; Apple, 2014; Au, 2008; Blackburn, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Giroux, 1988). Critical pedagogy argues that it is the role of the classroom teacher not only to understand this but also to help students understand it, and perhaps most importantly, to help students learn how to resist and push against these societal phenomena. Freire (1970) argues that a critical stance begins with love; poet, scholar, and feminist Audre Lorde argues that self-love is a political act (Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Shor, 1992). Love is an important part of both teaching and learning—the love of self and the love of others. Educating children to look more critically at their community and their world promotes a love of others, and the resulting agency they uncover through understanding how their contributions matter to the world fosters a love of self. Simultaneously, we understand a trauma-informed framework to hinge on the idea of care. Thus, if we engage our students in ways that foster the love of others as they uncover ways to love themselves, critical pedagogy can be a useful lens through which to better understand how to teach critically within a trauma-informed framework.

Methodology

This article draws data from three qualitative case studies (Gibbs, 2018, 2019, 2019, 2020, forthcoming) (see Table 1), which engaged social studies teachers in semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1989) and classroom observations. While in two of these studies—the teaching of war to the children of soldiers and the teaching of lynching at schools near historic lynching sites—students participated in focus-group interviews (Morgan, 2002) and wrote journal entries in response to specific prompts about their learning, the data from which this paper emerges draws mostly on the voices and perceptions of teachers as they engaged in the teaching of difficult histories. Findings from teacher data from all three studies were triangulated with reports that students in the war study made about the teaching they experienced, what if any changes they thought should be made to the instruction, and what they believed the importance of specific content and the role of the school in making the world a more just place to be (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For each study, field notes, a methodological journal, and analytical memos were created throughout the data-collection process. Data across the three studies were analyzed by both authors of this article through multiple rounds of coding, using elemental coding methods (Saldaña, 2013), including initial coding, in vivo coding, process coding, and values coding; these were helpful to the authors in "reviewing the corpus [to] build a foundation for future coding cycles" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 83). The themes discussed in this paper emerged from this process.

Table 1: Studies from which data for this article is drawn

Topic	Teacher Interviews	Classroom Observations	Student Focus Group
5-year examination of teaching for social justice in unjust school spaces	9 teachers interviewed twice each year for 5 years for between 90 and 120 minutes each	2 each year for each teacher	Not conducted

Topic	Teacher Interviews	Classroom Observations	Student Focus Group
1-year examination of how war is taught to the children of soldiers	9 teachers interviewed twice over one year for between 60 and 90 minutes each	5 teachers observed teaching war between 5 and 12 times over the course of one year	6 whole-class focus group interviews with 3 separate groups of students (each group of students interviewed twice)
An ongoing examination of how lynching is taught in schools near historic lynching sites	11 teachers interviewed twice for between 60 and 120 minutes	2 teachers observed, one for 3 days, the other for 5 days (the length of their instructional units on lynching)	2 whole class focus group interviews with two groups of students

Trauma-Informed Instructional Practice (TIIP)

Trauma-informed instructional practice (TIIP) is a broad and quite generalized term. Falling within the scope of TIIP are such diverse practices as restorative justice (Winn, 2018); developing classrooms as safe and empowering spaces (Carello & Butler, 2015); creating schools that are aware of the trauma students have faced and are responsive to student needs (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016); teachers and schools developing empathy for students and devoting attention to the need to develop resiliency and grit in students (Zakszeski, Bentresco, & Jaffe, 2017). Venet (2019) offers a concise description of trauma-informed teaching: know your students and know the support systems a school can provide. Much of the literature on trauma-informed pedagogy is important and, at the same time, so general as to not be actionable by practitioners. For example, a guide from Concordia University in Portland, Oregon, advises teachers to look beyond behavior, build relationships, create a safe environment, meet students where they are, and be predictable (The Room 241 Team, 2018), all of which is excellent advice, but also quite vague. A recent interdisciplinary review of the past two decades of research around school approaches to trauma-informed practices (Thomas, Crosby, & Vanderhaar, 2019) confirms that research on those practices has only more recently been taken up by educators. Thus the studies that do exist, grounded in other disciplines, often lack both the specificity needed by teachers and the perspective of student experiences. Several participants in the three studies featured in this article also note the dearth of research by educators for educators, stating that while the existing information on TIIP is useful in that it focuses on student trauma, it does not offer specific strategies for teaching difficult and messy history to students who have had traumatic experiences.

Looking more closely at Thomas, Crosby, and Vanderhaar's (2019) review of research about school-based approaches to trauma-informed practices does, however, provide some insight into trauma-related resources which educators may engage and consider while teaching difficult history. Specifically, those who teach children affected by trauma and/or who may experience secondary traumatic stress themselves can rely upon *building knowledge* on the nature and impacts of trauma; *shifting perspectives* to build emotionally healthy school cultures; and *engaging in self-care* (Thomas, Crosby, & Vanderhaar, 2019, pp. 426–428).

Critical Teaching and TIIP

Like many concepts, critical teaching has been known by other names, social justice teaching foremost among them (North, 2009; Sleeter; 2014; Swalwell, 2013). Sleeter (2014) provides four central tenets of

social justice teaching: situate families and communities in structural analysis; develop relationships with students, families, and communities; have high academic expectations; and teach an inclusive curriculum. We argue that critical teaching moves beyond this in two specific ways. First, critical teaching pushes back overtly or covertly against a standards-based, testing-focused curriculum that deprives students of a more robust learning experience. Second, critical teaching employs a discussion-oriented inquiry-based pedagogy that directly examines issues of race, class, power, gender, sex, and resistance and works at growing students' sense of critical agency (Gillen, 2014). Social justice teaching has been reduced too often in school sites to attention to equity and access rather than being practiced as an intentionally engaged pedagogy to develop and deliberately build the skills of dangerous citizenship (Ross & Vinson, 2010). Dangerous citizenship creates students who not only understand content through a critical lens but also learn how to advocate for themselves, their community, and others. This, we believe, is where critical teaching intersects with the resources for engaging TIIP—specifically, how critical social studies teachers *build knowledge* about messy histories, *shift perspectives* to consider the assets of students rather than trauma-based deficits, and encourage both students and themselves to *engage in self-care* when confronting trauma that emerges from a critical approach to teaching and learning about hard history (Thomas, Crosby, & Vanderhaar, 2019).

Quandaries and Contradictions of TIIP Roll Out

In all three studies, teachers reported myriad ways in which trauma-informed instructional practices were rolled out poorly in their schools. Almost universally, TIIP was presented to teachers in a one-day workshop as a narrow set of checklists to be used for planning and instruction, with some focus on the trauma and social-emotional damage that students endure in schools and classrooms and in the world in general. Universally, the teachers involved in all three studies felt that TIIP is needed, and they had a deep sense that their students were suffering. The teachers also indicated that at the end of the workshop, they were left feeling unsure about how to implement TIIP in any meaningful way. One teacher said that TIIP "is a bit like culturally relevant pedagogy in that it's all inclusive. I mean, it's how you relate to students, how you connect to them, how well you know them… but that's what I do already … so have I been doing TIIP and I just didn't know it?" Ladson-Billings (1995) notes that the response when she initially made presentations on culturally relevant pedagogy was similar; she often received the critique that what she described was "just good teaching." Her response was that it was just good teaching—and more. The more, however, seems to be the complicated part about TIIP that wasn't being adequately presented to the teachers in these three studies.

For example, the TIIP professional development presentation at one school included excerpts of a TEDx Talk (TEDx GoldenGateED, 2011) in which scholar Jeff Duncan-Andrade argues that the children in East Oakland have seen as much violence and endured as much trauma as soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. The school where this professional development took place is in an urban area in Southern California and serves a mostly Latinx population. Though the school isn't in East Oakland, the students similarly experienced violence, racism, and fear on a daily basis. The teachers we spoke with self-identified as critical educators, several of whom had developed a required 9th grade ethnic studies course (Acosta & Mir, 2012; Takaki, 2008; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2014) that engaged many of the elements of TIIP. The course connected directly to the history of the community in which the school is situated, worked at honoring the students' ethnic and cultural heritage, and highlighted the greatness within the neighborhood, while also teaching students the skills and enactments of agency required to create change (Gillen, 2014).

After reviewing key elements of TIIP and showing excerpts of Duncan-Andrade's TEDx Talk, district and school leaders explained that TIIP was the "new push" that year and would be taken into consideration in the teachers' annual reviews and evaluations. Evidence of TIIP for that purpose would come from observations of instruction. The key elements of TIIP that the administration was looking for were that, as one teacher

related: "classroom is a supportive and nurturing environment"; "instruction is culturally relevant"; "instructor demonstrates understanding of students and their environment"; and "[classroom] shows evidence of a healing environment."

Teachers were left with several quandaries as they wrestled through what they identified as contradictions. They worried aloud about the tensions between teaching more critically and practicing TIIP, which (as defined by their school) didn't support critical teaching. One teacher said:

> The question I asked myself after the professional development was, "Doesn't the truth heal?" I mean, can't it? I mean that's the crux of my pedagogy and curriculum… the old biblical saying, right, "you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free"? That's what I thought TIIP was going in but now… I don't know.

The belief that a thoughtful teacher with a strong connection to students, who knows who they are and where they are from, can lead them successfully through learning hard history (Costello, 2017) and help them come to deep understandings was in direct conflict with the TIIP framework that the school leadership expected teachers to engage.

In their analysis of this contradiction, several participants referenced a recent report by the Southern Poverty Law Center's (SPLC) Teaching Tolerance division that indicates that students generally learn very little about slavery, and that what they do learn is narrow, incomplete, and often so general as to be meaningless (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). A strong thread throughout the report is that the truth about slavery, its connection to a White supremacist ideology, and its echoes in the epidemic of police violence against Black men, can lead to a deeper understanding of our present-day dilemmas and can aid in healing. This is, of course, if the teaching about slavery is done right—that is, using a TIIP framework. As the report by the SPLC points out, too often "simulations" that are poorly thought through, rather than well-facilitated discussions, examinations of documents, or historical investigation, are used in teaching about slavery (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018).

Several teachers worried that the students would inevitably later discover the difficult truths about slavery, which could lead to bitterness and anger not only at the historical reality they would uncover but at the school system and their class that helped perpetuate a lie through omission. The teachers indicated that students currently experienced trauma, as defined in the professional development sessions, through physical abuse, the opioid epidemic, racism, misogyny, and homophobia in their neighborhood, home, or school. However, students did not experience the historical trauma of slavery. Thus, the key contradictions and quandaries that teachers surfaced were: *Can the historical truth be healing if taught correctly? Does helping students understand and unpack the ramifications of historical traumas constitute a trauma-informed pedagogical approach?* The answer that the teachers were getting to both questions was "no." This meant that they needed to choose either to teach critically, presenting students with thoughtfully created instruction on difficult topics, or to avoid controversial topics (Hess, 2009) altogether.

This focus on TIIP coincided with a conservative turn in the ideology and politics of the United States with the election of Donald Trump in 2016. Several studies have indicated that in the run-up to the presidential election and since then, schools and classrooms became incredibly tense spaces where women, ethnic and racial minorities, and LGBTQIA students and faculty have been attacked and undermined (Costello, 2017; Rogers et al., 2017). As a result, Sondel, Baggett, and Dunn (2018) have advocated for a pedagogy of trauma to help support students as they make their way through these difficult times and have demonstrated how social justice teaching has decreased under the increasingly conservative national and local landscape. For the teachers in the three studies, the advent of TIIP, together with the country's turn to the right—or at least

to a more aggressive conservativism—have conspired to create pressure against teaching critically. As one teacher explained:

> I mean it's like threading a needle… there's so much to think about. There always was. I always thought about my students [and their trauma] and how to support them, I think all good teachers do. But now … with trauma defined in particular ways… and since Trump, I mean it's just all complicated. Threading a needle, like I said, and sometimes I feel like I'm doing that in the dark and that's not good for kids.

The following sections take a closer look at what threading the needle looks like when teaching not just about American slavery, but about other traumas such as war and lynching, especially to descendants and peers of descendants of those who originally experienced those traumas.

Teaching War to the Children of Soldiers. Teachers who taught the children of soldiers about war consistently indicated that they feared traumatizing their students. As one teacher replied when I asked why he didn't teach war more critically, "Why would I do that? That's just dangerous. Aren't these students going through enough?" She was referring to the anxiety students felt over parents often rotating to frontline positions (the study took place near a special forces military base) and the possibility of them being injured or killed. Teachers who did teach war critically still worried about inflicting trauma, and as one teacher said, "pull[ed] their punches." He told me:

> I had a whole lesson planned out, we were going to explore the Battle of Pointe du Hoc on D-Day, part of [a] larger thread of troubling the typical notion of sacrifice. But when the students came in that day, I got nervous. I sensed something in them, that they were troubled. So I taught the lesson from a 50,000-foot view. Same lesson, few details, they seemed largely disinterested. There were no discussions, no examination of hard and interesting questions. I found later nothing had happened. I worried something had happened to [a] parent that I hadn't heard about. A student told me it was just a case of 'the Mondays,' and here I was worried about trauma.

Teachers who taught war critically as well as those who didn't were surprised by what students said during the group interviews (Morgan, 2002). The teachers shared that the students didn't talk about war at home in any specific or meaningful way; as one student said, "the war is just like a cloud, not a black cloud exactly, but maybe a gray one, that just kind of hangs over our heads at home." Several students agreed with this assessment. They said they've learned not to ask questions and that their parents have learned to talk about deployments in very general and oblique ways. "I talked about my dad's last tour when he came home last time for a couple of hours, but he didn't say anything. I still don't know what happened or what he did or anything," a student shared. What was most provocative and important about students' commentary was that they almost universally agreed that they wanted to learn more about war. As one student said:

> I don't want to be told what to think about it, but I want to know more. I'm kind of realizing this right now… so I'm kind of thinking out loud, but I've had history for three years now and I don't think I've ever thought about war or what it means, or when we should go, or why, or what a just war is, or how to fight it, or whether it's worth it… I like just learned it. I copied it down, I memorized it, I passed the test and I'm an A student. But there's so much about war that I just haven't thought about and I realize I want to.

The one caveat students had regarding learning about war was that they also wanted their parents presented in, as one student put it, "a good light." He continued, "If your parents, served just know they did their job. They were ordered to do something ugly and they did it. No one should be able to see what they have to do."

This student raised a challenging contradiction and a needle needed to be threaded by teachers. He was an advocate for more critical teaching, but at the same time he also wanted to ensure that his and other students' parents "came off" as another student said, "looking good." Accomplishing both is quite complicated, but necessary. Interestingly, though the school that these children attended advocated TIIP instruction, it didn't have a forward-leaning support system for students whose family members deploy overseas. As the principal explained, "We wait for them and follow the student." The principal, who is married to a soldier and who has taught on or near 11 military bases over her 38-year career, continued, "If we go to them, we could trigger something… we don't want to cause harm… we want to support them when they are harmed." So until a crisis arises, the trauma-informed work is done in classrooms through pedagogical and relational choices between students and teachers, rather than as a whole-school effort.

Teaching Lynching in Schools Near Historic Lynching Sites. Teachers in schools near historic lynching sites either avoided teaching lynching at all, taught it as minimally as possible, or taught it completely without shying away from the violence of the history. Those who avoided it did so for several reasons that might be best summed up by one teacher's comment:

> [Lynching is] the third rail… I mean it's everything we're not supposed to teach, sex, unfounded accusations of rape, extrajudicial violence, police complicity, public murder and then often a public celebration. How can students get their heads around that? I can't even. And then the photographs… they just demonstrate the absolute depravity and horror.

This teacher, like many, taught lynching, as he said, "softly"—that is, just so students knew what it was—because he was convinced that teaching an in-depth, more truthful history of lynching could cause trauma.

The study focused on lynching examined the teaching practices in mostly rural Southern communities within 20 miles of a historic lynching site. The fear of causing trauma was particularly acute in schools that were racially mixed. Teachers indicated that teaching lynching "would just make it worse," in the words of one, referring to the inherent racial tension that existed in the school and the community. Teachers who avoided teaching lynching said that TIIP as defined at their schools meant developing a supportive, nurturing environment and empathy. Many teachers indicated that teaching lynching in depth would take their classroom to the brink of irreversible division. As one teacher said, "I fear we would never recover from that conversation." The teacher felt strongly that irreparable damage would be done to the classroom community, which would be so frayed that his White students and Black students wouldn't be able to remain connected. These teachers believed that silence about some topics was necessary. As one said, "We teach about race and class and gender, but we have to have limits."

Those who taught lynching in depth, on the other hand, did so thoroughly and, in most cases, with no holds barred. Graphic photographs of lynching were used to "demonstrate the horror of the racial violence at that time," one teacher said. He continued:

> Look, kids today are strapped to their phones and see violent images all the time. The violence they see is completely unfiltered. I have to use everything at my disposal to get their attention, keep their attention and make them understand… they're so desensitized to violence. So, do I have to use the lynching photographs? Yeah, I have to use everything that I have.

Teachers who taught lynching in all its horror and anguish supported their approach with arguments similar to those from critical race theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Taylor, Gilborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009) and culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) (Paris & Alim, 2017). As CRT does, the teachers argued that racism exists and is common throughout the history of the United States, but that if it is taught truthfully and

well (that is, in accordance with CSP), it can lead to a type of healing through empathy and understanding. The teachers who taught lynching this way worked in schools using TIIP and felt that teaching hard history thoughtfully (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018), though it may be painful, was consistent with a trauma-informed pedagogy. However, they all acknowledged that in most cases, they were teaching at the edges of their school's definition of TIIP, if not outside those bounds.

At all the schools featured in this essay, the definition of TIIP was reductive and too general, and did not fully engage the affordances of trauma-related resources—building knowledge, shifting perspectives, and self-care (Thomas, Crosby, & Vanderhaar, 2019). TIIP, as it was defined for these teachers in these contexts, supported the choice of avoiding difficult topics; it offered no guidance on how to both teach critically and engage in trauma-informed practice. Perhaps more problematically, not being provided any professional development on pedagogy nor any definitional guidance signaled to these teachers that they were outside the norm of their school. They assumed, possibly correctly, that they would be punished if they were caught teaching lynching critically; they therefore did so surreptitiously and didn't reach out to colleagues or community members for support and guidance. Teaching critically is always difficult, but doing so alone and covertly can be costly for students and teachers. It can go wrong and in myriad ways. A student could be triggered by discussions of race, abuse, poverty, gender, or homophobia in ways they themselves wouldn't have anticipated. A teacher may be unprepared to manage the emotional response they receive from students and the teacher is unable to support them. A class discussion on a difficult topic could be interpreted by students as an invitation to air racist, homophobic, or misogynistic views that could inflict harm on other students. Teaching critically and through a trauma informed pedagogy is a difficult task.

Discussion and Recommendations

Threading the needle between TIIP and critical teaching (Duncan-Andrade, 2007) is difficult. This is particularly true when school systems and individual schools offer a generalized definition of TIIP, limited professional development, and few trauma-related resources—particularly resources for building knowledge, shifting perspectives, and engaging in self-care when working with students with trauma (Thomas, Crosby, & Vanderhaar, 2019). The teachers who participated in our studies, while excited that their schools were turning an eye toward supporting their students through TIIP, felt largely adrift and unsupported in their efforts to engage in trauma-informed critical teaching of difficult history. Teachers reported that their schools' choices regarding TIIP signaled that engaging in TIIP meant not teaching critically. For several teachers, that was unfathomable. They felt that a crucial part of their job was to guide students through painful content, particularly content that their students were personally connected to. The way TIIP was presented to them, or at least as they interpreted it, left these teachers few options for enacting it within their classrooms with a critical lens.

In response to the tension described above, we offer several recommendations for teachers and schools who teach difficult history using a critical pedagogical approach and TIIP. We frame these suggestions according to the trauma-related resources of building knowledge, shifting perspectives, and engaging in self-care (Thomas, Crosby, & Vanderhaar, 2019). Furthermore, we call for more focused research by educational researchers on these practices. Our recommendations are to:

1. **Offer more robust professional development around TIIP (Building Knowledge)**

    The teachers in all three studies indicated that they were in favor of trauma-informed schools, particularly with regard to pedagogy. They generally disagreed about what that meant. They received less than a day of professional development which, as described by the teachers, offered general

guidelines for what constitutes a trauma-informed school and what resources were available, but little about pedagogy and teaching.

2. **Contextualize TIIP within lived experiences in the classroom, school, and community to best address students' reactions to hard history (Shifting Perspectives)**

   We argue that what happens in classrooms is the most important aspect of schools and accordingly contend that much time must be devoted to explaining what trauma-informed instructional practices are, what they look like, and what they are not. We would recommend a series of professional development sessions on how to do TIIP well, with continuing facilitated discussions in departments or grade levels. This could lead to organic agreements about what teaching critically with a trauma-informed lens looks like.

3. **Be explicit and provide examples about how teaching critically works with TIIP (Building Knowledge)**

   This could be part of what we describe in our second recommendation, but we argue that it needs its own emphasis in professional development. Some, perhaps many, teachers may be unfamiliar with teaching with a critical lens, so more time may be needed for them to familiarize themselves with this concept and then work at connecting it to TIIP. At least part of this time should be used to surface and discuss specific issues that might be considered controversial within the specific context of the school (i.e., teaching war to the children of soldiers and teaching lynching in schools near historic lynching sites). This will give teachers a clear signal about what can be taught, and how.

4. **Take the long view when threading the needle (Self-Care)**

   We recommend that TIIP become an embedded part of professional development for an entire year, if not longer. Teachers need to be able to take time to get used to this difficult work, fully understand the impact it has on their students and themselves as teachers, have practice implementing it and reflecting upon the practice, and be observed and receive feedback from administration and colleagues. This embedded professional development means that TIIP will be a topic that is returned to again and again in deeper and more complex and reflexive ways.

We are living in an ever more violent and complicated world. Children are seeing and experiencing violence at an unprecedented rate as television, social media, and other outlets bring the world to them, even if they themselves are not experiencing trauma. The school is the first line of defense—and in too many cases, the only line of defense—against this barrage. We must create trauma-informed schools and trauma-informed instructional practices. We must, however, make certain that trauma-informed instruction does not mean avoiding, simplifying, or simply not teaching difficult content with a critical lens. Trauma-informed instructional practices ought to provide guidance about how to teach critically while doing no harm to students or their community. However, history must be taught honestly, or the trauma from the past will continue to haunt students as they move into their future. Teachers need to continue to seek out ways to better thread the needle between critical teaching and trauma-informed instructional practice.

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Creating Classroom Community to Welcome Children Experiencing Trauma

Katherina A. Payne, Jennifer Keys Adair, and Shubhi Sachdeva

School as a civic space encourages teachers and students to consider the fundamental question, "How do we live together?" While secondary classrooms may deliberate public policy issues that inform this question (e.g., Hess & McAvoy, 2015), early childhood classrooms afford spaces for young children to negotiate this question through their embodied, everyday experiences. This question is at the heart of social studies education, yet social studies has been increasingly marginalized or pushed out of elementary and early childhood curricula (e.g., Fitchett, Heafner, & Lambert, 2014; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012). As social studies is pushed out, concurrently schools have readily adopted curricula for "social-emotional learning" (SEL).

In early childhood settings, educators often try to support the development of community (a goal of engaging the question of how we live together) through a lens of prosocial development or social-emotional learning. These frames tend to position children as individuals who lack the ability to engage in White middle-class notions of peaceful social interactions and acts of kindness and to encourage schools to take on the responsibility of teaching those predetermined skills (Schonert-Reichl & O'Brien, 2012). The focus on individuality often removes the child from the collective space of the classroom community, as well as takes away their authentic ways of being a community member. Emphasizing remediation of individual behaviors differentiates many social-emotional learning curricula from a vision of civic education that negotiates the question of how we live together.

Over a year, we spent 469 hours in three classrooms in a Head Start center in South Texas. We observed and documented how young children act with care and concern alongside and for their community members, that is, their classmates (see Payne, 2018; Payne, Adair, Colegrove, Lee, Falkner, McManus & Sachdeva, 2019). In other words, we saw how young children embodied civic skills and dispositions in their everyday actions. Additionally, we saw how their teachers' actions either allowed or constrained these opportunities. Rather than focusing on what individual children lacked in "social skills," we observed how teachers and children negotiated difficult circumstances to better include all children in the classroom community. How children acted civically, that is, acted with and on behalf of their communities, and how their teachers supported this work fostered social and emotional learning that enmeshed the individual within the collective.

We offer one experience and story of Luis[1], his peers, and his teachers as evidence of how attending to civicness reframes social emotional learning as a more collective endeavor. We consider how Luis's teachers and classmates approached his social learning, inclusive of his experience with trauma, from the point of view of civicness, incorporating social-emotional learning into community building work in authentically caring ways (Valenzuela, 1999).

Recognizing Trauma in the Everyday Settings of Early Childhood Education

During the course of our *Civic Action and Young Children* study, we spent many hours observing and filming in a Head Start preschool in San Antonio, Texas (see Payne, 2018; Payne, et al., 2019; Adair, Phillips, Richie & Sachdeva, 2017). Early on, we noticed that children struggled with varied difficult circumstances, including poverty, homelessness, discrimination, and threat of deportation. Yet teachers did not label children as homeless, illegal immigrants, or poor. Children seemed to help one another more than we saw in other

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1   All names are pseudonyms.

preschool classrooms. We started filming to capture all of the ways that children acted as a community and soon realized that instead of dismissing children's behaviors, needs, or desires as problematic, children and teachers together tried to meet everyone's unique needs without judgment.

In particular, we noted how two teachers, Ms. Luz and Ms. Louisa, who worked in a general education classroom, and their group of 17 3- and 4-year-old children, supported one 4-year-old Latino boy, Luis. In class, Luis enjoyed building ramps with blocks, helping set up lunch, and riding tricycles during recess time. During the year we spent with Luis and his classmates, we also learned that his family was experiencing housing insecurity. Consider the following scene from a morning in their classroom:

> Ms. Louisa, the assistant teacher, is standing at the door greeting children as they arrive for the day. Luis walks up the hallway, wrapped in a plush bright blue blanket. Ms. Louisa calls out, "Good morning, Luis! Put your blanket in your locker." She continues, "Wow, Luis, I like the way you walked in this morning, put your blanket in your locker. You can get it during nap time, okay?" Luis slowly unwraps himself and shoves the blanket in his locker, and then gives Ms. Louisa a high-five as he walks into the classroom.

> The class begins their morning routines and circles up on the rug for their morning meeting. Luis crouches over and puts his head on the floor. The children around him leave him alone as he falls asleep.

> Luis sleeps through the morning, curled over with his head on the rug. When center time begins, children head over to the rug where Luis is sleeping to play with the blocks. Victor and Giovanni start building a tall structure near Luis's feet. Luis, still sleeping, has spread his body out on the rug. Enrique is building a structure around Luis and soon realizes he cannot keep building the way he did the other day and pleads, "Luis, move!" The other children continue building around Luis. Soon the blocks are close, but not quite touching Luis's head, arms, legs and feet. Ms. Luz, the head teacher, comes over to check on Luis. Enrique tells her, "Luis is blocking the way."

> Ms. Luz kneels down next to Luis, fixes the collar of his shirt, and gently shakes his shoulder. She says, "Luis, you're missing work time, Luis. Are you going to wake up? Luis?" She sings his name out, "Lu-is. Are you ready to wake up now?" She announces to the group playing all around Luis, "He doesn't want to wake up."

> The students continue building. When Nicholas goes to knock down his blocks, he is careful to knock them away from Luis. The students gradually move their structures to the other half of the rug, away from Luis.

> The class prepares for their second small group activity. Ms. Luz calls out, "Luis, we're going into our second group, Luis." David is gently shaking Luis. Ms. Luz tries one more time, "We are going to feed our chameleon flies, Luis." Luis continues to sleep.

> As the students line up for recess, Ms. Luz stays behind with Luis to wake him up. She calls the school leader, Dr. Benevides, to come help so that she can join Ms. Louisa and the students heading outside. Dr. Benevides picks up Luis and carries him to her office where he wakes up and then rejoins the class outside during recess (Video, April 28, 2016)

This scene highlights how Luis's classmates and teachers engaged in everyday civicness to create space for him to be part of the classroom community. The children continued to access the block area for play, while allowing Luis to continue sleeping. They also negotiated how his presence shifted their play—Enrique openly struggled with how to build in the way he wanted and attempted to get Luis to move and Nicholas ensured

the blocks tumbled away from Luis.

We also noted how the teachers' actions modeled particular ways of acting as a community. When Ms. Luz and Ms. Louisa watched and reflected on our recording of this scene, they pointed out that they didn't force Luis to wake up. They described Luis's situation in plain terms, not with labels, to the children and to us, the researchers. The teachers pointed out that Luis did not get enough sleep at home and that they wanted to help him be successful with his peers and in his academic learning, so they let him sleep. They described his life at home as "a living situation that was a little different," or they would simply say that Luis and his family were living in a motel. They did not ever say on camera or in passing that he was homeless, yet they were acutely aware every day of his need for security, calm, and extra understanding.

In such difficult circumstances, it may be tempting to blame the home situation for what is happening at school and then look down or think ill of the child's family. There is extensive evidence that making assumptions about families does not help teachers treat children with kindness, nor do negative labels help teachers set an example for children to treat one another with kindness, empathy, and helpfulness (Adair, 2015; Adair, 2014; Brown, 2016; De Lissovoy, 2012; Dyson, 2015; Gold & Richards, 2012; Martínez, 2018; Souto- Manning & Martell, 2016).

Teachers need to be able to adapt to unique needs while keeping a positive outlook on a child and their family. Labeling often accompanies deficit thinking, which then makes a teacher act differently towards a child. Wright (2012; 2014) explains that strengths-based, non-labeling approaches to young children experiencing trauma or extreme stress helps teachers meet their needs in ways that are better for children. He explains,

> Teachers must apply a strength-based perspective—seeing children as fighting to live, rather than on the risky road to failure. Teachers must be vigilant about responding not only to children's behavior, but to their needs as well. Sometimes traumatized children are too anxious to sit quietly during circle time, too afraid of who might walk in the room to take their eyes off the classroom door, or too deprived to share a doll or toy. Rather than criticizing children for these behaviors, it is important for teachers to recognize the underlying causes and help the child to feel more calm, safe, and content. (2012, p.28)

Ms. Luz and Ms. Louisa noticed and responded to the unique needs of Luis and the other children in the class without labeling them or attaching negative assumptions to them or their families.

Ms. Luz and Ms. Louisa believed that each child had something unique to offer to the classroom community and Luis was no different. They viewed him not as a problem that had to be removed, but as a useful member of the community. They saw him act out and hit other children when he was tired, but they remembered that he was also the boy who taught other children how to build tall structures with blocks. They knew that he was good at reading and many times helped other children figure out words on the word wall. They appreciated that Luis liked to help set up tables for lunch.

Ms. Luz and Ms. Louisa understood that each child in their care needed support in unique ways and they recognized how each child offered possibilities for others to engage with and learn to be a responsive community. Luis helped others to see that equity does not mean equality. His classroom community, both children and adults, learned through him and each other that people need different resources to succeed and these resources are not the same for everyone. By seeing their teachers treat Luis and his family with

respect, the children understood that needing support and help was not a sign of inadequacy or weakness but a human need. They also learned that everyone can lend support. In Ms. Luz and Ms. Louisa's classroom, teachers and children often supported one another by saying, "we are all trying our best."

In this scene and in the teacher's reflection, the attention was on how to engage Luis as a community member, rather than on how to "fix" Luis's behavior. The teachers recognized that all children needed support and contributed to the community in varied ways, at different times. Positioning Luis as a member of the community shifted the attention away from individual behaviors, and toward the collective possibilities shared among all community members. The children's and teachers' actions highlight the civic skills and dispositions of problem-solving, care, and inclusion. The teachers' engagement with the family and larger community highlighted their deep understanding of the circumstances Luis encountered outside of school. Incorporating this knowledge into the work of "how we live and learn together" in the classroom models a type of civicness focused on collectivity and asset-based approaches to children, families, and communities.

Welcoming Luis as Integral to the Classroom Community

The teachers modeled kindness, patience, and inclusion in how they worked with Luis and allowed him to get what he needed from school. Sometimes that was sleep. When Luis was sleeping in the middle of block-making, the children just worked around him. The children recognized Luis's need to sleep because they had seen the teachers not get upset or frustrated about it. Ms. Luz commented,

> If we were there day after day forcing him to get up, then maybe [they] would have gotten really upset and gotten up and went [sic] to get a teacher because they'd know we'd force him to get up. So I think they saw us not making a big deal either (Interview, May 8, 2017).

Other times, Luis needed patience or the opportunity to fix a problem. Children learned to be patient with Luis through their experiences living and working as a community. They knew he was having a hard time, but that was all they knew. They also knew that he could be helpful, adept at block play, and skillful at academic work such as reading.

The teachers offered many opportunities for children to problem-solve in empathetic ways with Luis. They helped children figure out how to be patient with Luis and still share their concerns. In other words, the children learned social and emotional skills and dispositions through their everyday interactions as a *classroom community*. By focusing on interactions rooted in everyday experiences, children and teachers constructed ideas of civicness through embodied practices (Payne, 2018; Payne, et al., 2019; see also, Rogoff, Paradise, Arauz, Correa-Chávez, & Angelillo, 2003; Urrieta, 2013).

One day Luis was having an exceptionally hard time and was even biting and sticking his tongue out at his classmate David. When it was time for small group lessons, the class split in half to go with one of the two teachers. Luis sat down at one of the tables between Diamond and Giovanni. Giovanni objected loudly, "No!" Ms. Louisa asked him what was wrong. Protective of Diamond, Giovanni explained that Luis was probably going to be mean to her. Ms. Louisa told him and the other children at the table that she believed Luis was going to change his behavior. Giovanni passed out papers for the activity and started with David, who had been bitten by Luis. Luis turned toward David, sitting a few children away from him. He apologized to David. David then came over and hugged Luis, who hugged him back (Field Note, March 3, 2016).

Giving Luis patience, comfort, and opportunities to work through the problems he caused was part of an overall approach to creating a classroom community that emphasized children as community members

whose participation and welcoming attitudes were critical for helping everyone in the class feel safe. This sense of safety and care was part of everyday life. Wright (2012) notes that these types of feelings in a classroom space are critical for children experiencing trauma. He writes,

> Especially for children who have experienced trauma, classrooms must be safe, predictable, structured, and caring. Raising one's voice, abrupt transitions, or an unpredictable schedule, for example, may trigger the traumatized child to fight, flee, or freeze. Each of these responses interrupts learning and social-emotional development (p. 28)

The emphasis on patience, care, and being welcoming was directly related to the teachers' unwillingness to label children or to approach them in a negative way, as well as to an overall emphasis on supporting each other as a community.

Of course, children who are experiencing trauma—such as not having a permanent or consistent place to live—need many resources. The school offered a closet of clothes and household supplies, referrals to social workers, on-site counseling, and nursing services as well as assistance with food. These resources complemented the teachers' desires to welcome Luis into the classroom community by meeting his and his family's needs without judgment.

Creating Civic Classrooms

We saw multiple ways in which teachers and children engaged with each other every day that allowed them to work through social and emotional skills and dispositions. Reframing these interactional opportunities through civicness affords a more collective view of social emotional learning. Rather than working with a child experiencing trauma through an individualized and decontextualized curricula, focusing on the community created opportunities for all children to practice authentic care and for Luis to experience inclusion in the community. Here are five recommendations to help create classroom communities that both welcome children experiencing trauma and create authentic opportunities for children to enact civicness.

1. **Use unique differences as opportunities for children to problem-solve and understand their community.**
   Ms. Luz and Ms. Louisa noticed what individual children needed and they shared with the class what some of those needs were to facilitate children helping one another. They supported children using their own ideas to solve problems. They often observed children working through problems and only stepped in to give advice or support. They encouraged children to talk to one another throughout the day as a way for them to share stories and get used to each other as unique human beings.

   During activities at the block center, when Enrique wanted Luis to move, the teachers did not scold him or correct him, they simply let him problem-solve on his own. Eventually he moved his block building to another area so he could have more room. Rather than intervene on behalf of Enrique, Ms. Luz allowed him to figure out how to solve his problem, while taking into account Luis's need to sleep.

2. **Help children learn how to respond to everyone's unique needs.**
   Ms. Luz and Ms. Louisa took many opportunities to highlight each child's unique needs. Ms. Luz explained, "In our class, what's fair for one child might not be the same fair for the other child. They didn't say that's not fair Luis gets to sleep and I don't. They knew it was fair for him to sleep because I guess that they realized they all have different needs. He was more tired and they weren't tired" (Interview, May 8, 2017).

Recognizing and teaching children how to recognize each person's unique needs included everyone in the class. Another student, Diamond, used to have a hard time in class and would sometimes throw materials. After talking with her mother, they learned that Diamond really liked to help out. So Diamond began to take on the role of helping pass out papers and materials, even when the teachers had not asked for a volunteer. Students not only allowed Diamond to do this extra task, but they also began to go to her for help or assistance. Liliana asked for Diamond's help each day to open her milk carton, and Diamond patiently opened and showed Liliana how to do it for herself (which she eventually did).

Children's need for help was matter-of-fact rather than a source of shame. At lunch the teachers often reminded the children that they could open their own milk cartons, as Diamond helped Liliana to do. When Alycia joined the class halfway through the year, the teachers reminded the children to help her: "Who is the person that might need help?" To which the children responded, "Alycia." Rather than being a moment where Alycia was called out for a deficiency, the students viewed this as a reminder to help Alycia if she needed it because she was new to the class.

3. **See each day as a new day.**
   Ms. Luz and Ms. Louisa insisted that each day was a fresh start. They greeted each child warmly every morning and welcomed them at the door of the classroom. They did not stay upset from the day before if it had been a bad day. They told us that when teachers are really frustrated with a child for not listening or behaving poorly then they are not happy to see them in the morning. This affects the child and the teacher in negative ways, particularly when children experiencing trauma are hoping for safety, care, and opportunities but expecting harshness, frustration, or even anger. Offering children new starts every day was a key part of the teachers' approaches to welcoming and including children in the classroom. This expectation extended to the children, who were often told, "Today is a new day."

4. **Notice needs without labeling children.**
   Ms. Luz and Ms. Louisa saw and described children's behaviors, actions, and situations without attaching a label to them. In our research meetings, one day we realized we had been talking about Luis as "the child who is homeless." While we had thought we were being careful with our language in our study and in our analysis, we realized that we were giving a label to Luis that we had never heard used by Ms. Luz or Ms. Louisa. They said that they had spent a lot of time figuring out what Luis wanted and needed. They had spoken with his mother, sharing that he was sleepy in class. After talking with her, they realized the family was first living with friends and then in a motel. We never heard the teachers say anything negative about the parents or even offer pity for the child's circumstance.

5. **Offer parents positive views of their children.**
   Ms. Luz and Ms. Louisa worked hard to get to know the parents of the children in their classroom. Their communication always began with positive observations about the children, usually with stories about how the child had helped their classmates or learned something new. Toward the end of the school year, we showed the scene of Luis sleeping to his mother. She was impressed by Luis's classmates: "They were very careful when my son was asleep on the floor. Building around him, trying not to hit him. They're very smart." She talked about the two teachers' approach to working with her son, noting their patience:

   I would always wait for the phone to ring at home, wait for that phone call at home, Luis

did this, Luis did that, and they never, not once, called me. I would tell Ms. Luz, I know how Luis can be. [She would reply], "No he did good, other than him going to sleep he did good." You know, he bumped his head, or he bumped one of the other children, but he said he was sorry, he apologized (Focus Group, May 8, 2017).

Luis's mother commended the teachers' patience and positive outlook on her son. Rather than framing Luis as "a problem," they helped him, first by meeting his needs and second by supporting him to develop tools to reconcile with his classmates. Offering parents a positive view of their children emphasizes that the action, not the child, is at issue. In addition, the teachers gave children space to own their actions, rectify them, and move on with a fresh start.

Recognizing Strengths and Possibilities in the Classroom Community

Ms. Luz and Ms. Louisa used their tools of observation, problem-solving, and home communication to understand root causes of behaviors and seek out strengths-based approaches. The teachers focused on offering Luis the best experience in school they could, helping him to become a valuable member of the classroom community and working with the school to address systemic and resource-oriented needs. Both teachers carefully observed children and sought out additional information from caregivers to move forward with a plan of how to best support them.

The teachers modeled how to include Luis in the classroom community without stigma and gave children opportunities to practice the skill of caring without labeling. The children in Ms. Luz and Ms. Louisa's classroom learned how to be community members who supported Luis and recognized his needs. Supporting how children could act with and for each other, in other words being civic, afforded opportunities to learn how to live and learn together in everyday, embodied ways. Along with continued attention to connecting Luis's family with adequate resources, supports, and advocates, we hope that over time, Luis's life will stabilize so that he can fully engage with the curriculum and prioritize learning when at school. In the absence of such generosity, children tend to stop viewing school as a place that works for them, which moves them farther away from what might be their most direct pathway to a life of more security and stability.

Children today face innumerable obstacles to feel safe outside of our classrooms. As educators, we need to know about those obstacles and recognize their immense impact on young people's behaviors and feelings. Yet these obstacles do not define children. Teachers can use that knowledge to help themselves and even very young students learn to be a part of a community by noticing and responding to one another's unique needs without judgment. If we are able to show that level of compassion, kindness, and understanding, then we can trust that young children will also approach each other in meaningful ways.

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Interrupting Trauma with Hope, Kindness, Art, and Healing

Christine M. Her, Yvette Z. Hermann, and Emma K. Parker

ArtForce Iowa is a non-profit organization based in Des Moines, Iowa. Founded in 2012, ArtForce Iowa has a mission to transform youth in need through art. It is pioneering a non-pathologizing approach to working with children in need of services and it offers a critical humanizing perspective using art and music. In this article, seven youth stories provide windows into the troubling, but hopeful, effects of the young people's relationship with their own healing. The article aims to shed light on the promise of authentic kindness, the freedom of art, and the empowerment of youth leadership to support the social and emotional lives of children from marginalized communities.

ArtForce Iowa was conceived by a man who was convicted of attempted murder and terrorism for a drive-by shooting that happened in the summer of 1999 in Des Moines, Iowa. While in prison, this man hand-wrote three manuscripts—a memoir and two novels—inspired and informed by the narrative styles of Philip Roth and Saul Bellows. After his release, he sought the help of an editor for his third manuscript, a novel.

In the writing lab at Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC), he met Yvette Hermann, an adjunct instructor of writing who would later become the ArtForce Iowa Creative Pathways Program Director. At their first meeting, he said, "I wish I could make sure I'm the last Black Kid to discover he's an artist in prison."

Together, he and Yvette set a goal to review 25 manuscript pages per session. They met in person. They debated adjectives and scarcely made small talk—there was too much to do. After they had examined 225 pages, he asked, "Remember when you told me what a teaching artist is? Can you help me with something?" This middle-aged man looked back and saw his younger self: a Black boy who was in and out of juvenile detention, profiled as dangerous, forced into the school-to-prison pipeline, and then served hard time. He realized that if he had had art, if he had had a caring mentor who could advocate for him, his life would have been different. "Could this dream, this place, be reality?"

The Beginnings of ArtForce Iowa

It was then that ArtForce Iowa was born. The 501c3 non-profit organization was first named The Film School, then changed to Iowa Arts-in-Education DBA ArtForce Iowa.
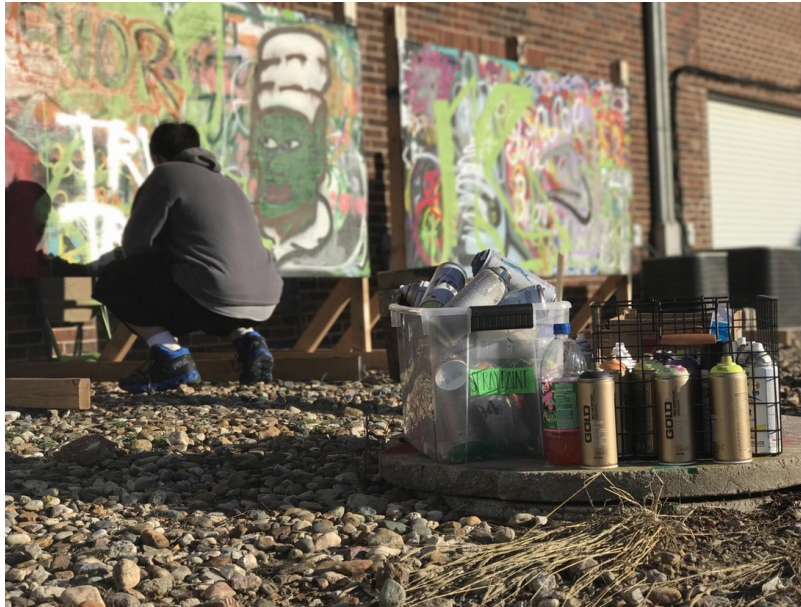

Figure 1. Youth artist tagging in Graffiti Alley at ArtForce Iowa

Art workshops began in 2013, with young people referred through Polk County Department of Juvenile Justice. Youth leadership shaped the program. When young people requested a specific arts discipline, ArtForce Iowa staff and volunteers found professional practicing artists to mentor them. Among the first art forms explored were audio production, rap, street art/graffiti, voice lessons, acting, and video production. Since day one, ArtForce Iowa has been driven by the needs and creative ideas of youth artists who live in high-poverty, high-crime neighborhoods.

Youth artists at ArtForce Iowa have pointed out that the veil of "Iowa Nice" (a label often used to describe the friendliness of people from Iowa) does not extend to the people of color in our state. To the youth artists, people with power in Des Moines appear united in their denial of systemic problems that perpetuate inequality: intergenerational poverty, institutional betrayal, income disparity, implicit bias (specifically in education, government, and social services) and the legacy of White supremacy. According to *The Atlantic*, "[Des Moines is] a city with an [economically] stagnant Black community that accounts for most of the area's poverty" (Vasilogambros, 2014). Iowa disproportionately incarcerates Black and Brown people (Fineran, 2018). And Iowa is one of just three states that permanently ban all people with a felony conviction from voting (Gruber-Miller & Rodriguez, 2019).

In 2013, ArtForce Iowa established "Creative Pathways" as the name for the supportive arts community program that serves court-involved youth ages 13 to 19. Over the next five years, Creative Pathways' community of youth artists grew to include court-involved youth aged 12 to 13, youth with five or more behavior referrals in school, and youth involved with the foster care system. ArtForce Iowa recognized that these youth had one thing in common: high levels of adverse childhood experiences and significant trauma. Deficits in connection, attunement, trust, autonomy, and love in their early development taught these highly

functional young people an array of adaptive survival styles that helped them cope with everyday life, and it often took months to build trust (Heller & LaPierre, 2012, p. 5).

Think about it: first these youth suffer from neglect, abuse, self-harm, exposure to crime, violence, and poverty in their histories and environments. Then they are marginalized and demonized by the education and judicial systems as well as the community at large. Some ArtForce Iowa youth artists refer to themselves as "broken." They have been taught to believe it's the truth.

In 2016, ArtForce Iowa recognized another community need too big to ignore: youth who are refugees, immigrants, or first-generation American-born who are also victims of crime. In the Des Moines public school system, 61.9 percent of students are non-White (Des Moines Public Schools, 2019), with precious few role models of color among faculty and administration. In response to this need, ArtForce Iowa launched a new program based upon the Creative Pathways program model. This program is called DSM Heroes (DSM is the airport code for Des Moines, Iowa).

ArtForce Iowa Today

Workshops at ArtForce Iowa do not look like classrooms. Workshops look like a group of friends creating art and music together, or a family sharing a meal together (Figure 2). Workshops take place Monday to Thursday from 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM, but youth artists know they can reach out any time, for a ride to a workshop or just to connect. Workshops begin with a free hot meal and an ArtForce family check-in ritual called "highs and lows" in which everyone reflects on positives and negatives in their lives. This helps our community of staff, mentors, and youth artists create and maintain a nonjudgmental environment where everyone feels safe to express what's on their mind. All workshops are planned with the 25-year evidence base of Self-Determination Theory. This theory maintains that autonomy, competence, and relatedness can foster intrinsic motivation, a characteristic crucial to building resilience in struggling and disempowered young people (Self-Determination Theory, n.d.).

Figure 2. Youth artists enjoy a meal prepared by Chef of the Year, Aaron Holt, at ArtForce Iowa

Both Creative Pathways and DSM Heroes workshops put the wants and needs of the youth artist at the forefront. Artist mentors at ArtForce Iowa ask youth artists, "What would you like to make today?" and lend a helping hand when youth ask for it. Artist mentors are practicing artists trained to use art as a catalyst for communication and connection, to encourage self-expression, self-esteem, hope, and future success. The limitless creative possibilities of art allow young people to express their feelings without having to talk (Van der Kolk, 2014, pp. 244-245).

Adults who work with children in schools and other contexts may have peculiar expectations, perhaps based upon their own schooling. They expect young people to arrive at school nourished and well-rested. They expect young people to be happy to submit to the demands of the school day: sitting where they are assigned, doing what they are told, and submitting to authority no matter what. We are not here to say why this is unreasonable. We are here to say these expectations are hurting our children, who should find joy in learning. The youth ArtForce Iowa serves are sometimes victims of grave injustices, or scared, or hungry. They may not have the words to express their needs or fears. Instead of being identified as in need of loving support, they may be labeled as disruptive (or worse). The secret curriculum they are learning is, "You are not good enough and we don't want you here." This lesson can follow someone for a lifetime.

At ArtForce Iowa, it is our mission to transform youth in need through art. Young people who engage with ArtForce Iowa report increased self-esteem and quality of life. They return over and over because they feel safe from judgment, away from adults who are "trying to get them in trouble." We see reduced recidivism. High engagement rates. High graduation rates. Connections with positive adults appear to make the difference for disconnected young people.

Our Collective Stories: #KNOWJUSTICE

Every year in May, ArtForce Iowa youth artists have the opportunity to share their work with the community in a multimedia art exhibit: #KNOWJUSTICE. We bond together and with community supporters to explore difficult topics and create meaningful art together. Thematic exploration begins early in the year in partnership with Drake University Law School, sponsored by the Slay Fund. Brent Pattison, Director of the Middleton Center for Children's Rights at Drake University Law School, says,

> My clients often feel unwelcome at school, under scrutiny in Juvenile Court, and sometimes even disconnected from their families. When they go to ArtForce Iowa, they are welcomed, respected, and cared about… they instantly find a safe and supportive community where they can learn new ways to express who they are through art.

Pattison adds that the #KNOWJUSTICE partnership is valuable for his students because they learn to build rapport with young people, in addition to providing legal representation. Law school students, artist mentors, and youth artists learn about social justice issues from each other in presentation, informal conversation, and while art-making in the months leading up to the exhibit. Youth artists conceive and create art in collaboration or solo: songs, poems, paintings, textile art, sculptures, installations, documentaries. Youth artists have chosen to use court documents, shackles, and broken glass in their art, a sign of healing being actively chosen and pursued.

All of the art pictured in this article was initiated in search of the answer to the question: "What is justice?" and featured in a #KNOWJUSTICE exhibit. We invite you to wonder: What is justice to you? What would your art look like based on your life experiences?

ArtForce Iowa will launch the sixth annual #KNOWJUSTICE: Know Change art exhibit on May 7, 2020 in Des Moines, IA. ArtForce Iowa and #KNOWJUSTICE aim to end the cycle of not being heard, of being pre-judged based upon your past or physical appearance, of living out the life that poverty prescribes. The success of #KNOWJUSTICE is not in fundraising or even community-consciousness-raising (yet). The success is in the prolonged creative effort of young people who have been taught not to try. The success is in their conversations and their self-perception as independent beings with influential thoughts and feelings about important issues. Youth artists have a lot to tell us about justice, personal power, and the world. In the following section, we offer profiles of several ArtForce Iowa youth artists. Their stories and their artworks speak for themselves.

Case Studies/Stories

Youth artist, songwriter, rapper: TWW

TWW was born in South Sudan and moved with his parents to Iowa when he was 1 year old. He has lived in Des Moines all of his life. ArtForce Iowa met T when he was referred to the Creative Pathways program by his Juvenile Court Officer (JCO, the juvenile equivalent of a probation officer). The first day we picked him up at his high school for workshop, he was bleeding from cuts near his eye and mouth. Someone had jumped him. He was casual about it: "Don't worry… it happens all the time… it's chill." T shared that he often crashed at friends' houses rather than sleeping at home.

T was not a big talker, but his writing talent emerged during a workshop and caused excitement among the ArtForce family. The voice, the rhythm, the rhyme, the truthful and revealing lines of poetry were already music. He began to smile and laugh more often and talked about studying music theory in college. His first instrumental composition begins and ends with a metronome, weaving boredom with fantasy. Listen to: **"Bleh"**

Figure 3. T practicing guitar.

T worked in the recording studio on spoken word poetry and rap while studying the ukulele and bass guitar with an ArtForce Iowa mentor. His lyrics referenced a search for stability amid street violence, social apathy,

and immersion in drug culture. He released a track for exhibit at #KNOWJUSTICE: *Finding Home* (Day & D, 2017) and moderated a panel of police officers, lawyers, and juvenile court officers at #KNOWJUSTICE: *Manifesto*. Listen to his track: **"To the Sky."** Research during his songwriting process inspired him to take on a modern rap opera, and he began to shape a mixtape that told the story of Bobby, an "everyboy" left to his own devices to survive.

We were with T to celebrate his case closing in juvenile court. Then, something happened. ArtForce Iowa mentors reached out to him and tried to ensure he knew ArtForce would always be a safe place for him. No answer. Months later, T informed us he had been kicked out of his house by his mother on his 18th birthday. He could no longer rely on his best friend. He had stopped going to school. T said that he needed access to health care and a place to stay. He opened up to us about his depression. T's pain was palpable and evident in his face, his voice, his gait. We listened to him, heard him, offered support, and gently suggested he seek mental health services. T has good reason to be skeptical of support that is not his own idea, and he turned down clinical help. He did accept a ride to a local shelter, and we didn't hear from him for a few months.

TWW is on his own now. He graduated from high school with an equivalency diploma in December 2018. He works at a sandwich shop, goes to community college, and lives in an apartment. He still has no contact with his parents. His visits to ArtForce Iowa are unpredictable and infrequent, but always focused on his music. Listen to: **"Bobby's Story."**

Youth artist, "lady boss," sculptor, illustrator: D

D was 6 years old when she came to America, a Karen (Kuh-REN) refugee born in a refugee camp in Thailand. In Des Moines, her family's apartment complex hallways smelled like food garbage and the parking lot is unpaved, littered, and directly across the street from the United Way of Central Iowa and a community college campus. She shares a bedroom with five other people. D walks five blocks to catch a public bus every day, even in below freezing weather. She lives on one of the busiest corridors in the metro nearly two miles from school. The school district's policy states she lives close enough to walk.

She is a quick learner who will take any opportunity to avoid the spotlight. D lacked confidence when she came to us. In workshops, she would often stop creating things and claim that it was "too hard." Her posture was slouched forward and her gaze was usually downcast. We quickly learned that she views things in an abstract way. With our encouragement, she has created some beautiful and intricate pieces, working in sculpture, colored pencil, origami, graphite, watercolor, and embroidery, to name a few. D has blossomed into a hilariously charming, candid individual: "Miss, are you going to drive into that pothole again today?" With a big smile and giddy laugh: "Those glasses look good on you, but you should get contacts."

Seeing that she was uncomfortable with her body and often called herself "ugly" or "fat," a female artist mentor told D, "You're not fat." That weekend, the same artist mentor helped her find a bra that fit her. We saw a change in her posture and confidence almost immediately, and the "lady boss" began to emerge.

During the spring of 2017, with the help of artist-in-residence and filmmaker Kristian Day, D wrote and directed a short film about domestic abuse that presents ArtForce Iowa as a safe place for anyone experiencing current or past trauma. Watch D's video: **"Finding Home."** She collaborated with Kristian on the direction of the video, and included other youth artists.

D's first sculpture, "Decemberland," is a tabletop art installation of found materials (shells, twigs, rocks, leaves, and recycled food packaging) representing a truly multicultural neighborhood block with homes

that resemble caves, huts, and high-rises. ArtForce Iowa staff noticed her interest in architecture and perspective drawing, and introduced her to an architect who helped reinforce her passion. D created two three-dimensional models of her apartment complex (Figures 4 and 5). The "Present" shows littered trash, dirt patches, broken concrete, a ruined children's playset, parking lots without parking lines, large potholes, and wrecked dumpsters. The second scale model, the "Future," has apple trees, a community garden, benches, a swing set, lined parking lots, and working dumpsters.

D is now a project manager in her own right, enlisting the help of artist mentors in order to create her more labor-intensive pieces.

Figure 4. Detail of "Present," *Present & Future.* Artist Statement: "Where I live looks trashy and I want to make it better."
Sculpture by D in Des Moines, IA. April 2018

Figure 5. Detail of "Future," *Present & Future.* Sculpture by D in Des Moines, IA. April 2018

The partnership of youth artist, composer, rapper, audio producer: L and youth artist, actor, singer, filmmaker: M

L and M are the first youth artists in separate programs (Creative Pathways and DSM Heroes) to collaborate together at ArtForce Iowa. When L, from the south side of Des Moines, and M, living on the north side, met at ArtForce Iowa in the summer of 2018, they wanted nothing to do with one another. They shared a dislike for the ArtForce tradition of "highs and lows" in group workshop, because neither was comfortable expressing themselves in English. M would watch L say hello to the group and bolt upstairs to the recording studio, where he would emit thumping electronic bass beats for 90 minutes. M was fascinated but intimidated by the recording studio, and one day he asked L if he could watch him make music. Take a journey through their process:

> **HIT_1.** First solo composition by L, January 2017.
>
> **MB BEAT 2 draft.** First collaborative composition by L and M, April 2018.
>
> **Tk.** First solo performance by M, mastered by L, March 2019.
>
> **MB.** Collaborative composition by L and M, April 2019.

L, a youth artist with a history of arrests for fighting and gun possession, and M, a youth artist who escaped genocide in his home country, learned they spoke the common language of music. ArtForce Iowa staff learned a lesson from their collaboration: the language of art can bridge differences in background or history and render those differences inconsequential.

Youth artist, philosopher, visual artist, creative writer: RM

RM joined ArtForce Iowa in the fall of 2018. He is a 17-year-old Karen refugee who came to America from a refugee camp in Thailand when he was 5 and a half years old. RM is unapologetically himself. In no time, he found his niche as a creative writer and visual artist. RM consistently explores new artistic forms such as guitar, singing, acting, and playwriting. His creating process allows him to share his philosophies: "It is simple to be kind. But so hard, too." He has been an ArtForce Iowa ambassador, making sure every new youth artist and artist mentor feels welcomed and heard.

The artwork he produced for #KNOWJUSTICE: *Origins* captures who RM is as a young adult navigating his way through his life. "The Maze of Life" (Figures 6 and 7) presents the viewer with specific hardships and celebrations that one might experience from birth to death.

Figure 6. The Maze of Life. Artist Statement: "The Maze of Life is more than a maze game. The making of this maze took time and patience just like growing in this life. As we build to our goal, sometimes we need others' help to reach our goal. This maze represents the choices we make in life. You can choose your own path, but some can be difficult." Sculpture by RM in Des Moines, IA. May 2019

Figure 7. Troubles can make us feel down. Detail of sculpture by RM in Des Moines, IA. May 2019

One day during ArtForce Iowa's daily ritual of "highs and lows" RM lowered his head and said quietly, "Sometimes I think of things that are not so great." When he raised his eyes, he saw acceptance from the community. He realized no one had judged him and no one needed more information. He felt safe. Now he often shares that he struggles with his brain. This internal struggle is evident in "Hero" (Figure 8). RM's gritty use of charcoal makes the viewer question what the young artist is feeling. The two pieces capture that he is philosophical and hopeful, while acknowledging that life is a mighty struggle.

Figure 8. Hero. Charcoal and pastel on paper by RM in Des Moines, IA. May 2019

Youth artist, songwriter, singer, painter: XZ

XZ grew up in the foster care system. Her foster parents adopted, abused, and neglected her and another adopted child. She was locked in a basement every day after school and all weekend. She was often fed crushed granola bars or expired soup. X started getting in trouble in school when she tried to tell other adults about her situation at home. Finally, when she was 13, she got the attention of a teacher. She was removed from the adoptive parents' home and placed in a youth shelter, where she was connected with ArtForce Iowa staff.

At ArtForce Iowa, XZ was initially a quiet presence, painting or writing fiction with headphones on. She began to play piano with an artist mentor's encouragement, setting her words to music. She was inspired to write about romantic relationships, the good and the bad parts. She has trusted ArtForce Iowa mentors to join her for her staffing meetings and at therapy appointments. She went through periods of calm, focused on painting or writing. She met a therapist who recognized her traumatic history and knew she would not feel safe until she lived in a home with caring adults. This therapist became her foster mom. Both XZ and her new foster family leaned on ArtForce Iowa when they needed support after misunderstandings or panic attacks.

Figure 9. Take Me Home. Paint on canvas by XZ in Des Moines, IA. May 2016

Sometimes XZ attended ArtForce workshops three times a week, sometimes not at all. Her favorite workshops were the ones where she could decide between painting, singing, or songwriting, depending on the kind of day she had had so far. Her first painting (Figure 9) showed incredible promise and intuition, in both its theme and its process. XZ told her mentor, "I didn't use a brush because I just wanted it to be me and paint."

Figure 10. Blue Girl. Paint on canvas by XZ in Des Moines, IA. May 2017

Working alongside other youth artists, her painting style evolved, and she created a series of larger-than-life portraits of women. The paintings sold so quickly we only have a photograph of *Blue Girl* (Figure 10).

XZ loved music just as much as painting, but she struggled with piano because of a wrist injury that hadn't healed properly. She learned to play chords slowly, with lots of air between each. Her playing technique informed her songwriting. Her first song, still a demo version, is haunting and emotional. Listen to "Belladonna," written and performed by XZ in 2017.

From the day that XZ left her abusive home, she began healing. Today, she has graduated from high school, lives with her boyfriend in an apartment downtown, works part-time, and manages her lawsuit against the system and the people who caused her so much harm.

ArtForce Iowa and Trauma

ArtForce Iowa aims to end the cycle of unrecognized trauma. We wish for a world in which everyone and every institution seeks to lift up struggling people with nurturing support. ArtForce Iowa and other safe creative spaces for youth offer art opportunities and creative freedom, but we still have to send these youth back into a White supremacist culture every day. Here are some of the experiences our youth have shared with us:

- EM, a 16-year-old refugee from Burma was not issued a locker at her high school. The school support staff said, "Everyone gets a locker. She just didn't know she had one because she doesn't speak English." EM had learned conversational English at the age of 9 as a child worker in Malaysia, where she was the sole provider for her family of five. She learned how to read and write in English when she came to America at the age of 14.

- VF, a 12-year-old told by his teacher, "You're just another bad Black boy."

- KG, a 15-year-old girl, spent two hours each way on the school bus because she lived at a shelter and had to be the first one picked up and the last one dropped off.

- Middle schoolers having a private conversation at school are told to speak English.

- ArtForce Iowa girls feel less safe on the streets of Des Moines in the wake of the 2016 presidential election because of their religion and ethnicity.

- H, a 15-year-old girl, reports cyber sexual harassment from the safety of ArtForce Iowa. The police tell her there's nothing they can do, then visit her home address unannounced (and without a translator) while she is at school the next day. Her mother panics because of the confusion.

Well-meaning adults with privilege often have no idea that they are perpetuating oppression with their actions and word choices. To better understand the negative impacts caused by repeated micro-aggressions and psychological trauma, we must recognize that poverty, racism, genocide, and systemic oppression (such as redlining and mass incarceration) are traumatic. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) work must be expanded to include the above and more factors. We know through Iowa ACEs 360 research (Original ACE Study, n.d.) that connection with positive adults can reduce or mitigate the negative health effects of multiple ACEs. We also need to do the work to reduce the unchecked growth in occurrence of these adverse experiences and the harmful labels that result.

For example, "trauma-informed care" principles have been adopted by some progressive schools and youth-centered environments to prevent re-traumatization. We applaud their efforts to support struggling students, but the term "trauma-informed" pathologizes and disempowers. "Healing-centered engagement"

is the term offered by Shawn Ginwright (2018), author of *Hope and Healing in Urban Education: How Activists are Reclaiming Matters of the Heart*.

When we reflect on our practices at ArtForce Iowa, we look not through the lens of intention, but through impact. Did we help? Can we help? How can we support without interfering or imposing our values? How can we provide a safe space that leads to self-healing? How can we move forward without falling into the role of "savior?" How can we be mindful of any and all pathologizing and blaming behavior and language biases? How can we empower our youth artists to "play the game" well enough to thrive without surrendering their values? At ArtForce Iowa, we know we are not healers and we don't claim to be. We try our best to create a safe culture centered around self-healing. We strive to give youth artists space to reclaim their own power.

Towards Healing

ArtForce Iowa results so far include: reduced recidivism; high engagement rates; high graduation rates; self-reports of increased self-esteem and quality of life; and high marks in an external program evaluation that assesses safety, support, interaction, engagement, youth-centeredness, and access. Connections matter. Healing is often described as a personal journey, but we find that building authentic resilience requires the support of a life-affirming community as well as the removal of immediate threats to safety and well-being.

We can't (and shouldn't) try to erase or even heal traumatic wounds. Licensed therapists and counselors who understand ACEs are actively moving from using the language, "What's wrong?" to "What's happened to you?" but we are not counselors or therapists. We are careful to avoid asking for trauma disclosures, instead leading with "What kind of artist are you?"

But what do we do when a child spontaneously shares something troubling? Are they looking for help or an empathetic ear? When do we escalate to families or authorities? What are the consequences of sharing this information? We don't have all the answers, so we don't work in isolation. We work as a family team and we know what motivates us: interrupting trauma with hope, kindness, art, and opportunity.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to our amazing artists and supporters. Without you, ArtForce Iowa cannot accomplish our mission to transform youth in need through art.

Most importantly, thank you to every youth artist and their caregivers for entrusting us with their safety. It is a privilege to know you and to see you. We love you forever.

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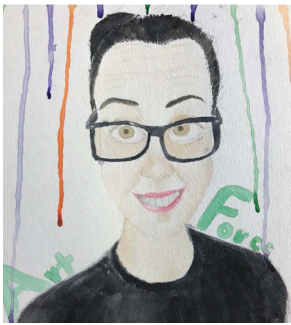
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Emma Parker is the DSM Heroes Program Director at ArtForce Iowa. Emma is a visual artist with a talent for envisioning collaborative projects. She graduated from Iowa State University with a BFA in Studio Art.

Staff portraits: Watercolor on paper by youth artist SP.