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The Ethical Relationship Between School Violence and Teacher Morale

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Abstract

This study explores how negative school climate factors, such as classroom violence, can influence a teacher's pedagogical approach to classroom learning and relationships with students using a transformative lens to improve student engagement and pedagogical approaches after such tragedies occur. The Burke-Litwin (2010) model of organizational climate is used as a framework to understand how a school's organizational climate contributes to a positive learning culture for teachers, post-trauma, with the goal of heightening teachers' ability to continue to teach and to maintain student engagement post-violence. Major conclusions show that the underlying school climate plays a critical role in how a teacher recovers after witnessing a school shooting. In the recovery of post-violent school events, school cultures have a major impact on teacher morale, relationships between teachers and students, absenteeism (student and teacher), school discipline and, grades and test scores. A school's organizational climate essentially contributes to teachers' abilities to engage students actively in the classroom and to continue to be involved in motivational teaching and new pedagogical approaches despite witnessing violence.

Keywords

The ethical relationship between school violence and teacher morale

Jennifer O'Connor Duffy[1] and Edward Mooney, Jr.[2]

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Keywords: pedagogy, school organizational climate, Burke-Litwin model, teacher effectiveness, school violence

I.

Introduction

The focus of this research project is to address the question, "What are the psychological and professional effects for a teacher witnessing an episode of severe school violence and how does such an episode influence their teaching practice?" To date there are no studies and no documentation on what effects witnessing a severe incident of school violence has on a teacher's career (Daniels, Bradley, & Hays, 2007; Daniels & Bradley, 2011; Fox & Stallworth, 2010). An understanding of how a teacher is affected by school violence can assist in the development of a teacher trauma incident management system – and, perhaps, an institute to serve as a central resource for teachers and schools struggling with school violence in the future to prevent the decline in learning post-incident.

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Problem Statement

This research study addresses the effect of school shootings on teachers' career-paths after witnessing traumatic events. A recent study reported that in the period between 1996 and 2006, "207 student homicides occurred in U.S. schools, an average of 21 deaths per year" (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010, p. 27). Many teachers who witness school shootings are not offered job modifications plans to assist them in returning to duty. A number of these teachers leave the profession because of the trauma, suffering for the rest of their lives. In addition, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future estimated that teacher attrition is at a point where "almost half leave after five years" (The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future [NCTAF], 2002, p. 3). The loss of skilled educators could prove debilitating for the profession of teaching.

Van der Kolk (1993) described how trauma changes a person psychologically and physiologically. Teacher stress, burnout, and anxiety, particularly after a traumatic event, play a part in this desertion of the profession and an inability to engage in meaningful pedagogy (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005). Without treatment, victims (teachers for the purposes of this study) can degrade into rigid thinking, paranoia, defensiveness, over-reactivity, and health problems (Van der Kolk, 1993, p. 231). The impacts of school gunplay are at the top of the list of severity of campus issues. A University of California, Los Angeles, study listed the most traumatic as "…community violence, catastrophic school violence after a sniper attack, a school shooting" (Steinberg, Brymer, Decker, & Pynoos, 2004, p. 99).

Purpose Statement

Shootings on American school campuses are a growing problem. The overall purpose of this study is to investigate the previously unstudied situation psychological and professional effects on a teacher witnessing an episode of severe school violence. A primary goal of the study is to gather more scholarly data to inform the practice of helping teachers recover from witnessing violence in their schools. In this narrative study, the experiences of two teachers, before, during, and after they witnessed school shootings, are analyzed to determine the effects of these incidents on their career pathways and teaching motivation. The first participant, a middle school teacher, observed the shooting of one student by another, only a few feet away from her position during a computer-based writing lab. After the shooting, she struggled with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Seligman, 1972) and unsupportive actions on the part of her school administration. These factors led to her psychological disability and medical retirement due to the fact that she could no longer engage in her teaching efforts. The second participant, a middle school teacher at a different school, watched as a lone gunman came onto campus and randomly fired at students. This teacher's actions stopped the shooting and may have saved many lives. He was able to continue teaching, reflect upon his career as an educator, and deepen his commitment to safeguarding the process of scholarly inquiry. A comparison of these cases helps to understand the psychological and organizational factors that affect educators who witness school shootings.

Significance of the Problem

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Teachers who develop two-way avenues of respect, compassion, and openness build large groups of followers inclusive of students, administrators, and the learning community (Blasé & Blasé, 2001; Coles, 2000). These teachers are the embodiment of intellectual motivation by inspiring many to continue learning, to continue caring about the academic process, and to continue building relationships built on trust, openness, and a passion for understanding in academia (Hansen, 2007). There have been no articles published on the loss of teacher motivation after an incident in school violence. A few articles came tantalizingly close (Daniels, Bradley, & Hays, 2007; Daniels & Bradley, 2011; Fox & Stallworth, 2010), calling for a review of how teachers handle the trauma of school shootings, but as of this date, there are no first-hand narratives directly connecting the relationship between school violence and pedagogy.

If classroom relationships matter, then we must look long and hard at how severe violence, such as murder, impedes all forms of teaching relationships (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005). It is our hope that the story of these particular teachers will shed some light on how witnessing severe school violence affects professional educators. It is our belief that we as a profession, scholars, and a society need to hear this story and open a new dialogue – for teachers in the future that may have to confront school violence and the aftermaths in the classroom.

Primer: A History of American School Violence

A teacher witnessing the murder of one student by another in the early years of the 21st century is not an incident that stands alone (Fox & Stallworth, 2010). Unfortunately the participants' experiences are but one link in a long chain of episodes of violence in American schools. The topic of this project, the incidence of violence, is not an isolated event disconnected from educational history (Jordan, 2003). A short review of a history of the milestones of school shootings and violence may shed some light on this idea (Newman, Fox, Roth, & Mehta, 2004; Roberts, 2007).

Watson and Watson (2002) issued a seminal work on this topic "School as a Safe Haven," addressing not only school violence, but the wider factors of school safety such as mechanical failures, school bus problems, and decrepit facilities, among others. This work, however, did not research pedagogical affects. Beyond their work, minimal research has been done to chronicle the rise of violence in American schools (Newman, Fox, Roth, & Mehta, 2004; Roberts, 2007). Indeed, Watson and Watson (2002) argued that there has been "very little historical perspective developed or written on the safety of the American school" (p. x). Given the realm of increasing severe school violence, this study calls attention to how learning is affected.

Shootings do not occur in a vacuum – there are multiplicities of safety and violence concerns confronting public schools (Daniels, Bradley, & Hays, 2007; Elliot, Hamburg, & Williams, 1998). The United States Department of Education compiled statistics and perceptions of school safety issues; their latest report (2012) "Indicators of School Crime and Safety" painted a picture of what violence and safety issues have occurred in America during this decade. The report is divided into six primary categories, representing various aspects of school safety and learning. Yet the report lacks a category for pedagogical practices post- violence, including violent deaths, nonfatal student and teacher victimization, school environment, fights, weapons,

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illegal substances, fear and avoidance, discipline, safety, and security measures. Scholarly inquest for this particular study arises from a lack of research of pedagogy in a classroom post-violence (Elliot, Hamburg, & Williams, 1998).

Research Questions

1. What are the psychological and professional lived experiences of a teacher who witnessed an episode of severe school violence?

2. How were the responses to the classroom trauma by the school administrators and human resources department perceived by the subjects, and how did those perceptions influence the subjects' ability to function in their professions and personally post-shooting?

3. Did the subjects believe they were given the professional support and guidance from administration after the school shootings? Did they feel safe in their schools after the shootings?

4. Did the subjects have the emotional, physical, and intellectual skills to perform the tasks within their jobs after the shooting? Did the actions of the school officials after the shootings affect their performance?

II.

Brief Literature Review: the history of ethics in schools

Since the early days of the American Republic, educational leaders have recognized that schools are more than a place to disseminate knowledge (Harris, 1958). Horace Mann believed that we are not living isolated lives but are deeply affected by our relationships. He stated that an "attachment to our fellow-beings, which binds men together in fraternal associations, is so strong, and is universally recognized as so natural, that we look upon hermits and solitaries as creatures half-mad or half-monstrous" (Mann, 1855, p. 127). Indeed, other early philosophers have noted this same concept. John Dewey wrote, "Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life" (Boydston, 1991, p.5). Teachers are a part of the fabric, the continuity, of this society. Not caring for a teacher emotionally wounded by any trauma unwinds and frays the fabric of our society a bit more; this lack of support affects the children, and the "social continuity of life" of which Dewey speaks. Hence, the importance of this study cannot be underestimated given the current rise in school violence during the last five years.

In consideration of the ethics in regards to teachers stressed by poor morale and traumatic situations, Albert Schweitzer declared that as a profession we have a "sense of duty toward others," (Hansen, 2007, p. 158). Society must reach out and assist. The Dalai Lama opined that when we neglect the well being of others, "…and ignore the universal dimension of our actions, it is inevitable that we will come to see our interests as separate from theirs" (Lama, 1999, p. 163). To extrapolate from his thoughts, if we do not reach out to teachers who are highly stressed or unsupported in a school system or have witnessed a traumatic event in their classroom, we

create a "society of separateness." He continued by noting "…we find that if a person lives a very selfish life, without concern for others' welfare, they tend to become quite lonely and miserable" (Lama, 1999, p. 89). This does not describe the "social continuity" Dewey wrote about a century earlier. The fabric of society, once again, unravels a bit more. As teachers disconnect from their school leadership and community, they also can disconnect from their students.

Being social creatures, we cannot long or easily live apart from other members of our society and teachers cannot effectively engage students in learning without being connected and invested in their achievement. Horace Mann also conveyed that, "Doing nothing for others is the undoing of ourselves" (Harris, 1958, p. 83). Mann was correct; investigating possible actions to assist hurting teachers is not only desirable but necessary. As one member of our society is wounded, all are exposed to this pain. Reaching out to assist struggling teachers, therefore, is the ethical course, and one that binds and protects the social fabric, the continuity of life, and most importantly, the dissemination of knowledge to students. If this continuity, as Dewey pointed out, is a primary duty of the schools, then we are defeat our purposes by not helping struggling teachers who have witness traumatic events in their classrooms.

By reaching out, society opens a dialogue. As Paulo Freire wrote, "…a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is a logical consequence." (Freire, p. 71). This trust tightens the weave of the fabric called society. Freire continued this discourse about trust by stressing that, "The trust of the people in the leaders reflects the confidence of the leaders in the people" (Freire, p. 42). Reaching out in such a way builds trust between administrators, parents, teachers, and students.

Translating philosophy into practice: the effects of school violence on teachers

Given the worst trauma imaginable, this study analyzes how teachers were affected by school shootings. Safety is a critical issue according to Burke and Litwin (2010) model, as demonstrated further below. The psychological trauma of witnessing a school shooting includes "both immediate and long-term consequences… immediate reactions to this sort of trauma include physical, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive responses" (Daniels, Bradley, & Hays, 2007, p. 653). These responses affect all aspects of the teacher's life. In the classroom, Elliott, Hamburg, and Williams (1998) reported that fear and heightened levels of stress lead to burnout and less effective work. The Elliot study is critical; any issues in a school that heighten stress and anxiety can lead to less effective work. When it comes to issues of safety, Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, and Roth (2004) reported that teachers who are worried about violence are more likely to leave the teaching profession.

The emotional shock wave of trauma spreads to those beyond the school affected by a shooting. There exists a pervasive fear among teachers and employees at other schools following a shooting (Daniels et al., 2007). This fear is compounded by the ever-present thought that "our school could be the next one on the evening news and that our own students could be the ones running for their lives" (Daniels et al., 2007, p. 133). Daniels continued by mentioning that all in the profession watch to see how teachers exposed to the trauma manage. He compared the fear to a contagious disease.

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III.

Theoretical Framework: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Organizational Climate

The psychological and professional toll

The most widespread toll of school violence on teachers comes from the psychological concept of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Seligman, 1972). While the discussion in this paper focuses on an academic inquiry and not the diagnosis of a psychologist, Ardis (2004) described PTSD as having four clusters of symptoms following exposure to trauma. The first cluster involves intense fear combined with a sense of helplessness and horror. This stage occurs immediately after the trauma and can last for a few days. In many situations, Ardis continued, this proves to be debilitating – teachers are almost unable to function shortly after a shooting, never mind engage in meaningful teaching practices. The next set of symptoms involves a re-experiencing of the events through "flashbacks." The teacher that witnesses a school shooting re-lives, over and over again, the emotions of the event, which can be emotionally and professionally crippling. The third set of symptoms includes avoidance – staying away from anything that reminds the victim of the trauma. The horror of the initial trauma and the resultant flashbacks impede on the victim's professional path (Mitchell & Everly, 2001). In the case of teachers, any exposure to the classroom or area where the violence took place could trigger recurring flashbacks, and a renewal of the intense emotions felt as the trauma was happening. Daniels et. al (2007) described how, in the third stage, teacher absenteeism increases as these traumatized individuals seek to escape the cycle of emotional "re-injury." Finally, Daniels described the fourth stage as one in which individuals with PTSD experience increased sleep disturbances, irritability, difficulty concentrating, hyper-vigilance, or being easily startled. These symptoms "often arise within 3 months of the event (acute reaction) and may persist for longer than 3 months (chronic reaction). Symptoms of PTSD may be delayed in their onset, sometimes not surfacing until 6 months or more after the violence at school (Daniels, 2007, p. 654).

The scale of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder may be staggering for the education profession (Kondrasuk, Greene, Waggoner, Edwards, & Nayak-Rhodes, 2005). Daniels (2007) estimated that each year 234,000 teachers in the United States are victims of school-related violence. While most of these are not shooting related, it does point to a huge need in the profession. This process, the building of PTSD, occurs with all kinds of traumas experienced in a school, from the theft of money to witnessing a student fight - to a school shooting (Lawrence & Fauerbach, 2003). All stressors and traumas can build Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Seligman, 1972). The more a school struggles with a diversity of challenges, the more the probability for trauma, stress, and PTSD, resulting in a lack of transformative teaching.

Van der Kolk (1993) described how trauma changes a person; left untreated, these victims can degrade into rigid thinking, paranoia, defensiveness, over-reactivity, and health problems (Van der Kolk, 1993, p. 231). Yet these teachers continue to stand before our students and remain a part of our society. They have an effect on the their students. The investigators in the Daniels study (2007) felt so compelled that they wrote, "We strongly recommend that in their efforts to provide assistance to the student body, psychologists not overlook opportunities to provide aid to teachers and other school staff who have been traumatized" (Daniels, 2007, p.

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657). But teachers are often overlooked in all types of school trauma. They noted, "Although school districts make efforts to provide students with mental health services, it has also been shown that teachers and other school personnel may not receive the support they need following mass trauma" (Daniels, 2007, p. 657).

The Burke-Litwin model

In 1978 George Litwin began work on what would later be called the Burke-Litwin Model - what is described as an organizational model "with climate as the centerpiece" (Burke, 2010, p. 210). Burke and Litwin defined organizational climate as "a set of psychological priorities of a given…environment that are based on the collective perceptions of the people" (Burke, 2010, p. 210). They further identified areas of consideration they considered to be primary for "organizational understanding and analysis" (Burke, 2010, p. 214). These include external environment, mission and strategy, leadership, organization culture, structure, management practices, systems (policies and procedures), work unit climate, task requirements, individual skills, motivation, individual needs and values, and finally, individual and organizational performance. This study uses this framework to analyze a school's environment.

Work unit climate. Simply put, work unit climate addresses the collective perceptions of members of the same work unit. Burke revealed that all employees have opinions on, among other things, how well they are managed, how clear the expectations are, how they feel their performance is recognized, how much support they feel they receive from other unit members, and whether their management is supportive given the circumstance. An appropriate question that arises from this factor might be, "How fairly do administrators support employees affected by workplace trauma?"

Motivation. Burke explained that motivation includes the individual's need to achieve, to affiliate with others, and to have some degree of power. Employees need to feel they are being directed toward "goals that, when reached, will help to satisfy our needs" (Burke, 2010, p. 223). This concern raises the questions of, "How do the actions of administrators post-trauma influence the motivation of teachers?" and "Do educational administrators support the needs of teachers after such violent incidents so as to continue the learning process in the classroom?

Individual and Organizational Performance. The relationship between the performance of the teacher and the school, and vice-versa – what the organization does -- can influence the performance of the individual. In this study a relevant question might be, "Did the actions of the school after a workplace trauma affect the performance of the teacher as it relates to the ability to teach?" The organizational climate construct played a significant role in the career decisions of the participants after witnessing school shootings. The intersection of conditions in the organizational climate and the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder proved to influence their ability to continue teaching.

IV.

Research Methodology

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Narrative approach

This study fits well into the purpose of a narrative form of qualitative research. Kohler-Riessman (2008) described the necessary ingredients in a narrative as "a speaker connects events into a sequence that is consequential for later action and for the meanings that the speaker wants listeners to take away from the story" (Kohler-Riessman, 2008, p. 3). Therefore, this research was conducted utilizing open-ended, broad questions in an interview format. The researchers interpreted the meanings that the participants have attributed to the incident and its aftermath. Social constructivism is the underlying paradigm of this research. Creswell describes social constructivism as a "worldview," one in which "individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (Creswell, 2012, p. 20). The goal of this research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' view of the situation.

Data Collection

As the formal process of creating this research project, teachers who witnessed shootings in one particular state were sent an introductory inquiry message. The initial contact script was utilized to affirm their interests. The two participants responded to the same short inquiry message and introductory script. Once IRB approval was received, and within the guidelines that the board expected, the interview process began.

Data came from a number of primary sources, including interviews with the participants, medical documents of the participants, school letters and forms regarding the campus issues of both participants, court documents in the subsequent legal actions against the shooters, discussions with friends and relatives of the participants, as applicable and available, social media news items from the time of the incidents, and campus visits, as practical and applicable. These sources were utilized to triangulate and corroborate the facts in the case and to understand themes and perspectives.

The participants were questioned in a series of interviews. In the first phase of the interviews, a discussion of life prior to the incident took place. The second phase focused on the shooting incidents witnessed. The final phase covered the period following the incident, extending to approximately six months after the shooting. Using constant comparison, an axial coding exercise was undertaken, blending the coding results from all interviews. Universal codes were assigned across the interview transcripts. Saldana describes the purpose of axial coding as "to strategically reassemble data that were 'split' or 'fractured' during the Initial Coding process" (Saldana, 2009, p. 159). As additional interviews were brought into this process, codes were redefined and redeveloped to facilitate statements that did not fit the patterns of the first interview.

V.

Findings

In one of our two stories, a young teacher, with the pseudonym Melissa, witnessed a fatal shooting in her classroom. A student pulled out a loaded gun and shot the student sitting in front of him. The teacher is now on permanent disability as a result of this trauma and perhaps as a

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result of a lack of professional support systems in her district. She suffered both emotionally and professionally from this experience. Consequently, her students and the education profession lost an outstanding teacher. With school shootings on the rise, more teachers will be following this teacher's path out of the profession, further impacting the problem with teacher retention and the decline of learning goals (The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future [NCTAF], 2002, p. 3). In contrast, another teacher, with the pseudonym Mike, watched as a lone gunman walked onto his campus and opened fire on students. Because of his quick actions, the gunman was stopped, and no one was killed. While one boy struggled with a major gunshot wound, he survived. The teacher's career also survived the incident. He felt he had been awarded significant support from his district and his community. One teacher left the profession and her students; the other teacher was able to stay in his classroom and continue educating. Understanding what made the difference in these two cases can allow the profession to assist in the rehabilitation of the witnesses of school shootings and to minimize the loss of teachers and student learning as a consequence. In sum, this study attempted to identify what factors contribute to a teacher's recovery or disability after such traumatic events. The data showed that the psychological and organizational culture theories gave a framework for understanding the journeys of these teachers post-trauma.

Introducing the Participants

Melissa. Melissa was a teacher in her 30s when the shooting occurred at her school. She had been in the teaching profession for a decade and had received stellar evaluations throughout her career. Melissa holds Bachelor's and Master's degrees, and is married. Her teaching philosophy was centered on building relationships with her students, and her classroom was well organized. Melissa prided herself on her attention to detail and her compassion for her students. Her husband is an active professional in another field; they have known each other since childhood. Melissa is the mother of three children, ranging from an infant up to a teen at the time of the murder. Her youngest daughter was born shortly before the shooting and Melissa had just returned to her classroom duties from maternity leave. She was dealing with issues surrounding post-partum depression, and was under the supervision of her physician at the time.

Mike. Mike was a teacher in his 50s at the time of the shooting at his school. He had taught at the high school and middle school levels for over 30 years and had always received outstanding evaluations. Mike holds advanced degrees. He is the father of two children. Like Melissa, Mike's teaching philosophy was centered on building relationships and keeping communications open with his students. He had few classroom discipline issues.

VI.

Analysis of Narrative Findings

Melissa's story

Melissa experienced a PTSD activating event - the shooting. Her immediate response following the shooting is typical of the shock of a trauma. She said, "That's when all of a sudden

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your body just goes, well, it's like a wave, like a shock wave probably, when a bomb goes off and all of a sudden it hits you; and then you start to shake and you start to cry." After the shock, Melissa felt guilt. She expressed this in her conflict over taking time for off from work to recover versus being there to teach her students. The administration did not allow her time off to emotionally heal and she was professionally pressured to return to work. She said, "My first class back was frightening." She did not feel ready to be responsible for her class and as a result she panicked upon returning to teach. She also felt guilt toward the parents of her students when she said, "I was scared to confront the parents...I was worried they would be angry at me that I was not able to stop the shooting." Melissa felt shame about being a victim and simultaneously working as a teacher. She felt completely isolated from her school environment, which affected her ability to function intellectually in the classroom and to feel safe.

It was apparent that she felt an overwhelming burden due to her inability to focus on her teaching duties post-trauma, and felt that she disappointed her students. She felt a lack of support from human resources and her supervisors. They did not understand any aspects of her trauma, and consequently she was unable to find the strength to continue teaching. The perception of failure for not saving the student's life, compounded by a negative work climate, decreased her motivation and hindered her individual performance.

Melissa saw the erosion of her self-worth and a growing depression. She said, "I had a very negative view of the way people saw me. People basically, as far as I knew, thought I was the worst teacher in the world and I deserved everything I was getting because Zach had gotten killed." Without school support, Melissa was overwhelmed. She was very clear when she said, "I was just scared in general. It was just this overwhelming fear of other teachers and administrators. I felt like, 'Oh, my God. They're either all looking at me, or…how do I know somebody's just not going to kill me as well?' That general anxiety transitioned into a severe aspect of PTSD, a real deep-seated fear. She was terrified that someone might kill her. The fear worsened over time – becoming acute anxiety. According to her psychologist, she developed agoraphobia – a fear of going out in public.

This fear and anxiety infused her work world. Anger and resentment arose in the interviews. Her voice pitch changed as she mentioned that the school administration officials were covering themselves for liability purposes. Their concern was not the welfare and safety of the children. They were ensuring that they didn't have to be held accountable in any way for the shooting. On the day she walked off her job, after weeks of struggling with her school leadership in hopes of gaining their support, her last spoken words were those of severe anger, "Well, you know what? F*** you all." She walked into her classroom, grabbed her belongings, and left.

Melissa and the Burke-Litwin Model

As Lawrence and Fauerbach (2003) suggested, adjustment to trauma is a dynamic process influenced by pre-trauma factors, resilience-recovery variables, and traumatic event characteristics. Melissa's most difficult issues were resilience recovery variables; these focus on personality, social support, and additional stressful life events. Her struggle with post-partum depression (an additional stressor) exposed her to deeper emotional trauma. This was in addition

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to a lack of support at her school after the shooting. Melissa's own words revealed her emotional scars: "I walked into my classroom, and I started crying." Her social structure was cut in many areas. Beyond her disconnect with school administration, she found little connection with her co-workers. In her own words, she revealed, "I had nobody understanding or supporting me. My teacher friends, they had been at the school that day, but they hadn't been in the room. They hadn't processed anything. They hadn't felt it or seen it."

Melissa: the intersection of PTSD and a negative work climate

The effects of the school shooting produced strong symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder for Melissa. The PTSD was compounded by her post-partum depression and social isolation. This groundwork created a situation in which a major emotional struggle would erupt – between Melissa and her employer, her students, her family, and indeed, her own needs. In terms of working with her students, Melissa found it more and more impossible to develop emotional bonds, to have patience, and to adjust lessons to meet student needs due to her own inner turmoil. This turmoil was preventing her from connecting with those with whom she was charged with working.

One aspect of PTSD is the need to feel safe after trauma. Considering Melissa's struggle with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, a sense of security was paramount. As Kazdin wrote, people with PTSD "may relive the event via intrusive memories, flashbacks and nightmares; avoid anything that reminds them of the trauma; and have anxious feelings they didn't have before that are so intense their lives are disrupted" (Kazdin, 2000, p.251). The trauma happened at school, thus flashbacks and anxiety would present on or near the campus. Melissa was astounded when administrators "put some of those kids right away back into the computer lab. I thought the administrators were nuts for doing so." She knew the demands of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and she recognized what this placement of the children who witnessed the murder back into the very site of the murder could do. Kazdin's words rang true. The children and Melissa needed to avoid anything that reminded them of the trauma, but they were forced to confront the reminders in that computer lab. To Melissa, this was a blatant disregard for the emotional need to feel safe.

Melissa, PTSD and task performance

Elliott, Hamburg, & Williams (1998) reported that fear and heightened levels of stress lead to burnout and less effective work. It could be argued, as previously described, that Melissa's therapist-diagnosed struggle with PTSD after the shooting and her additional problem of Post-Partum Depression, significantly impaired her competence. Melissa's ability to function was compromised at this very point. From the moment of the shooting on, Melissa was forced to deal with an extraordinary trauma event. As the first construct (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) outlines, she exhibited the symptoms of PTSD, including pain, confusion, guilt, shame, self-worth dissipation, anxiety, fear, anger, resentment, depression, and acute anxiety. Her struggle with these symptoms degraded her ability to attend to her professional responsibilities, particularly without the support of her school leadership.

Melissa's career

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Shortly after the incident, Melissa found herself needing to go on permanent psychological disability. Her doctors and the state teachers' retirement system approved her request. She has not returned to teaching since, and has expressed no desire to ever do so again.

Mike's story

As with Melissa, Mike's journey begins with an activating event, in this case a shooting at his school. In his own words:

> That was when I heard the shots. I was about 30 feet away. I thought that some kid had set off a firecracker in a trash can. I'm thinking, "The kids should know they're not supposed to do this." I'm running through the list of usual suspects in my head. At that moment I saw a man reloading a bolt-action rifle. I had to switch gears from condition *white*, I guess you would call it, to condition *red* immediately. I'm thinking, "It's a bolt-action rifle. He's reloading it." Then, he shot again because I didn't have time to process it yet. I ran up to him. When I grabbed him, you would think that he would use the fact that he's got a gun in his hand to at least jam, hit me with the rifle butt or something like that, but he just dropped it. I had him pinned down. But he had already gotten the second shot off - and unfortunately, that's the one that hit Billy.

Mike, PTSD and the process of adjustment to trauma

The descriptions Mike provided match the definition of an activating event in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. He was definitely confronted with trauma. He experienced emotional terror and confusion as he watched the shooter. Mike could not process what he was seeing. He said, "When he shot again I didn't have time to process it yet." Mike believed that the assailant was able to fire another round because he did not act fast enough to stop him. He experienced pain and helplessness after the shooting. Mike expressed these feelings in more than words. He had difficulty speaking, needing to pause from time to time and take a breath as he described, "I just started crying and feeling helpless that I couldn't help Billy. All I could see was his face…He was just bewildered and hurt and in shock. He was pretty much covered up by people trying to make sure that he wasn't going to bleed to death." While awaiting emergency medical help to arrive, Mike experienced a momentary flash of confusion as he tried to comprehend what was happening.

In terms of anxiety and fear, Mike said he struggled with both of those elements. He admitted that after the shooting he "didn't get a whole lot of sleep that night." Adrenalin from the incident, anxiety over whether or not the two students would be okay, and concern for his wife ran through his mind. As he was still processing the incident, only minutes after it had finished, he said, "I called my wife. I told her that there was a shooting at our school and that I was fine, but that one student got shot and then my wife screamed. I said I have to hang up."
He also admits to dealing with the "flight-or-fight reaction," which is symptomatic of fear. He said, "If you decide to run, great that's okay, help some kids along the way. Help them get to a safe place. If you decide to fight, be smart about it. Don't just soak up bullets." While he dealt

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with fear, there is nothing in his interviews that indicates this fear became overwhelming. Again, Mike continued teaching in the same school long after the incident was over.

Mike and the Burke-Litwin Model

After the scene had been secured by law enforcement and as he was walking out of the building through the gym, Mike was approached by a sheriff and his principal who said, "We all agree that you did good work today." Their initial support actually helped me a lot, because I was thinking that I messed up, because I let Billy get shot. Jordan (2003) indicated that emotional support coming quickly after a traumatic event is critical to long-term healing. The simple pronouncement from law enforcement and school administration was healing medicine, well dosed, at a very opportune time. Mike was still processing what he went through, and the implanting of this idea, that he had done "good work," was valuable in his long term recovery. Indeed, this positive work climate may have enabled Mike to continue to teach until he reached his re-determined retirement age. A social support system, mentioned by a number of PTSD experts, bolstered and supported Mike on his road to recovery. He was not alone. His administration and friends rallied around him celebrating him as a hero.

Another act by law enforcement officer may have proven critical in Mike's long-term recovery. After the shooting, he was stopped by another officer. Mike presented his school identification. The officer responded with, "This is our school and we are making sure everyone is safe. Stay calm." The sense that proper authorities were in control throughout the period after the shooting pervaded many of Mike's statements. He knew the right people were in charge at that moment. He was able to put fear out of his mind.

There is no indication of symptoms of depression or anxiety in any of the interviews provided. Mike has stayed actively motivated in his career and in helping others heal from school violence. He said,

> Since then I try to do things that have to do with school security. If anybody calls me and says, "Hey, look, there is a group of school security people, will you go and speak to them?" Sure, I'm not hard to get, all you got to do is ask me and I help and talk to others.

There's no depression here. To the contrary, he seems to have found a new sense of purpose. He has even spent a lot of time outlining what could help future schools that have to cope with shootings.

Mike's career

Mike received emotional support from all areas in his life, from his school administrators, the school district's psychological services department, from the local law enforcement agencies, and from his fellow teachers. According to the Burke-Litwin model, the positive work environment heightened Mike's ability to survive post-trauma and motivated him to then help other schools confronting security issues.

A comparison

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What can we learn from these two examples about how witnessing a school shooting affects a teacher's ability to work with his or her students? How does a teacher's changed ability to work with students affect student performance? The core area of impact is teacher emotional stability and positive work climate.

As Melissa's case illustrates, untreated severe Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms can quickly lead to a deterioration of emotional stability, especially if there are pre-existing emotional issues involved, such as her post-partum depression. Anxiety, fear, sleeplessness, and withdrawal from relationships take a heavy and quick toll. A lack of access to professional counseling and administrative, as well as colleague support, was severely damaging to her motivation and performance as a teacher.

Melissa felt terrible guilt as her needs clashed seriously with those of her students. Yet, she felt unsafe in her own classroom and in her own home; she withdrew to the point where she was agoraphobic. Due to the fact that Melissa was unable to continue in her professional role, her students were left with a succession of substitutes and changes. There was a severe disruption in their learning.

In Mike's situation, without severe additional psychological stresses and with emotional support from his work environment, he was able to maintain his emotional stability and continue in his professional career.

The core lesson is that teachers who witness school violence need immediate emotional and administrative support. The longer such support is withheld, or perceived as being unavailable, the more the damage to the emotional wellbeing of the teacher and the greater the loss to the teaching profession.

VII.

Conclusions

The effects of school shootings go well beyond the lives of the teachers who must witness such violent acts. School shootings have tremendous impact on the community. Recent incidents such as at the Sandy Hook (Newtown, Connecticut) Elementary School have emotionally shattered towns and cities inclusive of administrators, teachers, students, parents, and the community. A study at UCLA told us that the impacts of school gunplay are at the top of the list of severity of campus issues. That paper listed the most traumatic events for school as "…community violence, catastrophic school violence after a sniper attack, a school shooting" (Steinberg, Brymer, Decker, & Pynoos, 2004, p. 99).

As seen in this study, the impacts of school shootings vary greatly and are often determined by a number of variables, such as the intensity of the incident, the background of the educator involved, and the management of the situation by authorities. The profession needs to address the impact of school shootings, as working with these teacher witnesses cannot be guided by a simple formulaic response. Finally, and perhaps most sobering to our society, school shootings are not rare events. Consider that, between July 1, 2009, and June 30, 2010,

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there were 33 school-associated violent deaths. This number represents almost four deaths on American public school campuses each school month – almost one death per week (Robers, Zhang, & Truman, 2012, p. 6). This is a significant issue, and not one that will go away easily. This study hopes to open a dialogue about these problems.

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