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Understanding Trauma

Founding Editors: Erika Engelbrecht-Aldworth & Melissa Gardner

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Volume I: Understanding Trauma

Erika Engelbrecht-Aldworth and Melissa Gardner

FOUNDING EDITORS

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AI Disclosure Statement

In the development of Teachers Matter: Volume I, we employed various artificial intelligence (AI) technologies as vital research tools to enhance the quality and accuracy of the content presented. The following outlines the specific applications of AI in this process:

1. Paraphrasing Research Articles: AI was utilised to paraphrase selected research articles, allowing for the integration of essential ideas and insights while ensuring the content was articulated in a distinct voice. This approach aimed to maintain the integrity of the original research while avoiding verbatim duplication.

2. Revising and Improving Grammar: AI tools played a significant role in the revision process, focusing on enhancing grammar, sentence structure, and overall clarity. The objective was to produce a manuscript that meets high standards of readability and fluency, contributing to a better understanding of the material.

3. Plagiarism Checks: To uphold academic and ethical standards, AI-based plagiarism detection tools were meticulously utilised. These tools scanned the manuscript for potential instances of plagiarism, affirming that all content was original and that due credit was given to the sources of inspiration.

Through the careful integration of AI technologies, we aimed to ensure scholarly rigour, clarity, and originality throughout the preparation of this ebook. It is important to note that while AI contributed to various processes, the final editorial choices and content assessments were rigorously made by the authors and the editorial team, emphasising the necessity of human judgement and contextual insights in academic discourse.

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CONVERSATION ①

THE JOURNEY OF SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION: A TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

Erika Engelbrecht-Aldworth and Melissa Gardner

Introduction

We have witnessed classrooms evolve from the dark days of apartheid to today's digital landscape. The journey has been anything but smooth. It brims with lessons of resilience, innovation, and an unwavering commitment to equity. As we share this overview, we draw from extensive research and our personal experiences on the front lines of education. Join us in exploring current viewpoints and how we can use this to propel forward, as we set the stage for the "Teachers Matter" series.

The Legacy We Cannot Ignore

To conceptualise the state of education in South Africa, it is vital to understand the past that has shaped us. From the colonial era and its development into the apartheid regime, South Africa's educational system has been long rooted in inequities that crafted deep socio-economic divides that still carry enormous consequence for today's learners. The imposition of Western education and apartheid policies like the Bantu Education Act of 1953, institutionalised racial segregation, ensuring that black learners received substandard education. This perpetuated cycles of poverty and inequality

which continues to victimse our societiy's landscape to the present day (Mouton et,al., 2013).

The end of apartheid in 1994 was a significant milestone for South Africa, symbolising not just political and social liberation, but also the promise of an equitable and inclusive educational system. However, transforming the deeply entrenched, segregated education system into one that genuinely promoted equality has been fraught with challenges and complexities. Authors like Badat and Sayed (2014) and Mpu and Adu (2021) have extensively discussed the persistent efforts needed to make social justice in education a reality. They argue that, despite the initial high hopes, achieving truly inclusive education remains an ongoing endeavor. This includes addressing disparities in resource allocation, teacher training, curriculum development, and student support services.

South Africa is known for its impressive policy documents that aim to address these issues. The Constitution (1996) enshrines the principles of equality and non-discrimination. White Paper 6 (2002) outlines a comprehensive strategy for inclusive education, aiming to provide support to all learners, irrespective of their disabilities or learning challenges. The SIAS (Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support, 2012) document further details procedures to identify and support learners with barriers to learning including environmental barriers. However, while these policies are well-crafted and embody the spirit of inclusion and equality, their implementation often lags. This gap between policy and practice is due to various factors, including inadequate funding, insufficient teacher training, lack of resources, and systemic inefficiencies. As a result, the promise of an inclusive educational landscape remains unfulfilled for many learners and teachers in South Africa. Fast-forward to the 21st century, and South Africa's education system, compounded with the past, is grappling with a host of new challenges.

The 21st Century and its Curveballs

One of the biggest challenges faced by South African education in recent years was arguably the COVID-19 pandemic. The full depth of its consequences is yet to be fully understood. Interestingly, Maree (2022) argues that South African schools managed to turn adversity into opportunity, showcasing innovations in remote learning and

demonstrating stellar community resilience. Furthermore, Landa, Zhou, and Marongwe (2021) highlight essential lessons learned about education during emergencies, emphasising the need for flexible and adaptive educational systems.

In addition to coping with the pandemic, the South African curriculum has undergone significant changes to reflect broader societal evolution. For instance, Bertram (2020) explores how the history curriculum has been reshaped to provide a more inclusive and critical view of the nation's past, challenging old narratives of oppression. These developments illustrate the ongoing efforts to adapt education to better serve all members of society, even in the face of unprecedented challenges.

The COVID-19 Impact: Shifts and Setbacks

The COVID-19 pandemic has undeniably reshaped the educational landscape, presenting new challenges for inclusive education initiatives as schools rapidly adapted to remote and hybrid learning models. Mpu and Adu (2021) explain that the pandemic exacerbated existing disparities, making equitable access to educational resources even more critical, which contrasts with Maree (2022), who observed schools turning adversity into opportunity through innovations in remote learning.

Digital transformation emerged as both a saviour and a challenge during this period. While it facilitated learning continuity, it also heightened class-based privileges and exposed the severity of the digital divide, particularly affecting rural and underprivileged areas (Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020). Lubinga et al. (2023) highlight that schools struggled to bridge this digital divide, impacting educational outcomes and deepening inequalities. Additionally, violence within schools intensified during the pandemic, complicating efforts to maintain safe learning environments. Milligan et al. (2024) report an increase in incidents of violence, challenging the well-being and safety of both learners and teachers. These issues are compounded by socioeconomic inequalities, underscoring the persistent challenges in achieving equitable educational outcomes (Graven, 2014).

It would be naïve to overlook the profound impact COVID-19 has had on education. Our current narratives may not yet fully conceptualise the shifts initiated by the global pandemic, which could explain the insufficient response from departments of education on both large and small scales. T

he recovery efforts have often been too little, too late, with an excessive focus on content coverage that neglects the emotional trauma imparted by COVID-19.

Framing the Rest: Contributing Factors

The educational landscape in South Africa is shaped by a multitude of factors, including basic infrastructure, socioeconomic conditions, political influences, and the crucial aspect of teacher training.

Quality infrastructure directly impacts educational outcomes, with poorly maintained buildings, inadequate sanitation facilities, and overcrowded classrooms creating environments that are not conducive to learning (Milligan et al., 2024; de Wet, 2024). Addressing these issues requires targeted investment, equitable resource distribution, and policies prioritising educational equity (Bertram, 2020; Maarman & Lamont-Mb).

Socioeconomic factors furthermore influence education in South Africa. Poverty, unemployment, and inequality create significant barriers, shaping educational opportunities and outcomes, particularly for learners from marginalised communities. Research by Maree (2022) and Paton-Ash and Wilmot (2015) highlights how poverty directly affects access to educational resources, perpetuating a cycle where disadvantaged learners struggle academically compared to their more privileged peers (Entwisle, 2018; Taylor & von Fintel, 2016).

Unemployment further exacerbates these challenges, as economically strained families prioritise immediate needs over education, impacting school attendance and academic support (Das-Munshi et al., 2016; Pillay, 2021). The legacy of apartheid ensures that the distribution of quality education remains uneven (Ngobeni et al., 2023).

Violence within schools is another factor to be considered, this is including teacher-on-learner violence and gender-based violence, which undermines the safety and well-being of both learners and teachers (Milligan et al., 2024; Dlungwane & Hamlall, 2024). The root causes of this violence are multifaceted, often tied to socio-economic disparities and systemic failures (Badat & Sayed, 2014). Addressing this violence requires comprehensive strategies, including policy reforms, teacher training, and community involvement. Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) emphasise the importance of

preventative measures such as conflict resolution training and positive discipline practices to create a supportive learning environment.

Effective policy and governance are crucial for navigating the complexities of South Africa's educational landscape. Post-apartheid reforms aimed at achieving social justice and educational equity have been hampered by bureaucratic inefficiencies and resource constraints (Maree, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed these vulnerabilities, underscoring the need for more responsive and adaptable governance structures (Landa et al., 2021). Inclusive education policies remain a primary goal, yet their execution faces significant hurdles, particularly in resource-scarce settings (Mpu & Adu, 2021). Effective governance structures are imperative to translate policies into tangible improvements in educational outcomes (Hendricks & Mutongoza, 2024). Community involvement and the decentralisation of decision-making processes are essential for effective educational governance. By fostering ownership and accountability, stakeholders can collaboratively work toward creating a more equitable educational system (Bertram, 2020).

Amidst these challenges, strides have been made in curriculum reform and innovative pedagogical approaches. The advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has necessitated reforms to equip learners with digital literacy and computational thinking skills (Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020). Bertram (2020) further notes that the transformation of the school curriculum aims to foster skills essential for this centuary, such as critical thinking and adaptability.

However, integrating 4IR technologies into South African classrooms has faced hurdles due to disparities in infrastructure and digital skills among teachers (Adu & Zondo, 2024). Continuous professional development is therfore essential for teachers to effectively harness these technologies in their teaching.

The Present Landscape and Looking Forward

As we move into 2024, South African education stands at a critical crossroads. Ongoing efforts aim to promote inclusive education, drive digital transformation, and enhance teacher professional development to address learning losses from both historical and recent challenges (Adu & Zondo, 2024; Lubinga et al., 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the need for resilient strategies and innovative solutions.

Teacher training is fundamentally central to overcoming these educational challenges (Mpu & Adu, 2021; Adu & Zondo, 2024). With the rapid pace of digital transformation in education, the uneven access to technology across different regions calls for targeted interventions to bridge the digital divide (Landa et al., 2021; Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020). Implementing inclusive education policies that address both learning and environmental differences remains critical but faces numerous challenges. Resource constraints and varying levels of support for learners with special needs underscore the need for comprehensive reforms (Mpu & Adu, 2021).

Teacher training in South Africa, particularly in rural areas, is crucial. Teachers in these regions face significant challenges due to limited access to training resources and infrastructural issues. Targeted interventions and equitable access to professional development programs are essential to address these disparities (Spaull, 2015; van Rensburg & van der Westhuizen, 2024).

The historical context of post-apartheid South Africa adds to the complexity of these educational challenges. Persistent social justice and inequality issues profoundly affect policy and practice within the educational sector (Badat & Sayed, 2014). Effective teacher training must integrate broader efforts to dismantle systemic inequalities and promote a more inclusive society (Branson et al., 2024).

Moving forward, there is an urgent need for comprehensive reforms in teacher education and professional development. Enhancing pre-service training quality, integrating 4IR-aligned pedagogies, and fostering a culture of continuous learning are vital steps. Research highlights the importance of robust professional development to support teachers in immediate recovery efforts post-pandemic and to lay the groundwork for sustainable educational transformations in South Africa.

Wrapping Up: The Road Ahead

As South Africa navigates through 2024, the quest for an equitable and inclusive educational landscape faces both historic and contemporary challenges. The COVID-

19 pandemic exposed and deepened existing disparities, but it also highlighted the resilience and adaptability within the educational system. Moving forward, continuous efforts must focus on improving teacher professional development, driving digital transformation, and implementing inclusive education policies effectively.

Quality infrastructure remains a cornerstone for positive educational outcomes, yet resource constraints and inadequate facilities still hinder progress. Socioeconomic factors like poverty and unemployment continue to shape the educational experiences of many learners, necessitating comprehensive and targeted interventions to break the cycle of inequality. Additionally, violence within schools remains a critical issue that needs addressing through policy reforms, teacher training, and community engagement.

The digital divide is another pressing concern; while digital transformation has the potential to revolutionise learning, unequal access to technology underscores the need for targeted measures to bridge this gap. Effective governance structures and community involvement are essential for fostering an inclusive and accountable educational system. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) poses both opportunities and challenges, making it imperative to equip teachers and learners with the necessary digital literacy and critical thinking skills to thrive in this era.

Conclusion

In conclusion, comprehensive reforms in teacher education and professional development are crucial. By enhancing pre-service training, integrating 4IR-aligned pedagogies, and fostering a culture of continuous learning, South Africa can lay the groundwork for a more equitable and sustainable educational future. The journey toward true educational equity is ongoing, but with resilient strategies and innovative solutions, there's hope for meaningful progress.

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CONVERSATION ②

WEATHERING THE THUNDERCLOUDS OF TRAUMA

Dr. Laila Jeebodhi-Desai

Introduction

Trauma, just like huge thunderstorms (or even smaller rumbles) does not discriminate whom it chooses to encounter. It impacts every specie from all walks of life, from birth to accidental occurrences to displacement or dissolution, to the experience of death, trauma is inevitable. But just like braving thunderstorms are possible with adequate awareness and preparation, it is encouraging to note that by integrating basic trauma sensitive mindfulness techniques into daily routines, schools can provide students and staff with practical tools to manage stress, build resilience, and foster a sense of safety and connection. This article aims to provide basic guidance of practices, which when applied consistently and with sensitivity, can create a more supportive and trauma-informed school environment.

The Gathering Storm: Understanding Trauma in South African Schools

Trauma is often described as a sudden or unexpected event that is experienced and has some effect on the person/s who have experienced it. Bereznicki (2023) refer to this description as the Three E's of trauma. In the evolving landscape of education, the need for trauma-informed practices specifically within the realm of schools has become increasingly essential.

The unique socio-economic and cultural realities of South Africa mean that both students and staff are frequently exposed to varying forms of trauma, often in subtle ways that go unnoticed until they manifest in behavioural or emotional challenges.

Schools are not only places of learning but also spaces where the effects of trauma can play out daily. Teachers, therefore, are in a pivotal position to understand, contain, and manage trauma, creating environments conducive to healing and growth. Within the South African context, trauma can be subtle and pervasive. It includes the daily challenges of living in communities affected by either poverty or exposure to crime, and systemic inequality. The constant exposure to these stressors can lead to cumulative trauma, which affects both students and staff.

Both students and staff may experience trauma at home due to domestic violence, substance abuse, or family instability. Additionally, community violence, gender discrimination, and the effects of generational trauma still echo in many South African communities. Many staff members within the schooling system, may face personal or professional trauma, dealing with the stresses of an under-resourced education system, large class sizes, and, in some cases, their own exposure to violence or poverty.

It is vital for schools to acknowledge this broader definition of trauma and recognize that the effects of trauma can manifest in various ways, including poor academic performance, behavioral issues, absenteeism, and emotional distress. By understanding the South African context of trauma, schools can take the first step toward becoming trauma informed. Strickland (2019), discusses how trauma-informed schools can help reduce school violence in SA.

Seeking Shelter: Containing Trauma in Educational Spaces

Containing trauma refers to the ability of a school community to recognise and respond to trauma in ways that create a sense of safety and stability. For teachers, this means being aware of the signs of trauma and having strategies to support students who may be struggling. Creating trauma-informed spaces involves small but significant changes in how schools operate.

A study conducted by Nicolson (2021) indicates the need for schools to be optimal places for learners to receive the necessary care after exposure to trauma, while Mosomane (2023) highlights the need for curriculum to include more trauma informed approaches.

Teachers can start by establishing consistent routines, which help create predictability and a sense of safety for students. A simple daily check-in, where students can express how they feel in a safe and non-judgmental space, can also provide valuable insight into their emotional state. It is equally important to foster a culture of connection and trust. Students who have experienced trauma often struggle with relationships and trust. By building strong, supportive relationships, teachers can provide a safe environmen where students feel seen and understood. This, in turn, helps contain the impact of trauma, preventing it from disrupting the broader learning environment.

Braving the storm: Self-Regulation Strategies for Students and Staff

While professional support from trained educational, counselling or clinical psychologists, registered counsellors or social workers is often necessary for dealing with severe trauma, schools can implement self-regulation strategies to support both students and staff in the interim. These strategies help manage the emotional and behavioral effects of trauma, creating a more balanced school environment. For students, self-regulation techniques might include mindfulness exercises, breathing techniques, or sensory activities that help them manage their emotions.

Teaching students to recognise their triggers and develop coping strategies empowers them to take control of their emotional responses. Staff also need support in managing the stress and emotional toll of working in trauma-affected environments. Regular professional development on self-care, peer support groups, and access to wellness resources can help teachers manage their own emotional well-being. By ensuring that staff are also emotionally regulated, schools create a healthier environment for everyone.

Basic trauma-sensitive mindfulness techniques that schools can implement:

1. **Grounding techniques:** Grounding helps individuals connect with the present moment, which is particularly helpful for students who may dissociate or feel overwhelmed. A simple exercise is the "5-4-3-2-1" technique, where students identify five things they can see, four things they can feel, three things they can hear, two things they can smell, and one thing they can taste. This helps bring awareness to the present moment in a gentle, non-invasive way.

2. **Awareness of breathing:** Deep, slow breathing can help calm the nervous system. Teach students to take slow, deep breaths, focusing on the feeling of the breath entering and leaving their bodies. A technique called "box breathing" can be particularly effective: inhale for four counts, hold for four counts, exhale for four counts, and hold again for four counts. This structured approach can be grounding and soothing for students experiencing stress or anxiety.

3. **The Body Scan:** The body scan is a mindfulness practice where individuals focus on different parts of their body, noticing any sensations without judgment. Teachers can guide students through a brief body scan, encouraging them to relax their muscles as they focus on each body part, from head to toe. This helps students develop awareness of physical tension and encourages relaxation.

4. **Safe Place Visualisation:** Visualisation can provide a sense of safety and calm. In this exercise, students are guided to imagine a place where they feel safe, such as a quiet beach or a cozy room.

They are encouraged to picture the sights, sounds, and smells of their safe place. This mental imagery can help them feel more secure and relaxed, especially when they are feeling anxious or overwhelmed.

5. **Keep moving:** Movement-based mindfulness, such as simple stretching or yoga poses, can help students reconnect with their bodies in a safe and gentle way. Teachers can lead short sessions of mindful movement, encouraging students to pay attention to how their bodies feel as they move. This can be particularly effective for students who may struggle with sitting still or those who experience hyperarousal.

Treading carefully: Caution when implementing Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness in Schools

Always be mindful when incorporating mindfulness into a trauma-sensitive environment. It is crucial to:

Offer Choice: Always give students/teachers the option to participate. Forcing students to engage in mindfulness exercises can be counterproductive, particularly for those who may be uncomfortable with the practice.

Baby steps: Begin with short, simple exercises and gradually increase the duration as students/teachers become more comfortable. A few minutes of mindfulness at the beginning or end of the day can make a significant impact without feeling overwhelming.

Create a safe non-judgmental space: Ensure that the physical and emotional environment is conducive to mindfulness. A quiet, calm space with few distractions can help students/teachers focus on the exercises. Additionally, fostering a non-judgmental atmosphere where students/teachers feel safe to express themselves is key.

Display compassion: Trauma-sensitive mindfulness should be part of a broader support system within the school. Regular check-ins with students, referral or access to therapeutic services, and peer support groups can enhance the effectiveness of mindfulness practices.

By integrating these mindfulness techniques into daily routines, schools can provide students and staff with practical tools to manage stress, build resilience, and foster a sense of safety and connection. These practices, when applied consistently and with sensitivity, can create a more supportive and trauma-informed school environment.

Building Resilient Umbrellas: Creating Trauma-Informed Schools for Lasting Impact

Becoming a trauma-informed school is not about making drastic changes but about cultivating awareness, compassion, and support within the school community.

By understanding the subtle and daily impacts of trauma in the South African context, containing trauma through stable and supportive environments, and implementing self- regulation strategies, schools can create spaces where both students and staff can thrive.

Teachers play a crucial role in this process, and by adopting trauma-informed practices, they can contribute to a more resilient and empathetic school environment, ultimately supporting the academic and emotional success of all students and themselves.

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CONVERSATION ③

BEYOND BEHAVIOUR: HOW TRAUMA-INFORMED TEACHERS ENHANCE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Melissa Gardner

Introduction

Recently, when picking up my toddler from school our conversations have been slightly more dramatic. When asked how his day has been, his response has changed causing a shift in our well-established routine.

He has been replying, "I need to go to the doctor." The aliment changes day to day, from a headache to a sore throat to a broken toe but his insistence on medical care remains adamant. His symptoms, despite the ailment of the day, have also remained consistent. He has been tearful, full of moans, clumsy, and rougher than usual. Admittedly, on a few of the days, I have turned to paracetamol, a tried and tested solution. However, when this intervention failed me I knew, that whatever was causing discomfort, needed to be escalated. An unsuccessful doctor's visit later, I turned to his teacher enquiring about his current experience of school. She noted that nothing was out of the ordinary- "better than ever". There was another piece of the puzzle that did not fit.

Haphazardly and thankfully, another mother in the class sent a message on the class's WhatsApp group querying if anyone else's child was struggling to adapt to the nap that the class had recently stopped. There was the answer. Somewhere in this busy life, I had missed a piece of communication from the school- the culprit for our afternoons

that had become unbearable and painstaking. Although my son had tried to tell me that he was tired and still needed a nap, it was communicated as physical discomfort, emotional dysregulation, and impaired motor coordination.

This story provides me with a simple illustration of a larger classroom experience. The current unrecognised crisis of the traumatised learner.

Trauma and the brain

Early childhood trauma has been shown to significantly alter brain functioning, impacting both structural and functional aspects of the brain. Research indicates that experiences of trauma during critical developmental periods, especially early childhood, can lead to changes in the hippocampus, amygdala, and prefrontal cortex—regions crucial for memory, emotional regulation, and executive function, essentially the regions of the brain that underly learning (Teicher et al., 2006; Schaefer & Tolin, 2017). The classroom however does not have a standard presentation of trauma. As noted in the simple metaphor above, the classroom can often feel like chaotic places where behaviours do not have much consistency or explanation. This is because young children rarely have the capacity to make the connection between their trauma and their presenting behaviours. Furthermore, behaviours themselves may not remain consistent which leaves teachers and management perplexed or misguided. Trauma causes basic needs of children to go unmet. Unmet needs in children cause disruption.

Acquiring Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Although not officially recognised as a diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), the concept of acquired ADHD has gained increasing attention. Acquired ADHD refers to a condition where an individual does not have ADHD from birth but develops symptoms resembling ADHD due to alterations in neurological structures caused by significant life events, such as trauma. These traumatic experiences can lead to behavioral symptoms that mimic those of ADHD, with impaired impulse control being a prominent feature (Teicher et al., 2006). In the classroom, this manifests as difficulties with turn-taking, challenges in sustaining attention, increased conflicts with peers and teachers, and overindulgence in activities such as food consumption or screen time (Schaefer & Tolin, 2017).

Understanding this distinction is crucial for accurately addressing and supporting children affected by trauma who display behaviors similar to ADHD.

It is not misbehaviour?

It is easy to misinterpret children's behaviors as acts of rebellion or naughtiness, but these behaviors often reflect deeper issues. The universal need for love and acceptance is fundamental for children's growth, and when these needs are met, children thrive. Traumatised children, however, have a unique set of needs that are frequently overlooked and inadequately addressed in schools (Perry, 2006). This underscores the increasing need for trauma-informed teaching, where educators are equipped to recognise and address the symptoms of trauma within the classroom. While some teachers may argue that therapeutic interventions fall outside their purview, it is essential to recognise that altering the classroom environment can be more feasible than changing the brain's responses (Blom, 2020). Creating a sense of safety in the classroom—without formal therapy—can significantly benefit trauma-affected students. Trauma-informed practices help in establishing a supportive environment that minimizes triggers, allowing the brain to move out of survival mode and enhancing executive functioning. This, in turn, improves learning and fosters a greater sense of well-being in children (van der Kolk, 2014).

On the lookout for trauma

Trauma manifests differently across developmental stages, influencing behaviors, emotions, and cognitive functioning in unique ways from early childhood through adolescence. Here's a breakdown of how trauma is typically presented at each stage:

Early Childhood (0-5 years)

Behavioural Symptoms:

- **Regression:** Young children might revert to earlier developmental stages, such as bed-wetting or thumb-sucking (Perry, 2006).
- **Sleep Disturbances:** Difficulty sleeping, nightmares, or frequent waking can occur (van der Kolk, 2014).
- **Attachment Issues:** Children may exhibit clinginess or fear of separation from caregivers (Zeanah et al., 2009).

Emotional Symptoms:

- **Increased Irritability:** Persistent crying, tantrums, and heightened emotional sensitivity are common (Perry, 2006).
- **Fearfulness:** An increased startle response and heightened anxiety about specific situations or objects (Teicher et al., 2006).

Cognitive Symptoms:

- **Difficulty with Learning:** Trauma can affect cognitive development, leading to problems with attention and learning (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2018).

Middle Childhood (6-12 years)

Behavioural Symptoms:

- **Social Withdrawal:** Children may isolate themselves from peers or avoid social interactions (Hodas, 2006).
- **Acting Out:** Aggressive behaviour, defiance, or disruptive actions in school settings can be prominent (Jensen et al., 2014).
- **Regressive Behaviors:** Reverting to earlier developmental behaviours like tantrums or bed-wetting can continue (Zeanah et al., 2009).

Emotional Symptoms:

- **Persistent Fear or Anxiety:** Ongoing anxiety about safety or hypervigilance can manifest (van der Kolk, 2014).
- **Difficulty Regulating Emotions:** Increased outbursts of anger or sadness, and difficulty managing emotions (Perry, 2006).

Cognitive Symptoms:

- **Problems with Concentration:** Difficulty focusing on schoolwork or following instructions (Jensen et al., 2014).
- **Negative Self-Concept:** Feelings of worthlessness or guilt, often linked to trauma (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2018).

Adolescence (13-18 years)

Behavioral Symptoms:

- **Risk-Taking Behavior:** Increased engagement in risky activities or self-destructive behaviors (Hodas, 2006).
- **Substance Abuse:** Experimentation with drugs or alcohol as a coping mechanism (van der Kolk, 2014).
- **Social Problems:** Struggles with peer relationships, often manifesting as withdrawal or conflict (Jensen et al., 2014).

Emotional Symptoms:

- **Depression and Anxiety:** Higher risk of developing mood disorders, including depression and generalized anxiety (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2018).
- **Emotional Instability:** Intense mood swings and difficulty regulating emotions (Hodas, 2006).

Cognitive Symptoms:

- **Difficulty with Self-Concept:** Challenges in forming a stable sense of identity or self-esteem (van der Kolk, 2014).
- **Impaired Executive Function:** Problems with organization, planning, and decision-making, affecting academic and personal functioning (Jensen et al., 2014).

Understanding these presentations helps in tailoring interventions and supports to meet the specific needs of individuals at different developmental stages affected by trauma.

The trauma-informed teacher and classroom

A trauma-informed teacher and classroom are designed to recognise, understand, and respond to the effects of trauma on students' learning and behaviour. This approach focuses on creating a safe and supportive environment that addresses the emotional and psychological needs of students who have experienced trauma.

Here's what a trauma-informed classroom and teacher might look like:

Characteristics of a Trauma-Informed Teacher

1. **Awareness and Understanding:**
   - **Knowledge of Trauma:** Understands the impact of trauma on brain development and behaviour. Educates themselves about the signs and symptoms of trauma (van der Kolk, 2014).
   - **Sensitivity to Triggers:** Recognises potential triggers and stressors in the classroom environment that could impact traumatised students (Hodas, 2006).

2. **Empathy and Relationship Building:**
   - **Building Trust:** Focuses on creating strong, trusting relationships with students. Uses consistent and predictable interactions to build trust (Perry, 2006).
   - **Active Listening:** Practices active listening and validates students' feelings and experiences (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2018).

3. **Supportive Responses:**
   - **Regulation Strategies:** Implements strategies to help students manage their emotions, such as calming techniques or mindfulness exercises (Jensen et al., 2014).
   - **Non-Punitive Discipline:** Uses restorative practices rather than punitive measures. Emphasizes understanding and correcting behaviour rather than punishment (Blom, 2020).

4. **Professional Development:**
   - **Ongoing Training:** Engages in continuous professional development on trauma-informed practices and trauma sensitivity (Zeanah et al., 2009).

Characteristics of a Trauma-Informed Classroom

Safe and Predictable Environment:

- **Physical Safety:** Ensures the classroom is a physically safe space with clear rules and routines that provide structure (van der Kolk, 2014).
- **Emotional Safety:** Creates an environment where students feel emotionally secure. Displays empathetic and supportive behavior (Hodas, 2006).

Fostering Resilience:

- **Supportive Relationships:** Encourages positive peer interactions and promotes a supportive classroom community (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2018).
- **Skill Building:** Focuses on teaching coping skills, emotional regulation, and resilience-building activities (Jensen et al., 2014).

Responsive Practices:

- **Flexible Approach:** Adapts teaching methods to accommodate students' needs and provide individualized support (Blom, 2020).

- **Trauma-Informed Practices:** Implements strategies that help students feel safe and valued, such as trauma-sensitive communication and behaviour management techniques (Perry, 2006).

Collaboration and Support:

- **Team Approach:** Works collaboratively with counsellors, social workers, and other support staff to address students' needs comprehensively (Zeanah et al., 2009).
- **Family Engagement:** Engages with families to understand the students' backgrounds and involve them in the support process (Hodas, 2006).

Examples of Trauma-Informed Practices

- **Classroom Layout:** Organizes the classroom to reduce chaos and provide a calm, predictable environment.
- **Emotional Check-Ins:** Incorporates regular emotional check-ins or "morning meetings" to gauge students' emotional states and address any concerns.
- **Safe Spaces:** Designates a quiet area or "safe space" in the classroom where students can go to calm down if they feel overwhelmed.
- **Visual Schedules:** Uses visual schedules and clear routines to help students anticipate and prepare for daily activities (van der Kolk, 2014).

Conclusion

Incorporating trauma-informed principles into teaching and classroom environments is not just a strategy—it's a fundamental shift in how we understand and address the diverse needs of students affected by trauma. As highlighted, trauma can deeply impact students' emotional, behavioural, and cognitive functioning across different developmental stages, manifesting in various ways from early childhood through adolescence.

Trauma-informed teaching recognizes these impacts and emphasizes creating safe, predictable, and supportive environments that address both the emotional and psychological needs of students.

A trauma-informed teacher is one who builds trust, practices empathy, and employs strategies to help students manage their emotions effectively. Such educators understand the significance of trauma's impact on behaviour and learning, and they integrate these insights into their daily interactions and classroom management practices. A trauma-informed classroom, therefore, is characterized by a strong focus on safety, resilience, and flexibility, ensuring that students feel valued and supported.

By implementing trauma-informed practices, schools can create environments that not only accommodate the needs of traumatized students but also foster their growth and development. This approach encourages a collaborative and compassionate response that extends beyond traditional disciplinary methods, aiming instead to support students in overcoming their challenges and thriving academically and emotionally. Ultimately, embracing trauma-informed education is a powerful way to transform classrooms into spaces where all students, particularly those impacted by trauma, can achieve their full potential and feel a deep sense of belonging and security.

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CONVERSATION 4

THE ROLE OF TEACHER OBSERVATIONS: LEGAL FRAMEWORKS IN PROTECTING CHILDREN IN SOUTH AFRICA

Erika Engelbrecht-Aldworth and Melissa Gardner

Introduction

In South Africa, teachers are essential in nurturing learners' emotional and psychological growth. A crucial aspect of this responsibility involves recognising and addressing trauma stemming from *Adverse Childhood Experiences* (ACE's) such as abuse, neglect, and loss. Effectively identifying the signs of trauma and understanding the legal framework for reporting crimes against children is vital for protecting vulnerable students.

Understanding Trauma in Learners

Trauma in children can present itself in numerous forms, such as withdrawal, aggression, anxiety, and difficulties with concentration. Studies indicate that around one in four children in South Africa has experienced significant traumatic events (Woollett et al., 2020). Because the symptoms of trauma can often be misconstrued as behavioural issues, teachers must remain observant and attentive (Powe-Wilson, 2024). By doing so, they can effectively identify learners who may need support.

The Legal Framework for Reporting Crimes Against Children

Teachers can significantly contribute to the protection of learners by familiarizing themselves with the legal framework governing the reporting of crimes against children in South Africa (Chitsamatanga et al., 2020) .

Key legislation includes:

The Children's Act 38 of 2005

The Children's Act 38 of 2005 is an important legislation in South Africa designed to protect the rights and welfare of children. According to van der Zalm's analysis from 2008, this Act aims to tackle various challenges children face, especially those arising from customary laws that may clash with more modern legal standards. The Act sets out essential measures to prevent abuse, neglect, and exploitation, ensuring that the best interests of the child are always a priority. By upholding children's rights, the Act reflects South Africa's commitment to international standards and serves as a vital resource for teachers in understanding how to support and protect vulnerable young people in their care.

Duty to Report: Section 110 mandates that anyone with knowledge of a child being harmed must report the matter to the police or the Department of Social Development. This compels teachers to act when they notice signs of abuse.

Best Interests of the Child: The Act prioritises the welfare of the child, ensuring their protection from abuse and neglect.

Access to Support: It also facilitates immediate psychological support for abused children, which aids in their recovery.

The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007.

The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 is an important law in South Africa that aims to tackle the serious issue of sexual violence, especially against women and children.

As highlighted by Artz and Roehrs (2009), this Act not only clarifies the definitions of various sexual offences but also makes significant changes to ensure a stronger legal response to these crimes.

It places a legal obligation on teachers and medical professionals, to report any suspected cases of sexual abuse they encounter. This legislation is crucial for creating a safer environment and for supporting the health and well-being of survivors, ensuring that the legal system works alongside healthcare efforts to address sexual violence and aid those affected.

Mandatory Reporting: This Act requires teachers to report any suspected cases of sexual abuse involving children, reflecting the commitment to safeguarding children.

The Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act 7 of 2013

The Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act 7 of 2013 represents a significant legislative effort in South Africa to address the pervasive issue of human trafficking, particularly concerning vulnerable populations such as children. This Act is a crucial step towards establishing a comprehensive legal framework aimed at preventing trafficking, protecting victims, and prosecuting offenders. Dafel (2014) states that this Act aims to combat grave violation of children's rights and ensure justice for victims.

Reporting Trafficking: Individuals aware of trafficking, particularly involving children, must report these incidents to law enforcement.

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 represents a significant legislative framework designed to govern the education system in South Africa, particularly regarding the rights and responsibilities of parents, educators, and learners within public schools. In his 1997 article, P. J. Visser explores the principles underlying this Act, emphasising the pivotal role that parents play in the educational landscape.

The Act not only outlines the duties of parents but also delineates their rights, ensuring that they are actively involved in the educational process of their children. This introduction sets the stage for a deeper understanding of the interconnected roles and responsibilities established by the Act, highlighting the importance of collaboration among all stakeholders in promoting a conducive learning environment for every child.

Safety and Duty of Care: This Act underscores the responsibility of teachers to provide a safe school environment and to report any suspected abuse or violence.

The Child Justice Act 75 of 2008

The Child Justice Act 75 of 2008 represents a significant shift in South Africa's approach to young offenders, aiming to address the complexities of juvenile crime within a framework that prioritises rehabilitation over punitive measures. As articulated by Terblanche (2012), the Act establishes a legal framework that acknowledges the unique developmental needs of children, recognising their potential for rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Central to this legislation is Section 68, which sets out the principles and guidelines for sentencing young offenders, intending to strike a balance between accountability and the child's best interests. By fostering a more compassionate and nuanced understanding of juvenile justice, the Act seeks to empower young individuals, ensuring that responses to their offending behaviour consider their age, maturity, and social circumstances, thereby promoting a more just and equitable society.

Protection of Child Victims: This Act emphasises the importance of professionals, including teachers, in reporting crimes against children, acknowledging the difficulties many children face in voicing their experiences.

Reporting Mechanisms

In South Africa, several channels are available for effectively reporting suspected abuse:

Child Protection Units: Specialised units within the South African Police Service focus on crimes against children, enabling teachers to report suspected abuse directly for prompt intervention.

Hotlines and Support Services: Organisations such as Childline South Africa offer confidential hotlines for reporting incidents of abuse or trafficking, along with guidance on the next steps.

School-Based Protocols: Schools should establish clear protocols for teachers to follow when they suspect abuse, including designated personnel trained to handle such disclosures.

The Role of Teacher Observations

Teachers play a critical role in the safeguarding and welfare of children, a responsibility underscored by their unique position within the educational environment. According to Baumgarten, Simmonds, and Mason-Jones (2023) this role extends beyond education into the realm of protection and advocacy. Teachers, during their daily interactions and close observations, are often the first to notice changes in a child's behaviour or physical condition that may indicate abuse or neglect. Their ability to recognise and report such signs is pivotal in initiating timely interventions to protect children from further harm. The review by Baumgarten et al, (2023) emphasises the importance of equipping teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to identify and report abuse effectively, thereby fulfilling their essential role in the broader child protection ecosystem.

Teacher observations are vital in identifying learners who may require additional support.

Effective observation includes:

1. Spotting Behavioural Indicators: Teachers often recognise changes in learners' behaviour before anyone else. Signs such as increased absenteeism, withdrawal, or other behavioural shifts can indicate underlying trauma. Careful documentation of these observations helps build a clearer understanding of the learner's struggles.

2. Creating a Safe Space: Establishing a nurturing and consistent classroom environment allows learners to feel safe expressing their feelings. Teachers can foster open communication by being approachable and empathetic, making it easier for learners to seek help.

3. Facilitating Communication: Effective observations lead to collaborative discussions among educators, support staff, and parents. When teachers share their insights with mental health professionals, it paves the way for necessary interventions and referrals, ensuring learners receive comprehensive support.

The Referral Process

Once a teacher identifies that a learner may need additional help, support and possible intervention, the referral process becomes crucial.

Important steps in this process include:

1. Knowing When to Refer: Teachers should trust their instincts about when a learner might benefit from specialised support services, such as school counselling or external mental health resources.

2. Documentation and Reporting: Thorough documentation of observed behaviours and relevant contexts, such as changes at home etc., is essential. Detailed reports will help mental health professionals understand the urgency and scope of the situation.

3. Collaboration with Support Staff: Working closely with mental health professionals and administrative staff facilitates effective referrals. Multidisciplinary meetings can enhance the understanding of available resources within the school and help identify external support services.

4. *Follow-Up and Monitoring Progress:* After making a referral, continuous monitoring of the learner's progress and the effectiveness of interventions is vital. Maintaining open lines of communication with mental health professionals allows teachers to adjust their strategies as needed to better support the learner.

Conclusion

Fostering an environment that prioritises the emotional and psychological well-being of learners, and by navigating the legal frameworks designed to protect them, teachers in South Africa play a crucial role in safeguarding children against trauma. Through vigilant observations and timely interventions, teachers can significantly contribute to the recovery and success of vulnerable learners, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive in a safe and supportive educational environment.

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CONVERSATION ⑤

TACKLING ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES IN THE CLASSROOM

Erika Engelbrecht-Aldworth

Introduction

Imagine noticing one of your students acting out, zoning out, or not being themselves. Perhaps the learner was constantly engaged in class but now seems distant or has become increasingly disruptive. These changes can be puzzling and concerning, making you wonder what might be happening beneath the surface. The behaviours you observe are often more than isolated incidents of *"bad behaviour"* or inattention they can be signs of more profound struggles and unspoken pains.

What are ACEs?

Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can be crucial in these situations. ACEs refer to potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years), such as experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect, witnessing domestic violence, or growing up in a household with substance use problems, mental health issues, or instability due to parental separation or incarceration. These experiences can profoundly impact a child's physical, emotional, and cognitive development. In the classroom, ACEs often manifest in easily misinterpreted ways. Children dealing with such experiences may exhibit a range of behaviours—from aggression and defiance to withdrawal and anxiety (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2024).

They might struggle with concentration and learning, affecting their academic performance and social interactions. As teachers, recognising these signs and understanding their root causes is essential for effectively supporting and nurturing every student.

Finkelhor et al. (2013), broke down these traumatic events into ten categories:

Abuse: Physical, emotional, or sexual.

Neglect: Physical or emotional.

Household dysfunction: This can include substance abuse, parental separation or divorce, mental illness, domestic violence, or having an incarcerated household member.

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES [ACEs]

Categories of ACEs

ABUSE
- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse

NEGLECT
- Physical neglect
- Emotional neglect

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION
- Substance abuse
- Parental separation /divorce
- Mental illness
- Domestic violence
- Incarcerated household member
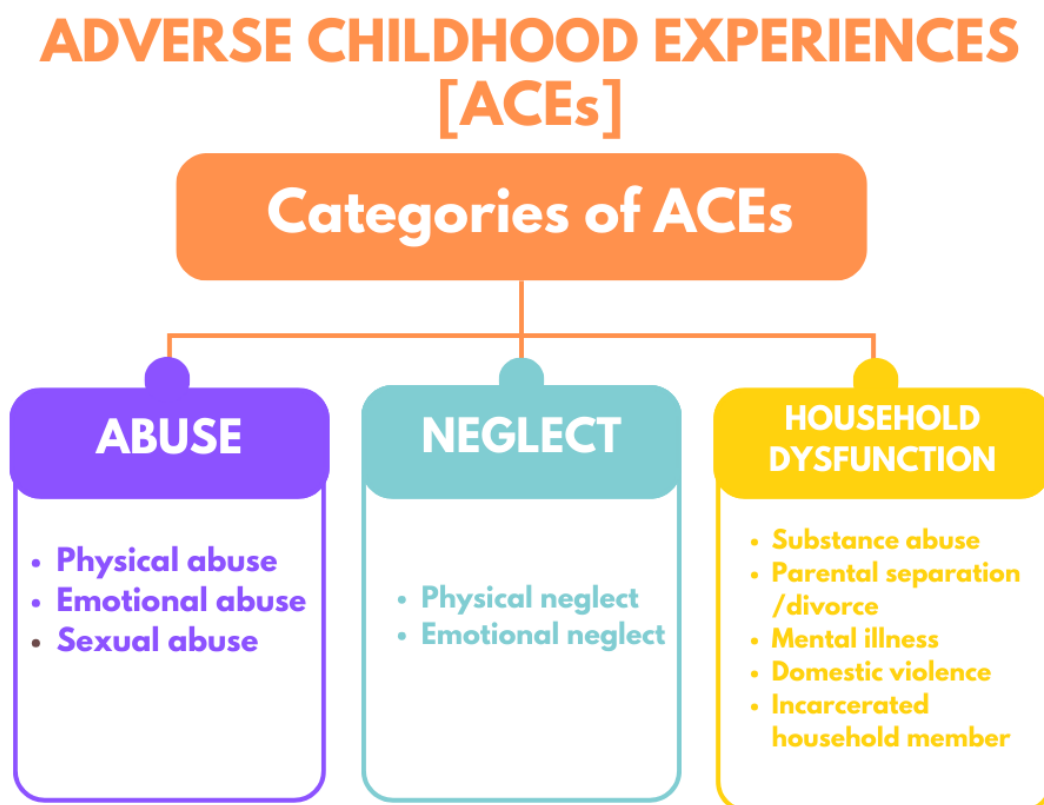
Understanding these can help you step in and support children through these tough times, reducing the chance of long-term adverse outcomes (Barry & Gundacker, 2023).**Classroom Clues: Spotting ACEs in Action**

Okay, how do you know if a child in your class might be dealing with ACEs? You might see them struggling to concentrate, constantly on edge (hypervigilance), skipping school, or acting out (Barry & Gundacker, 2023; Grasso et al., 2016). Others might withdraw, show signs of anxiety or depression, or be unusually compliant as a coping mechanism. These behaviours are not just "bad behaviour"—they often are a cry for help.

Teacher to the Rescue: Playing the First Responder

Gone are the days when teachers were only responsible for academics. Now, you are also a frontline worker in identifying and handling trauma. You are often the first adult outside the family to notice these signs. You have a massive role in spotting these behaviours, creating a safe space in your classroom, and making initial referrals to professionals (Gabrielli et al., 2023). Think of yourself as a first responder who stabilises the situation until professional help arrives.

ACEs Across the Ages: Tailored Tactics

Children process trauma differently as they grow, and it is crucial to adapt your approach depending on their developmental stage (Narayan et al., 2021).

Let us break it down into the different Phases:

Foundation Phase (Ages 5-9)

At this tender age, ACEs can cause developmental delays, attachment issues, and emotional dysregulation. You might notice children struggling with separation anxiety, making friends, or lagging in language and cognitive skills (Gu et al., 2022). They may be unable to articulate what is wrong, but their behaviour speaks volumes. Be patient, offer consistent routines, and create a warm, welcoming classroom atmosphere.

Intersen Phase (Ages 10-12)

Moving into tween territory where, learners may show academic struggles, social withdrawal, or become more aggressive.

These learners may lose interest in school, challenge authority, or have problems with peers (Madigan et al., 2023). Fostering a supportive, inclusive classroom community can make a massive difference. Engage learenrs in group activities that focus on building trust and cooperation.

Senior Phase (Ages 13-15)

In the teenage years, ACEs often hit hard. Teens might engage in risk-taking behaviours, misuse substances, or battle mental health issues like depression and anxiety. They might also resort to self-harm (Kim et al., 2022; Carlson, 2019). This age group will often seek independence yet desperately need stability.

Being consistent and creating a safe, non-judgmental space can help. Maintaining open lines of communication can encourage them to seek help when needed.

Further Education and Training Phase (Ages 16-18)

By late teens, the cumulative toll of ACEs can lead to chronic absenteeism, disengagement, and severe emotional or behavioural challenges. Watch out for truancy, severe dips in academic performance, and significant mental health issues, including suicidal thoughts (Vazquez et al., 2022). Offering pathways to professional counselling and alternative educational or vocational opportunities can be game-changing.

Learning Roadblocks: How ACEs Impact Education

Learning roadblocks can manifest in various forms, often hindering a learner's ability to fully engage with and benefit from learning opportunities. These obstacles can stem from a myriad of factors, including neurological differences such as ADHD or dyslexia, emotional and psychological challenges such as anxiety and depression, and external influences such as socioeconomic stressors or unstable home environments.

These factors can interfere with a child's cognitive processes, concentration, and motivation, leading to gaps in knowledge and skills that can accumulate over time.

Foundation Phase

ACEs during these critical early years can disrupt a child's brain development, leading to difficulty concentrating, remembering, and managing tasks.

These children might struggle with basic literacy and numeracy skills and have difficulty following classroom routines (Bellis et al., 2019).

Intersen Phase

As children grow older, ACEs can manifest as learning difficulties, hyperactivity, and behavioural problems. These challenges can hinder their ability to form friendships, understand and follow instructions, and engage positively with their education (Crede et al., 2023). A supportive classroom environment can make a world of difference. Reinforce positive behaviours, create group activities involving teamwork, and build a sense of community in your classroom.

Senior Phase

In their teenage years, the impact of ACEs can become even more pronounced with complex emotional and behavioral issues disrupting learning. They might be under constant stress, suffering from low self-esteem, and facing high levels of anxiety. This can lead to academic disengagement, increased absences, and a higher likelihood of dropping out of school (Hughes et al., 2017; Carlson, 2019).

Further Education and Training Phase

The cumulative effects of ACEs can catch up with adolescents during late adolescence. They may struggle with motivation, exhibit risky behaviours, and face frequent academic and social failures. These experiences can severely limit their prospects for higher education or vocational training, affecting their future employment opportunities (Dube et al., 2023; Ruge et al., 2024).

The Power of Teacher Observations

How do you effectively spot signs of ACEs? Detailed, accurate observations are critical. Think of yourself as Sherlock Holmes.

Here is a checklist to keep it all on point:

I. *Descriptive Observations:*

Jot down specific behaviours, noting how often they occur, how long they last, and any apparent triggers. Instead of saying, "Johnny was disruptive," write "Johnny shouted and threw his books three times during the math lesson today, each episode lasting about two minutes."

II. *Contextual Information:*

What else is happening in the classroom or the child's environment? Have there been any significant changes in their life that you know of?

III. *Impact on Learning:*

How are these behaviours affecting their academic performance and social interactions? Do they need to catch up in specific subjects, miss homework, or have conflicts with classmates?

IV. *Communication with Families:*

Please keep track of any discussions you have had with the child's family regarding observed behaviours and their responses or lack thereof. This can be crucial in understanding the child's background.

This detailed information can benefit school counsellors, psychologists, or external therapists, giving them a clearer picture to work with and facilitating more targeted interventions (Murphey & Sacks, 2019; Gabrielli et al., 2023).

Building a Trauma-Informed Classroom: Tips and Strategies

Welcoming children who have experienced ACEs into your classroom is about recognising the signs and making meaningful changes to help them thrive.

Foster Emotional Safety: Creating an environment where your learners feel emotionally safe is paramount. This means ensuring that your classroom is where they feel respected, valued, and understood.

Consistent Routines: Keep routines predictable as children dealing with ACEs often live in chaotic environments and benefit from stability.

Positive Reinforcement: Frequent, positive reinforcement can help build self-esteem and encourage good behaviour. Recognise and celebrate small victories.

Open Communication: Promote open communication lines, ensuring they feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings.

Safe Spaces: Designate a "Calm Corner" or safe space in your classroom where learners can go to regulate their emotions.

Implement Restorative Practices

Traditional disciplinary methods might not be practical or appropriate for those dealing with trauma. Instead, consider restorative practices that focus on repairing harm and building relationships rather than punishing bad behaviour.

Restorative Circles: These can be used to address conflicts within the classroom and build a sense of community. Everyone gets a chance to speak and be heard, fostering empathy and understanding.

Mediation Sessions: Offer mediation sessions where learners can work through their issues with the support of a neutral third party.

Reflective Practices: Encourage children to reflect on their actions and consider how they affect others, promoting accountability and self-awareness.

Teach and Model Emotional Regulation

Students impacted by ACEs might struggle with managing their emotions. Teach and model strategies for emotional regulation.

Mindfulness Activities: Incorporate mindfulness practices like deep breathing, guided imagery, or yoga into your daily routine to help learners manage stress and anxiety. Simple, short sessions can be a good start and gradually become part of their self-regulation toolkit.

Emotion Identification: Help learners identify and name their emotions. Use tools like emotion charts, feelings flashcards, or journals. Please encourage them to express their feelings constructively, which can help build emotional literacy.

Problem-Solving Skills: Teach problem-solving strategies to help children navigate conflicts and challenges. Guide them through steps such as identifying the problem, brainstorming solutions, evaluating options, and choosing the best action.

Promoting Resilience

Building resilience in children can help them cope with and recover from adversities. Incorporate practices that foster a growth mindset and encourage perseverance.

Growth Mindset Language: Use language that promotes a growth mindset. Praise effort rather than results and encourage learners to learn from mistakes. Emphasise that everyone can improve with hard work and persistence.

Resilience Projects: Engage learners in projects that highlight stories of resilience. Discuss famous individuals who overcame significant challenges and analyse the traits and strategies that helped them succeed.

Support Networks: Encourage children to build support networks with peers, mentors, and family members. Facilitate opportunities for kids to connect with positive role models and supportive adults.

Navigating Conversations with Parents/Caregivers

Discussing ACEs with parents or caregivers can be delicate. Approach these conversations with empathy, respect, and a focus on collaboration.

Build Trust: Establish a trusting relationship with parents. Approach them from a place of concern and support rather than judgment. Explain that your goal is to work together for the well-being of their child.

Share Observations: Use your detailed observations to discuss specific behaviours and their impact on learning and social interactions. Avoid making assumptions or diagnoses.

Collaborative Solutions: Work together to find solutions. Offer resources and referrals to counselling services or support groups. Emphasise the importance of a unified approach to support the child.

Follow-Up: Maintain ongoing communication with parents. Check-in regularly to share progress and challenges and adjust strategies as needed.

Engaging School Staff and Community Resources

Collaborating with other school staff and community resources is essential to providing comprehensive support for learners with ACEs.

School Counselors and Psychologists

Referrals and Interventions: Regularly refer learners showing signs of trauma to school counsellors or psychologists for professional assessment and targeted interventions.

Team Meetings: Participate in regular multidisciplinary team meetings that include special education teachers, school nurses, and administrators to develop holistic support plans for learners experiencing significant challenges.

Community Partnerships

Mental Health Services: Establish connections with local mental health services for referrals. These partnerships can give children access to therapy, counselling, and other essential services.

Family Support Services: Collaborate with community organisations offering support to families, such as parenting workshops, family counselling, and financial assistance programs.

Training Programs: Advocate for professional development workshops that educate all school staff about trauma-informed practices and how to support learners with ACEs effectively.

The Power of Peer Support

Encouraging positive peer interactions can significantly impact a learner's school experience, fostering resilience and creating a supportive environment.

Buddy Systems: Set up a buddy system where students can support each other academically and emotionally, building trust and camaraderie.

Peer Mentorship Programs: Establish peer mentorship programs where older learners mentor younger ones, fostering responsibility in the mentors and providing relatable role models to younger learners.

Group Projects and Activities: Encourage collaborative group projects and activities to foster teamwork and social skills, ensuring inclusivity and a sense of belonging for all learners.

Empowering Learners Through Self-Advocacy

Teaching children self-advocacy skills empowers them to take charge of their learning and well-being.

Learner-Led Conferences: Encourage learners to lead their parent-teacher conferences. This practice allows them to articulate their strengths, areas for growth, and goals, fostering a sense of ownership over their education.

Provide Choices: Offer choices within assignments and activities to give learners control over their learning, increasing engagement and motivation.

Teach Self-Advocacy Skills: Instruct learners to communicate their needs, ask for help, and set personal goals. Role-playing scenarios can help to practise these skills.

Integrating Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Incorporating Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) into the curriculum provides learners with skills to manage their emotions, set and achieve goals, show empathy, establish positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Adopt a SEL curriculum that integrates critical competencies like self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making into daily lessons.

Morning Meetings: Start the day with morning meetings to build community, discuss emotions, and set a positive tone.

Emotion Check-Ins: Conduct regular emotion check-ins where learners can express their feelings. This will normalise talking about feelings and foster emotional literacy.

Creating a Supportive Physical Environment

The physical environment of your classroom can significantly impact those who have experienced trauma.

Calming Atmosphere: Create a calming atmosphere with soothing colours, comfortable seating, and soft lighting. Avoid overly stimulating decor.

Sensory Tools: Provide fidget spinners, stress balls, or weighted blankets to help students self-regulate. These tools show learners that taking breaks and managing their emotions is okay.

Accessible Help: Ensure that resources like counselling information, helplines, and pamphlets about mental health services are readily accessible to learners and families, displayed in common areas, and ensure privacy for those seeking help.

Building Community Awareness

Raising awareness within the broader school community can create a more supportive environment for children with ACEs.

Parent Workshops and Seminars: Educational workshops can inform parents and caregivers about ACEs, their impacts, and how they can support their children at home. Topics might include stress management and communication strategies.

Guest Speakers: Invite experts in child psychology, trauma-informed care, and mental health to provide insights and strategies to parents and school staff.

Interactive Sessions: Conduct interactive sessions where parents can ask questions, share experiences, and get practical advice on supporting their children.

School Awareness Campaigns: Run school-wide campaigns to raise awareness about ACEs, mental health, and the importance of empathy and support through posters, assemblies, and special events focused on mental health and resilience. Use visual aids, social media, and school newsletters to spread information. Create engaging, informative content that captures attention and educates simultaneously.

Peer Support Networks: Establish peer-led support groups where learners can discuss their experiences and develop coping strategies, building a robust and empathetic school community. This works well for learners in the Senior and FET Phase.

Supporting Teachers: Self-Care is Vital

Supporting learners with ACEs can be emotionally taxing, making teacher well-being crucial.

Professional Support: If you are overwhelmed by the emotional toll of supporting traumatised learners, seek professional support. You can use school counsellors, join support groups for teachers, or access available mental health resources.

Setting Boundaries: Set clear professional boundaries to balance work and personal life. Recognise when to step back and recharge, prioritising mental health.

Self-Care Practices

Engage in regular self-care activities such as:

Regular Exercise: Physical activity reduces stress and improves mood, whether it's yoga, walking, or practising a favourite sport.

Mindfulness and Meditation: Practices like mindfulness and meditation manage stress and enhance emotional awareness. A few minutes a day makes a difference.

Hobbies and Interests: Make time for enjoyable hobbies such as reading, painting, or gardening. Engaging in activities you love is rejuvenating.

Social Support: Connect with colleagues and friends who understand teaching challenges. A support network provides emotional support and practical advice.

Collaborative Efforts: Teachers and Beyond

While teachers play a significant role in supporting children with ACEs, a collaborative approach involving multiple stakeholders can amplify support efforts.

Professional Development: Ensure all staff receive ongoing professional development on trauma-informed practices to create a unified approach to supporting learners.

Policy Implementation: Develop and implement school policies that support trauma-informed practices, including protocols for identifying and responding to signs of trauma, ensuring access to mental health resources, and creating a supportive school climate.

Partnerships with Local Agencies: Provide additional resources and support by partnering with local mental health agencies, child welfare services, and community organisations.

Community Programs: Facilitate community programs focusing on mental health awareness, stress management, and other relevant topics.

Building a Resilient Future

Supporting students with ACEs is a multifaceted and ongoing effort. By understanding ACEs, spotting the signs, and implementing trauma-informed practices, you can make a significant impact on your students' lives. You can help them navigate their challenges and equip them with the resilience and skills needed for a brighter, healthier future. Remember, your role as an educator is invaluable—not just in academic instruction but in shaping your learners' emotional and psychological well-being. We can build a supportive and nurturing educational environment for all children through collaboration and dedication.

Conclusion

Your role as a teacher extends beyond traditional academics; you are an essential part of a collaborative network that includes families, school staff, and community resources. By working together, we can address the complex needs of students affected by ACEs and help them build a brighter, more hopeful future. Remember, your impact on your learners today will last a lifetime. By embracing a trauma-informed approach, you are not just teaching but transforming lives.

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CONVERSATION ⑥

HOW CHILDHOOD TRAUMA DICTATES HOW YOU FILL YOUR CUPS OF NEED.

Dr. Gerdi van den Berg

Introduction

Our life experiences play a huge role in how our truth is formed. Our personal truth, the truth as we perceive it, is in charge of our entire being: What we think, what we choose and how we react. It manages our perception and our opinions. It determines our attitudes towards life. There is constant non-verbal communication between the different aspects of our being. How we listen to it and the extent to which our inner language becomes discernible to us are very important. In ourselves, we should know this core and bring it inline with the rest of what we know about our make-up. It is almost like gutter pipes that fit into each other to channel the flow of water to the desired destination. When change comes through truth and lasts, true re-creation has taken place.

Realignment is a requirement for re-creation

The processing of information that becomes apparent during cognitive behaviour therapy is interwoven with the re-creation process, i.e. the changing of our entire being. Cognitive therapy helps people to see their perceptions and convictions for what they are: not necessarily the truth. It also helps them to change those perceptions so that they can function more effectively.

Your modes of thinking, knowledge, understanding and the behavioural choices that stem from your perceptions are employed to change your thought patterns and conform to your new heart convictions. A sound understanding of the principles of cognitive neuroscience goes a long way towards providing insight into the process.

Inner order is needed before people can function effectively and experience the fullness of life-giving relationship. To create that inner order, realignment needs to happen. The better you understand this inner order, the more prepared you are to do the work to establish it so that you can be realigned and experience the necessary change. Sustainable renewal only comes from truth at a heart level. Realignment is a requirement for re-creation.

Assumptions that will keep you going in circles

If. That short word that indicates a condition. Not when, but if. Almost as if the word itself indicates an unlikely chance, something you have no control over. You are fenced in. Exposed. Powerless.

Or are you? 'If' can indicate something unlikely or it can indicate hope. 'If I...' can point the way out of bad situations and equip you to take the right steps to a life of abundance. It can motivate you to execute those steps one by one. Surefootedly. Focused and excited. The conditionality of such an 'if' is therefore brimming with energy and momentum – a 'Watch out, world, here I come!' momentum.

However, the opposite is also true. Your thoughts about your prospective course of action can also trap you in an unhealthy and unhappy situation. The things you think you should do to improve your situation lead to the opposite outcome. Instead of accelerating your growth, they can act as a handbrake. There are quite a few of these conditions or things you think you ought to do that can lead you down the wrong track. Sometimes society called out 'if' on your behalf. You were made to understand that nothing would change before some or other condition was met. You *believe* society. You *believe* your environment. You *believe* your past. You *believe* your culture. You grant top priority in your decision-making and in your definition of yourself.

You do what society and your culture and your peers tell you to. Still, you do not manage to change your situation. Does that mean you are done for? Are you

doomed to stay where you are? Not at all. However, it does mean that you must subject the conditions you impose upon yourself to serious scrutiny. You should compare your 'ifs' to the truth. Only then will you gain courage and start living with hope. When you start applying truth to your life, you become receptive to fresh knowledge and insight. You can reach the destination intended for you, the one created for you. Before we can set out on the road of truth and hope, we need to make sure we can discern the detours that will delay our progress.

The burden of the past

We cannot imagine an existence without time. Time makes the progression of life measurable. We need a yardstick for beginnings and endings, moving forward and going back. This yardstick that measures past, present, and future consist of tiny time particles called moments.

We experience time as something that steadily moves forward, moment by moment. Each moment builds on the one before and influences the one that is coming next. Certain moments leave deeper impressions that others – they day you wrote your final university paper, the evening you said 'yes' to the love of your life.

Time is a mysterious concept – consecutive, dynamic, and completely out of our control. It is sobering to realise how unperturbed time marches on without an iota of help or control from us. People experience the passage of time in different ways. Sometimes time seems to stand still, at other times is simply flies by. We have different perceptions of time that often speaks more to our state of mind than to reality. Despite these perceptions and attitudes, time soldiers on.

Cups of need

When love and acceptance are not given unconditionally, one's self-definition becomes conditional, prompting you to look for measurable qualifications all the time. What must I do to be worthy and acceptable – or just good enough? We measure ourselves by all the colourful photos of ideal lifestyle and achievements.

When you start digging in a broken person's life, the foundation you often get to is rejection. People want to be accepted. When we are weighed and found wanting, we can't be whole.

We instinctively know that it is hugely important to experience unconditional acceptance in the womb and the cradle already. It is if we arrive in this world with a number of tiny cups. These cups are empty and are supposed to be filled by our primary caregivers. They should fill our need cups out of their own overflow.

A young child's cups that typically need filling are:

- to feel they matter;
- to feel physically, emotionally and spiritually safe, and feel provided for;
- to receive recognition for everyday achievements;
- to be treated with compassion and respect;
- to know that their lives have a glorious goal, and
- to feel good enough, even when they make mistakes and reveal their shortcomings.

This list of needs can be summed up in two words: unconditional love. We need to hear that we are 'enough' just because we are here. Unfortunately, our primary caregivers do not always have full cups themselves. They try so desperately to their own cups filled that they have no energy left to fill those of ours.

The first three years of a child's life are crucial

When children are deprived of the safety and unconditional love for any reason, it makes them anxious about life's demands and about their future. Subconsciously (and sometimes consciously) they are driven to less wholesome life choice.

Since their basic needs are not being met, they look for ways to fill their need cups. They want to fit in. They want to feel safe in their environment. Unfortunately, most efforts to fill their cups lead to recurring disappointment and, sometimes, despair.

The first three years of a child's life are crucial, because that is when certain very specific brain circuits are formed. These circuits should lead the child away from negative emotions such as anger, frustration, sadness, jealousy, fear, pain, and shock, and bring him or her to the positive emotion of joy instead. In other words, a child should learn to process negative emotions in a positive way. When parents or caregivers comfort children after they take a tumble or distract them when another child said something hurtful, the good circuits are reinforced. I am talking about the circuits that lead to your place of rest and recovery. It is the place of joy.

If you build this circuit and reinforce it often, recovering after disappointments gradually becomes easier. Finding your joy again does not take quite so long. This good place of rest becomes the default station where you can stop and recover after an upsetting experience. It boosts your confidence in your ability to seek and find your own solutions for recuperation. It establishes healthy resilience and confirms our belief that our actions play a large role in the outcomes of our lives.

If you were not privileged enough to develop such a resting place, such a wellspring of joy, your brain likely mapped out some other routes that are supposed to lead to recovery.

However, alternative recovery routes are often harmful, because they ar rooted in bitterness, rebellion, or self-pity. Other unhealthy avenues include performance -driven behaviour, aggression, and arrogance. Your own efforts to get your cup filled often leads to these. Neither rest nor peace resides here, but restlessness and discontentment do. There is a deep yearning within you that you can't quite define, and it leaves you vulnerable, unfulfilled, and frustrated. You are always chasing something else, something more. And before you know it, the negative behaviour that led you to this place starts all over again. This cycle is the result of trauma.

There are two types of trauma. Type A takes place when you do not get the type of treatment you are supposed to. Neglect and emotionally distant care count themselves under this type. Type B trauma happens when you are actively harmed, for example when you are physically, sexually, verbally, or emotionally abused.

In our relationship with other people, we often fall into specific pattern that typifies most of our relationships. The type of connection we form with our parents or first caregivers, become our spontaneous, involuntary reaction. It becomes our standard relationship that forms the template for all our relationships, often without us being aware of it. Relationships that are built on love promote honesty, transparency, and intimacy. Such a relationship consists of loving bonds between the relevant parties. Naturally, one likes to spend time with someone with whom you feel a love connection. Also, you do not mind if that person can see everything that's going on inside you, including your weaknesses. You do not fear rejection because it is not on the menu. Such a relationship always makes you feel safe and secure.

Yet, when your behaviour in relationships focus on avoidance, chances are you are being motivated by fear. Because you fear that the relationship will not work out, everything that you do is driven by the desire to avoid disappointment. You can't imagine revealing your real self to the other person because the potential negative consequences are just too scary. A person can fear different things – abandonment, rejection, or punishment. When a humiliating experience has impacted you very deeply, you will avoid all situations that can lead to the same embarrassment. You might think that you are safeguarding yourself, but in reality you are boxing yourself in and sacrificing quality of life.

Emotional ties are formed between baby and its caregiver during every interaction. The way the caregiver handles the baby conveys whether the caregiver assigns worth to the baby or not. When the verbal and – vitally important – non-verbal communications is negative, the baby's needs are not met. That results in trauma. This trauma surfaces later in life when the person struggles to build meaningful relationships.

Conclusion

Ultimately, healing is only possible if the person reacts to their body and spirit's cries for help and seeks counsel. Each one of us needs to discover the truth – that we are important. We are precious. Not every mirror you look into gives you a true picture of reality. The more secure you are in your understanding and acceptance of yourself, the less disturbance you will experience when conflicting data enters. This centeredness will enhance your inner harmony and your social sphere. How you view *you* will ultimately influence how others view you and themselves. We store our identity or self-definition in our hearts. It is the only place that allows us to give raw, objective opinions, regardless of what our moral convictions or relationship demands might be. It starts with you. How you choose to fill your cups of need based on your *truth.*

This article by Dr. Gerdi van den Berg is based on her research and book:

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CONVERSATION (7)

THE TRAUMA OF HOMELESSNESS AND ITS IMPACT ON YOUNG CHILDREN

Felicia Pettiford

Introduction

Every night, while many children sleep peacefully in their own beds, countless others face the harsh reality of homelessness—a destabilizing crisis that disrupts their lives and undermines their future potential. Imagine the struggle to focus and thrive academically when the uncertainty of where you will sleep each night clouds your mind. For thousands of children across the U.S., this is a daily reality. Childhood trauma, especially stemming from homelessness, significantly affects emotional, academic, and social development and can have many long-term effects (Murran et al., 2023). As educators, understanding this trauma and providing meaningful support is crucial.

Addressing homelessness in educational settings requires more than just providing basic resources; it demands an awareness of the profound emotional and psychological needs these students have (Heerde et al., 2023). Educators can offer essential stability, structure, and compassion amidst chaos (Koh et al., 2023).

However, a recent study in the Early Childhood Education Journal highlights that many educators, particularly pre-service educators remain unprepared to deal with the

ramifications of students who are homeless and harbor misconceptions about how homelessness affects teacher-student relationships and the support required (Wright et al., 2018).

Children facing homelessness often carry an immense emotional burden, including anxiety, fear, and insecurity (Kimiecik, 2024). The instability of not knowing where they will sleep each night, living in different locations, or living in a shelter fosters trust issues, making it challenging for them to form stable relationships with teachers and peers (Minion et al., 2024). Behavioural issues may arise not as acts of defiance but as responses to their chaotic world. Recognising these behaviours as trauma responses allows us to approach children with empathy rather than frustration (Kornbluh et al., 2024).

As expected in these situations, academic performance is directly impacted by homelessness (Hubbard, 2023). Frequent absences due to unstable living conditions or the need to prioritize survival over education hinder their ability to focus in class. Concentrating on lessons becomes nearly impossible when basic needs including shelter, food and safety are unmet. This is even more evident in younger children where a lack of consistent early education can lead to a variety of developmental delays, causing these children to start behind their peers and struggle to meet critical milestones (Murran et al., 2023).

Socially, children experiencing homelessness often grapple with profound feelings of isolation and alienation, largely due to the instability and frequent relocations that can characterize their lives (Edwards, 2024). Constantly moving from one place to another or living in a shelter disrupts their ability to form lasting friendships and establish a stable social network.

Each new school or community introduces a fresh set of faces and social dynamics, which can be overwhelming and make it difficult for these children to build meaningful relationships.

The stigma associated with homelessness further compounds their sense of being "different" from their peers (Hamor, 2024). This stigma can manifest in various ways, such as insensitive comments, exclusion from social groups, or actual bullying.

Children may be teased or marginalized due to their living situation, leading to feelings of shame and humiliation. Such negative social experiences not only reinforce their sense of isolation but also contribute to diminished self-esteem and a persistent sense of unworthiness (Niu et al., 2023).

The impact of this social exclusion can be profound (La Fuente, 2024). Children who face bullying or social ostracism may withdraw from interactions, becoming more isolated and less likely to engage with their peers. This withdrawal is often a protective mechanism, shielding them from further emotional pain but simultaneously deepening their feelings of loneliness. The resulting isolation can hinder their social development, making it challenging for them to develop essential interpersonal skills and build a supportive social network (Otmar et al., 2024).

Moreover, the emotional wounds inflicted by these experiences can lead to long-term consequences (Büttner et al., 2024). The inability to connect with peers or the experience of being judged can contribute to a cycle of insecurity and mistrust, making it even more difficult for these children to seek out and maintain positive relationships in the future. This social and emotional turmoil can affect their overall well-being, making it essential for educators and caregivers to create environments that foster inclusivity, empathy, and understanding (Halverson et al.,2024).

Creating a safe and consistent classroom environment is one of the most impactful strategies educators can employ (Barry et al., 2024). Establishing predictable routines, expectations, and offering emotional check-ins can provide a sense of stability and security. Simple practices, such as offering private moments for sharing feelings or a calming corner in the classroom with meaningful materials, can significantly affect their well-being.

Flexibility with academic expectations is also essential. Recognize that frequent absences do not reflect a lack of commitment but rather the challenges these students face. Extending deadlines, offering alternative assignments, or providing one-on-one time can help them keep up (Sattin-Bajaj et al., 2024).

Advocating for additional resources, such as counselling and tutoring services, is crucial. These students need not only academic support but also emotional and mental

health resources. An empathetic classroom culture benefits all students, especially those experiencing homelessness.

Teaching empathy and understanding, and fostering peer support through group activities, can help build connections and a sense of belonging (Russel et al., 2024).

Implementing trauma-informed practices, such as mindfulness or calming exercises, can assist students in managing their emotions and stress. Open communication with families, conducted with compassion and without judgment, is vital. Connecting families to local resources like housing support, food programs, or community organizations can provide stability beyond the classroom (Mansfield, 2024). Some educators may be hesitant to engage with students' circumstances outside the classroom due to concerns about violating ethical codes or school policies. However, classroom teachers often serve as the primary point of contact for families and are frequently trusted by them before any other entities involved in their child's life.

Schools cannot solve homelessness alone, but they can collaborate with local organizations, such as shelters and food banks, to provide comprehensive support. By initiating school-community projects, like supply drives, schools can extend their support to the wider community (Tan et al., 2024).

Educators hold significant power in supporting children both in and out of the classroom. Advocating for policy changes and additional funding for schools that assist homeless students, including the need for more school counsellors and/or social workers, is essential (Shawder, 2024). Partnering with community organizations to address broader housing insecurity issues can contribute to systemic changes that prevent homelessness.

Here is a list of specific activities that teachers can do with students experiencing homelessness to support their emotional, academic, and social needs according to Kim (2024):

1. **Daily Routine Activities:**

- *Morning Check-Ins:* Start each day with a brief, informal check-in where students can share how they're feeling.

- *Consistent Schedule:* Implement a clear and consistent daily schedule to provide structure and predictability

2. **Emotional Support Activities:**

- *Feelings Chart:* Use a feelings chart or mood board where students can indicate their current emotions, helping them to articulate their feelings.

- *Emotion Journals:* Encourage students to keep a journal where they can write or draw about their experiences and emotions.

3. **Trauma-Informed Practices:**

- *Mindfulness Exercises:* Incorporate short mindfulness exercises or breathing techniques to help students manage stress.

- *Calming Activities*: Create a calming corner with sensory tools, books, or calming visuals where students can go when they need a break.

4. **Academic Support Activities:**

- *Catch-Up Sessions:* Arrange one-on-one or small group sessions to help students catch up on missed work or understand challenging concepts.

- *Flexible Assignments:* Offer alternative formats for assignments, such as oral presentations or creative projects, to accommodate different learning styles and situations.

5. **Social and Peer Support Activities:**

- *Group Projects:* Organize group activities and projects that require teamwork, fostering collaboration and helping students build connections.

- *Peer Buddy System:* Pair students with peers who can offer support and companionship, helping them feel more included.

6. Empathy and Understanding Activities:

- *Empathy Lessons:* Use stories, role-playing, and discussions to teach students about empathy and understanding different perspectives.

- *Community Service Projects:* Engage students in community service activities that help them connect with others and feel a sense of contribution.

7. Family Engagement Activities:

- *Resource Workshops:* Host workshops or informational sessions for families about available resources, such as housing support or food programs.

- *Positive Communication:* Maintain open and compassionate communication with families, offering support and understanding without judgment.

8. Community Collaboration Activities:

- *School Supply Drives:* Organize drives to collect and distribute school supplies, clothing, or other essentials to support homeless families.

- *Partnership Projects:* Partner with local shelters or food banks for community service projects that involve students and their families.

9. Building Resilience:

- *Resilience Stories:* Share stories or books about overcoming adversity and building resilience to inspire and empower students.

- *Goal Setting:* Help students set and work towards personal or academic goals, providing encouragement and celebrating their progress.

10. Physical and Creative Outlets:

- *Art Therapy:* Provide art supplies and encourage creative expression as a way for students to process their experiences and emotions.

- *Movement Breaks:* Incorporate regular physical activities or movement breaks to help students release tension and stay engaged.

By implementing these activities, educators can create a supportive and nurturing environment that helps students experiencing homelessness feel more secure, connected, and capable of succeeding in their educational journey.

Conclusion

The trauma of homelessness leaves lasting scars on young children, but educators can help them heal, build resilience, and achieve success. Trauma-informed teaching provides the security and support these students need to thrive. By continuing to support these children in the classroom and beyond, we move closer to a world where every child has a safe place to call home.

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CONVERSATION 8

THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN ENHANCING TEACHER WELL-BEING AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF LEARNERS

Dr. Joyce Toendepi and Erika Engelbrecht-Aldworth

Introduction

Balancing ever-growing class sizes, endless piles of marking, and the constant struggle for support can feel like a daily uphill battle (Botha, de Jager, & Evans, 2023). Did you know that there is a secret ingredient that could lighten your load, boost your well-being, and enhance your learners' academic performance? In this article, we want to show you how Spirituality can change your life. Please note that we are not talking about a Sunday service here. No, what we are referring to is not religion. We want to invite you to think broader than religion. We refer to a higher awareness that helps you find peace, purpose, and a sense of interconnectedness to transform your everyday teaching life (McClurg et al., 2024). Intrigued? Let us explore the elements of Spirituality that can add value to your life.

What is Spirituality?

Spirituality is complex and personal, but allow us to demystify it for you. It is **not** about attending a religious service on a Sunday; it is about your quest for meaning and purpose in life. Spirituality is the gateway that connects you to a more profound sense of existence in this world.

It is an authentic way of living that naturally boosts your well-being (Engelbrecht-Aldworth & Wort, 2021). Think of it as a secret ingredient for a happier, more fulfilling life.

How Spirituality Enhances Teacher Well-Being

Spirituality can enrich your teaching life by giving you a more profound sense of purpose and connection to your work. By incorporating practices like mindfulness, meditation, or reflective prayer into your daily routine, you can find an inner peace that helps you handle the demands of teaching with greater ease. This sense of tranquillity can strengthen your emotional resilience, allowing you to face challenges more gracefully and patiently. Furthermore, embracing spirituality may help you become more empathetic and compassionate, fostering stronger, supportive relationships with your students and colleagues. By focusing on your spiritual growth, you can sustain your passion for teaching and contribute to creating a more positive, nurturing environment in your classroom.

Spirituality enhances teacher well-being in the following ways:

- *Increased Job Satisfaction:*

Imagine showing up to work each day not just because you must but because you see real, deeper meaning in your work. Spirituality can help you find that purpose, leading to greater job satisfaction and a renewed commitment to your learners (Li et al., 2024).

- *Enhanced Resilience:*

Ever felt like you're on the verge of breaking down? Understanding spirituality can help you develop emotional resilience, providing a strong foundation to confront challenges directly. (Kumar, 2024). This makes it easier to bounce back and continue doing what you love - teaching.

- *Greater Sense of Community:*

Spiritual practices can help strengthen your connections with colleagues, fostering community and support within the school (McClurg et al., 2024).

Imagine having a support network always there for you, making your workplace feel like a second home.

- *Improved Emotional Health:*

Incorporating spiritual practices into your daily routine can be a game-changer for managing stress and avoiding burnout (Bucza, 2024). Think of it as your daily dose of emotional wellness.

Applying Spirituality to Enhance Academic Performance

Recent research shows that spirituality can boost academic performance (Turi et al., 2020; Imron et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2024). Studies have examined how adding meditation, mindfulness, and reflective thinking can help learners focus better, feel less anxious, and improve their emotional well-being (Pascual, 2022). Learners who are more centred and less stressed are more likely to engage deeply with their studies and do better academically (Anzures, 2023). Spirituality is a mental toolkit that helps learners handle the pressures of school life more efficiently.

This suggests that schools should consider including some spiritual development programs or activities in their schedules to support learners in a more well-rounded way and help them succeed academically.

Now let us explore the ways you can bring Spirituality into your class:

Foundation Phase

Picture your little ones attending a classroom filled with warmth, empathy, and a sense of belonging from day one. Integrating spirituality in early childhood education means weaving in storytelling with moral lessons, fostering attentiveness, kindness, and emotional regulation (Schoem et al., 2023). Encouraging art and play stimulates creativity and helps young learners feel valued in the class community (Lee, 2024).

Intersen Phase

Spirituality can be a powerful tool for inquisitive pre-teens to foster engagement and respect. Introduce group reflections where learners share personal experiences and values, promoting a supportive and understanding classroom atmosphere (Mulang &

Putra, 2023). Imagine the boost in motivation when learners see real-world applications of their studies through service learning projects, embedding community involvement and establishing a sense of purpose (Mulawarman et al., 2024).

Senior Phase

Spirituality awareness can serve as a guiding force during times of academic stress and personal struggles. Providing mentorship rooted in shared spiritual and ethical principles can help students navigate both their personal and academic challenges. (Agustina et al., 2024). Life skills programs that integrate spirituality can foster resilience, making it easier for children to manage stress effectively (Husanovich, 2023).

Further Education and Training (FET) Phase

This is where we try to prepare learners for the adult world. We direct learners through mentorship programs that emphasise ethical and spiritual values, providing them with the tools to tackle future challenges (Agustina et al., 2024). Combine this with mindfulness practices in language classrooms to reduce anxiety and improve academic performance (Zeilhofer, 2023).

Culturally responsive teaching methods incorporating spiritual values ensure that every learner's background is respected, fostering inclusivity and engagement in your classroom (Esat et al., 2024).

The Broader Impact of Spirituality on Education

When you think about it, the impact of spirituality on education goes way beyond just hitting the books. It brings mindfulness, compassion, and living ethically, which help children grow intellectually, emotionally, and morally. Imagine developing a deeper self-awareness and a sense of purpose that makes you and your learners more engaged with your studies and relationships. Plus, when educational settings foster a spiritual environment, it can build a community based on mutual respect and empathy, making the learning experience much more prosperous. By combining academic rigour with spiritual insights, education can prepare learners for career success and a fulfilling and balanced life.

Here are some ways that Spirituality can impact education:

Emotional and Mental Health: By embracing spirituality, you can better understand yourself and your learners, leading to more empathetic and supportive interactions (Rothì et al., 2008). This helps create a stable learning environment where everyone can thrive.

Ethical and Moral Development: Spirituality isn't just about academic success—it's about nurturing well-rounded individuals. Imagine guiding your learners towards being compassionate, respectful, and morally grounded citizens prepared to contribute positively to society (Roberts & Lucey, 2023).

Building a Supportive School Culture: By promoting values of interconnectedness and community, spirituality can help create a school culture where everyone feels valued and supported (Paul & Jena, 2022). This mutual respect and community atmosphere can enhance academic outcomes and create a more harmonious school environment.

Enhancing Teacher Efficacy and Retention: Spirituality can increase job satisfaction and reinforce a sense of purpose in a high-stress profession like teaching. This can help reduce burnout and turnover rates, ensuring that experienced and passionate teachers like you remain in the profession (Li et al., 2024).

Processing Trauma Through Spirituality

Many learners face trauma. Integrating spirituality into your classroom can help foster resilience and promote post-traumatic growth. Trauma-informed teaching and spiritual practices can create a safe and nurturing environment for your learners (Stephens, 2020). Activities such as mindfulness and reflective practices can help them make sense of their experiences, promoting healing and emotional stability (Fortuna et al., 2023; Kira et al., 2020).

Spirituality as a Tool for Processing Trauma in Different Learning Phases

Bringing spirituality into the classroom can be a heartfelt way to help students process trauma at different learning stages. You can create a warm and supportive space where learners feel safe to explore their emotions. These spiritual tools provide comforting moments for learners to openly address their feelings and experiences, fostering a sense of security and connection.

When these practices are tailored to fit each developmental stage, learners and teachers can process trauma more effectively, enhancing emotional well-being and making the learning journey richer and more compassionate.

Let us look at ways you can introduce these tools into your classroom at each level:

Foundation Phase (Grades R-3)

At this early stage, learners begin navigating the world outside their family environment. Spiritual practices such as simple mindfulness exercises and guided imagery can help young children who have experienced trauma feel safe and grounded. You can create a nurturing atmosphere where children can express their emotions through art and storytelling, fostering a sense of security and belonging in your classroom. These practices can help alleviate anxiety and build a foundation for emotional resilience.

Intersen Phase (Grades 4-6)

As learners grow older, they develop more complex emotions and social relationships. Introducing practices like deep breathing, basic meditation, and reflective journaling can assist in processing traumatic experiences. You can facilitate group discussions that emphasise kindness, empathy, and community-building, which can help students feel connected and supported. These activities allow learners to understand their feelings and develop coping mechanisms in a safe space.

Senior Phase (Grades 7-9)

Learners face significant physical, emotional, and cognitive changes in this transitional phase. Spiritual practices such as more advanced meditation techniques, yoga, and service activities can promote self-awareness and emotional regulation.

You can encourage students to engage in reflective practices that help them process their trauma and understand their inner worlds. Group activities that emphasise collaboration and mutual support can help students feel less isolated in their experiences.

FET Phase (Further Education and Training)

As teenagers approach adulthood, they encounter more tremendous academic pressures and social complexities. Spirituality can be integrated into their routine through mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), contemplative reading, and community service projects. You can support students by fostering an environment where discussing emotions and mental health is normalised and encouraged. These practices can help learners manage stress, build resilience, and find meaning and purpose amidst challenges.

Vocational Training and Higher Education

In vocational or higher education, students face the dual challenge of transitioning to adulthood while preparing for their careers. Advanced spiritual practices such as mindfulness meditation, reflective writing, and ethical contemplation can be especially beneficial. You can support students by incorporating discussions about life purpose, values, and long-term well-being into their curricula. Encouraging involvement in community service and peer support groups can provide additional emotional and spiritual support, helping learners find a balanced path forward.

By integrating spirituality into these various learning phases, learners and teachers can foster an environment where trauma is acknowledged and actively processed, leading to healthier emotional development and a more profound sense of community and personal well-being.

Conclusion

Integrating spirituality into South Africa's education system offers a wealth of benefits. For teachers, it can provide a sense of purpose, enhance emotional resilience, and foster a stronger sense of community. Spirituality can improve academic performance, promote emotional well-being, and contribute to ethical and moral development for

learners. By weaving spirituality into the fabric of your teaching practice, you are not just educating—you are nurturing well-rounded, compassionate, and resilient individuals ready to take on the world. Spirituality helps you create a holistic learning environment that values emotional, mental, and spiritual growth as much as academic achievement.

Embrace this journey and build a thriving, engaged, conscientious future society where people are taught about the importance of authenticity, finding meaning and purpose while investing in personal connection with others who share their experiences in this world.

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CONVERSATION ⑨

THE HIDDEN CRISIS: TEACHER TRAUMA

Erika Engelbrecht-Aldworth

Introduction

We know that teaching is an immensely rewarding profession. Shaping minds, inspiring young learners, and fostering a love for knowledge make our jobs fulfilling. Yet, it is vital that we discuss the trauma many of us face in the school environment. This toxic part of our profession impacts our well-being negatively. In this article we aim to take a closer look at the different types of trauma teachers encounter and discuss why it is critical to address these issues for our own sake and for the benefit of our learners.

Emotional and Psychological Trauma in Schools

Emotional and psychological trauma refer to the profound impact distressing events within schools have on the mental and emotional well-being of teachers. These traumas can stem from bullying, harassment, verbal abuse, and chronic stress. When teachers face constant criticism, undue pressure, or are subjected to demeaning interactions, it can lead to significant psychological strain. This type of trauma is beyond physical harm. It signifies the invisible wounds that impact our mental health, self-esteem, and overall sense of security and worth (Rezende et al., 2023; Yusri el al., 2024).

The importance of starting conversations about emotional and psychological trauma is crucial to creating supportive and nurturing environments where teachers can thrive, free from the crippling effects of persistent stress and negative treatment (Farmer, 2020).

Bullying and Harassment

As teachers, we face bullying or harassment from not only learners but also form management, colleagues and parents. This can manifest in threats, undue criticism, or outright humiliation that leads to severe psychological distress (Rezende et al., 2023). The stress of such experiences is not simply psychological; it impacts all other aspects of our lives.

Verbal Abuse

Name-calling, insults, and derogatory comments are unfortunately not uncommon in our profession. Verbal abuse can seriously hurt our confidence and sense of self-worth, making us question our abilities (Wettstein et al., 2023). Yusri, Aryani, and Hasmawati (2024) have noted how verbal abuse can have long-term impacts on our emotional well-being. These verbal assaults can come from learners, managers, colleagues, or parents. Exposrue to constant verbal abuse creates an environment of increased negativity and stress.

Workplace Stress

The constant pressure to meet educational standards, manage classroom behaviour, and juggle administrative tasks can be overwhelming. It is no surprise that prolonged exposure to such stress can significantly affect our mental health (Farmer, 2020). I often find myself buried under a mountain of tasks, feeling the weight of not meeting unrealistic expectations.

Physical Trauma

Physical trauma in teaching refer to incidents and experiences that result in bodily harm or physical threats. This directly impact a teacher's physical safety and well-being. Physical Trauma can manifest as direct violence, such as assaults or threats from learners or intruders, leading to significant injuries or fear for personal safety. Everyday incidents like pushing, hitting, or accidents within the school premises also contribute to this trauma. Physical confrontations not only affect our immediate physical health but also result in emotional stress and anxiety (Jackson & Stevens, 2023; Rezende et al., 2023). Addressing physical trauma involves ensuring a safe and secure working environment where we feel protected and supported (Okeke & Simphiwe, 2024).

Violence

Physical assaults or threats from learners are sadly real risks in our profession. While school shootings often capture media attention, everyday violence - like pushing or hitting - can be deeply traumatising (Jackson & Stevens, 2023). I remember an incident where an aggressive learner's behaviour led to a physical altercation, leaving me shaken for weeks. Okeke and Simphiwe (2024) describe how pervasive school violence impacts teachers' ability to feel safe and secure in their work environment. The fear or actual experience of violent incidents such as shootings or bomb threats can be deeply traumatising. The anxiety and alarm that come with these threats linger long after the event has passed (Jackson & Stevens, 2023).

Injuries

Accidents within the classroom such as slips, trips, or falls can result in physical injuries, further compounding our stress (Rezende et al., 2023). These injuries adds physical burden to the existing emotional strain. This is a reminder of the physical dangers inherent in our work environment.

Secondary Traumatic Stress

Vicarious trauma, also known as secondary traumatic stress, occurs when individuals indirectly experience trauma through exposure to others' firsthand accounts of distressing events. As teachers, this often manifests when we hear about or witness the personal traumas of our learners, which can include stories of abuse, neglect, or significant family issues (Sharifian et al., 2023). As empathetic teachers, we often absorb their pain, which can significantly impact our mental health. I recall countless conversations with learners facing unimaginable hardships at home, and each story left a mark on me. Secondary trauma can be overwhelming.

Over time, this indirect exposure to trauma can lead to symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in us, even though we are not the direct victims of the trauma (Ormiston et al., 2022). The emotional burden of constantly absorbing and empathising with the traumatic experiences of learners can lead to severe psychological and emotional strain, impacting our mental health, sense of well-being, and professional effectiveness (Sharifian et al., 2023). Recognising and addressing vicarious trauma is essential in supporting teachers and maintaining a healthy, empathetic educational environment (Frearson & Duncan, 2024).

Systemic Trauma

Systemic trauma within the teaching profession refers to institutionalised challenges that contribute to a toxic and oppressive work environment. These can include unfair policies, unrealistic performance expectations, and a chronic lack of resources or support from the administration. When we grapple with such systemic issues, it can lead to feelings of helplessness, frustration, and a diminished sense of professional efficacy. These institutional stressors take an emotional and psychological toll on us, creating a school culture where fatigue, chronic stress and burnout are the norm (Oberg et al., 2023; McMakin et al., 2020).

Addressing systemic trauma involves comprehensive reforms to create fair, supportive, and resource-equipped educational settings where we can thrive and feel valued for our contributions (Oberg & Bryce, 2022). Some institutional policies can be extremely unfair or oppressive.

Unrealistic performance expectations, inadequate support resources, and inflexible administrative practices can create a toxic work environment (Oberg et al., 2023)

Feeling unsupported by our administration is a common issue. When we are left to fend for ourselves without the necessary resources to do our jobs effectively, it can lead to feelings of helplessness and frustration (McMakin et al., 2020). There were times when I felt completely isolated, battling not just for my learners but also for my own sanity. The need for systemic change is imperative.

Burnout is a state of chronic physical and emotional exhaustion resulting from prolonged exposure to stress and demands, particularly in professional settings such as teaching. It manifests through feelings of being overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands.

Burnout is the result of unrealistic workload expectations, such as planning lessons, grading assignments, and managing classroom dynamics within impossible time frames, which extend well beyond regular working hours. This can lead to severe exhaustion and a diminished sense of accomplishment (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; Farmer, 2020).

Emotional exhaustion, another core component of burnout, stems from the constant emotional demands of teaching, including addressing diverse learner needs and managing interactions with parents and administrators (Douglass et al., 2021). Addressing burnout requires systemic changes and support mechanisms for teachers to ensure that we have the necessary resources and time to recharge and maintain well-being (Benner et al., 2023).

Chronic Overwork

We all know the long hours do not end when the school bell rings. Planning lessons, grading assignments, and attending meetings often extend into nights and weekends. This chronic overwork can lead to severe exhaustion and burnout (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020). Constant unrealistic demands can lead to an overwhelming sense of fatigue, making it difficult to maintain passion for teaching (Benner et al., 2023).

Emotional Exhaustion

Constantly managing classroom dynamics, addressing diverse learner needs, and interacting with parents and administrators can be emotionally draining (Douglass et al., 2021). We often neglect our emotional needs in the face of relentless demands.

Social Trauma

Social trauma in teaching is the result of the emotional and psychological impact from social interactions and relationships within the school environment. Isolation, discrimination, and cultural conflicts often contribute to this form of trauma. Teachers may experience a sense of loneliness when we feel unsupported or disconnected from our colleagues.

This can exacerbate stress and decrease job satisfaction (Berger et al., 2021; King et al., 2023). Navigating the complex cultural differences and biases within the school setting can lead to feelings of alienation and frustration, particularly for teachers from minority backgrounds (Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2023). Addressing social trauma involves fostering a supportive and inclusive community where we feel valued, respected, and connected.

Isolation

Teaching is a profession that thrives on collaboration and feeling isolated can be devastating. Particularly in competitive or unsupportive school environments, the lack of a supportive community increases feelings of loneliness (Berger et al., 2021).

This stress is not just personal; it impacts our effectiveness as teachers when we are constantly battling these underlying tensions (Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2023). King et al. (2023) suggest that building supportive networks among teachers is crucial for combating feelings of isolation.

Crisis Events

Crisis events in teaching refer to significant, often sudden incidents that disrupt the normal functioning of a school environment and can profoundly impact the mental and emotional well-being of both teachers and learners. These events include occurrences such as school shootings, bomb threats, natural disasters, and public health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Such traumatic incidents can lead to heightened anxiety, fear, and long-term psychological issues as they create an atmosphere of instability and danger (Jackson et al., 2023; Luthar et al., 2020). Addressing the impact of crisis events requires comprehensive emergency preparedness, effective communication, and strong support systems to ensure that we can navigate through these challenging times with resilience and emotional stability (Fan et al., 2021).

Natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, or wild fires can disrupt our school community. These events add another layer of stress and trauma as we try to support our learners while dealing with our own personal losses (Luthar & Mendes, 2020).

Addressing Teacher Trauma

Addressing teacher trauma requires a multifaceted approach that include individual, systemic, and community-level interventions. One of the primary strategies involves building robust support systems within schools, providing professional development focused on mental health awareness, and offering access to counselling and mental health services (Douglass et al., 2021; Oberg et al., 2023). Promoting self-care is equally vital, with schools encouraged to facilitate wellness programmes and advocate for a healthy work-life balance (Kim et al., 2021; Farmer, 2020).

Additionally, fostering a collaborative and inclusive culture can mitigate feelings of isolation and enhance our overall well-being (Berger et al., 2021; King et al., 2023). By implementing trauma-informed practices, revisiting institutional policies, and ensuring administrative support, we can create a safer and more nurturing environment for ourselves and our learners (Luthar & Mendes, 2020; McMakin et al., 2020).

Building Support Systems

One effective way to tackle teacher trauma is by building robust support systems within our schools. Here are some strategies that have worked in various settings:

Professional Development: Schools can provide training focused on mental health awareness and strategies for managing stress and trauma. This kind of professional development can empower us to take proactive steps to protect our well-being (Oberg et al., 2023). These sessions are not just helpful; they are necessary for understanding and managing the various stresses we encounter. Garay et al. (2024) emphasise the importance of trauma-informed training for teachers, highlighting its role in reducing burnout and enhancing resilience.

Peer Support Networks: Establishing peer support groups or mentorship programmes can give us a sense of community and a forum to share experiences and coping strategies (Berger et al., 2021). Talking to someone who truly understands can make all the difference. King et al. (2023) introduced the CoHealing intervention to address teacher burnout and indirect trauma, focusing on building strong peer support networks.

Access to Mental Health Services: Ensuring that we have access to counselling and mental health resources is critical. Professional support can help us process our experiences and develop resilience (Dou glass et al., 2021).

Speaking with a counsellor who understands the unique challenges of teaching has been transformative for me.

Promoting Self-Care: Self-care is essential, yet it is something we often neglect due to our demanding roles.

*Personal Wellness Programmes*Schools can offer wellness programmes that include activities like mindfulness, yoga, or other relaxation techniques (Kim et al., 2021). Incorporating these activities into my routine has provided much-needed relief. Fan et al. (2021) discuss the benefits of wellness programmes in reducing symptoms of PTSD among teachers, particularly during stressful periods like the COVID-19 outbreak.

Work-Life Balance: Promoting a healthy work-life balance is crucial. Administrative support in setting reasonable expectations and ensuring we have time to recharge can make a significant difference (Farmer, 2020). I have learnt to set boundaries, though it is difficult, to ensure I have time to rest and rejuvenate.

Recognition and Appreciation: Regular acknowledgement of our hard work can boost morale and reduce feelings of underappreciation (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020). Simple acts of recognition from my peers and administrators have gone a long way in making me feel valued.

Enhancing Systemic Support: Enhancing systemic support within the educational environment is crucial for addressing the multifaceted traumas that teachers face. This involves revising institutional policies to ensure fairness and support, reducing class sizes, and providing sufficient planning time and resources (Oberg & Bryce, 2022). Schools should periodically review and revise policies to ensure they are fair and supportive. This might involve reducing class sizes, providing adequate planning time, and ensuring we have access to the resources we need (Oberg et al., 2023). Policies should be designed with teacher well-being in mind.

Administrative support is integral: School leaders must actively support us by being accessible, providing opportunities for professional growth, and fostering an inclusive and collaborative school culture (McMakin et al , 2020). Effective leadership can create an environment where we feel heard and supported, mitigating feelings of isolation and burnout. Leh (2024) suggests early intervention strategies to stop the avalanche of teacher trauma, emphasising proactive administrative support.

Creating safe and inclusive work environments: Schools should strive to create environments that are both physically and emotionally safe for all staff and learners.

This involves clear anti-bullying policies, cultural sensitivity training, and established protocols for handling crises and conflicts (Luthar et al., 2020). Systemic changes are essential to creating a supportive educational ecosystem where we feel empowered and valued. A safe environment allows us to focus on teaching without fear. Kostouros et al. (2023) discuss how trauma-informed teaching can make a significant difference in creating supportive school climates, particularly for teachers working with learners from diverse backgrounds.

Trauma-Informed Practices

Applying trauma-informed practices in schools involves creating an environment that understands, recognises, and responds to the effects of trauma on both learners and teachers. These practices focus on building a safe and supportive atmosphere where trust and emotional security are prioritised. Educators and administrators should be trained to recognise signs of trauma, enabling them to provide appropriate support and accommodations (Brunzell et al., 2021; Rodger et al., 2020). Implementing techniques for emotional regulation and stress management during the school day can benefit the entire school community, fostering resilience and coping skills (Kim et al., 2021).

Additionally, strengthening relationships and promoting strong communication within the school can lay the foundation for a more compassionate and understanding educational setting. Embracing trauma-informed practices ensures that schools are better equipped to address the complex needs of learners and staff affected by trauma, thereby enhancing overall well-being and educational outcomes.

The Path Forward

Addressing the variety of traumas that we, as teachers, face requires a multifaceted approach involving individual, systemic, and community-level interventions. School administrations, policymakers, and society at large must recognise and actively address our mental health and well-being.

By doing so, we not only support ourselves but also enhance the overall learning environment, benefiting our learners and the school community as a whole.

Conclusion

Educational systems must urgently prioritise the implementation of trauma-informed practices and support mechanisms to address the often-overlooked crisis of teacher trauma. Ignoring this issue can lead to dire consequences. By fostering a culture of understanding, compassion, and resilience, we can ensure that teachers are well-equipped to face the challenges of their profession without compromising their well-being. A positive state of well-being enables teachers to be effective, passionate, and sustained contributors to their learners' growth and academic success. Investing in the well-being of teachers is, ultimately, an investment in the future of our leaders.

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CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION PROGRAMME

WHY EVERY TEACHER SHOULD INCLUDE THE "MY BODY IS MY BODY" PROGRAMME IN THEIR LESSONS

Chrissy Sykes

Introduction

Over the past 30 years, I have had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the transformative power of well-structured, proactive child safety education. The "My Body is My Body" programme stands out for its simplicity, effectiveness, and its profound impact on both children and educators alike. Incorporating this programme into your lessons is not just a beneficial add-on—it is a crucial step towards fostering a safer, more supportive classroom environment where children can thrive.

Understanding the Need: The Impact of Abuse and Trauma on Children

It is an unfortunate reality that many behavioural issues in children stem from underlying abuse or trauma. Children may not always have the words to express what they are experiencing, so their emotions often manifest through behaviour. These behaviours might include withdrawal, aggression, anxiety, or difficulty concentrating - signs that something deeper may be troubling them.

As educators, understanding this link between behaviour and trauma is essential. By recognising these signs, teachers can become a first line of defence in identifying and addressing issues that may be impacting a child's well-being.

The "My Body is My Body" programme empowers teachers with the tools to have these critical conversations in a way that is age-appropriate and sensitive to the child's needs.

Our free courses and resources are available on our website at www.mbimb.org all you need to do is register to access everything.

The Benefits of the "My Body is My Body" Programme

1.**Empowering Children with Knowledge and Confidence**
One of the most significant benefits of this programme is its ability to empower children by teaching them about body safety in a way that is both engaging and memorable.

The use of music, activities, and animated videos makes the lessons accessible to young minds, ensuring they understand the key messages:

- *What is and is not appropriate behaviour*
- *How to recognise potentially harmful situations*
- *The importance of speaking up.*

<u>**Our 6 songs:**</u>

1. My Body Is My Body
Objective: To teach children that their bodies are their own and no one has the right to hurt them or touch their private parts.

2. If It Doesn't Feel Right, Don't Do It
Objective:
- To teach children to listen to their own feelings.
- To talk about peer pressure.
- To help children with body empowerment.

3. The "What If" Game

Objective: The 'What If 'game can be applied to any situation that you may suspect is happening to a child. Use the game to give answers to difficult situations that children may not know how to get out of safely.

4. If You've Got A Problem

Objective: To reinforce the learning of telling someone if there is a problem and if that person does not listen keep telling till someone does listen.

5. Love Is Gentle

Objective: To teach children that love is gentle and kind and is all about caring, sharing and trusting.

6. Say No To Secrets

Objective: To teach children NOT to keep SECRETS

Opening Lines of Communication

The programme is designed to open channels of communication between children and trusted adults. Often, children who are experiencing abuse or trauma may feel isolated and unsure of whom to turn to. By normalising conversations around body safety and encouraging children to express their concerns, the programme helps break down these barriers, making it easier for children to seek help when needed.

Building a Safer Classroom Environment

When implemented across a classroom or school, the "My Body is My Body" programme contributes to a culture of safety and respect. It fosters an environment where children feel valued and secure, knowing that their teachers are not only educators but also protectors of their well-being. This sense of safety creates a foundation for effective learning and emotional development.

Supporting Educators with Effective Tools

Teachers are often the first adults outside the family to notice when something is wrong with a child. However, without the right tools, it can be challenging to know how to address these concerns. The "My Body is My Body" programme provides educators with clear, effective resources to teach body safety and recognise the signs of abuse. This support can be invaluable in helping teachers feel confident in their ability to make a positive difference.

Promoting Early Intervention and Prevention

By educating children early about their rights to safety and respect, the programme plays a crucial role in preventing abuse before it occurs. Children who understand their rights are more likely to recognise inappropriate behaviour and report it, leading to earlier intervention. This proactive approach is essential in safeguarding children's futures and ensuring they grow up in a supportive environment.

Positive Impact in the Classroom

Implementing the "My Body is My Body" programme can have a profound impact on classroom dynamics. When children feel safe and understood, they are more likely to engage positively with their peers and educators. Teachers who have integrated this programme into their lessons often report a noticeable improvement in classroom behaviour, with students showing greater empathy, cooperation, and self-assurance.

Moreover, the programme's focus on not keeping harmful secrets reinforces the importance of trust and transparency, which are crucial components of a healthy school culture. As students become more aware of their rights and the support available to them, they contribute to a community where everyone looks out for each other, creating a ripple effect of positive change.

The "My Body is My Body" programme is more than just a set of lessons—it's a commitment to the safety, dignity, and well-being of every child in your classroom. By incorporating this programme into your teaching, you are not only providing essential education but also taking a stand against abuse and trauma.

You are equipping your students with the knowledge and confidence they need to navigate the world safely, while also fostering an environment where they can thrive both academically and emotionally.

In a world where safeguarding children has never been more critical, the "My Body is My Body" programme is an invaluable tool for every teacher committed to making a lasting difference in the lives of their students.

Introduction

Teaching is a rewarding yet demanding profession. In South Africa, the challenges are unique. Teaching is challenging due to our high learner-to-teacher ratios, limited resources, and many socio-economic issues our schools face daily (Botha and Hall, 2024). Through my own experience as a teacher, my research and my work, it is clear that the well-being of teachers is crucial not just for our health and happiness but for the success of our learners, too. My mission is to create a teacher support system tailored specifically to these challenges and the well-being of all who move within the sphere of education.

The goal is simple*:* help teachers flourish personally and professionally, reignite their passion for teaching, and ultimately improve their learners' learning experience and academic performance (Hughes, 2024).

Building a Global Support System for Educators

As @theteachercoach, I focus on personal and professional development opportunities rooted in scientific research.

This is not just about surviving the school year but about thriving within the challenges that it brings. One of the key initiatives I have launched is the **#2minsfor21daysteacherwellbeingchallenge**.

What Makes This Challenge Special?

The most crucial element of this Teacher Well-being Challenge is that a teacher created this challenge for teachers.

Evidence-Based Practices: I researched and curated 21 science-backed strategies that boost well-being. These practices are not just theories but actionable steps teachers can take to improve their well-being.

Daily Integration: The idea is to make well-being practices manageable and sustainable. Teachers can weave these practices into their everyday routines with just two minutes a day. I know firsthand that, as teachers, we do not have the luxury of spending more than a few minutes daily on well-being.

Dual Focus: It is about personal well-being, but it goes beyond your own well-being. The challenge was created to empower you with skills to make a supportive and positive classroom environment.

Whole-School Approach: This challenge is an effective tool for a Whole-School Well-being Campaign. It shares content that school leaders can use to embrace and foster a school culture where well-being matter.

Growth and Fulfillment: When teachers grow professionally and personally, they experience increased job satisfaction, less burnout, and a more positive outlook on the teaching profession and life in general.

Collaboration for Change

I am committed to making a systemic change in education by using awareness campaigns to start uncomfortable conversations about the lack of well-being and support in education. I call on others who work within education to advocate for safer and more supportive school environments globally.

This collaborative approach ensures that our efforts are not isolated but part of a more significant movement that aims to transform our education system at its core.

Rekindling the Joy of Teaching

One of my primary goals is to help teachers rediscover their passion for teaching. Through various strategies and initiatives, I aim to reconnect educators with what made them fall in love with this profession in the first place. Learners benefit immensely from a more vibrant and inspiring learning environment when teachers are passionate and engaged.

Join the Movement: Together, We Can Make a Difference

I invite all teachers to join the second **#2minsfor21daysteacherwellbeingchallenge,** which starts on September 1st, 2024. Become part of a community dedicated to prioritising teacher well-being.

This initiative is an ideal opportunity for School Management Teams, Heads of Departments, Grade Heads, and teacher friends keen on enhancing their personal well-being and professional development, especially as we navigate the challenges of Term 3 and Term 4.

Transforming School Cultures and Climates

Implementing the ***#2minsfor21daysteacherwellbeingchallenge*** can lead to meaningful improvements in the school climate. When teachers feel supported and valued, they are better equipped to handle the demands of their jobs, leading to a more positive and productive school environment (Dreer, 2024). This holistic approach ensures that well-being practices permeate the entire school, fostering a culture of care and support.

Benefits of a Positive School Climate

A positive school climate shapes social dynamics and overall well-being in a school (Pinchak, 2024). Such a climate fosters a supportive and inclusive environment where learners feel safe, respected, and engaged. This enhances academic performance and strengthens interpersonal relationships by encouraging dense friendship networks (Mamas et al., 2024). Moreover, a positive school climate can significantly reduce incidents of adolescent violence, as it cultivates a sense of community and mutual respect among learners, thereby mitigating conflicts and promoting harmonious interactions (Rahayu et al., 2024).

A Positive School Climate also affects teachers positively:

Improved Teacher Retention: Reduced burnout and increased job satisfaction mean schools can retain experienced and passionate teachers, which is critical for maintaining high educational standards (Huang, 2024).

Enhanced Student Outcomes: A positive and supportive classroom environment leads to better student engagement, higher academic achievement, and improved social-emotional development. (Lapidot-Lefler et al., 2024).

Community Building: A school culture prioritising well-being encourages stronger relationships among teachers, students, and parents, creating a more cohesive and supportive community (Raju, 2024).

Looking Ahead: Embracing the Future of Teacher Well-Being in South Africa

I have reached a point in my career where I no longer follow instructions blindly. Instead, I seek answers and support. Someone had to take the lead in providing the support teachers need. It dawned on me that I could be the change within my immediate environment. I could make incremental changes and add tangible value by sharing my experience, my research, and my journey in education. I was amazed at the response of other specialists in the education sector who were eager to help, guide, consult, and empower.

I now share the solutions to my challenges and questions with my community through research-backed initiatives, professional development opportunities, and collaborative efforts with educational stakeholders. To further amplify this impact, I have intentionally created a network of education specialists to support and guide me as we work together to establish a more supportive and resilient education system.

Strategies for Sustained Impact

Teachers must upskill to adapt effectively to the rapidly evolving classroom landscape, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic (Banerjee, 2024). Supported and valued teachers are more likely to inspire, engage, and effectively educate their learners (Daniel et al., 2024). This transformation starts with everyone who is invested in the future of education. Now is the time for change as we focus on teacher well-being and set the stage for significant improvements in education. The journey to enhancing teacher well-being is continuous and collaborative. By prioritising the health and happiness of our teachers, we not only improve their quality of life but also enrich the educational experiences of countless learners – the future leaders (Packham et al., 2024).

Ongoing Professional Development: Lifelong learning keeps us all evolving. Regular workshops, sharing new research in education, online awareness campaigns, networking with others in the field, and training sessions ensure teachers stay updated with the latest well-being practices and educational strategies, sustaining momentum and impact (Stark et al., 2024).

Building a Network of Support: By establishing a network of well-being advocates and champions, we can spread the message and support integrating well-being practices in more schools. This network can provide invaluable resources, share success stories, and offer peer support (Thomas, 2024).

Research and research publication: Continuous research, research publication and evaluation are essential to understanding the effectiveness of well-being initiatives.

Collecting data and analysing outcomes allow us to refine our approaches, ensuring lasting and meaningful impact (Zhang et al., 2024).

Join Me in Making a Difference

Join this movement for change in the educational sphere as we prioritise teacher well-being to lay the groundwork for a more effective, compassionate, and resilient education system. I invite you to join this campaign, whether you're a teacher, school leader, policymaker, or community member. Let us work together to create environments where teachers and learners can thrive.

Here are ways you can add value:

Participate in the Challenge: If you're an educator or working within the education system, sign up for the **#2minsfor21daysteacherwellbeingchallenge** and start your well-being journey today.

Spread the Word: Share information about the challenge and all our initiatives with your colleagues and educational networks: the more hands and hearts involved, the more significant the impact.

Collaborate: Engage with school leaders, policymakers, and community members to advocate for policies prioritising teacher well-being. Start conversations!

Support Continued Research: Stay informed about ongoing research in teacher well-being and support initiatives that further our understanding of the challenges and solutions in this field. We must support research initiatives and participate wherever we can. Knowledge is the only way to make the change we want to see in education. Let the data speak for us!

Conclusion

By placing a premium on teacher well-being, we can substantially enhance the quality of education. When teachers rediscover their passion for teaching and build the resilience to tackle daily challenges, it benefits the academic performance of their learners. This vision of prioritising well-being is an aspirational goal and an essential foundation for a successful education. Let us create an environment where passion and productivity can flourish, paving the way for a brighter and more prosperous future in education, with teacher well-being as its cornerstone.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Conversation 2:

Weathering the Thunderclouds of Trauma: The need to create Trauma-Informed Schools in South Africa

Leila Jeebodhi-Desai

Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness Techniques

Grounding Techniques:

- "5-4-3-2-1" Exercise
- See, Feel, Hear, Smell, Taste
- Connect with the present moment

Awareness of Breathing:

- Deep, Slow Breathing
- Box Breathing Technique
- Calm the Nervous System

Body Scan:

- Focus on Body Parts
- Notice Sensations
- Relax Muscles

Safe Place Visualisation:

- Imagine a Safe Space
- Visualize Sights, Sounds, and Smells
- Feel Secure and Relaxed

Keep Moving:

- Mindful Movement
- Stretching and Yoga Poses
- Reconnect with the Body

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Appendix B

Conversation 3:

The Journey of South African Education:

A Teacher's Perspective

Melissa Gardner

Trauma Reaction Cards™ Checklist

Client Name:_____   Date:_____

Behavior Reactions

☐ Hitting	☐ Arguing	☐ Not listening /defiance
☐ Fighting	☐ Cursing	☐ Breaking things
☐ Running away	☐ Crying	☐ Outbursts of anger
☐ School problems	☐ Lying	☐ Bathroom problems
☐ Avoiding people, places, things, or sensations related to the trauma	☐ Acting younger than you are	☐ Isolating yourself from others
	☐ Unsafe sexual practices	☐ Trying to end your life
☐ Hurting your own body	☐ Stealing	☐ Using drugs/alcohol/cigarettes
☐ Taking out your feelings on people you care about	☐ Tantrums	☐ Trusting others too quickly/ Inappropriate boundaries
☐ Trouble getting along with others	☐ Difficulty separating from caregivers	☐ _____
☐	☐	

Body Reactions

☐ Feeling like you are re-experiencing the trauma	☐ Being on guard or constantly alert	☐ Feeling disconnected from your body
☐ Jumpy or easily startled	☐ Trouble with eating	☐ Hyperactive
☐ Body feeling shaky	☐ Feeling short of breath	☐ Nightmares
☐ Trouble with sleep	☐ Bellyaches/Nausea	☐ Headaches
☐ Low energy	☐ Body feeling of panic	☐ Feeling disgusting/gross/dirty
☐ Body or muscles tense	☐	☐

Feelings Reactions

☐ Guilty	☐ Having worries	☐ Sad
☐ Angry	☐ Nervous/Anxious	☐ Moody/Irritable
☐ Ashamed	☐ Depressed	☐ Helpless
☐ Numb	☐ Betrayed	☐ Hopeless about Future
☐ Rejected	☐ Easily upset	☐ Not caring about others
☐ Not enjoying the things used to	☐ Feeling different from others	☐ Embarrassed
☐	☐	☐

Brain & Thinking Reactions

☐ "Everyone is unsafe"	☐ Not trusting others	☐ "It's my fault" or blaming self
☐ "The world is a bad place"	☐ "I am bad"	☐ Change in spiritual beliefs
☐ Difficulty concentrating/ focusing	☐ Forgetting parts of the trauma	☐ Tring to keep feelings/ thoughts of trauma out of head
☐ Having memories/flashbacks	☐ Thinking about the trauma often	☐ Thoughts about what happened pop into you head
☐ Thinking nothing good will ever happen	☐ Thinking about dying/ wanting to die	☐ Pictures of what happen pop into your head
☐	☐	

Appendix C

Conversation 4:

The Role of Teacher Observations:

Legal Frameworks in Protecting Children

in South Africa

Erika Engelbrecht-Aldworth and Melissa Gardner

Support Contact Details List in South Africa

Here's a list of important support contact details, hotlines, helplines, and emergency numbers in South Africa that can be valuable for teachers and anyone needing assistance regarding child protection:

1. South African Police Service: Child Protection Units
Emergency Number: 10111 http://www.saps.gov.za
2. Childline South Africa
Helpline Number: 0800 055 555 https://www.childlinesa.org.za
3. The National Counseling Line:
South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG)
Helpline Number: 0800 567 111 (free mental health support)
https://www.sadag.org
4. Tears Foundation:
0800 005 773 (supports survivors of sexual violence)
https://www.tears.co.za
5. Lifeline South Africa
Helpline Number: 0861 322 322 (emotional support and crisis intervention) https://www.lifeline.org.za)
6. Suicide Crisis Helpline (SADAG)
Helpline Number: 0800 567 891 (24-hour help for those in crisis)
https://www.sadag.org
7. Department of Social Development
General Inquiries Number: 0800 220 250 https://www.dsd.gov.za
8. The National Human Trafficking Hotline
Helpline Number:0800 222 777 (to report suspected trafficking)
https://www.dsd.gov.za

Important Emergency Numbers:
Ambulance and Medical Emergencies:10177
Fire Department: 10177
Emergency Services (General):112 (from any cellphone)
These contacts can be crucial for teachers, children, and families in need of support and assistance.

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Mandatory Reporting

Section 110(1) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 outlines that any suspicion or disclosed abuse (physical, sexual or emotional abuse and deliberate neglect) of a child must be reported to the relevant authorities. A Form 22 (https://knowledgehub.health.gov.za) is completed and submitted to the Department of Education, Child Protection Organisation, or South African Police Services. When an educator suspect abuse or abuse is disclosed to them by a learner, they need to inform the Principal and SBST Coordinator of the School within 48 hours.

Signs to look out for:

1. Unexplained burns, bites, bruises, broken bones or black eyes.
2. Appear scared of parents or reluctant to go home after school.
3. Frequent absenteeism.
4. Consistently dirty and lacking sufficient basic needs.
5. Difficulty walking or sitting.
6. Sudden behaviour change (aggressive or withdrawal).
7. Age-inappropriate sexual knowledge.
8. Runs away or attempts to run away.
9. Sudden behaviour changes close to the end of the school day.
10. Reluctance to change in front of other learners or wearing long-sleeved clothing in hot weather.

Basic Counselling skills
- Active Listening that reflects empathy and concern.
- Stay calm
- Open-ended Questions (Who, What, Where, When, How long).
- Be genuine and honest about mandatory reporting.

Educators play a significant role as first responders in children's lives. They are trusted adults that children in danger often confide in. It is essential not to take this role lightly. It is further imperative for educators to practice daily self-care to give learners a place of fullness.

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Appendix D

Conversation 5:

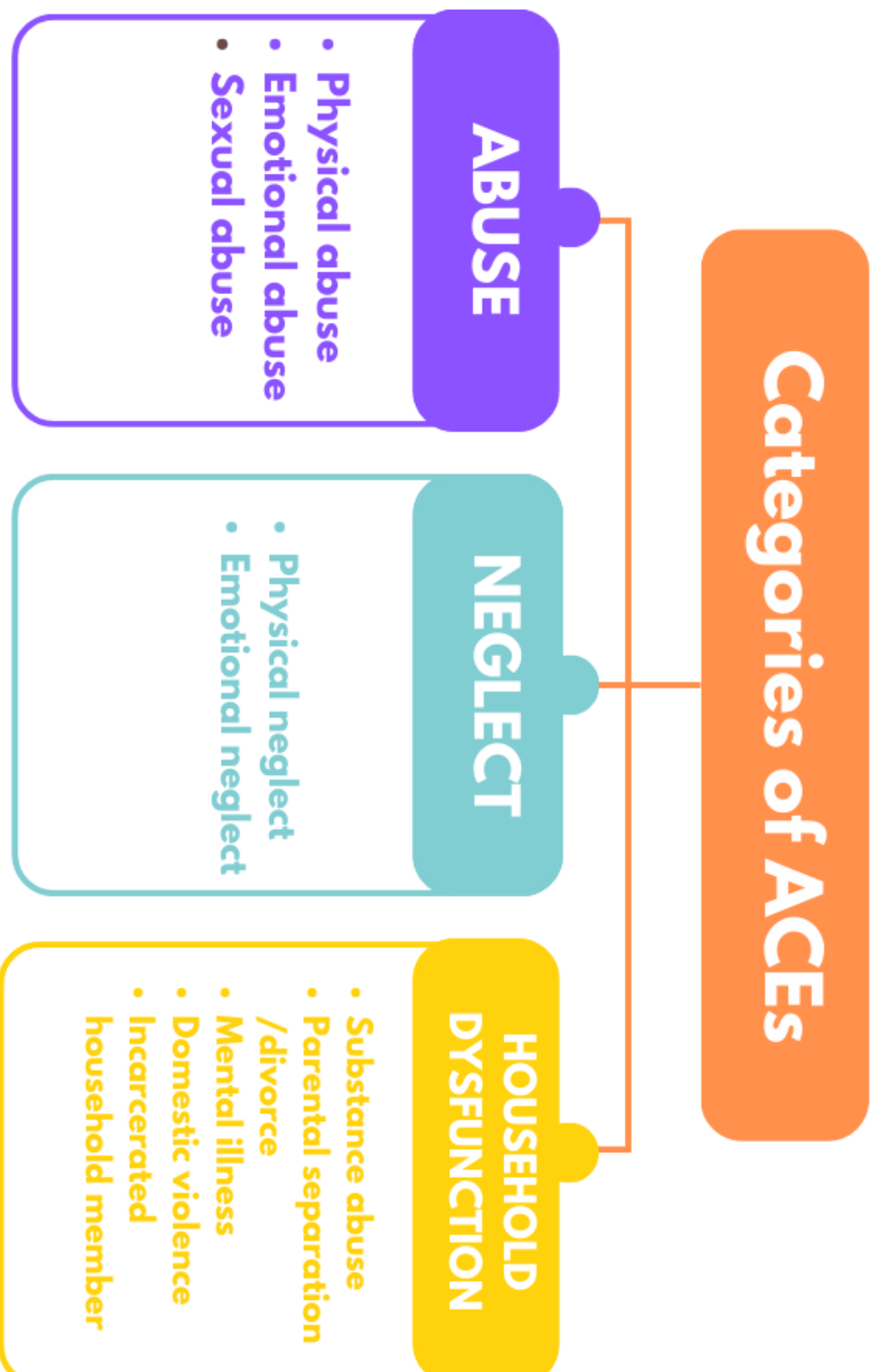## Tackling Adverse Childhood Experiences

in the Classroom:

A Guide for Teachers as First Responders

Erika Engelbrecht-Aldworth

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

[ACEs]

Categories of ACEs

ABUSE

- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse

NEGLECT

- Physical neglect
- Emotional neglect

HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION

- Substance abuse
- Parental separation /divorce
- Mental illness
- Domestic violence
- Incarcerated household member

Understanding Adverse Childhood Experiences [ACEs]

What are ACEs?

Adverse Childhood Experiences, known as ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood. (0-17 years)

These events include:

- Experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect
- Witnessing domestic violence
- Growing up in a household with:
  - Substance use problems
  - Mental health issues
  - Instability due to parental separation or incarceration

Impact on Child Development:

ACEs can profoundly affect:

- Physical development
- Emotional well-being
- Cognitive growth

♥ Dear Teacher,

You are the first responder. [The one who needs to stabilise any situation until help and further support arrives.]

Be ready.

Adverse Childhood Experiences [ACEs]

Foundation Phase (Ages 5-9)
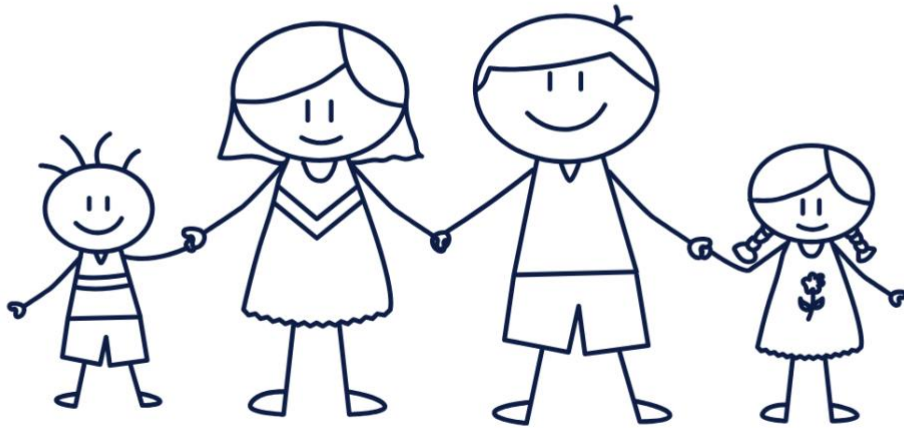
Signs to Look For:
- Developmental delays
- Attachment issues
- Emotional dysregulation
- Separation anxiety
- Difficulty making friends
- Lagging in language and cognitive skills

Teacher Tips:
- Be patient
- Offer consistent routines
- Create a warm, welcoming classroom atmosphere

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Adverse Childhood Experiences [ACEs]

Intersen Phase (Ages 10-12)

Signs to Look For:

- Academic struggles
- Social withdrawal
- Increased aggression
- Loss of interest in school
- Authority challenges
- Peer relationship problems

Teacher Tips:

- Foster a supportive, inclusive classroom culture
- Engage learners in group activities

Adverse Childhood Experiences [ACEs]

Further Education and Training Phase (Ages 16-18)
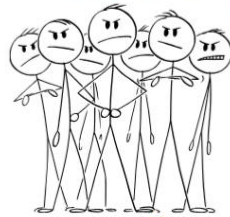
Signs to Look For:

○ **Risk-taking behaviours**
○ **Substance misuse**
○ **Chronic absenteeism**
○ **Disengagement**
○ **Severe dips in academic performance**
○ **Significant mental health issues (including suicidal thoughts)**

Teacher Tips:

○ **Offer pathways to professional help and counselling**
○ **Provide alternative educational or vocational opportunities**

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Adverse Childhood Experiences [ACEs]

Senior Phase (Ages 13-15)

Signs to Look For:

- Risk-taking behaviours
- Substance misuse
- Mental health issues:
  Like depression and anxiety
- Self-harm

Teacher Tips:

- Be consistent
- Create a safe, non-judgmental space
- Maintain open lines of communication

Appendix E

Conversation 6:

How childhood trauma dictates how

you fill your cups of need.

Dr. Gerdi van den Berg

Gerdi van den Berg

Website:
https://heartmatters.co.za/

Workshops & Training
https://heartmatters.co.za/workshops
-and-training/

Services:
https://heartmatters.co.za/services/
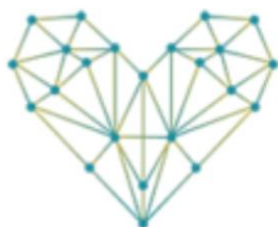
Heart Matters
Know who you are

Contact details:
gerdi@heartmatters.co.za

A CHANGE OF HEART
DR GERDI VAN DEN BERG

A CHANGE OF HEART
Realigning Your Life to
Unlock Your True Potential
DR GERDI VAN DEN BERG
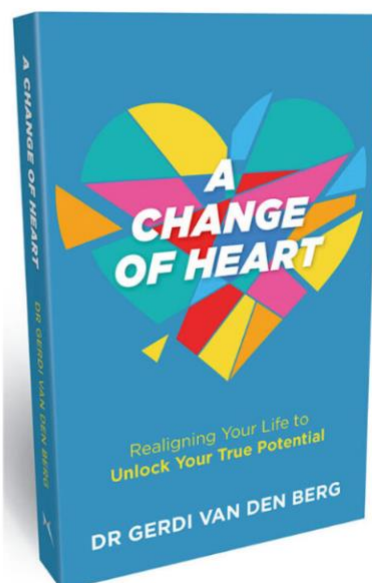
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Appendix F

Conversation 7:

The Trauma of Homelessness and Its Impact on Young Children: How Educators Can Support Them in the Classroom and Beyond

Felicia Pettiford

The Trauma of Homelessness

Homelessness destabilises children's lives, affecting emotional, academic, and social development.

Recognizing trauma and providing support is crucial for educators.

Homeless children face emotional burdens and challenges in academic performance and social relationships.

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The Trauma of Homelessness

Activities to Support Homeless Students

Daily Routine Activities:
Check-ins, consistent schedules.

Emotional Support:
Feelings chart, emotion journals.

Trauma-Informed Practices:
Mindfulness exercises and calming activities.

Academic Support:
Catch-up sessions, flexible assignments.

Social and Peer Support:
Group projects, peer buddy system.

Empathy and Understanding:
Empathy lessons, community service projects.

Family Engagement:
Resource workshops, positive communication.

Community Collaboration:
School supply drives, partnership projects.

Building Resilience:
Resilience stories, goal setting.

Physical and Creative Outlets:
Art therapy, movement breaks.

Appendix G

Conversation 8:

The Role of Spirituality in Enhancing Teacher Well-Being and Academic Performance of Learners

Dr. Joyce Toendepi and

Erika Engelbrecht-Aldworth

Resource List 1:

Here is a comprehensive list of apps and digital tools, categorised by age group, to help enhance spiritual development and well-being.

Early Childhood (Ages 3-7)

1. Breathe, Think, Do with Sesame

Interactive activities that teach young children problem-solving and emotional regulation through engaging animations and games featuring Sesame Street characters.

Use it during transitions or as a calming activity after energetic periods. It is great for helping children develop emotional regulation skills in a fun and familiar way.

https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/activities/breathe-think-do/

2. Smiling Mind - Kids Program

Mindfulness activities are tailored for various age groups, including kids. Activities are designed to help children improve emotional regulation and understand mindfulness.

Implement as part of a daily routine, such as morning mindfulness sessions, to start the day or as part of a calming corner for individual use.

https://www.smilingmind.com.au/

3. Stop, Breathe & Think Kids

Meditation and mindfulness activities are designed for young kids to help them understand and manage emotions through fun, guided exercises.

Use during dedicated mindfulness periods or as a break activity to help children refocus and regulate their emotions.

https://www.stopbreathethink.com/kids/

4. Purrble

This is an interactive tool that helps children develop emotional regulation through tactile feedback. The app guides children in calming the "Purrble" by soothing it.

It is ideal for individual use during times of high emotion or stress. It could also be integrated into a quiet classroom or sensory room corner.

https://purrble.com

Resource List 1:

Here is a comprehensive list of apps and digital tools, categorised by age group, to help enhance spiritual development and well-being.

Foundation Phase (Ages 7-11)

1. Mind Yeti

Provides guided sessions that help children calm down, focus, and connect through mindfulness and relaxation exercises.

Use for group mindfulness sessions, as a calming activity after recess, or during transitions between different subjects or activities.

https://www.mindyeti.com/

2. GoNoodle

Short videos that promote movement, mindfulness, and stress relief for kids, making learning fun and engaging through dance-alongs, songs, and mindfulness exercises.

Use as brain breaks throughout the day to energise students in the morning or calm them down after lunch.

https://www.gonoodle.com/

3. Mindful Powers

Engaging interactive app that helps students manage emotions through story-driven experiences and activities centred around mindfulness and relaxation.

Use as part of social-emotional learning (SEL) lessons or individual mindfulness practice.

https://mindfulpowerslife.com/

4. ClassDojo

A classroom management tool with added mindfulness activities through its "Big Ideas" series, which focuses on emotional well-being and positive behaviour.

Use for class management and integrating short mindfulness breaks to help students reset and refocus.

https://www.classdojo.com/

Resource List 1:

Here is a comprehensive list of apps and digital tools, categorised by age group, to help enhance spiritual development and well-being.

Intersen Phase (Ages 11-13)

1. Calm Classroom

A series of short mindfulness activities explicitly designed for classroom settings to help students manage stress and improve focus.

Integrate into daily routines, particularly at the start or after lunch breaks, to recalibrate focus.

https://www.calmclassroom.com/

2. Flow and Balance

Guided mindfulness and yoga activities tailored for school-aged children to improve focus, emotional balance, and overall well-being.

Use in physical education classes, wellness programs, or as part of a broader health curriculum.

https://www.flowandbalance.com/

3. Zen Space

A simple digital environment where students can create their zen gardens, fostering creativity and relaxation.

Use during art classes, free periods, or relaxation breaks to help students de-stress and enhance their focus.

https://zenspace.org/

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Resource List 1:

Here is a comprehensive list of apps and digital tools, categorised by age group, to help enhance spiritual development and well-being.

Senior and FET Phase (Ages 14-18)

1. Simple Habit

Provides short, guided meditations tailored for busy lifestyles, helping users manage stress, improve focus, and enhance overall well-being.
Introduce during homeroom or advisory periods to help students develop mindfulness habits and reduce stress.

https://www.simplehabit.com/

2. Insight Timer

Extensive library of guided meditations, music tracks, and expert talks on mindfulness and emotional well-being.
Use for longer mindfulness sessions or independent student use to improve focus and manage stress.

https://insighttimer.com/

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"When you teach with a profound sense of purpose, you not only educate minds but also uplift hearts. Embrace spirituality to find deeper meaning in your daily teaching."

[Li, Ju, & Kong, 2024]

"Build emotional resilience through spirituality."

Building a Community

"Spiritual practices foster a sense of community and interconnectedness among teachers and learners, transforming your classroom into a second home."

[McClurg et al, 2024]

Sustaining Passion

"Let spirituality sustain your passion for teaching. By nurturing your well-being, you can continue to inspire and impact lives positively."

_____

"Integrate spiritual practices into your routine to manage stress and avoid burnout. Take care of your emotional health so you can be your best for your learners."

[Roberts & Lucey, 2024]

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Appendix H

Conversation 9:

The Hidden Crisis:

Teacher Trauma

Erika Engelbrecht-Aldworth

The Silent Crisis

- Teachers carry invisible wounds from constant criticism, undue pressure, and demeaning interactions.
- These emotional and psychological traumas affect mental health, self-esteem, and sense of security.

Let's start a conversation to create supportive environments where teachers can thrive.

Bullying & Harassment

- Come from learners, colleagues, managers, and parents.
- Leads to severe psychological distress.
- Threats and undue criticism affect all aspects of a teacher's life.

Stand Up Against Bullying and Harassment in Schools

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Physical Trauma in Schools

Physical violence in schools is a real risk for teachers, leading to injuries and ongoing fear for personal safety.

Make our schools safer for everyone

Emotional and Psychological Trauma

The Silent Crisis

Teachers face profound emotional impacts from bullying, harassment, and chronic stress.

Start conversations and support emotional well-being.

Emotional and Psychological Trauma

More Than Just Words

Name-calling, insults, and derogatory comments are **Verbal Abuse.** This decreases confidence, leading to long-term emotional scars.

Create policies against verbal abuse in schools.

Emotional and Psychological Trauma

Breaking Under Pressure

Long hours, unrealistic demands, and verbal abuse lead to severe exhaustion and burnout.

Support systemic changes for sustainable teaching environments.

Appendix I

Preventing Trauma:

Why Every Teacher Should Include the

"My Body is My Body"
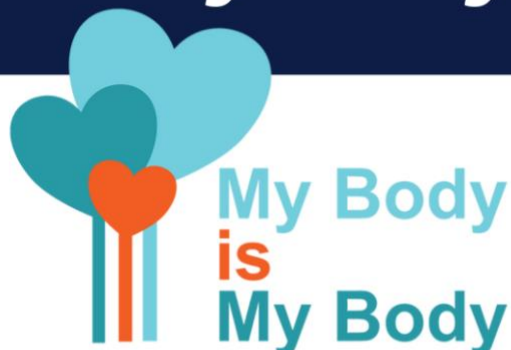
Programme in Their Lessons

Chrissy Sykes

"My Body is My Body"

Website:
https://mbimb.org/

Worldwide helpline numbers:
https://mbimb.org/worldwide-helpline-numbers/

MBIMB Free Educational Resources:
https://mbimb.org/mbimb-resources/

MBIMB Free Courses:
https://mbimb.org/courses/

Contact details:
Chrissy@mbimb.org

Appendix J

Proactive Article:

Why Teacher Well-Being Matters

Erika Engelbrecht-Aldworth

Why Teacher Well-Being Matters

The goal is simple.

Help teachers flourish, reignite their passion for teaching, and ultimately improve their learners' learning experience and academic performance.

[Engelbrecht-Aldworth, 2024]

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Resource List 2:

Here is a comprehensive list of apps and digital tools to help enhance spiritual development and well-being .

Professional Development and Personal Well-Being For Teachers

1. Headspace
Guided meditations, mindfulness exercises, and relaxation techniques are designed to improve mental health and well-being.
Use to develop mindfulness habits that can be modelled and taught.
https://www.headspace.com/

2. Calm
Meditation sessions, sleep stories, breathing exercises, and relaxation music tailored to improve overall wellness and mental health.
Use mindfulness practice and stress management to maintain a calm, focused mindset.
https://www.calm.com/

3. Smiling Mind
Offers a variety of mindfulness and meditation exercises for different age groups, including programs tailored specifically for adults.
Engage in regular mindfulness practices to enhance personal well-being and integrate insights from the app into classroom mindfulness activities.
https://www.smilingmind.com.au/

4. MyLife Meditation
Personalised meditation and mindfulness practices based on current emotions help users find balance and focus.
Use it to understand better and manage your emotional state. This can then help guide students' mindfulness practices.
https://my.life/

Take just 2 minutes a day for 21 days to focus on your well-being with science-backed strategies. Let's create a supportive and positive classroom environment together!

😊Click the link to join our WhatsApp group:

[The Teacher Coach Teacher Well-being Community](#)

the Teacher Coach

Personal and Professional Development for educators.

"We all need good news, support & safe spaces."

[The Teacher Coach]
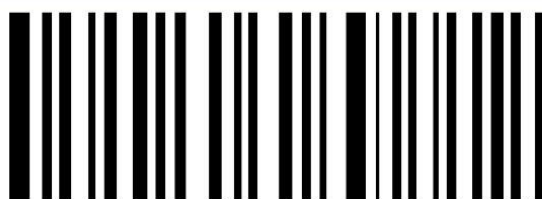
South African Teacher Well-Being Initiative

The South African Teachers Well-being Initiative, now known as SATWI, was founded by Erika E. Aldworth in 2023 whilst completing her M.Phil in Personal and Professional Leadership. Two main branches have formed under SATWI, The Teacher Coach and Teachers Matter. The Teacher Coach, renowned for its 21-day Wellness Challenge, is headed by Erika E. Aldworth. The Teacher Coach provides educational institutions with upskilling services based on scientific study but delivered by a teacher to teachers increasing its efficacy and relatability. Teachers Matter was then co-founded by Erika E. Aldworth and Melissa Gardner, an educational psychologist, out of a profound need for research to be delivered with more relatability to the everyday teacher- bridging the gap between research and practice. This bi-monthly publication is free for both the readers and its researchers. It makes room for global voices from all professions invested in upskilling the educational sphere.

Teachers Matter

THE SATWI RESEARCH INITATIVE

Volume I

AUG 2024

SATWI

CHAMPIONING WELL-BEING FOR A THRIVING TEACHER COMMUNITY

SOUTH AFRICAN TEACHER WELL-BEING INITIATIVE