

An Analysis of Teacher Knowledge of Recognizing and Addressing the Needs of Traumatized Students

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Abstract : Childhood trauma is well documented in mental health research, yet has received little attention in urban schools. Child trauma affects brain development and impacts cognitive, emotional, and behavioral functioning. When educators understand that some of the behaviors that appear to be aggressive in nature might be the result of a hidden diagnosis of trauma, learning can take place, and the child can thrive in the classroom setting. Traumatized children, however, do not fit neatly into any single 'box.' Although many children enter school each day carrying with them the experience of exposure to violence in the home, the symptoms of their trauma can be multifaceted and complex, requiring individualized therapeutic attention. The purpose of this study was to examine how prepared educators are to address the unique challenges facing children who experience trauma. Given the vast number of traumatized children in our society, it is evident that our education system must investigate ways to create an optimal learning environment that accounts for trauma, addresses its impact on cognitive and behavioral development, and facilitates mental and emotional health and well-being. The researcher describes the knowledge, attitudes, dispositions, and skills relating to trauma-informed knowledge of induction level teachers in a diverse middle school. The data for this study were collected through interviews with teachers, who are in the induction phase (the first three years of their teaching career). The study findings paint a clear picture of how ill-prepared educators are to address the needs of students who have experienced trauma and the implications for the development of a professional development workshop or series of workshops that train teachers how to recognize and address and respond to the needs of students. The study shows how teachers often lack skills to meet the needs of students who have experienced trauma. Traumatized children regularly carry a heavy weight on their shoulders. Children who have experienced trauma may feel that the world is filled with unresponsive, threatening adults, and peers. Despite this, supportive interventions can provide traumatized children with places to go that are safe, stimulating, and even fun. Schools offer an environment that potentially meets these requirements by creating safe spaces where students can feel at ease and have fun while also learning via stimulating educational activities. This study highlights the lack of preparedness of educators to address the academic, behavioral, and cognitive needs of students who have experienced trauma. These findings provide implications for the creation of a professional development workshop that addresses how to recognize and address the needs of students who have experienced some type of trauma. They also provide implications for future research with a focus on specific interventions that enable the creation of optimal learning environments where students who have experienced trauma and all students can succeed, regardless of their life experiences.

Keywords : educator preparation, induction educators, professional development, trauma-informed

Conference Title : ICAP 2020 : International Conference on Animal Proteomics

Conference Location : Paris, France

Conference Dates : June 25-26, 2020