

**Classmates Left-Behind:
Adolescent Trauma Precipitated by School Violence**

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Trauma is a fact of life. It does not, however, have to be a life sentence.
-Peter A. Levine

Introduction

At any given time in our nation, a child, teacher or administrator may be subjected to school violence. School violence comes in many forms. This would include physical violence, bullying, school shootings, fights or assaults, and other types of violence that includes suicide. The victims of such violence are not only those individuals that were the direct recipients of the violent act, but also those who are bystanders or classmates of the victims. Such violence can be perpetrated on the school grounds, the school bus, cafeteria, sport rooms or gym, along with the actual classrooms. In the aftermath of such incidents, these survivors (as the actual victim) or bystander survivors must adjust both emotionally and psychologically to the new normal that incorporates the memory of the incident, specifically, a traumatic event. Such tragic incidents can leave the actual victims dead, maimed or otherwise wounded. Many survivors may be subjected to intense and extended rehabilitation. The tragic incident can be life altering for the victim and for those friends and family that knew the victim. However, those individuals that witnessed the incident of violence, or even heard about the incident, are left shattered and afraid. They must learn to deal with the trauma of the event. These individuals are the classmates that are left behind. Such a tragic event occurred at my school in April of 2016:

“Wilmington Teen Dies After Fight in School Bathroom” was written in large bold letters to commence the news article. It continued: “Amy Joyner, a 16-year-old sophomore, was reportedly assaulted by other students. She was pronounced dead after being flown to a hospital.” [Brett Klein, Philadelphia Magazine, 2016]. This incident occurred on April 21, 2016. The incident occurred in the girls’ restroom next to my classroom. I was one of the teachers that ran to the restroom to determine what was happening when the apparent fight ensued.

May, 2016, another traumatic event occurred:

“Howard High School Freshman Fatally Shot in Wilmington” was the Headline of this news article announcing the killing of Brandon Wingo, a varsity basketball player. The article stated, “Wilmington police found Brandon Wingo lying mortally wounded Thursday afternoon a few blocks away from Howard High School of Technology”. He had been shot in the head” [Associated Press, May 20, 2016]. This young man was a freshman student at my school.

Amy and Brandon were the victims. They are no longer living. Their young, vibrant lives were cut short because of violence. What is the aftermath of those students that must learn to deal with the loss of these classmate? Many of these students do not have a solid support system to help them handle this type of trauma in their lives. On the

day Amy died, the students did not know what was happening in the school because we were placed on a lockdown status. This means, all movement in the school was halted. Students were required to stay in their classes.

The horrible incidents of these two students left behind many other students that experienced their great loss and were traumatized by the effect of the incident. The healing process of losing Amy had barely begin to set in, when another incident of violence occurred...we lost Brandon. What is left behind from these horrible events are wounded children that must figure out how to deal with the loss of their classmate. They had to learn how to cope with the trauma of these events.

Rationale

I teach in an urban school setting. Many of my students live in a community where violence is a harsh reality. For these students, living in a country with the added threat of school violence creates more trauma and a greater challenge for teachers to teach. Howard High School of Technology is located in Wilmington, Delaware. I teach Introduction to Criminal Justice to 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th graders in the Legal Administrative Assistant Career Program. Upon completion of this course, these high school students can pursue careers in the legal field. A specific portion of the course addresses the serious question of how the criminal justice system must deal with acts of juvenile violence (not specifically using the terminology of “school violence”), along with measures to eliminate such acts of violence on the school grounds.

During class discussions on the topic of school violence, the students have expressed concerns about protection from an active shooter. Many have expressed fear at something happening to them at school without the necessary protection. I must be the bearer of bad news in letting the students know that the problem with school violence is not so easily resolved. The students do not have a real sense of everything involved with school violence and what has to take place after such violence is perpetrated. I took the students concerns to heart. Having been placed in the position to deal with the aftermath of a traumatic violence incident at school helped me to want to develop a curriculum unit to assist teachers and students that have dealt (or may deal) with a traumatic school violence event. Because my students will be pursuing a career in the legal field, they must be knowledgeable of the criminal justice approach to curtailing (or eradicating) school violence. They should have an understanding of victimology¹ and not just be concerned about the offender of school violence.

I am devising a curriculum unit where the students can objectively learn more about the trauma in the aftermath of a school violence incident. I will use the resources of the current seminar *Trauma and Identity in Literature*, with Dr. Bernard McKenna, books, articles, law enforcement experts, professors of criminal justice and school violence and trauma, along with Internet resources. I will be in a better position to teach my students about the seriousness of trauma in the aftermath of a school violence incident, along with helping them to think about ways to eliminate this type of violence in America.

The students will also be able to look at the problem of school violence more objectively rather than accepting surface explanations they hear in the media. They will learn coping strategies for themselves and to share with others. These students are

tomorrow's future. In a short period of time, it will be their responsibility to address violence on different levels, including school violence, as legal scholars and their own career paths. This research will help to expose my students to the various aspects of trauma and the means of addressing it when or if a school violence incident occurs.

The student's responsibility will be to take the information I offer and research the topic further. This will give the students the opportunity to view the issue of school violence and the trauma of being left behind from various perspectives. Additionally, it will enhance their toolbox to help them to better understand the trauma of such an experience at school or in other traumatic settings. As eventual criminal justice professions in the field of law, they will also better understand victims of crime and be able to empathize with such victims in the event of catastrophic school violence (or violent event).

Violence in schools is not a new phenomenon. Sad to say that our society has become desensitized to incidents of violence in schools. Oftentimes, the focus rest with criminal justice professionals studying and implementing strategies to stop or curtail the incidences of school violence. However, it is very important to address the trauma of those students who experience violence in school as a "by-stander" or those left in the aftermath of such an event. The word "bystander" does not denote a student that is a participant, but as a survivor. This student must figure out how to navigate through the anguish of the loss of their friend and/or classmate, or even a member of the school staff. There are many instances where school violence strikes and teachers, administrators or other school staff are victims. Let's face it, losing someone by a natural death is hard, but losing someone to a violent death is even harder.

In the tragedies the occurred at my school, the classmates that were left behind caused me to want to better myself in helping these students to heal; and to help myself heal. It is a very difficult thing to offer support and understanding to children when you need help yourself. I can recall that I had to take off from work after Amy's death. Unfortunately, I was thrown right back into the traumatic stress within two weeks of Brandon's death. I had to regroup my thoughts about the incident. I had to allow myself the opportunity to put things concerning the deaths in its proper perspective. If I had to do this, I knew many of the students that personally knew Amy and Brandon had to do much more. After Brandon's death, I called in some of my senior students to help with my sophomores that knew Brandon. I did not realize that upon entering my classroom, several of the basketball students that played on the team with Brandon were in my class. I had to manage by-the-seat-of-my-pants. There was no strategy for dealing with these traumatized students. They looked to me for support and strength. I was completely lost. I had no professional training as to how to help these emotionally traumatized students. I had only my intuition for compassion to pour into these students. No teacher should be so ill equipped.

The incidents of school violence are something I have long been concerned about. After experiencing the deaths of Amy Joyner and Brandon Wingo, the support I had to render to their classmates that were left behind was unimaginable. I was without the expertise of how to handle such losses. Through the guidance and support of a great school principal Dr. Stanley Spoor and the entire school district, the staff and students were offered emotional support. I learned something about going through this experience

and that is, you must be a caring and understanding person (human being). There was no time to be a “teacher” and all that this title denotes. I had to be a person that connected with the anguish and pain of what these students were experiencing, along with being keenly aware of my own pain about the situation. There was unity and support for teachers and students alike. Everyone clung to one another and worked to grieve and heal together. This traumatic event taught us all that care and understanding of our emotions were vitally important. We knew that it would take time, so time was given to us. We were offered counseling and time away from the classroom. Students were allowed to go to the teachers they felt most comfortable with, even if it was not their scheduled time to be in a particular class. For example, if one of my students was in their math class and they were experiencing grief, they were freely allowed to come into my class to be with me and vice versa [this strategy was very helpful.]

Trauma. What is it?

According to Koch., Vajda, and Koch, (2020) trauma is defined as: “Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.”² This definition encompasses many emotions in the human psyche. First, there are many events or a series of events that can be traumatic to an individual. Many times, these events are abrupt and without the knowledge that they will occur. Such events can be catastrophic to the person experiencing them. Trauma was exactly what my school had encountered on these fateful days of student losses.

Contrary to what many may believe, traumatic events are not rare. According to Kleber, (2019), in a study conducted with 70,000 subjects, in 24 countries, 34.3% of the people experienced accidents or injuries, 22.9% of the subjects experienced physical violence and 34.1% had an unexpected or traumatic death of a loved one. His findings supported the hypothesis, although you would think not, that it is common for people to be subjected to traumatic events in their life. (p. 2).

These events can be physically harmful to life. Events that cause the person to be a victim are very serious. This will cause trauma. The person may be hospitalized or required to have rehabilitation to be healed or restored back to good health. This physical trauma can be towards another person. As humans, we sympathize with the plight of others. Whether the person was physically harmed and it ended their life, or they survived and recuperated, the trauma to the bystander, friend, family or other relation can be devastating to this individual from a distance. The application to this trauma is an emphasis on the classmates left behind that have lost a classmate through violence.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Another aspect of trauma within the definition is mental or psychological trauma. The mental association of trauma is where a person can experience nightmares, depression, relationship issues, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). According to Kleber (2019), there is a new PTSD definition in the International Classification of Diseases of the World Health Organization (2018). There are three categories of PTSD. 1) reexperiencing; 2) avoidance; and 3) hyperarousal. There are two core symptoms in

each category. “Individuals search for an answer to the question why it happened as well as in rethinking one’s attitudes and priorities to restructure one’s life along more satisfying lines” (p. 3). This section is important to your students because the classmate left behind may experience one or more of these psychological shocks after losing their classmate. It is important to understand PTSD in order to help your students if they experience this reoccurring issue. I was unaware of PTSD when the situations of losing students in a traumatic situation. What is explained next will be helpful if you are placed in such a situation. The knowledge of what the classmates left behind are experiencing will help you to be as supportive as possible.

Reexperiencing. “In PTSD, the past is relived with an immediate sensory and emotional intensity that makes victims feel as if the event was occurring all over again”³ With a psychological traumatic event, “most people will experience responses such as intrusions, nightmares, startle reactions, and numbness”⁴

The unexpected loss causes the person to fear. They think that the event may happen again. They are constantly hyper-aroused and don’t feel safe. They have a short span of patience and become petulant. They hold themselves responsible for the event and hold a consciousness that they did nothing to avert the incident. They may feel that other people do not understand their feelings of misery about the incident. This causes them to feel isolated from other people. However, the above-stated indicators, although intense, do not ordinarily rise to the degree of the PTSD disorder (Kleber, 2019).

Avoidance. The individual may find themselves avoiding congregating or participating in groups. Specifically, they may choose to isolate themselves and avoid others. This could cause problems with their daily activities. For a student in school, this avoidance can be reflective in excessive absences from school, going to places they should not be going to in order to avoid the location or people that perhaps remind them of the lost person or traumatic event. This avoidance can be very serious. Students may engage in the wrong things like drugs and alcohol as an avoidance. They may not want to experience reality because of recalling the traumatic event. A student may find themselves in a predicament they do not foresee being detrimental to them. It may cause them to be in danger.

Hyperarousal. “People with chronic PTSD come to suffer from numbed responsiveness to the environment, punctuated by intermittent hyperarousal in response to emotionally arousing stimuli. Thus, they come to suffer both from generalized hyperarousal and from physiological emergency reactions to specific reminders”⁵ “The present paradigm implies that people with PTSD suffer from heightened physiological arousal in response to sound, images, and thoughts related to specific traumatic incidents.”⁶

It bears mentioning that the “unexpected” loss of a family member or friend can be devastating. With PTSD, and this “unexpected” loss accounts for being the most frequent cause of event related “psychopathology within the general population because of the high frequency with which people experience such a loss. About this last-mentioned finding, it is relevant to remark that there is a close relationship between trauma and loss, and consequently between PTSD and complicated grief, but they are not similar. The concepts of Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder (1) and Prolonged

Grief Disorder (2) as result of the death of a family member or a close friend are included in DSM-5 and ICD-11, respectively⁷

Social Functioning. PTSD leads to a severe social decline that is associated with the most dysfunctional social groups. PTSD was found to have severe effects on quality of life in virtually all domains. The PTSD patients also had high levels of depression, suicide attempts and gestures, and alcohol abuse.⁸ This suggest that certain groups (in this case the school or classroom setting) can experience a decline in the social setting. Further, the classmates left behind can experience many social and emotional problems associated with the loss of a classmate. Depression is mimicked in many ways such as isolation, loss of appetite, increased appetite, insomnia, and much more.

Another aspect of the PTSD and the social decline is the issue of suicide and suicide iterations in the minds of the classmates left behind. For example, in the loss of a classmate, a group of students may want to create a shrine with flowers and candles to the victim. Specifically, “researchers postulate a link between crime and the victim’s report of life satisfaction and well-being.”⁹ In this case, the victim is the surviving classmate left behind. Their life satisfaction and well-being has been damaged because of the loss. They may not see the world in the same light they did prior to the loss of their classmate. They may not be able to deal with the loss and grief. They may become obsessed with the loss and not want to deal with the process of grieving and the sometimes-lengthy period of healing because it is too painful. Some students may want to transfer to a different school or find themselves attending school less because it can be a reminder or a trigger for PTSD.

Spiritual Well-Being. Spiritual well-being is also a factor discussed with the ultimate success of healing from PTSD. Students have their own spiritual beliefs and associations. According to van der Kolk (2007) the role of religious leaders in the provision of religious ceremonies that address issues of forgiveness and create a rationale for suffering can provide a critical vehicle for recovery. As adults, there is a realization that there is no answer or “fix” for addressing loss. It is left up to rationale and a way to genteelly help the students understand that there is no answer for why things like losing a classmate occurs. However, tapping to all resources that are available, like the clergy, can be helpful. Inviting the local clergy, or even community leaders such as city council or local legislators into the school (or classroom) can also be helpful in supporting the classmates that are left behind. Specifically, religious representatives can help with treatment when seeking to develop a social and treatment environment that encourages integration.¹⁰ In the cases mentioned at my school, all of the above were invited into our school to offer support and encouragement to help the students and staff start the healing process after our losses. I believe the community solidarity during this critical time was extremely valuable.

Grief

When someone that is very special in our life dies, many emotions can occur. Death can cause changes in one’s normal behavior. In experiencing the loss, you can feel sad, anger, fear, anxiety, guilt, loneliness, and numbness. You may have a loss of appetite, weight loss, weight gain, loss of sleep, loss of interest in socializing and a disruption of familiar living patterns.¹¹ Your life changes very quickly and you are

placed in a situation where you must adapt. With classmates, although the lost classmate is not your family member, the students may have been very close friends. Even if it was not a close friend, the lost classmate could have been an associate or someone the surviving classmates knew indirectly. The classmates left behind may also internalize the present loss and apply their grief or hurt to a familiar loss they experienced in the past (maybe the loss of a grandparent, aunt, uncle, etc.). There is a void and emptiness. There is a shift in the normal routine. For instance, maybe the classmates rode the school bus together, or sat next to one another in class every day. This is a relationship and normal routine for these classmates. Having to shift your daily routine as a child is difficult. Having to accept this new change may be even harder. The classmate that is left behind can very well experience some of these physical and emotional aspects of the loss. They can also experience the effects of PTSD. This may be the replaying of the loss, i.e., what happened to the lost classmate, how you eventually heard about the occurrence, what was said, how it felt, what music was playing, the season of the year, etc. Specific to PTSD, one can argue that the recurrent and overlapping phases of reexperiencing and numbing are much closer phenomenologically to processes of mourning and bereavement¹² Grief and PTSD seem to be closely related in their affects.

Dealing with grief is hard for adults. It is also hard for children. It is normal for the child to feel depressed, guilty, anxious, or angry at the person who has died, or at someone else entirely. The child should be allowed to express themselves. It is also advised that grief counseling with a professional therapist be arranged. Childmind.org offer suggestions such as drawing pictures, building a scrapbook, looking at photo albums, journaling or telling stories as a way for the child to express their grief.¹³

5 Stages of Grief (5 SOG). Another important aspect of grief that is worth mentioning, and something that can be helpful for the classmates left behind, is explaining that there are 5 SOG. This term was coined by researcher Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, (1969) in her book entitled “On Death and Dying.” The book initially addressed those patients that were afflicted with a terminal disease and the idea was to help these patients. The 5 SOG includes: *denial*, *anger*, *bargaining*, *depressing* and *acceptance*. The first stage is *denial*. In this stage, a person can experience many emotions such as shock and fear. This happens right after the death. The next stage is *anger*. The person can feel angry, upset, lonely, and agitated. The next stage is *bargaining*. This bargaining may include things like, “if I had done this or that, the person may still be here” or they may choose to talk about the loss. The next stage is *depression*. This stage causes the person to withdraw and feel very sad. The last stage is *acceptance*. Acceptance is where the person is able to come to terms with the loss and starts to move on with their life.

These 5 SOG can be interchangeable. Also, there is no set time for each of the stages. Students need to understand that the 5 SOG is not something that **has** to occur. If they do not go through the 5 SOG, it does not mean that something is wrong with them. Ultimately, there comes a point where the student that has lost their classmate will arrive at the end stage of “acceptance”. I find that when you explain this to the students, it helps them to understand where they are in the stages. It seems to put a “face” on their emotions so they can see that grief is real, but there will eventually be an end to it.

Traumatic Stress Responses

There are distinct stress responses after a child experience a traumatic event. These responses can be minimal or pronounced. Traumatic events such as school violence can impact students in many ways. This can include their grade point average (GPA) and turning in assignments, being absent from school or attendance issues, drop out because of the stress they fill, getting suspended or even expelled from school because they are dealing with the stress of the event they experienced.¹⁴ Often times, these stressors can occur with children that are not directly connected to the event. Just by being in the school environment can be a contributing factor. These stressors may start subtly and grow.

Specific stresses may include intense reactions that remind the child of the traumatic event. This can include, but is not limited to: “thinking others are violating their personal space, i.e., “What are you looking at?”, blowing up when being corrected or told what to do by an authority figures, fighting when criticized or teased by others, and resisting transition and/or change”. Some students can develop impaired learning because of intrusive thoughts. Their concentration may be affected. Others may experience sleep problems, such as nightmares. Another big issue can be emotional problems such as anger, social withdrawal or moodiness.¹⁵ Each of the above can present problems with the interaction among administrators, teachers and peers.

Trauma for Teachers and their Response for the Classmate Left Behind

“Studies have found that children are more able to get comfort from adults they know well, and even from other children, than from crisis experts who are not familiar to them. Studies also show that adults *listening* to children is more important in this kind of situation than knowing the perfect thing to say to them: A comfortable and safe setting where kids are allowed to be sad and upset and confused is the most valuable thing you can offer.”¹⁶ For many students, school is a safe place. In school, students may have built caring relationships with their teacher, administrators and school staff. Students that have experienced trauma may have trouble adjusting in class and accepting directions from authority figures. Some become dissociative to deal with the situation. They may result to social isolation. [See *Social Functioning*.]

Teachers. Teachers are role models to students. After trauma, kids need to feel safe. They need caring and supportive teachers. Even more connected than the teacher-student connection, they need supportive relationships. Patricia A. Jennings in her book “Teaching in a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom: What Educators Can Do to Support Students” (2019), discusses 3 factors associated with the need for resilience after trauma for students: 1) a strong parent-child relationship, or a strong relationship with a surrogate caregiver who serves as a mentor if a parent is unavailable; 2) good cognitive skills, which are predictors of academic success and lead to prosocial behavior; and 3) the ability to self-regulate emotions, attention, and behaviors. This will help the traumatized student adjust better.

Adolescence students. With adolescence students, the teacher should be sensitive. This could have a big impact on a positive outcome for the student. The three things the adolescence students need from the teachers is: “*perceived support*, where the student’s perception that the teacher is sensitive to their need and is supportive is evident.

Utilization, which means there is a willingness of the student to rely on the teacher for help, and a sense of relatedness. This *sense of relatedness* is reflected in the extent to which students feel successful in their bids for belonging and acceptance.”¹⁷ Being understanding of the students are very important. Sometimes, it’s just being a person to listen. You may not have the words to say, but listening is healthy for the student. I would say listening and having a sense of relatedness is very important during a traumatic event. I found myself doing this but did not know it was the right thing to do at the time. It was good to know I had done the correct thing.

Younger students. In contrasting younger students from adolescence, they younger students need *closeness* and *dependence*. Closeness is the magnitude of positive emotion and warmth the teacher gives to the student. Dependency is where the student clings to the teacher or shows possessiveness. This breeds a negative outcome. If the teacher gives *conflict*, it emits a negative emotion and a lack of rapport between the teacher-student. This causes poor academic and behavioral outcomes.¹⁸

Practical suggestions. First, acknowledge the loss. Do not try to avoid the fact that someone passed away. Let the students talk in the classroom. Allow the students to express their feelings and share their memories of the classmate that is gone. Allow them to ask questions. You may not have the answers, but at least it helps for the classmates to feel free to ask. Let the students know that you and others are sad. The students need to know that you are human. Avoid breaking down in front of the students.¹⁹

“Grief rituals are designed to help bereaved people return to being able to make reasonable contributions in their social and work lives.”²⁰ It is suggested that you go back to your regular routine. This will be comforting for the students. Allow the students to memorialize the lost. In other words, allow them to express their thoughts through remembering their classmate. They could write stories, draw pictures, make a card to give to the family, or plant a tree. Each one of these things will be helpful for the classmates left behind. It will also be a nice gesture to share words of comfort in a story or card that you can give to the lost classmate’s family.

School Violence

The Propensity of School Violence. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics that was published in (2019) and whose data was retrieved from the (2017) year, “A school-associated violent death is defined as "a homicide, suicide, or legal intervention (involving a law enforcement officer), in which the fatal injury occurred on the campus of a functioning elementary or secondary school in the United States," while the victim was on the way to or from regular sessions at school, or while the victim was attending or traveling to or from an official school-sponsored event.”

Boys/Girls and Violence. Perpetration statistics for (2010) indicate that between 30-40% of boys and 16-30% of girls have committed a violent offense by the time they are 17 years old, 30% report having been in a physical fight within the last year, and between 700,000 and 1,000,000 youth have been identified as gang members²¹

Forester, et al. (2015) further states that data suggest that urban minority youth living in distressed communities are at significantly greater risk for violent victimization (e.g., being in fights, being injured in a fight, or being threatened with a weapon at

school), violence perpetration, and gang affiliation than their non-Hispanic white peers (p. 1). Physical attacks or fights include “actual and intentional touching or striking of another person against his or her will, or the intentional causing of bodily harm to an individual” (SSOCS, 2010, p. 2). Physical attacks or fights are the most common types of school violence.²²

According to the 2017-18 National Center for Education Statistics (2019), in every survey year from 2001 to 2017, a higher percentage of male students than of female students in grades 9–12 reported having been in a physical fight during the previous 12 months, both anywhere and on school property. In 2017, for example, 30 percent of male students, compared with 17 percent of female students, reported having been in a physical fight anywhere; 12 percent of male students, compared with 6 percent of female students, reported having been in a physical fight on school property.

The aforementioned data on school violence shows the propensity of school violence on or near the campus. School violence is not an isolated occurrence. This data also shows that in all likeness, there is a greater chance for a violent incident to occur where classmates could potentially be left behind. The various aspects of this curriculum unit will be advantageous to school administrators, teachers, parents and staff.

Minority Girls and School Violence

“Girls and boys differ in violent behavior, although they are similar. Girls have been shown to have later ages of onset (though an earlier peak for serious violence, suggesting a steeper desistance rate), as well as a greater proportion of late-onset offenders developing into persistent offenders. “Girls have been shown to engage more frequently in verbal and social forms of violence, (including alienation, ostracism, character defamation, peer exclusion, gossip, and collusion) girls may also be more effective in hiding physical aggression from adults than boys are.”²³

Minority Boys and School Violence

“For African American male adolescents, estimates as high as 98% have witnessed violence and 73% have reported victimization (Gaylord-Harden et al. 2017). Further, 74% of African American male adolescents’ report witnessing a shooting, 56% report witnessing a stabbing, and 29% report being shot at with a gun (Paxton et al. 2004). For male adolescents of color in urban communities, ECV has a significant influence on daily life and impinges negatively upon optimal development”.²⁴ Some studies have shown boys to exert more physical aggression than girls in the early school years (Coie and Dodge 1997; Xie et al. 2011), and to have higher rates of more extreme forms of violence such as carrying guns in high school (O’Donnell, 1995) p. 1467.

The Media and School Violence

Not much should be said about the Media and a traumatic school event...but something must be said. During the time of both deaths at my school, the Media arrived early in the morning to place a microphone in the face of our students, more specifically, our traumatized students. The Media may not realize it, but approaching school students after such a terrible incident was unconscionable. These students had lost their friends. As the classmates left behind, they were not considered when asked to relive how they felt and/or discuss things about the victims of the incident right in front of the school

building. Many newspapers and media sites published articles based upon gossip and innuendos. Students were videotaped and played on the evening news. They printed things that were simply not true. They even kept media personnel outside of the school grounds so they could listen to the school's morning announcements that are beamed through the loud speakers throughout the campus. They took whatever announcement they heard and publicized it. This upset many of the students. This was unnecessary trauma to the classmates left behind. It is advisable to limit the perimeters of the media on or near the school grounds. Their presence during this sensitive time only serves to victimize and/or traumatize the students even more. Students should be shielded from aggressive news reporters to avoid upsetting them. This is an area where school district officials and administrators must address.

Objective and Strategies

Teacher and Student Objectives. The teacher's objective is to teach a comprehensive unit on school violence. This curriculum unit will focus on the role's students, teachers and administrators as it relates to school violence. Students will get an overview of trauma and its effects from school violence. Students will look deeper into traumatic responses to school violence. This curriculum unit will define key terms associated to trauma and school violence. The unit will further address the idea of school violence responses. Students will also critically think about the definitions associated with trauma, i.e., trauma, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety, grief, fear, healing, isolation, anger, social functioning, hyperarousal, avoidance, re-experiencing, denial, anger, bargaining, and depression.

By writing this curriculum unit, it is my goal to enhance my students' knowledge about the world around them. It is important for them to know that traumatic events may occur, such as a school violence incident. It is also important for them to understand that there is a healing process and several 5 Stages of Grief. The students' objective will be to work hard in understanding trauma and school violence including the terminology related to this topic. The students should not just learn the terminology; but be able to utilize the information they learn to help themselves (or someone they know) to identify stressors related to a traumatic event and responses to such. Most importantly, by having the students understand about traumatic events such as school violence; it will help to diminish their daily fears and anxiety about the event and ultimately heal from the incident.

Teaching Strategy

The teaching strategies I will use are news articles, books, videos, cooperative learning, demonstrations, workbooks and worksheets, handouts, diagrams, pair share, jigsaw, KWL, and Learning Focused Strategy (LFS). I intend to use a combination of lecture, Google Slides, SmartBoard, online resources from web research, and critical thinking exercises. The discussions will stimulate critical thinking and allow the students to connect the lecture to current issues related to trauma and school violence. I will also utilize the required class textbook on criminal justice (specific to school violence crimes). I also plan to have guest lecturers from a law enforcement agency, counselor (grief expertise), and the court's representative to visit the class (students may have questions about the court process of the offenders of such school violence.)

Curriculum Task List (Standards)

Legal Office Skills. Task No. 3.0 Students will conduct on-line searches for information related to various legal topics and will locate Internet sites related to the legal profession.

Human Dynamics in a Law Office. Task No. 14.2 Students will identify the causes of stress in a law office and will prepare a plan of action to take in dealing with professional stressors.

Due Process – Criminal Law. Task No. 1.3 Students will identify citizen rights protected under the Bill of Rights, especially relating to the first, fourth, fifth, sixth and eighth amendments.

Employability Skills. *Task No. 1.0 Students will engage in community based and assigned clerical and technical work activities while working as interns at various public service agencies throughout New Castle County.

***Note:** Because the students in a vocational technical school participates in Cooperative Learning, which is an on-the-job internship learning in the 12th grade, they may be exposed to various types of issues related to the client (civil and criminal) that fall under trauma. This legal subject matter may include cases at the Department of Justice, private law offices, defense attorney offices, or cases that deal with criminal law, domestic violence, personal injury, torts, accidents, etc.

LFS (Learning Focused Strategies)

Learning Focused Strategies (LFS) includes activating strategies, assessment prompts, vocabulary preview, graphic organizer, and extended thinking.

Using LFS, the “Unit Essential Question” is: What is trauma? The “Lesson Essential Question” are divided into three components: 1) What is stress and PTSD?; 2) What is the impact of trauma on students that have lost a classmate?; and 3) What is trauma for teachers and their response for the classmate left behind? [See Appendix for *Student Learning Map* for this unit.]

Textbooks for this Curriculum Unit

The textbook that has been selected for this curriculum unit is: *44 Children’s Books About Mental Health: Best books for helping kids understand emotional and learning challenges*, by Cicero, Karen. This book is amazing. In this book, the teacher can locate a book that coincides with a grade level from K-12. There are 44 children’s books on mental health that the teacher can choose from. The books will use terminology aligned to the grade level you are teaching. Sometimes, it is appropriate to use a book from a different level that can have a good impact on the topic being discussed in a very generic manner.

Classroom Activities

Activity No. 1. Write a Poem or Rap. Have students write a poem or rap lyrics (some call this “The Spoken Word”). The rap should be in good taste and not offensive in nature. It should have words of encouragement and strength for the bereaved. Guide the

students to share positive thoughts that support the bereaved. Try to use words that are uplifting and words that invoke happy thoughts...something light and bright. For example, words like “sunshine”, “beautiful”, “fly free”, or “sunset”. The students can complete this activity by recording the poem or rap on a video. Students can also perform their poem or rap live. If they perform live in class, select a soft “instrumental” song (on a low volume) to play as background music when the students present their poem or rap in live a class.

Activity No. 2. Make a Caring Card. Students are given clean construction paper to create a “caring card” to the lost classmate’s family. Include flowers, make a collage, or memory board with pictures. They can also create a large 3-D board in unison that shares all of the comments from the students in the class. The items needed would be color markers, glitter, ribbons, miscellaneous items to attach to the paper (ornaments), glue sticks, and construction paper. Students can write their thoughts to the lost classmate or words of encouragement to the family.

Activity No. 3. Journal Your Thoughts. During this activity, have students to write their thoughts on a blank piece of paper. You can give the students story starters such as: “Today, I’m thinking about...”, “When I think about ...” or “My thoughts about...”. This will help the students to think about “their” thoughts, not any others. Have them express themselves openly and honestly. Be sure to let them know that “they are the only ones” that will see their journal. The journal is personal and should not be shared. Encourage them to go back to their journal as often as they chose. Let them know that this is a safe place to write down their personal thoughts. They should also look at previous entries to see their progress from earlier post to where they are currently.

Activity No. 4. Guest Speaker. Invite a professional mental health counselor or law enforcement officer into your class. Arrange the topic with the guest speakers prior to them arriving. Have them address certain areas of concern in their presentation. The topics will come from a pre-discussion with the class about their ideas or concerns. You can also have the students write out questions for the guest speaker prior to the day the guest speaker arrives. The teacher should read the questions and allow the guest speaker to answer the questions. Avoid impromptu questions by the students. This may open a dialogue that may not be conducive for the whole group. Assure the students that have additional questions during the guest speaker’s presentation that their questions will be answered, but at another time.

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Curriculum Unit Textbook

Bohm, Robert M., and Haley, Keith N., *Introduction to Criminal Justice*, McGraw Hill, 2021. This is one of many textbooks that can be used to teach criminal justice in schools.

Cicero, Karen, "44 Children's Books About Mental Health: Best books for helping kids understand emotional and learning challenges."

<https://childmind.org/article/best-childrens-books-about-mental-health/>

At this website, there are many topics related to children such as anxiety, ADHD, dyslexia, grief, emotions, etc. The books have authors and illustrators for the younger children. The books can be applicable to all ages with a bit of "tweaking" on behalf of the teacher. For this curriculum unit, I would suggest the following books on this website: 1) "When Dinosaurs Die: A Guide to Understanding Death," by Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown; 2) "One Wave at a Time: A story About Grief and Healing," by Holly Thompson; and 3) "Draw it Out," by Staffanie Lorig and Rosalie Franklel.

Suggested Readings for Young Children:

These books can help a young child with their feelings: “The Grief Bubble: Helping Kids Explore and Understand Grief” by Kerry DeBay and “Why Did You Die: Activities to Help Children Cope with Grief and Loss” by Ellen Goldring and Erika Leeuwenburgh.”²⁵

Suggested Readings for Pre-Teens and Teens:

This book would be helpful for the pre-teen and teens with their emotions surrounding death: “When a Friend Dies: A Book for Teens About Grieving & Healing” by Marilyn E. Gootman Ed.D.²⁶

Curriculum Unit Teacher Textbook Resource

Jennings, Patricia A., *The Trauma-Sensitive Classroom: building resilience with compassionate teaching*, New York: W.W Norton & Company, (2019). Series: A Norton professional book/ Includes bibliographical references ISBN 9780393711868 (pbk.) https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Trauma_Sensitive_Classroom_Building/LEXNDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover. This booklet would be a helpful asset for teaching and supporting students that have experienced trauma. You as the teacher can visit this website to get support to help you address the issues students encounter when they have experienced trauma. The Foreword as written by Daniel J. Siegel in the book, states that he hopes the book gives you (the teacher) assistance in helping students to overcome their trauma so they are able to flourish without losing themselves.

Internet Research:

United States Supreme Court, Website: www.supremecourt.com

Resources related to the above objective:

The resources stated above include a comprehensive overview of a real problem that deals with trauma in schools. Various aspects as discussed about the topic are addressed.

These resources will enlighten both the educator and the students alike.

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Notes

¹ “Victimology focuses on whether the perpetrators were complete strangers, mere acquaintances, friends, family members, or even intimates and why a particular person or place was targeted.” (Karmen, 2018).

² (Koch, et al, 2020, 193)

³ (van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 2007, 8)

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- ⁴ (Kleber, 2019, 3)
⁵ (van der Kolk, et al., 2007, 218)
⁶ (van der Kolk, et al., 2007, 219)
⁷ (Kleber, 2019, 2)
⁸ (Hanson, et al., 2010, 168)
⁹ (Hanson, et al., 2010, p. 6)
¹⁰ p. 552
¹¹ (van der Kolk, et al., 2007 404)
¹² (van der Kolk, et al, 2007, 122)
¹³ Ehmke, R., Childmind.org
¹⁴ NCTSN (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Trauma Facts for Educators)
¹⁵ NCTSN (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, Trauma Facts for Educators)
¹⁶ (Koplewicz, n.d.)
¹⁷ (Jennings, 2019)
¹⁸ (Jennings, 2019)
¹⁹ (Koplewicz, n.d.)
²⁰ (van der Kolk, et al., 2007 404)
²¹ (Forster, et al., 2015)
²² (Freeman Shaub, 2016, 28)
²³ (Yarnell, et al., 2014, 1467)
²⁴ (Gaylord-Harden, et al., 2018, 3263)
²⁵ (Reece, 2013)
²⁶ (Reece, 2013)