

LA 5.2: Understanding Issues Surrounding Student Trauma on My Teaching

Dealing with the Impact of Trauma for Students and Teachers



Learning Outcome

Teachers create a learning environment that is sensitive to and supportive of ELs' cultural identities, language and literacy development, and content area knowledge and a safe place for students to be.

Assessment: 25 pts.

TA: 45 Minutes

Pedagogical Intent

Teachers can create a classroom welcoming to all students, even students living in trauma, as they consider things they themselves can do in their classroom to help these students feel comfortable and safe.

Student Position

Students have learned about race and discovered their own beliefs in their lives to date. They have learned about white privilege and fragility and are now ready to consider the students in their classrooms who are living in trauma.

Instructions

1. You will participate in watching and discussing a [power point](#) entitled Trauma Informed Care.
2. Fill in the answers to the questions as class members discuss the points on the power point.
3. Use the notes sheet that is found by clicking and downloading the following link: [Notes Sheet: Trauma Informed Care](#).
4. Participate in a discussion led by the facilitator regarding the information you just received and examples of students in trauma you have worked with.
5. Now read the article found below: 'Are You At Risk for Secondary Traumatic Stress'. As you read think about the trauma you face and how you can help yourself in such situations.
6. Discuss ideas from this article and determine if some of these ideas may be helpful for you to use with your students as well as yourself.
7. The facilitator will ask you each to take another turn in the game "Life on the Edge".

Are You At Risk For Secondary Traumatic Stress?

EDUTOPIA TEACHER WELLNESS

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Are You at Risk for Secondary Traumatic Stress?

Teaching and caring for others—especially kids in trauma—can be difficult. Here are six strategies to help you take care of yourself.

Caring is a finite resource. I learned that from an Ojibwa second grader.

At the beginning of the school year, David (not his real name) would jerk his neck back to flick the bangs out of his light brown eyes and write, "I love Mario. I love Mario. I love Mario" to the bottom of the page, and then grin and ask, "What do you think, Mr. Todd?" Some days, the page would be filled with, "I love soccer."

In early October, David stopped playing soccer at recess. When I asked him why, he walked away. Then he stopped writing. Each week, he became more of a ghost, refusing to communicate with me. One day after school, David broke the lock on my desk and stole my stockpile of pens. I caught him selling them, 10 for a quarter. The boy's guardians never returned my urgent messages. Meanwhile, a dozen other students in my class were in need.

The day before Thanksgiving break, the administrative assistant noticed David cupping his left ear in the cafeteria. I stopped breathing for a minute, suddenly awake to the fact that my student had been covering his ear all week without me registering that he might be in pain. Nor had I noticed that David's previously white T-shirt was the color of oatmeal and smelled like neglect.

When the administrator moved David's hand away, we saw that his ear canal had volcanoed into a mound of ooze and black crust. I was horrified by the wound and by my callousness, and ashamed to stand beside a colleague's full heart. Kneeling to hug the boy, she looked up at me and mouthed, "Oh my god!"

Fortunately, David flourished with a new guardian and counseling. And while there is no defending criminal disregard for a boy in my care, I now realize that my emotions had narrowed to Ryan Gosling levels after working with children whose temper swings overwhelmed my meager skills.

Symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress

Any professional who listens to children recount traumatic experiences is at risk of secondary traumatic stress, the emotional weight that some teachers carry after exposure to children who suffer. According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, secondary traumatic stress degrades our professional effectiveness and overall quality of life. According to Sheri Brown Sizemore, author of *To Love to Teach Again: 10 Secrets to Rekindling Passion to Keep You in the Classroom*, symptoms include anger, cynicism, anxiousness, avoidance, chronic exhaustion, disconnection, fear, guilt, hopelessness, hypervigilance, inability to listen, loss of creativity, poor boundaries, poor self-care, and sleeplessness.

If you recognize these symptoms, complete the Professional Quality of Life Scale, which measures compassion fatigue. Also be aware that there are strategies that can help, like these:

1. Connect with quality friends: Every Thursday morning at 5:30, I show up in a music teacher's driveway for a 50-minute "walk & talk." Eddie and I always discuss teaching problems. Besides being a good listener, my friend reminds me that my feelings matter, and that I'm enough. Regardless of my difficulties, I end the walk feeling emotionally recharged.
2. Write it out: Teaching requires mental and emotional dexterity. When one is weakened, the other is compromised. But writing can help. According to one study, expressive writing (describing feelings) "'offloads' worries from working memory, therefore relieving the distracting effects of worry on cognition." Set a timer for eight minutes and let it all out on paper.
3. Use drive time for self-talk: If I'm feeling out of sorts while driving to work, I talk about my concerns aloud and in the third person. For example: "Todd is feeling raw and fragile because of the crying jag that X had yesterday. He'll be OK today if he doesn't get overpowered by X's feelings." This emotional distancing, according to research on third-person self-talk, boosts rationality and improves people's "ability to control their thoughts, feelings, and behavior under stress." After that, I put Aloe Blacc's "The Man" on full blast and float into my classroom.
4. Avoid toxic colleagues: Research shows that toxic co-workers 1) are selfish, 2) display overconfidence, and 3) are found to declare "emphatically that the rules should always be followed no matter what." If a toxic co-worker hangs out in the break room, eat elsewhere with colleagues who smile with their eyes.
5. Do something tangible: To avoid marinating in diminished compassion, recharge by completing a small task—something specific and concrete. Run on an elliptical machine for 30 minutes or send a card to a friend. Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer, authors of *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work*, describe how small victories promote a more positive inner life, which "also leads people to do better work."
6. Don't suppress painful feelings: When I'm worried about a student, I remember that I don't have to be perfect and that there are weeks left to make a difference. "Mastering the ability to reframe problems is an important tool for increasing your imagination because it unlocks a vast array of solutions." A good psychotherapist can help you reframe issues, boost your emotional resilience, and enhance your classroom effectiveness.

Finally, don't forget the most important thing. "It's easy to say, 'It's not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem,'" said Fred Rogers. "Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes." Don't forget who you are.





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