“Anyone who says this isn’t worth talking about is disconnected. You don’t have to come from it to be touched by it... I’m not the only one with multiple deaths. Especially being in this neighborhood, or choosing to teach in this neighborhood, you’re signing on for that. It’s part of the package. Do you choose to be a part of it? It’s going to happen. I anticipate it. Do I look at a kid and say Oh are you going to be one of them? I hope not. But you just don’t know. “

Leading through Loss
The Impact of Student Homicide on Educators

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What’s the issue?
“We tend to remember only the good things…Like, we pass how many dead animals on the highway? At the time, it’s a shocking thing, but over time we tend to forget. And that’s one of those defense mechanisms that kicks in. With my students too.”
Three Research Questions:

1. According to urban high school teachers, how does student violent death impact their professional sense of self and teaching practice?

2. What factors influence urban high school teachers’ cognitive appraisal process and becoming resilient following the violent death of a student?

3. According to urban high school teachers, what kind of support do they need after a student’s violent death?
Theoretical Framework
How do teachers make meaning?
Cognitive appraisal.

- Person-Environment Relationship
- Cognitive Appraisal
- Emotional Respose
- Coping
Resilience
• Literature notes three types of exposure to violence:
  – Primary (victimization),
  – Secondary (violence seen or heard), and
  – Tertiary (learning of the violent death).

• Literature notes two types of community violence
  – Episodic
  – Chronic/compounded
The Project

• A sequential transformative mixed methods study
  – Surveyed 146 urban high school teachers from five regions in Los Angeles
    • Stress Appraisal Measure (SAM; Peacock & Wong, 1990)
    • The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) (Connor and Davidson, 2003)
  – Interviewed 16 teachers from the survey sample
Sample

• Survey
  – 32 teachers who had never experienced a student violent death (21.9%) and 114 teachers who had experienced at least one student gang/gun related death (78.1%)

• Interviews
  – 16 interviews with urban high school teachers who indicated on their surveys that they had experienced at least one student violent death(s)
Quantitative Findings

Anticipation of a future student homicide causes teachers higher rates of stress.

Regardless of their experience with student homicide, teachers felt that they had supportive resources in their toolkits.

Teachers’ resilience and appraisal of the phenomenon were not significantly affected by experiencing the violent death of a student or by time since the event.

The number of years in urban teaching contexts and the number of student homicides related to teachers’ self-perceptions of resiliency.

The more internal control teachers felt, the more they predicted being able to cope with and overcome future deaths.

Teachers’ trauma training informed their appraisal of student homicide.
Impact on Sense of Self and Practice

- Experiencing a student violent death caused teachers to integrate new social emotional competencies into their teaching practices.
- Teachers perceived the violent death of a student as a loss of investment.
- Teachers felt responsible for not preventing students’ deaths and took responsibility in preventing future student deaths through interventions.

Cognitive Appraisal and Resilience

- Teachers reported that student violent deaths created a sense of threat to their own personal safety.
- Teachers’ perceptions of a killed student’s circumstances, social conditions and behaviors mitigated how they placed accountability for the homicide.
- Teachers built their own resilience through inspiration and support from current students.
- Teachers took on new roles after death events, and these new roles promoted their autonomy and competency.

Needed Supports

- Teachers reported a desire to connect with colleagues who shared the student death experience for support.
- School systems’ communication about a student death and its aftermath informed how teachers experienced support.
- The practice of honoring the deceased student was a factor in teachers’ ability to build resilience.
Teachers reported a desire to connect with colleagues who shared the student death experience for support.

School systems’ communication about a student death and its aftermath informed how teachers experienced support.

The practice of honoring the deceased student was a factor in teachers’ ability to build resilience.
Teachers who appraised a student’s homicide as negative and highly stressful experienced traumatic stress reactions such as hypervigilance, hyperarousal, and self-blame.
Teachers reported that their schools’ leadership styles were a central mitigation factor for stress after the death of a student.
Teachers became more conscious in creating safe classroom environments and building positive relationships.
So what does this all mean?

- “Teaching Compounded Trauma” as a new term

- The quantitative and qualitative data both demonstrate that traumatic loss is not linear, but rather a dynamic experience that requires ongoing coping responses.
Recommendations for Urban Teachers
Recommendations for School-Site Leadership
Recommendations for Urban School Districts and Systems
IF we want students to arrive to school ready to learn,

Then we need to want teachers to arrive to school ready to teach,

And school leaders to arrive to school ready to lead.
This is a call for equity in access to support so that teachers can lead, facilitate, and create socio-emotionally grounded relationships with every single one of their students.

“We’re warriors. Bottom line, we are warriors and we are resilient people, and this neighborhood, when people come from here, they are already warriors. Because there’s no one out there who is not a warrior that is going to put themselves in a situation like this.”
Thank you.

Contact Us:
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