



Calming Corners

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Inquiry

How might calming corners be a trauma informed practice in our classrooms?

Introduction

One in three children under the age of 18 were reported to have suffered at least one adverse childhood experience in their lifetime (HRSA, 2020). It is inevitable we will teach children who have dealt with traumatic experiences, as some point in their lives. It is important that we are prepared to support them and give them tools to learn to cope with the long-term effects of trauma.

Trauma, especially when experienced at a young age, has potentially detrimental effects on the brain. For instance, babies are not born with the ability to self-regulate, they rely on a caregiver to be an external regulator, until they are able to sooth themselves. When a child has not experienced being settled and nurtured during times of heightened stress, their internal regulatory system is not equipped to self-regulate. Children who have had traumatic experiences live in a constant state of internal dysregulation because they have never had a structure to assimilate and integrate stress. Because of this, their behaviors are demonstrative of the internal chaotic world churning inside of them. If a child's past experiences have been chaotic, disruptive, and overwhelming, they will continue acting this way until a new pattern is established. This is why it is important that we, as educators, provide tools to help students establish their self-regulating system, such as calming corners (Forbes, 2013).

The purpose of this inquiry is to help educators gain a better understanding of what trauma and trauma-informed teaching, as well as a tool that can be used in our classrooms, to promote self-regulation and a safe learning environment, for all students.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

ABUSE	NEGLECT	HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION	
Physical	Physical	Mental Illness	Incarcerated Relative
Emotional	Emotional	Mother treated violently	Substance Abuse
Sexual		Divorce	

What is a calming corner?



One important aspect of trauma-informed classrooms is being proactive in preventing challenges before they develop, in the classroom environment. Calming corners are an important tool that help students re-retreat into a private space in the classroom when they are feeling overwhelmed and dysregulated. The goal is for students to be able to use the tools provided in the calming corner, to help them self-regulate and learn to cope with difficult or overwhelming situations. In the beginning, students will ideally have educators available to scaffold them in learning how to use the space to self-regulate, until they become proficient in self-soothing. It is not a place for seclusion, punishment, or control, but a space to overtly learn, practice, and implement self-regulation strategies. Calming corners also provide a safe space for overwhelmed children, within the classroom, so they are able to exit and re-enter the classroom unobtrusively once they have reached a self-regulated state. It is important to note that the rules and regulations of a calming corner should be explicitly taught.

Calming corners look different in every classroom but many of the main components remain the same. For instance, all calming corners should be located in safe and easily accessible spaces of classroom communities that provide some privacy, but also allows educators the ability to supervise children utilizing the calming corner. Additionally, they should have comfort and sensory items, relaxation tools, and reflective teaching tools. This includes, but is not limited to: stuffed animals, comfortable seating options, fidgets, weighted items, noise cancelling headphones, journals, and posters for identifying emotions. Having a visual timer is also a good tool for setting boundaries around time spent in the calming corner.

Trauma-informed lens

The trauma-informed lens changes the perspective of how an educator views a child and the classroom. With this perspective, a teacher can consider alternatives as to why a student might be acting a certain way, and the teacher can respond in a way that leads to positive interventions and won't cause additional trauma to the child. Most importantly, educators need to understand how trauma impacts the individual's brain, body, and emotions. When a teacher is trauma-informed, they are able to recognize that the undesirable behaviors, by a student, are attempts to soothe the emotional dysregulation, and this is often done subconsciously on the part of the trauma-impacted child. It shifts the question from "what is wrong with this child?" to "what has happened to this child?" (Resilient Educator, 2021).

TPEP Criterion

My topic relates to **TPEP Criterion 5: Fostering and managing a safe, positive learning environment.**

Descriptor: Learning environment; the teacher fosters and manages a safe and inclusive learning environment and takes into account: physical, emotional, and intellectual well-being of students



Social Emotional Learning

Social emotional learning has become an important part of the public education curriculum in Washington State. Calming corners can play an essential role in assisting social emotional learning in students. The goal of SEL is to give tools to students that they need to interact with and meet the demands of the social and instructional environment of school and beyond, such as practicing identifying feelings, self-regulating, and controlling their impulses. This also helps with classroom management, as children with strong social-emotional skills have been shown to be less disruptive and better able to take advantage of classroom instruction, than children who struggle with social-emotional skills, like students who have dealt with adverse childhood experiences (Jones & Bailey, 2014).

Implications in my own teaching

Because of my research done in this project, my experience student teaching, and the trauma-informed teaching class I was able to take, being a trauma-informed teacher is extremely important to me. In my own classroom, I plan to incorporate a multitude of trauma-informed teaching practices, including a calming corner. I want to empower my students to be able to handle difficult or dysregulating situations, by giving them tools that assist them in learning to adapt and self-regulate. My hope is to create a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students while being proactive in diffusing challenges before they arise.

Conclusions

The use of calming corners, is a trauma-informed teaching practice that makes education more accessible for all students, by providing a safe space for dysregulated students to learn to self-regulate and ideally prevent or handle challenges before they develop into something bigger. While these practices are focused towards students who have adverse childhood experiences, they are beneficial to all students. It also is closely related to social emotional learning as it ideally helps students learn to deal with difficult situations, manage their emotions, handle conflict, and more.

Calming corners and the use of trauma-informed practices, in schools, are becoming more common. Because this is a relatively new concept in education, there has not been extensive research done on the impact of calming corners on self-regulation, or trauma-informed practices, and there is room for more research to be done on the topic.

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