



Santa Cruz/Silicon Valley New Teacher Project

Combined Forum

January 17, 2020

9:00-3:00

Sunnyvale District Office

Presented by:

Jamie Brown
Assistant Director (Silicon Valley)
SC/SVNTTP

Candace McIsaac
Program Director (Silicon Valley)
SC/SVNTTP

Marvilyn Quiroz
Assistant Director (Santa Cruz)
SC/SVNTTP

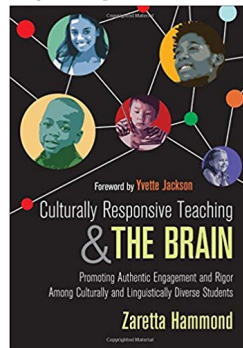
Melissa Roberts,
Senior Director
Program Director (Santa Cruz)
SC/SVNTTP



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The Santa Cruz/Silicon Valley New Teacher Project would like to thank the following organizations for their invaluable contributions to this training:

Zaretta Hammond's book, Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain , particularly the Ready for Rigor Framework and the CRP Observation Guide, have inspired a roadmap for our learning around Culturally Responsive Pedagogy.



Zaretta Hammond

National Equity Project's (NEP) insights into listening and communicating are foundational to effective mentor-teacher interactions in the quest for equity.



National Equity Project

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has provided a framework that deepens our understanding of the connection between Social Emotional Learning and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy.



Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

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Trauma-Informed Teaching Strategies

Jessica Minahan

Small changes in classroom interactions can make a big difference for traumatized students.

Up to two-thirds of U.S. children have experienced at least one type of serious childhood trauma, such as abuse, neglect, natural disaster, or experiencing or witnessing violence. Trauma is possibly the largest public health issue facing our children today (CDC, 2019). Traumatized students are especially prone to difficulty in self-regulation, negative thinking, being on high alert, difficulty trusting adults, and inappropriate social interactions (Lacoe, 2013; Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017). They often haven't learned to express emotions healthily and instead show their distress through aggression, avoidance, shutting down, or other off-putting behaviors. These actions can feel antagonistic to teachers who don't understand the root cause of the student's behavior, which can lead to misunderstandings, ineffective interventions, and missed learning time.

Neurobiologically, students can't learn if they don't feel safe, known, and cared for within their schools (Aupperle et al., 2012). When teachers are proactive and responsive to the needs of students suffering from traumatic stress and make small changes in the classroom that foster a feeling of safety, it makes a huge difference in their ability to learn. Here are some examples.

1. Expect Unexpected Responses

First, teachers must learn to put students' reactions into context—and not to take them personally. Students with trauma histories can react and behave in seemingly unexpected ways, such as having a sudden outburst during a favorite activity or crying out of the blue one second after laughing. Teachers may be taken by surprise. They say things like, "But he was fine this morning, I didn't see that coming!" or "She normally loves playing the drums in music class. I have no idea where her reaction came from." This uncertainty leaves the teacher in a constant state of hyper-alertness when interacting with the student. This in turn can result in fatigue, as the teacher is guarded and unable to predict what will happen from one moment to another.

One way to understand these reactions is to think of the student as a soda can, and events that may trigger their trauma stress as shaking that can. We can't tell by looking if the can was recently shaken, but if it was, opening the can results in an unexpected explosive, messy reaction. If a student is triggered and experiencing

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heightened emotion, even a benign direction such as, "Please move over to make room for Jenny" could result in an "explosion" that the teacher never saw coming. By using trauma-sensitive strategies in the classroom, we can help reduce the times our students are "shaken."

2. Employ Thoughtful Interactions

Traumatized students often behave in ways that may interfere with teaching and learning, which can be frustrating. Teachers are in a position of power, and these students may be overly defensive, anticipating adult criticism, or defiant, as a way to assert control (Jennings, 2018). Yet for traumatized students, the ability to learn and behave appropriately can be person-dependent. When they are with a safe and supportive adult, their behavior reflects that.

Consider this scenario drawn from schools I've worked with: Trevor, a 6th grader whose father overdosed on heroin two years ago and who has witnessed ongoing domestic abuse throughout his childhood, was in Ms. Carlton's class for part of the day and Ms. Finch's class for the other part. Ms. Carlton had a reputation of working well with hard-to-reach kids, and sure enough, Trevor behaved in a stellar way in her class. When he was with Ms. Finch, however, he was sent to the office nearly three times a week for explosive behavior.

The teacher is 50 percent of every interaction with a student: By changing the way we give a direction or respond, we can reduce problematic behavior. Ms. Carlton had taken the time to build a trusting relationship with Trevor and learned to give directions in a way that he would respond well to. Interaction strategies are a type of accommodation that typically go unnamed and unwritten, but they were the reason that Trevor could feel safe and access the curriculum (Minahan & Rappaport, 2012).

If Ms. Carlton had written down the successful strategies she used with Trevor, the list might have started with avoiding authoritative directives such as, "Pick that up." To give Trevor a sense of control, Ms. Carlton always embedded choice in her directions, asking, "Do you want to be in the front of the line or the back of the line?" instead of simply telling him to "line up." This helped prevent a poor reaction (Minahan, 2019).

Ms. Carlton also conveyed respect and transparency by providing the reason behind each direction. Instead of saying, "No backpacks on the floor. I don't want to trip and fall!" Ms. Carlton would say, "Oh dear, I hope I don't fall. I have a bad knee! Could you please move your backpack?" Stating the reason *first* assured that Trevor knew the context (and necessity) of the demand.

Conversely, Ms. Finch would often go up close to Trevor, tower over him, and say in front of his peers, "Stop tapping your pencil!" This typically ended in a power struggle and Trevor's escalating behavior. Trevor, like many traumatized students, had experienced a loss of control in his life, and power struggles with an authoritative figure were particularly triggering. Ms. Carlton instinctively knew that a more private nonverbal direction could be less confrontational for a student in "fight or flight" mode. She would write, "Please stop tapping" on a piece of paper, put it gently on Trevor's desk without his peers noticing, and then give him space by walking away quickly. When possible, she also gave Trevor extended time to comply with directions to avoid power struggles, asking, for example, "Can you please pick that up before lunch?" rather than, "Pick that up now" (Minahan, 2019). This allowed Trevor time to decompress and respond rationally.

3. Be Specific About Relationship Building

At one point in the year, Ms. Carlton told Ms. Finch that building a relationship with Trevor was key to her success with him, and she suggested that Ms. Finch do the same. Unfortunately, saying, "Build a relationship" is too vague and leaves too much up to the teacher's instincts. Instead, Ms. Carlton could have told Ms. Finch that she greeted Trevor every day at the classroom door and asked him about the Avengers or basketball. She could have told Ms. Finch how she used the "two by ten" rule; she talked to him for two minutes a day for 10

days in a row about topics unrelated to academics or behavior. Whenever Ms. Carlton could see she wouldn't have time for this in the 10-day period, she asked the counselor or special education teacher to cover her class for two minutes so she could go for a walk with Trevor. She repeated this trust-building strategy several times throughout the year, especially after he exhibited anger or frustration and after school vacations and long weekends.

Ms. Carlton skillfully used relationship-building and interaction strategies to work with Trevor. Yet the impact could have been greater had she written and shared those strategies with Ms. Finch and the rest of Trevor's team via a shared document, behavior plan, or student success plan (Minahan, 2019). Likewise, if counselors, school nurses, and psychologists write and share such techniques with each classroom teacher, kids like Trevor, when triggered, wouldn't always have to leave class to find a safe adult.

4. Promote Predictability and Consistency

Not knowing what is coming next can put anyone on high alert, especially traumatized students. Providing predictability through visual schedules of the class agenda or school day can help. Ms. Carlton was adamant about previewing any changes to the normal routine ahead of time (saying, "We are going to have indoor recess today because of the snow," or "The DVD player isn't working so we can't watch a science video at the end of class today"). This prepared Trevor and thus elicited a calmer response.

A teacher's behavior can also feel unpredictable to traumatized students. When students are working independently and quietly—doing what they are supposed to be doing—they don't know when they will get the teacher's attention. But when students are doing the wrong thing—like drumming on the desk with a pencil in each hand or swearing—teachers are more predictable and react quickly! Because predictability is comforting to students with anxiety and trauma histories, they may resort to getting the teacher's attention through inappropriate means. Trevor could get Ms. Finch to react immediately by flipping his water bottle noisily, but could go 20 minutes without so much as eye contact from her when he was quietly reading.

To counter this imbalance and create an overall feeling of safety, teachers can use predictable positive attention (Minahan, 2014). During independent work time, if a teacher says to a student "Great work! I'll be back to check on you," the student has no way of predicting how long they need to wait—and from past experience they know that the teacher may forget to return altogether. Using predictable positive attention, however, the teacher can say, "I am going to check on you in 10 minutes," put a timer on the student's desk, and add, "Come tap me on the shoulder when the timer goes off." If the teacher has many students in the class that could benefit from this, she could transfer the strategy to small groups: "I will check on this desk group at X time."

Another strategy for providing predictable attention, especially for middle and high school students, is to hand an anxious or traumatized student a sticky note with a time on it as they walk into class each day. The first time, the note will need to be explained: "If you don't understand something in class, please don't worry—I am going to check on you during independent work time at 11:45, and I will answer any questions you have then." Ms. Carlton found this strategy comforting to Trevor. This predictable check-in pairs the negative thoughts the student may have ("I don't know how to do this") with a reassuring thought ("But my teacher will be here in seven minutes!"). The student can better tolerate uncomfortable feelings when they know help and a positive interaction are coming. Telling the student what will happen and when and *always* following through establishes the teacher as a consistent, reliable adult.

5. Teach Strategies to "Change the Channel"

Traumatized students often engage in inaccurate thinking, tending to focus on the negative. Common classroom management strategies often only exasperate this tendency. How many of us have seen frequent

movement breaks on a student's IEP or student success plan? It is one of the most common accommodations that we offer to students who seem dysregulated. Unfortunately, during these breaks, students can ruminate on negative memories, current stressors, angry thoughts, or worries. If we ask a high school student who is getting angry and becoming agitated to take a walk, he may ruminate the whole time and return just as angry. Sending a 1st grader to a "calming chair" can leave her to perseverate on worrying thoughts. Instead, we need to help them "change the channel." Both Ms. Carlton and Ms. Finch used breaks with Trevor, but in vastly different ways.

When adults can't sleep, we often read a book or watch TV, which distracts us from uncomfortable thoughts so we can fall back asleep. Teachers can use the same principle for kids with trauma and anxiety: Teach students that their brain is like a remote control that they can use to "switch the channel" to help them calm down (Minahan & Rappaport, 2012). These switching activities are called cognitive distractions or thought breaks and are incompatible with negative thinking. A listening center or "find the picture" activity can be helpful to young children. For older students, you might try Mad Libs, trivia, or more abstract strategies such as counting all the green items in the room, saying the alphabet backwards, or thinking of the first 10 lines of a favorite movie. Ms. Carlton taught Trevor to do *Star Wars* trivia when he was upset, which helped him calm down quickly. Conversely when Ms. Finch had Trevor go for a walk, his negative thinking would escalate, and he would often not return to class.

6. Give Supportive Feedback to Reduce Negative Thinking

Many traumatized students interpret information through a negativity amplifier. When a teacher says, "Please correct the first problem," the student might hear, "You are stupid." Or a student might report that the teacher screamed at her when the teacher was really using a calm tone, as even neutral facial expressions can be misinterpreted. It is helpful to smile and explicitly say when you are happy with the student, a strategy Ms. Carlton utilized. When giving negative feedback, teachers can use the positive sandwich approach—starting and ending with a positive comment: (1) "I love how you remembered the formula," (2) "You made a small calculation error there," (3) "Great job getting problem #3 correct."

7. Create Islands of Competence

Recognizing areas of strength in students is a powerful way to combat the poor self-concept and negative thinking associated with trauma (Jennings, 2018). To support a more accurate self-concept, teachers can provide what Robert Brooks calls "islands of competence" for students swimming in a sea of inadequacy (2003). When a student thinks negatively, the negative moments during the day tend to weigh more heavily than the positive moments. We need to counter this effect with positive experiences. Educator teams need to ask themselves, "Does the student *feel* competent during the day?" If the answer is no, contriving an island of competence for the student is in order. Ms. Carlton often asked Trevor to help a younger student or a peer who was struggling in an academic area Trevor was strong in, or had him fix the stapler when it was malfunctioning. She would also point out in a written note to Trevor that he was the first student to finish a math activity. In high school, educators may want to foster students' talents by never letting them drop electives (which might require creativity in scheduling academic support in core classes).

It is important that students experience competence to develop a more accurate self-narrative and to begin to create a positive future picture of themselves. We want them to say, "I really helped that student with her artwork. When I grow up, I could work with kids." Or "I am good at fixing things. I could be a mechanic someday."

8. Limit Exclusionary Practices

Behavior is communication, and we've looked at how traumatized students often communicate feelings through their behavior. Teachers' behavior is also communication—and it may not be communicating the message we are striving to send. Common teacher practices such as ignoring inappropriate behavior, sending students to the office, or sending younger kids to sit alone at a back table or in the hallway can unintentionally trigger students who have experienced abandonment or neglect. We need to remember that when some of our students were young and cried, no one came. Ignoring them can trigger a trauma response and make them feel the teacher doesn't like them or is even happy that they are upset.

Ms. Finch would ignore Trevor when he was expressing anger, such as by crumpling up a paper, growling, or slinging a book from his desk onto the floor. On the other hand, Ms. Carlton responded to such moments at the beginning of the year by validating Trevor's feelings ("I am sorry you are upset" or "I see that you are angry"). This is a much more empathetic approach, will preserve the relationship, and will avoid triggering a trauma response in the student.

Another practice to be cautious about is using time with a preferred adult as an incentive. For example, a principal might say, "If you get all your homework done this week, you and I will have lunch together!" The problem with this is that if the student *doesn't* get all their homework done, then the principal withholds their attention and time. This implies the relationship is conditional and can trigger an abandonment trauma response for some students. It is better to use one-to-one time with students in a noncontingent way. This way adults are communicating, "I like you for who you are," not "I like you when you behave the right way."

Fostering a Feeling of Safety

Students can't learn unless they feel safe. When it comes to student trauma, there is much that is beyond educators' power, but there is also a great deal they can do to build a supportive and sensitive environment where students feel safe, comfortable, take risks, learn, and even heal.

Reflect & Discuss

- ➔ As Minahan writes, "Students can't learn if they don't feel safe." What small changes are you willing to try in your classroom to foster a sense of safety among traumatized students?
- ➔ Think about one of your students who struggles with behavior. How could you help him "switch the channel" when he is upset?
- ➔ Do you routinely share—and exchange ideas about—what's working with a traumatized student? How could you better improve lines of communication across the whole support team?

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Jessica Minahan is a licensed and board-certified behavior analyst, special educator, and consultant to schools internationally. She is the coauthor of *The Behavior Code: A Practical Guide to Understanding and Teaching the Most Challenging Students* (Harvard Education Press, 2012) and author of *The Behavior Code Companion: Strategies, Tools, and Interventions for Supporting Students with Anxiety-Related or Oppositional Behaviors* (Harvard Education Press, 2014).

KEYWORDS

Click on keywords to see similar products:

safe, social-emotional learning, student behavior and discipline, supported, whole child, audience: building-level-specialists, audience: district-based-administrators, audience: higher-education, audience: instructional-coaches, audience: new-principals, audience: new-teachers, audience: principals, audience: students, audience: superintendents, audience: teacher-leaders, audience: teachers, level: early-childhood-education, level: elementary-schools, level: high-schools, level: k-12, level: middle-schools, level: post-secondary-schools, level: secondary-schools

Connector: Trauma-Informed Strategies

Read the article, "[Trauma-Informed Teaching Strategies](#)" and consider the reflection questions below.

Individual Reflection Part 1:

- Do you and your PT(s) routinely share and exchange ideas about what's working with a student who has experienced trauma? How could you better improve lines of communication between the two of you? Across the district/site?
- Minahan writes, "Students can't learn if they don't feel safe." What small changes are you willing to try in your mentoring to foster a sense of safety among traumatized students?

Individual Reflection Part 2:

Considering the Self Awareness quadrant in Hammond's R4R framework, how did the text:

- Deepen your understanding of how the brain learns?
- Broaden your interpretation of culturally and linguistically diverse students learning behaviors?

Role Play Scenarios

<p>Scenario #1: LASSC in connection to planning</p>	<p>PT: I want to do the same lesson from last year. My kids last year really loved it.</p> <p>MT: It's great to hear that you have found lessons that have engaged students in the past. Knowing what you know now about this group of students, what might work in the lesson for your students this year? (<i>Entry point for going back to LASSC</i>)</p> <p>PT: I've learned....</p> <p>MT: What might we adjust in the lesson plan to be responsive to their strengths and needs?</p>
<p>Scenario #2: Planning for priority groups to build off student strengths</p>	<p>MT: How do you plan?</p> <p>PT: I follow the curriculum, read the steps, and see what materials I have to get ready.</p> <p>MT: Last semester in our inquiry cycle, we identified a group of students emerging in their fluency. Thinking about what you learned about their strengths, how will you incorporate this knowledge into differentiating the lesson for them?</p>
<p>Scenario #3 Crosswalk between SEL Competencies and Trauma Informed Practices</p>	<p>MT: For your case study student, we identified he is strong in the SEL Competency of Social Awareness. We are not sure if he has experienced trauma, and, Trauma Informed Teaching Strategies can support all students in feeling safe in the classroom. Would you like to explore these strategies and build off his strengths?</p> <p>PT: Yes, I'd love to find ways to help him learn best.</p> <p>MT: Okay, great! A trauma informed practice that might build off of his strength is "Be Specific About Relationship Building."</p>

Preparing To Coach

Coaching Conversation Goal: *To utilize culturally responsive practices and SEL competencies in order to support a teacher in creating more equitable outcomes for students*

Scenario:

What is your wish for this teacher?

What is your hope for the student(s)?

What resources will you use with this teacher?

What mentor stems might you try?

What do you want the meta-coach to focus their feedback around?



Observation Data & Reflection - SEL Scenarios

Teacher:	Mentor:	Meta-Coach:
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Purpose: *This tool provides guiding questions to support teachers in recording and reflecting on what they are seeing and hearing that could translate into practice in their own classroom*

Directions: Use this tool to take notes during the observation process.

Teacher Area of Focus (CSTP/ILP/Other)	
Mentor Observation Area of Focus	How to support teachers in maintaining focus on student outcomes? To really see students for their strengths in ways that informs their practice and moves them to action.

Data Collection			
Purpose: <i>To gather data as it relates to a current area of focus</i>			
Time	Teacher Language/Actions	Mentor Language/Actions	Questions

Data Collection

Purpose: *To gather data as it relates to a current area of focus*

Time	Teacher Language/Actions	Mentor Language/Actions	Questions

Reflection/Next Steps:

Notes

