

Whole-Body Learning: making trauma - informed education universal

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2022 ABLE Assembly

Hello and welcome to my presentation: whole-body learning - making trauma-informed education Universal.

My name is Abby Neale and I am a teaching artist of Visual Arts and carpentry to elementary-age students. I'm employed by the Eliot School of Fine and Applied Arts and I teach within the Boston Public School System.

So here's the plan for the presentation: start with defining key terms, examine trauma's effect on the brain, how the Arts fit into the equation, my emotional first aid process, trauma-informed class routines, finally engage in 2 Trauma Centered-art projects.

Key terms.

The American Psychological Association defines trauma as an emotional response to a terrible event. Short-term shock and denial, followed by long-term unpredictable emotions, flashbacks.

The Center for Disease Control in the United States takes more of a clinical approach to trauma in children. They categorize traumatic events into the ACES or adverse childhood experiences. It is important to note that the ACES are not a definitive list, but act more like starting point. They intersect with forms of systemic oppression like race or class and stack on top of each other, creating a heavier burden for learners.

The CDC connect these Aces to increased likelihood of depression suicide, anxiety, addiction and dropping out of Education.

There are different types of trauma:

Acute sparked by a single event

Chronic prolonged repeated event

Complex trauma that occurs repeatedly in a close trusted relationship

Generational transmits through family and community histories, it is often connected to large systems of oppression, or historical events

Secondary trauma is indirect and very prevalent among caretakers and teachers.

Now we are going to break for an activity.

Please pause the video and create a graphic organizer about the different types of trauma

I found it helpful to kind of break these down and identify patterns and themes within different categories

Please pause here

welcome

Here is my example:

what I noticed was patterns around storytelling as well as the role family can play in both harming and healing. - you can share your insights on the discussion jamboard if you want

It's important to understand the idea of a person being triggered or activated or experiencing a flashback. Here, something has evoked the trauma and the person experiencing trauma has a flashback. The body goes into fight or flight and the brain reacts as if the trauma is occurring in the present but not as a memory.

To cope with the trauma we have resilience and protective factors.

Resilience is all about the individual coping mechanisms. This can be cultivated with therapy, the arts, and other strategies.

Protective factors are all about support systems. Healing from trauma requires wholistic support, think about maslow's hierarchy of needs. Not only that, but caretaker's need support too.

In trauma-informed space you might notice some differences in vocabulary : victim, Survivor, and thriver are common verbage. I recommend asking individuals. I tend to say person with trauma or students.

Now how does Arts education fit into all of this?

Art offers resilience models a lot of artists and creative people make work reflecting on their trauma and this can really reduce isolation and help people feel seen.

The immersive processes of artmaking can ground the senses help a person come back to the world after a flashback.

Art involves low-stakes play that gives people opportunities rebuild their confidence.

Making art also enables non-language Communications -

often people experience traumatic memories without linear narrative but like a collection of sense memories or vignettes like a series of photographs or the lyrics to a song.

Okay so let's look at how trauma affects the brain

The amygdala which is responsible for memory and identifying threats becomes over-stimulated and see threat everywhere

The hippocampus which covers the amygdala becomes under reactive and it can't identify past from present

the amygdala sends signals of fight or flight and adrenaline through the sympathetic nervous system.

The body goes into survival mode, de-prioritizing non-essentials like speech, language, and digestion

Okay now I'm going to share my emotional first aid routine inspired by the Boston Children's Hospital work

I go through these steps with students in fight, flight, or freeze, nearly every day with my elementary students.

I always start with grounding in the senses to disrupt those fearful patterns. I engage with deep breathing, touching something cold, or drinking cold water. Some people even use sour orcinamon candy to use the sense of taste.

Next I use movement to release some of that energy and adrenaline that has built up in the body.

when breathing slows down and their body language shifts, then I ask simple questions that I know the person can answer. I don't expect full-on conversation.

consent and personal space are key here, the fear response involves hiding or putting a back against the wall.

Present but not hyper fixated - I sit beside the student and model coping mechanisms - we are facing this problem together

Here are some practical routines in my classes

In my classrooms, I keep something like a *sensory bin* a *busy bin*, alternatively, a peace corner.

It include different accessible grounding tools such as pipe cleaners, bolts and Wingnuts, stress balls, and where's Waldo books. If it makes sense chewing gum and sour candies could be helpful. I like to take a Universal Design approach and make sure I have enough of these tools for everyone.

I also model boundaries both in asking for consent to enter or engage with the student's personal space artwork or tools.

I differentiate private art about big scary ugly things that you would keep in a diary with a lock on it. That is very different from the art that you might post on the refrigerator for your family.

When I see a student with built up adrenaline as a result of their traumatic behavior, or they need a break from a situation so that the class can return to neutral. I will send them on a *cool down walk*, that's a structured walk for my students where they are both walking and accomplishing a task. Filling my water bottle counting empty bulletin boards, this gives them a chance to rebuild their confidence, breathing, and counting and moving.

When transitioning from different phases of the class as a whole group like from art-making to cleanup my students and I take three deep breaths together

When something disrupt the routine of class like a half-day I will invite my students to do a *swirl of change* I will acknowledge the change and make space for students to ask questions about the change.

Activity time

Okay now we're moving into two different trauma-informed activities. You are welcome to participate, share via the additional resources there are 2 jam boards. These activities are seeds of inspiration, you're welcome to hack them and transform them into the context of your own teaching practice I would love to see a musical spin on resilience or a theatrical spin on the safe Spaces Project.

During the 2020 distance learning in the spring, I created a play therapy inspired activity to pair with some restorative justice conversations going on at my schools about the Black Lives Matter protest occurring all over our city. My primarily BIPOC students observed evidence of the protests everywhere. They were asking questions about how if they were black and they're hearing that it is controversial that to say that lives, like there's a matter. Police officers, are hurting people that share their identity, how do I stay safe, and who is a helper.

I created an activity inspired by Nel noddings the courage to care in schools. Students in Zoom art class were invited to bring a small toy or stuffed animal to art and use materials from around their homes to build a safe space for that animal. I made this nest pictured for a stuffed bird out of plastic bags and a broken headphone cable. This project offered students a role reversal; they were the creators of a safe space.

Interesting conversations arouse, one student said he wished he was a bird in a nest and then built a nest out of blankets. Another student's created a Lego structure for a tie-dye beanie babie and said "this has guns and cameras because bad people want to come to get the Unicorn because of her colors."

The resilience symbols workshop, I taught at Boston's Theater Offensive which empowers queer youth through theater. I taught it on the evening before election day in 2016.

This moment called for resilience-building; students felt powerless and anxious about the possibility of a fascist, homophobic gaining power in the white house.

We created patches that evoked the symbols of resilience: personal, historical, and pop cultural. Knives cut linoleum stamps, a breyer rolled rich smelling oil-based ink, and we printed onto swatches of fabric. No one looked at their phones, because their fingers were coated in ink, we had respite from a world about to change. We talked about the Japanese art form of kintsugi, repairing broken Ceramics with gold and the lovingly patched and studded DIY battle jackets of the punk movement. Both celebrate visible mends.

Participants made multiple patches that they could give to people. We brainstormed where we might incorporate seeds of resilience in our daily lives. Sewn on the inside of a jacket secret and close to our hearts ? Beside makeup mirror so that we can see it every morning? Wearing it loud and proud, so that other people can see and invite conversation around the resilient symbol. Maybe it's a way of signaling something about your identity.

You are welcome to participate and explore resilient symbols and how to incorporate them into teaching and a jam board in additional resources.

Thank you all for taking the time with me. Please connect in the additional resources if you find this interesting.