

The Helen Carswell Chair in Community Engaged Research in the Arts

Final Reports - 2018

What is trauma-informed practice?

Cathy Pavlik

What is this research about?

This research presented an overview of what trauma-informed practice could look like in the context of a music classroom at the Regent Park School of Music. The following six principles of trauma informed practice were adapted to be re-contextualized for the music classroom: acknowledgement; trust; safety; choice; community building; and empowerment. The goal of the research was to demonstrate that adverse childhood experiences have a significant and lingering impact on development, health and wellness into adulthood. Using Dan Siegel's model of the Triune Brain and the model of the Window of Tolerance from The National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine, the researcher demonstrated the biological effects of trauma on the human nervous system.

What did the researcher do?

The researcher conducted a literature review of current sources on the topic of trauma-informed practice. Information was synthesized and presented to RPSM staff in the form of a ten-page resource package with bibliography, a quick reference guide, and a sixty-minute presentation with discussion at the staff PD day in early September. All resources were shared in hard-copy and electronically through the staff on-line portal.

What did the researcher find?

When the body's biological defense system is triggered into a fight-flight-freeze-faint response, survival becomes the priority. A trauma-informed educator understands that extreme behaviours likely happen when a student feels that their safety is threatened, and a nervous system response happens at the level of the brain stem. This is not a cognitive choice. The brain's centers for language and higher-level reasoning are off-line as the body prioritizes

What you need to know:

Past trauma has lingering effects on the human nervous system which can cause a host of body responses and behaviour patterns that impact learning and development. Children in marginalized communities are more likely to have experienced some type of trauma, and/or have had experiences they perceived as traumatic. This experience of past trauma will have direct consequences on their ability to learn and interact in community settings. Trauma-informed practice means a shift in approach from the diagnostic to the compassionate, where educators begin to understand what happened to/for students and how these happenings have shaped the students' understanding of themselves and the world.

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safety. So too are empathy, emotional regulation and attention regulation off-line when a fear response is triggered. As educators develop an understanding of the effects of past and present trauma on students, they are better equipped to respond to student behaviours with compassion so that students can feel understood and empowered.

How can you use this research?

Emotional intelligence and emotional regulation are essential factors in navigating classroom dynamics. Educators can use this research to support programming choices, behaviour intervention strategies, and to develop a deeper understanding of their own well-being.

About the researcher

Cathy Pavlik is a Ph.D. candidate in music at York University where her research is focused around performance anxiety in singers. Cathy taught music and French immersion with the Durham District School Board, and she maintains a private music studio. She is a certified Emotional Success Coach and EFT Practitioner.

References

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Keywords

Emotional Regulation, Trauma-Informed, Adverse Childhood Experiences

About the Helen Carswell Chair

The Helen Carswell Chair in Community Engaged Research in the Arts represents a partnership between York University and the Regent Park School of Music (RPSM). Faculty and graduate students from across the university collaborate with RPSM on special projects that are aimed at researching and bolstering community music in the Jane & Finch neighborhood and beyond.

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