

Trauma and Teacher Perceptions of Maladaptive Classroom Behavior

An Action Research Pilot Study

Keona Griffin, MBA, MaT
314.281.2018 | KGriff03351@fontbonne.edu

ABSTRACT

This mixed method action research study examined how teachers interpreted student's maladaptive behavior, whether teachers recognized evidence of students' past traumas and whether they associated traumatic experiences with maladaptive behaviors. Qualitative data was collected via interviews and quantitative data was collected via the Feifer Assessment of Childhood Trauma Form.

PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Teachers are losing vital teaching and learning opportunities to maladaptive classroom behaviors. Seeking the cause of students' misbehaviors may lessen the likelihood of teachers misinterpreting possible manifestations of trauma and toxic stress as disruptive behaviors. Unchecked trauma manifest in schools daily. The impact is immediate and magnanimous, affecting AYP, student and teacher attendance, drop out and teacher turnaround rates. Teachers need training on how to recognize these manifestations in both their students and themselves and how to adapt classroom management techniques to "reach and teach students (Blitz et al., 2020, p. 95)," remedy/redirect behaviors and restore the classroom to an environment that is conducive for teaching and learning.

JUSTIFICATION

Preserve the integrity of the teaching and learning environment

1. Do their due diligence when it comes to knowing and caring for their students and themselves. "Students learn best when they feel like they are safe and supported by the adults around them" (Ham, n.d., 3:41-3:46).
2. Notably, however, teachers of all backgrounds report struggling with student discipline and needing administrative support for handling disciplinary situations (Blitz et al., 2020, as cited in Marinell & Coca, 2013).
3. Everything is compounded when maladaptive behaviors are present and the discipline strategies are ineffective.
4. Training + punishment = Effective discipline

PARTICIPANTS & METHODOLOGY

Convenience sample

- General education teachers
- Nonminority and nonblack participants
- N = 2**
- Caucasian
- Female
- Between the ages of 30-40
- Master's degrees
- Urban and Midwestern public school district
- 5th year of teaching

Participant A

- Married
- Teaches mathematics
- Taught internationally
 - Korea
 - South Africa

Participant B

- Single
- Teaches English Language Arts

Mixed methods study

- Structured interview
 - Virtual via Google Meet
 - Six talking points and open-ended questions
- 79-question survey
 - FACT (Feifer Assessment of Childhood Trauma) Survey
 - Administered and scored online by PAR (Psychological Assessment Resources) Inc.
 - Assess their perspective on stress and trauma and how they impact children in school-based settings.

RESULTS

Quantitative - Inconclusive

F.A.C.T Trauma Survey Index

Participant A

- Within the normal limits
- Composite score 53rd percentile = did not recognize any symptoms of stress and trauma that impacted school functioning.

Participant B

- Elevated range
- 95th percentile = did indeed recognize that her students experienced symptoms of stress and trauma that impacted school functioning.

Qualitative - Teachers do not recognize evidence of trauma in their students

Interviews

- Recognized behavior as manifestations of trauma when they were made directly aware of an antecedent traumatic event.
- Perceived the maladaptive behaviors as disrespect, anger, lack of perseverance, and empathy.
- After being made cognizant of traumatic events, they acknowledged said events by recognizing changes in behaviors and appearances. Additionally, they provided space and opportunities for students to retreat and restore when necessary.

CONCLUSION

Because teachers misinterpret student manifestations of trauma as maladaptive behaviors, they could benefit from trainings that offer a marriage between focusing on student needs, building equity, trauma recovery, teaching, and learning. Each construct has a unique purpose, but they are all related and interrelated. Additionally, each of these can be greatly enhanced by emotional intelligence. Armed with skills and strategies teachers may be better equipped to **reach** students, **remedy** or **redirect** their behaviors and **restore** both the students the environment so that teaching and learning continues with minimal disruptions.

Discipline Loop

Discipline = Punishment + Training



Maladaptive Behavior Process

