

CONTENTS

Introduction by Nell K. Duke *ix*

Letter to Readers *xi*

Section 1 *Not This Schools as Places That Cause Trauma* 1

An Invitation for Educators 3

Setting the Stage: Arlène's Journey to Trauma-Responsive Pedagogy 6

How We Can Miss the Trauma 8

Scenes from a Classroom 15

Going Beyond Your School's Mission, Vision, Values, and Benchmarks to Grow 17

Section 2 *Why Not? What Works? Trauma-Responsive Classrooms Promote the Well-Being of All Students* 19

Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma-Responsive Approaches 21

The Significance of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) 22

Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress 25

Balancing Risk with Resilience Across Development and Context 28

Building Resilience 31

Developing Lagging Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Skills 32

SAFE, PREDICTABLE, AND SUPPORTIVE CLASSROOMS 38

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMS 39

Building Supportive Relationships 40

Attending to Educator Well-Being 44

Minimizing Risk 47

Conclusion 48



Section 3 But That Teaching for Healing and Transformation: Seven Stages to Trauma-Responsive Pedagogy 51

Why Does Trauma-Responsive Teaching Begin with Knowing Yourself? 56

Why Doing This Work Offstage Matters 65

How Does a Culturally Relevant and Trauma-Informed Perspective
Impact My Ability to Respond? 65

How Can I Weave Trauma-Responsive Pedagogy into the Fabric of My Instruction? 68

Stage 1: Know Thyself 70

Stage 2: Know Thy Content (in the Context of Culturally Relevant and
Trauma-Responsive Pedagogy) 74

Stage 3: Bear Witness: Entering Our Classroom and Schools with a
Trauma-Responsive Lens 79

WITNESS (DON'T GUIDE, DON'T TEACH, BE PRESENT, AND WATCH) 79
MOMENT OF REFLECTION 80

Stage 4: Feel: Tending to the Wounds Within Ourselves and Within
Our Classrooms 82

TRY IT . . . 82

Stage 5: Grieve . . . It's an Ongoing Process 83

Stage 6: Initiate the Archetypes 85

Stage 7: Heal and Transform: The Intention and Practice of Teaching
the Whole Child While Nurturing Your Well-Being 86

Afterword by M. Colleen Cruz 91

References 93

INTRODUCTION

Nell K. Duke

If you have been in education for a while, you have no doubt seen certain areas get lots of attention for a short period of time and then fade from the spotlight. For example, when I was a teacher in training, cooperative learning was all the rage. Over decades, research continues to document the benefits of cooperative learning in numerous domains and at a wide range of age/grade levels, but the technique is far less commonly discussed and is probably underutilized.

I have been worried that trauma-responsive education may experience the same fate. There was a meteoric rise in attention to this topic, begun prior to the pandemic and then magnified during the pandemic. Yet already it seems as though this topic is fading from view in favor of others, such as “accelerated learning.” I am hoping that educators passionate about the important role that mental health plays in learning, and compassionate for children and youth who have experienced trauma, will help keep this topic front and center. And I hope that this brilliant book will play a role.

Another worry I have related to trauma-responsive education is that our field will attempt to enact it without sufficiently aligning to research. The rapidity with which trauma-responsive education has become known, and the many other demands that have co-occurred with that rise (e.g., figuring out how to teach remotely), make trauma-responsive education vulnerable to implementation that is underinformed by research. This is one reason why this book is so needed. It is short and accessible, which is key given so many demands on our time and thinking. Yet it also covers many important findings from research and expert practice.

This book addresses another worry I have had about trauma-responsive education: lack of an equity lens. The field needs to recognize the roles that systemic racism and classism in the United States play both in causing trauma and in affecting the degree to which schooling is responsive to trauma. At the same time, we must be vigilant that awareness of trauma does not lead to lower expectations for children who have experienced trauma or to excuse ourselves from providing all children a culturally and intellectually rigorous and engaging curriculum. I am grateful that in this book, discussion of trauma always includes attention to issues of equity.

To write this book, we needed authors who know research and practice in this area well. Arlène Elizabet Casimir was a clear choice. She used trauma-responsive practices as a classroom teacher, then in curriculum development work, and now as a professional developer and coach. Throughout her work, she thoroughly resists the deficit orientation that is so common in conversations about trauma and trauma-responsive instruction. Arlène is in enormous demand, and I could not be more thankful that she has decided to share her expertise and commitments in this book.

Courtney N. Baker, too, has a long history of work on trauma-responsive practice. Her research investigates approaches to providing trauma-responsive educational experiences for children, youth, and families. She has led numerous projects in this area, working in partnership with community and education organizations. Like Arlène, she brings an asset orientation to the work that is so important to progress in this area. Please join us in making that progress, appreciate what Arlène and Courtney have written, and thank yourselves for all you are doing to support children and youth who have experienced trauma.

LETTER TO READERS

Dear Reader,

We are so grateful that you are here with us to learn more about trauma-responsive pedagogy. Welcome!

Growing poverty and income inequality, social injustice, and system inequality, coupled with the global COVID-19 pandemic, mean that more children are attending school every year who have experienced significant chronic and acute stressors. Educators like you are deeply interested in supporting students, helping them learn, and ensuring that they reach their full potential. Trauma-informed schools are lauded as one way to address this challenge, but the concept can be challenging to define and difficult for teachers to implement, especially on their own. Together, we invite you, our reader, to explore the research and practice of trauma-responsive pedagogy in an easy-to-digest, actionable text that elevates the healing and wellness of both the children and the adults in your classroom.

We met in New Orleans, Louisiana. Arlène was teaching the first children to come to school post-Hurricane Katrina, and Courtney was a founding member of the New Orleans Trauma-Informed Schools Learning Collaborative, which developed and now implements trauma-informed approaches both in New Orleans and nationally. When Arlène's school participated in the pilot of this initiative, her classroom served as a lab site and model for transformative trauma-informed teaching. She received tools from the Learning Collaborative that supported her in shaping her approach to trauma-responsive pedagogy. Since then, Courtney's journey has been to gather and share the evidence behind trauma-informed approaches, with a focus on measurement, implementation processes, and outcomes. Arlène's path has focused on educator training with an emphasis on trauma-responsive pedagogy. We came back together to write this book to share our collective knowledge and wisdom with educators.

This innovative book first describes the challenges of a classroom that does not attend to adversity and trauma, then presents the research on trauma-responsive classrooms, and finally provides a framework to support educators in centering the whole child in their classrooms. We use approachable language, provide examples and anecdotes, and share strategies and lessons. Our goal is for you to pick up, digest, and apply this text with ease.

In this book, we empower you to support children who have experienced adversity and trauma so that they can be successful, both in your classroom and out of it. Just as we hope this book will give you valuable tools to help your students, we also aspire to offer you space and an urgent rationale to care for and love yourself in this work—your empathy, kindness, generosity of spirit, and engagement are exactly what your students, school, and community need to thrive. So, please take a deep and cleansing breath, and feel deeply welcomed to join us for a process of reflection, learning, and growth. We are absolutely certain that your effort will pay transformative and worthwhile dividends.

With love and care as you embark on this most important of journeys,
—*Arlène and Courtney*

ARLÈNE ELIZABETH CASIMIR

An Invitation for Educators

Imagine going to school one morning, in person or remotely. Maybe you had an awful night, a rough week, a couple of trying weeks, or you continue to carry the weight of the global pandemic as the effects rage onward. You may be caring for an ill family member, grieving a recent loss, experiencing financial difficulty, coping with a personal health crisis, or running on limited sleep. Whatever “it” is, you are managing multiple priorities and feeling overwhelmed and stressed out as the school day begins. Picture yourself carrying this load, on your face, in your rounded shoulders, or within your spirit when you enter your school community. Now, imagine your administrator or colleagues greeting you with:

“Good vibes only here!”

or

“Fix your face and leave it at the door!”

or

“You need to be positive!”

or

“Show some grit!”

Or maybe no one greets you at all but, you see your name removed from the “good” green zone to the “cautionary” yellow zone on the behavior chart *for everyone to see!*

Imagine being told to control your emotions by holding a bubble in your mouth, walking like a “delighted duck,” or worse, smiling and feeling “ecstatic” because *that* is the feeling the class will “study” today.

As you imagine this scenario, do you find yourself wondering: Where is the space for my humanity? This is a question that many students and teachers alike ask themselves every day (Shalaby

Do you find yourself wondering: Where is the space for my humanity? This is a question that many students and teachers alike ask themselves every day.

2017). It is no secret that we live in a world where people experience trauma—individually and collectively. We can consider trauma a universal human experience, given how many of us experience some, or multiple, forms of it in our lifetime. From grief and loss of those closest to us to disaster and war on a global scale, trauma impacts our lives and the lives of our students. We must also acknowledge that there are many instances where systemic injustices

perpetuate trauma by way of oppression. Classism, racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, and transphobia, to name a few, are connected to psychological trauma that individuals and communities experience (Holmes et al. 2016). It is important to recognize that trauma is not simply a negative experience students and teachers bring to school. There are many instances where, like many other institutions, schools can perpetuate trauma and often *are* sites of trauma themselves (Venet 2021; Duane 2022). Given these realities, I expand on what Richards (2020) wonders: Is it possible for educators and students to bring all of who they are into the classroom and still feel invited to be seen, heard, and supported through all the critical challenges that they have to navigate in life and in school?

Like in the imagination exercise at the beginning of this chapter, too often educators tell our students to leave their problems at the door, be positive, and bring good vibes only. Should a student choose not to, they endure consequences for their “non-compliant behavior” such as time out of the classroom, suspensions, and expulsions. Instead of being encouraged and supported to authentically feel the vastness of their emotions and to move through them with compassion, children, particularly children of color, are often hyper surveilled, criminalized, and dehumanized (Basile et al. 2019; Morris 2016). Trauma-informed educational practice is a decentralized movement (Duane and Venet 2022) to help us consider how trauma impacts our students.

There have been many versions and iterations of this approach both within education and in other fields such as psychology, social work, and medicine (Thomas et al. 2019). However, although most versions of trauma-informed practice focus on understanding and being informed by behavioral manifestations of trauma in school settings, I argue that trauma-responsive pedagogy invites educators to go a step further and to heal alongside our students, both onstage (while explicitly integrating teaching methods and practice) and offstage (by doing the necessary inner work to bring our whole being to the profession in healthy ways). As we explore the core tenets of trauma-responsive pedagogy in Section 3, we can also recognize that this responsiveness requires individuals to take up healing-centered (Ginwright 2018) and humanizing (Freire 1964) approaches to teaching and learning. Trauma-responsive pedagogy is a *pedagogy* grounded in teachers displaying humanization. It is a *pedagogy* that can equip educators with the mindset to transform learning experiences. It is a *pedagogy* that can encourage students to turn their wounds into wisdom (Dutro 2011) and recognize that our students' challenges are not a deterrent to their learning. As you will further see in Section 3 through lesson plans and classroom examples, this pedagogical stance provides the needed insight to understand adult and child trauma and encourages healing alongside our students.

Trauma-responsive pedagogy invites educators to go a step further and to heal alongside our students.

As we support students with developing the awareness, capacities, knowledge, and skills to identify, witness, transmute, and transcend their pain, we honor their dignity and their humanity, and we even have a powerfully vulnerable opportunity to heal with them. History has shown us that we are capable of accomplishing greatness even in the midst of immense sorrow and trials (Pat-Horenczyk and Brom 2007). Trauma, and the growth that can come in its wake, is what makes us human. But our ability to embody our full humanity and to integrate our growth to propel our lives forward depends on how our community engages with the complexity and fullness of our presence.

We are capable of accomplishing greatness even in the midst of immense sorrow.

As educators, we want what's best for our students. And we have a vision for what that looks like. To support our students in more closely connecting with the vision that we cocreate for their learning experience, we make statements and decisions that we believe will help our students. However, our well-intentioned efforts can—and often do—cause harm. While administrators and teachers, for example, ask students to comply with the upbeat ideal to “show some grit” or “be positive!”, we simultaneously punish children for failure to adhere (Love 2019). In doing so, we may unconsciously, or consciously, shame students for their trauma responses and perhaps cause retraumatization.

SECTION 3

BUT  THAT

*Teaching for Healing
and Transformation:
Seven Stages to Trauma-
Responsive Pedagogy*

ARLÈNE ELIZABETH CASIMIR

When I moved to New Orleans in 2011, my classroom was made up of children who were in the womb during Hurricane Katrina in September of 2005. But that wasn't the only storm that swept through leaving mass devastation in her wake. A beautiful yet complex cultural history, generational poverty, gentrification, mass incarceration, one of the highest murder rates in the country, and ranking forty-sixth in national K–8 education meant that the natural disaster completely destabilized an already precarious community. My students never weathered the watery doom firsthand, but the traces of it—and all of the other violent inequities they were subject to—contributed to the whirlwind of extreme and vicarious trauma they would experience.

Ironically, this is where my own healing journey began. Ancient wisdom traditions from the African diaspora and Indigenous cultures teach us that every healing journey begins with a crisis. My students' predicament brought up a lot of my own unresolved trauma as a second-generation Haitian-American from Brooklyn, New York. Acknowledging my own story and buried pain when trying to be responsive to my students' trauma made me realize all of the inner work that I would have to do while showing up for my students outwardly. I quickly learned that our collective healing would become a parallel process. Ideally, I would do this work on my own, first . . . but no college, graduate school, or teacher education experience could have prepared me for what I was experiencing in my classroom. I didn't have the capacity to go on an "eat, pray, love" sabbatical. And I couldn't afford to quit! I had to work, and the way I was *working* was not working for me or for my students. Their trauma continued to surface and disrupt our learning targets.

.....
Ancient wisdom traditions from the African diaspora and Indigenous cultures teach us that every healing journey begins with a crisis.
.....

I realized that the supreme target was returning to wholeness. We needed to heal in the classroom. It became necessary to respond to the trauma and to remove the barriers to their learning. As I responded to my own trauma, I felt myself healing. As I healed, I could teach them how to heal through my example.

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I have spent over a decade honing my practice, research, and skills to develop a parallel process-driven framework for trauma-responsive pedagogy. My hope is that this section (and this book at large in collaboration with Courtney) is an offering of the research and wisdom that we

have acquired through our various experiences and studies. I hope it can support you with this imperative work now.

I've learned there are seven stages to becoming trauma responsive while engaging in this process alongside students (shown in Figure 3–1). Just like healing, these stages are not linear. You may find yourself spiraling through them at different points in your journey. However, I do recommend going through the process once before revisiting and going deeper in a second round. Going through all the stages could take a quarter, a semester, a year, or even three school years when taken on

In this work, as an infamous Haitian proverb reminds us, "Behind mountains, there are more mountains."

a school-wide basis. Trust the process and know that you come back to each stage with more depth and complexity every time. A key principle of trauma-informed healing is to be flexible (Venet 2021). After going through the seven stages once, allow yourself to return to the specific stages that you feel drawn to, what your students need, and trust the timing of your selection. It's helpful to set yourself up for

success by setting a goal for how you move through the stages. That goal could be around the time it will take to go through the process, the inner work you'd like to focus on, and who you'd like to work with on your healing journey. Remember to give yourself compassion and grace. If you don't meet the goal, go back to your goal setting, set a new goal, and try again. In this work, as an infamous Haitian proverb reminds us, "Behind

mountains, there are more mountains.” This means when we feel like we’ve arrived, there’s more work to do and more places to go to heal. I also recommend that you find someone who will affirm and support you in the process.

FIGURE 3–1 *Seven Stages to Becoming Trauma Responsive*

- 1.** Know thyself.
- 2.** Know thy curriculum, research, and supporting educational frameworks.
- 3.** Bear witness.
- 4.** Feel.
- 5.** Grieve.
- 6.** Initiate.
- 7.** Heal and Transform.

The stages are a process to support educators in becoming trauma responsive. The framework is also meant to be inclusive. I have had new students and educators enter at different stages in their classroom or school community. However, I know the stages work best when anyone who enters later has the opportunity to repeat the process.

As you learn about and embark on the process, I invite you to read this section as:

- a person who is teaching or leading in uncertain times;
- a learner who is unlearning any limiting beliefs, behaviors, or practices;
- someone who lives in a toxic culture that causes trauma and who may be healing from their own trauma;
- a human being who is invited to bring their full self (emotionally, mentally, spiritually, physically, etc.) to this work;
- an adult with an inner child of their own who needs protection, love, and support.

Exploring these stages while wearing these various hats will allow you to examine where you are affirmed and where you may need to adjust, change, grow, reflect, or seek support. Take notes with your different hats as headings to track your progress.

As you learn more about the stages, think about where you feel drawn, what you have already experienced, and where you feel resistance. The areas where you feel resistance, ironically, are usually the areas where we need to visit more closely.

In the following sections, I'll walk you through each of the seven stages in the process-driven approach to being trauma responsive: know thyself; know thy curriculum, research, and supporting educational frameworks; bear witness; feel; grieve; initiate; and heal and transform.

AFTERWORD

M. Colleen Cruz

The word *trauma* was one of the big buzzwords in the 2019 educational world. It was hard to enter any school or district office without hearing people talking about it. “How do we help *those* kids with trauma?” And although it was a worthy goal to focus on trauma at the school level, there was a way in which trauma was very much a part of the othering of specific children, a way to further separate the practitioners from the pupils.

And then March 2020 arrived and everything changed. In one fell swoop trauma shifted from being about *them* to being about *us*.

In the book you just read, Arlène Elizabeth Casimir and Courtney Baker move the conversation beyond the buzzwords and the othering and into the research and practices school communities can and need to engage in. They let us know that, yes, trauma matters and there are things educators can do to respond to it. And also, perhaps most importantly to me, they firmly, and without hesitation, remind us that all of us are touched by trauma. This was true pre-pandemic but it has become absolutely impossible to deny now. For us to care for the students we serve, for us to successfully teach them, we must, of course, understand others’ trauma and how to respond to it, but also how our own trauma or experiences with others’ trauma can have a direct impact on how we respond, teach, and even interact with colleagues and families.

If you're anything like me, the first time I read this book in its entirety, I felt the full weight of everything Arlène and Courtney discussed. There is just so much hurt in our communities, both generationally and in the present moment, it is easy to feel like there's too much for one person to make a difference. But, as I let their words settle, I also realized something very empowering: they have given us the recipe for what to do next period, next week, next school year. Whether it's researched tools for identifying adverse childhood experiences or a protocol for teaching children how to hold space for each other, we are all leaving this book with a large trunk of information, strategies, and ways to take care of our own hearts. I, for one, am incredibly grateful to both Arlène and Courtney for the gift of this book, right at the perfect time. I am thrilled that it is now in the hands of so many educators. I know that the next time I sit in front of a gathered group of children in the classroom, the students and I will be all the better because of this book.