



Reflective Practitioner Preparation: In the Wake of 21st Century Terrorism

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This paper presents an example of reflective educational practice as the authors address the impact of trauma on the educational process. Multiple aspects of the educational process will be discussed: education at the national and local level as well as teacher preparation and K-12 classroom practice. The authors ground the theoretical piece in educational theory while also drawing on personal practical knowledge of experience from classroom practice. This reflective-reflexive, theory-practice inquiry method illuminated the ways that students and teachers must deal with trauma in the educational setting on a daily basis.

"A picture is worth a thousand words." When describing the Twin Towers in New York City on September 11, 2001, thousands of words were used to describe the multiple impressions, feelings, thoughts, and interpretations held by viewers. Likewise, when one now hears the two words, "Twin Towers," different images come to mind in contrast to images prior to September 11, 2001. These new images are reflexive responses to a traumatizing event and will dominate our thought patterns if left unanalyzed by subsequent information and events that can help us return to a sense of normalcy and stability.

Immediately following the tragic events of September 11, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) released suggestions to school systems in our local community for helping children cope with tragic events. As educators, we are also dialoguing about how to adequately prepare pre-service educators to effectively attend to devastating loss, and how we can assist students in moving beyond the tragic events that will unfortunately and eventually occur in our schools. Drawing on personal, practical knowledge of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1985), reflective analysis

(Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990; Dewey, 1938; Olson, 1997), and theory and experience, the following discussion is framed from our point of view as reflective-reflexive researchers.

Our purpose is three-fold. First, we present a case study of reflective practitioner preparation through a teacher narrative story of experience, followed by our reflective-reflexive narrative stories of experience. We reflected on the six-grade teacher's story, and reflexively turned it onto ourselves to analyze our own experiences, in an effort to contribute knowledge to the issue of preparing teachers for dealing with trauma. Thus, we provide a theory-practice connection exemplar for reflective teacher practice. The reflective-practitioner responds to students' needs that emerge as a result of national tragedies such as violent attacks, or local tragedies such as the death of a family member or classmate. Ideally, the reflective-practitioner, as a critical reflective leader, responds to the daily incidents of institutional trauma, which marginalize particular children through insensitive educational policies and practices. Finally, the reflective-practitioner teacher listens with care, understands, and draws on

knowledge and skills to support children/students through difficult situations.

Second, we present issues of child abuse, school violence, and marginalization as forms of domestic trauma that require school-based interventions. Finally, we discuss the pragmatics of facilitating the dialogical healing process in the school setting in response to national and local tragic events, but even more importantly, in response to the daily trauma that some children experience as a result of unjust social structures. In addition, we address the lack and absence of ongoing emotional healing processes for children dealing with the trauma of "otherness," a form of trauma that has resulted from educational practices that privilege the emotional needs of the members of the dominant culture. The continuous thread throughout this paper is that of reflective teaching practice as promoted by the Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) (1992) standards.

September 11: Sixth-Grade Classroom Case Study

People from diverse life contexts in the United States of America and around the globe, were heavily impacted by the traumatic events of September 11. One sixth-grade teacher described his reflective-reflexive (applying theory in practice) experience on the morning of September 11, 2001 with the following observation:

As my class sat and watched the horrifying events of the World Trade Buildings unfold before our eyes on September 11, 2001, I was rudely awakened by how insensitive and callous some of my students seemed to be. While watching Tower One burn after a terrorist attack, we watched live footage of Tower Two also being struck by another plane. As the building erupted into flames and the media began to give more details, they focused in on people from this building beginning to jump. I headed for my television control and began to turn this off fearing that this was too much for them to handle. As I reached the control, I heard a student in the background begin to giggle and say, "This is so cool". My initial reaction to this statement was absolute anger, sorrow, and frustration. How did this student come to be so unsympathetic to others? (Personal correspondence, 9-12-01)

This sixth-grade teacher was able to reflexively, or instantaneously, reflect on his recently attained knowledge of ecology theory and turn it inward to analyze the responses of his sixth-grade students in a moment of decision. While the events of September 11 were unique, the student's response was not, and as a whole, the event represents one

among numerous moments of decision that teachers are faced with during every class period of any given day. How we respond to our students can contribute to building the learning relationship, or may become a barrier to growth and development. This teacher was able to suspend an initial reflexive thought that resulted in angry feelings towards the student's response, and reflexively-reflectively analyze the response through an understanding of ecology theory.

It is easy at a time like September 11 to be conscious of how students in K-12 classrooms are affected by trauma. Systematic learning structures are disrupted by the presence of emotions that teachers are not used to dealing with in the classroom setting. If K-12 practitioners survive long enough in the teaching profession, they will eventually be forced to confront tragic events that occur on a national and international level, and even perhaps more profound, local tragic events in their own communities or schools. We can remember very vividly where we were when the announcement came that the Challenger Space Shuttle carrying teacher Christa McAuliffe, had just exploded on take-off. While one of us was teaching high school algebra in Oklahoma and the other was teaching middle school social studies in Texas, we can each recall where we were when we heard the tragic news. Both teachers and students had to process the event, and sixteen years later, most can still reconstruct where they were at the time of the broadcast.

During the past 16 years, we have experienced the loss of students and teachers to traffic accidents and illnesses. We have also experienced the unpredictable tragic deaths of students during their participation in athletic events, suicide, and gang or gunshot related incidences. In each and every case, disruption of mental and emotional capacities of students and teachers, and of the school climate, occurred as we suspended our daily curriculum and typical academic discussions to attend memorial services, funerals, and wakes with our students and colleagues.

However, the affect of tragic events is not limited to K-12 students and teachers. Pre-service teachers and their instructors, among others, are also impacted by death and traumatic events. For instance, one of our pre-service teachers experienced the loss of his sister in New York on September 11 as she worked in the Twin Towers. Though neither we, nor the larger population of pre-service teachers at our school knew the young lady personally, her death had a systemic effect. We felt our class member's absence while he was in New York futilely looking for the remains of his sister and helping his brother-in-law adjust to the loss. In the weeks following the tragedy, as instructors, we monitored and tempered class

discussions with great vigilance, knowing full well that a participant in the class discussions was suffering a direct and devastating loss.

In the wake of the aftermath of September 11, pre-service educators were beginning to ask an important question: What obligations do we have to adequately prepare pre-professional educator-students to deal with potentially catastrophic and upsetting events as they enter the teaching profession?

Theory-Practice Connections

Despite our best efforts to prepare our pre-service teachers in the applied areas of subject content, physical and cognitive developmental issues, and effective instructional methodology, it is also essential to focus on assisting our students in creating a foundation of reflective practice and skills that are grounded in theory. After hearing the callous comments from his student, our sixth-grade teacher could have reacted in an inappropriate manner toward the student, perhaps even resulting in the escalation of the disturbance. He chose however, not to be reactionary, and instead paused long enough to use critical reflective skills and draw loosely on his recent theoretical discussions in a graduate level course concerning Bronfenbrenner's work (1979), to understand the reactions of the student.

A complete discussion of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory is beyond the scope of this paper. Furthermore, we are not arguing for Bronfenbrenner's theory above other theories for understanding students' behavior and interactions in the classroom. We draw on Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory to the extent that it proved to be instrumental for our sixth-grade teacher who remembered Bronfenbrenner's statement, "A child's experiences are viewed as subsystems within larger systems, or a set of nested structures" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). According to this theory, these "nested structures" serve to assist children's understanding of themselves and their interactions with the environment. Understanding his student as a product of the environment helped our sixth-grade teacher make sense out of what he recognized as an inappropriate response to tragedy.

Children interact with the environment of which they are a part and these interactions are the engine of development. It can be confusing and frustrating as a teacher to try and understand the perspectives and reactions of children. However, when one begins to gain an understanding of and get a theoretical handle on the central issues in children's lives, this perspective becomes easier to put into context. Thus, the lack of communication in the classroom, parental involvement, and monitoring of certain issues will continue to result in callous and

inappropriate reactions from children in the wake of tragic events. As we continue to reflect on the events of September 11, 2001 and the events that occurred thereafter, many of us are not surprised at the reaction of some individuals. In essence, the example of the student reaction provided earlier was predictable given the extreme nature of the events and the student's assumed limited experiences with severe trauma. As educators however, it is important to understand that typical life experiences from a child's perspective can be equally traumatic and debilitating. Although in no manner attempting to lessen the devastation of September 11, we now turn to a discussion of the impact of abuse, violence, and traditional policies and practices in the schools that work to marginalize and potentially severely impact the lives of children. Understanding children as a product of their environment can be helpful in making sense out of what an adult teacher might initially recognize as an inappropriate response to tragedy. In addition, understanding the social and environmental systems that dynamically influence children throughout their development is key.

Domestic Trauma

Child Abuse

In 1999, an estimated 3 million children were reported to child protective agencies as victims of child maltreatment (Peddle & Wang, 2001). Because of the continuing rise in the reported cases of abuse, schools are experiencing increasingly greater challenges to recognize and to provide services to these students. In order to serve and support these victims, educators need to understand the dynamics of child abuse and to become more knowledgeable of school-based interventions. In addition, understanding the immediate and long-term effects of abuse is essential for current and pre-service teachers.

Several researchers suggest that children who suffer from abuse may exhibit symptoms commonly associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Ford, Racusin, Ellis, Daviss, Reiser, Fleishcher, & Thomas, 2000; Gorey & Leslie, 1997; King, 2000; Mcleer, Deblinger, Atkins, Foa, & Ralphe, 1988; Reebye, Moretti, & Lessard, 1995). In addition, Graham (1993) suggested that in fact, PTSD is the most common diagnosis for children who have been abused. Children who experience PTSD may exhibit a number of symptomatic responses commonly associated with a continual reexperiencing of the event, avoiding stimuli associated with the event, general numbing of responsiveness, and increased arousal. In addition, symptoms may include falling or staying asleep, difficulties in concentration and completion of tasks, and irritability that may include anger outbursts (American Psychiatric

Association, 1994). There may also be signs of hyperactive vigilance or exaggerated responses and actions. Etherington (2000) and others (Alter-Reid, Gibbs, Lachenmeyer, Sigal, & Massoth, 1986; Kendall-Tackett, Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993; Wolf & Birt, 1995) found that victims of child abuse and neglect might also exhibit elevated anxiety and depression, inappropriate sexual behavior, and social withdrawal. Kimerling and Calhoun (1994) noted several physiological symptoms that may be apparent in abuse victims, including headaches and stomachaches.

Victims of trauma, and in particular child abuse, may become hypersensitive to sights, touch, smells and sounds (Kolb, 1987) that are associated with these earlier emotional experiences. Child abuse victims may also experience persistent symptoms that interfere with normal development (McLeer et al., 1988). These symptoms may include excessive daydreaming or confusion and development of unwarranted specific or undefined fears. These intrusive thoughts and accompanying irritability often interfere with schoolwork and may be manifested in what many would consider developmentally inappropriate behaviors (Graham, 1993).

Despite the suggestion that the PTSD model is best suited to describe the symptomatology to violent trauma like sexual abuse, others have criticized its application in fully explaining the results of child abuse trauma (Finkelhor, 1990). Finkelhor, for instance, argued that the PTSD model is too narrow in that it overwhelmingly focuses on the affective realm. In his view, concentrating extensively on feelings minimizes attention to the thinking or cognitive realm. As a result, maintained Finkelhor, victims of child abuse have distorted cognitive maps about sex, family, and self worth. Not all victims of sexual abuse may exhibit PTSD symptoms but may have other problems that manifest themselves and become debilitating factors (Finkelhor, 1990).

School Violence

In October 2001, an HHS (Health and Human Services) news release carried the title: "HHS AWARDS \$10 MILLION FOR CHILD TRAUMATIC STRESS INITIATIVE" declaring, "HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson today announced the awarding of \$10 million in grant funds to improve treatment and services for children and adolescents exposed to traumatic events" (HHS News, 2001). While this appeared to be in direct response to the tragic events of September 11, a June 15 news alert indicating a July deadline for this grant proves differently. This news alert is evidence that there was concern for children already suffering from trauma-causing events, like school violence, much

earlier (The Center for Health and Health Care in Schools, 2001). Two months before the September 11 event, the announcement of the availability of \$10 million to improve services for children and adolescents exposed to traumatic events by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Center for Mental Health Services appeared in the Drug and Alcoholism & Drug Abuse Weekly and in Mental Health Weekly (CMHS, 2001).

Clearly, issues related to the treatment of childhood trauma, often related to violence, were being discussed prior to the September 11 event. Research has shown that children and adolescents today are more violent and therefore more often the victims of violence (Ceballo, Dahl, Aretakis & Ramirez, 2001; Gladstein, Rusonis & Heald, 1992; Rembolt, 1998; Lorion & Saltzman, 1993; Singer, Anglin, Song & Lunghofer, 1995). For the 1995-96 school year, California schools alone reported more than 22,000 violent crimes against people (California Safe Schools Report, 1997). As public schools continue to provide supportive services to students in the wake of Columbine and other school tragedies, it becomes even more critical for school practitioners to understand the impact violent, traumatic experiences may have on their students.

Raywid and Oshiyama (2000) concluded that there exists a substantial amount of research literature suggesting appropriate directions that schools can move in, in order to avoid more tragedies of school violence similar to that experienced at Columbine High School. Their suggestions of smaller high school populations, grouping by interest rather than academic grades, and encouraging tolerance, acceptance, and respect among students, may begin to offer some solutions in the attempt to create a stronger "community atmosphere". In many cases where violent student behavior has been observed, particularly in suburban schools, students and staff reported that perpetrators felt shunned or isolated and were not accepted into highly regarded extra-curricular activities or clique groups.

As a result of war, violence, and traumatic experiences, children not only see and experience tragic events, but also experience the potential threat of harm (Byrnes, 2001). In situations of violence, children may not secure a stable attachment to a nurturing adult. In fact, the interruption of daily routine, school services, and the physical structure of normally safe havens (whether at home or school), may have a long-term impact on the quality of children's lives even after the violence has abated (Byrnes, 2001). Some experts would also suggest that violent images have become so pervasive in the media, that children have become desensitized to

violence. Others would theorize that violence is rooted in the recent social and economic changes in the United States over the past 20 years. For instance, overworked and financially strapped parents vent their frustrations on their children, in some cases resulting in physical and emotional abuse taking place in the family. As recipients of abuse at home and seeing an increasing prevalence of violence in our society, children have grown accustomed to violence as a "normal" way to settle disputes (Remboldt, 1998). In addition to viewing violence as the most expedient way to achieve desired results, other children may use violence as a mechanism to obtain various desired possessions (Remboldt, 1998). Despite the fact that the sources of school violence (either in urban or suburban environments) lie in complicated, ambiguous arenas of social life (Perlstein, 2000), it remains the task of schools to respond with appropriate support for victims and survivors.

Bullying, sexual harassment, and other activities that students use to assert power and maintain their place in the pecking order are simultaneously pervasive and invisible, and as such, frequently overlooked by teachers and administrators (Perlstein, 2000). Together, they constitute the normal, systematic form of violence in our schools. In addition, where majority white males may often have a wealth of defined supportive groups or individuals if trouble arises, females and minority males in particular, often suffer inequitable support. The burdens of boyhood fall particularly hard on poor, minority males who are more likely to face punishment than nurturance (Felice, 1981; Nichols, Ludwin & Iadicola, 1999; Prothrow-Smith, 1991). In addition to structural shortcomings, poor minority youth are often victims of and participants in violent behavior as a result of their exposure to violence in their communities and because they have come to believe that school authorities cannot protect them (Ceballo, Dahl, Aretakis & Ramirez, 2001; Gordon, Gordon & Nembhard, 1994, Prothrow-Smith, 1991).

Ironically, at the same time that females are victimized at school, males are poorly served by their apparent privilege. In comparison to female students, male students have been found to fall short in academic achievement and also get into far more trouble behaviorally (Nichols et. al., 1999; Perlstein, 2000; Sadker, Sadker, & Long, 1997). As obstacles to females' educational opportunities have begun to diminish, American ideals of masculinity, the valorization of isolation and aggression, and taboos against displaying emotions other than anger have accentuated males' academic and behavioral difficulties (Pollack, 1998).

Identifying and reporting child abuse is a necessary skill that all child educators should possess. The need to understand how children respond to abnormal, uncontrollable, and traumatic situations and how these responses impact normal development is critical (Etherington, 2000). While having the skills to identify and report incidences is crucial, the safety and well being of children also depend on the ability of the school and community to move beyond detection to provide follow-up services. For victims of abuse and trauma, schools may be the main source of stability, consistency, and routine (Graham, 1993). Therefore, it becomes imperative that as pre-service educators, we assist our students - both those from supportive backgrounds and those from backgrounds where chances of success are hampered by traumatic events - to be proactive in their preparation to life and work.

**Appropriate Responses:
When Tragedy Affects the School Climate
Appropriate Adult Responses**

First, The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) suggests that adults should model a calm and controlled demeanor in the midst of tragedy and loss. Developmental psychologists would agree that children tend to take their emotional cues from significant adults in their lives. Although emotional states are often difficult to control, especially when tragic events take on a more personal nature, children need to understand that it is acceptable to have strong emotional feelings while at the same time maintaining a calm, non-anxious demeanor. Second, children need to be reassured that they are safe and that important adults in their lives are also safe. Understanding that trustworthy people are in charge in tragic situations (police, firemen, doctors, military etc.) will further help to ease potential anxious and frightened responses from students.

Adults should also understand that children (as well as adults) express their emotions differently. To assist students, it is vital that adults understand that there is no right or wrong way to express grief or anxiety. Children should understand that emotions are a natural way to deal with these issues and that it is all right to feel upset. However, as these feelings and emotions evolve, children may need assistance from adults in adequately and appropriately expressing these feelings. Even the emotion of anger is understandable, but depending on the age of a child, such an emotion may not be expressed in an appropriate manner. Changes in behavior, sleep patterns, and appetite may also be an indicator of a child's grief, anxiety, or discomfort in tragic situations. Adults need to be aware of a child's emotional state and assist them in expressing

themselves in manners that are appropriate and supportive, in an effort to eventually move beyond a tragedy.

Fourth, adults should provide factual explanations, especially immediately following a tragic event. When adults speculate or embellish events concerning what has happened or what may happen in the future, anecdotal information may become intertwined with factual events, resulting in an escalation of hypothetical or false causes, other results, and undue reactions. Children should be told truthful information and adults should not try to pretend that the event is not serious. Without dwelling on the potentially massive scale or scope of the tragedy, children ought to be given credit for their intellectual ability in understanding the seriousness of events. Finally, explanations that adults give should remain developmentally appropriate, based not only on age but also on students' individual characteristics and needs (Bowman, 1993; Elkind, 1989). Upper middle and high school students may have strong and varying opinions about the causes of violence and tragedy in schools and society. They may want to share concrete suggestions to help prevent these issues from reoccurring in the near future. In addition, students at this age level can often understand the social, political, and economic ramifications of world events and how these may impact their future lives. Upper elementary and middle school children may be quite vocal in asking questions about safety issues at their schools and in their communities. These students should be reassured and adults should assist them to separate reality from fantasy, and again, provide them with factual information. Early elementary school children should be insulated somewhat from the scope of events, but at the same time be respected for their thoughts and opinions. Information that is simple and brief should be provided and balanced with reassurances that the daily structures of their lives will continue with as little interruption as possible.

The NASP suggests that adults should encourage all children to verbalize their thoughts and feelings. In addition, these researchers maintain that developing good listening skills is essential. This requires adults to focus on skills that involve accepting and listening to children's thoughts, emotions, and feelings with a non-judgmental, non-opinionated demeanor.

Appropriate Parental Reactions

If at all possible, parents should maintain a "normal" daily routine in the days following the tragic event. Continuing to have planned, specific times for meals, homework, and bedtime will assist children in functioning with a sense of normalcy. Second, parents should take time to discuss the event

with their children in a developmentally appropriate manner. Parents should have the ultimate decision, especially for their young children, in determining what information should be disseminated. Third, the NASP also recommends that parents maintain close physical contact with their children during and throughout the days following a crisis situation. Close physical presence will not only reassure children, but will help parents monitor their reactions to what is taking place around them. For instance, spending extra time reading or playing quiet games with children can create an sense of calm, develop closeness, and a feeling of security.

Fourth, parents should take precautions to safeguard their children's health. Although we know that stress can be physically detrimental to adults, in a similar fashion, stress can physically affect children's well-being. Insuring that students continue to receive proper amounts of sleep, exercise, and appropriate nutrition are key factors that will assist students in dealing with and moving beyond tragic events. Fifth, parents should seek out and determine what resources their children's school has in place to help them cope with tragic occurrences. Most schools have a strategic plan of action to assist their staff, students, and parents in the case of emergency situations. Typically, school systems will provide extra counselors and support staff for students and their parents in the case of these types of events. Remaining in the physical environment of the school with friends and teachers may also help children regain a sense of normalcy.

Finally, parents should take advantage of family affiliations with churches, synagogues, and other religious organizations. These organizations provide opportunities for prayer and communal support and typically encourage hopeful and optimistic thoughts for the future. Praying and providing positive support for victims of tragedy can begin the healing process and children should be exposed to this often overlooked potential source of comfort and strength.

Appropriate Teacher/School Reactions

Similar to what adult responses ought to be, schools and teachers should provide additional support for students in the wake of tragedy. Schools should be safe havens and administrators and staff should assure students that they are well prepared to provide comfort and security at all times. Second, as adults and parents provide stability in the children's environment, schools should also seek to maintain a normal daily routine as much as situations will allow. Stability and calm are key components that will help to maintain a productive and welcoming school and classroom environment. Third, schools should provide information to both teachers and students that

may be useful in the classroom or in students' home environments. Although take-home parent information sheets and packets can be useful, teachers should provide news and information directly to students when possible, rather than having information passed on by way of public address announcements. In the school, teachers are the strongest direct connection to students, and students may interpret direct information from the teacher as the safest and most reliable source of information.

As a fourth support component, the NASP advises that schools should have a crisis plan ready to implement in the case of emergencies or traumatic situations in the school. School psychologists and counselors should be made available to talk to students and staff members who require additional support. Schools should also be aware of additional community resources that are available for students, and staff personnel should be knowledgeable of agencies that parents and students can be referred to. Fifth, teachers should be aware and monitor students who may have recently experienced personal tragedy or those who may have suffered indirect connections to tragic events. Children who may have recently traveled to a site of tragedy, like the most recent New York City incident, may feel a personal loss and connection to the event. These students may need extra support and consideration as events continue to unfold.

The NASP also suggests that schools and teachers provide an outlet for students who desire to assist in helping the victims of tragic events. Creating get-well cards or sending letters to victim's families and survivors of tragedies may be one avenue of support. In addition, writing thank you letters to emergency workers and health care providers, and even providing monetary donations are all methods that may be used to help students feel a part of recovery efforts. Finally, as tragic events unfold in the media frenzy of information, schools and teachers should monitor and in some cases restrict viewing of the events and the aftermath that follows, as our sixth-grade teacher did when he realized his students were viewing live events. Viewing of events should be developmentally appropriate for the age group of students in the classroom. In addition, teachers should allow for age appropriate discussions and activities as news of the event continues to be provided by the media. Teachers should not be expected to provide all of the answers, but they should ask questions that help guide the discussion, rather than dominate it. Two-way communication between the school and parents is a key factor and schools and teachers should place great emphasis on coordinated efforts to support children through tragic events.

Summary

As instructors of pre-service teachers, we are obligated to make certain that our students are prepared to teach not only in their content domain, but that they are also adequately prepared to assist students through tragic events that will undoubtedly occur. Properly trained adults, parents, school administrators, and teachers can work in a coordinated effort to provide an effective support system for our young people. This assistance begins with understanding our own emotions and how we as individuals see and deal with tragic events. Children will often take their cues from us; therefore, we as adults must be prepared to react with appropriate emotions and attitudes. Although not always easy given time constraints and other obstacles, taking time for reflection on events is essential to us as adults for a greater quality of life. Children too, need time and the opportunity for pause and reflection. As educators, our ultimate goal is to create classroom atmospheres conducive to all types of discussions, both those of celebration and of tragedy. In this manner, we can promote educationally and psychologically healthy learning environments, where students and teachers can engage in critical, reflective thinking.

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