

Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education



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Defining Trauma- Informed Education

My younger brother works in organic farming. After a few years as a worker on a community-supported vegetable farm, he transitioned into a role helping farmers to achieve organic certification. When he told me about this new role, I admit that I thought to myself: “How hard can certification be? Doesn’t ‘organic’ just mean ‘don’t use pesticides?’”

I was woefully underinformed about what it means to run an organic farm. It turns out, organic farming goes way beyond whether the tomato I buy at the market is covered in pesticide spray. As my brother explained to me, organic farming is about a system that respects biodiversity, stewardship of the land, and health for humans, soil, plants, and animals. To maintain an organic farm, farmers must foster healthy soil. They need to let fields rest, rather than depleting nutrients every growing season. They must provide areas of wildlife refuge on their farms to maintain biodiversity. In other words, most people understand “organic” as simply a way to differentiate one tomato from the other at the grocery store. But organic farming is truly a systemic approach, based on a value system about respecting and sustaining our natural environment.

As an educator and an advocate for trauma-informed practices, I can relate to my brother’s frustration with the public’s lack of understanding of what he does. When I mention the words *trauma-informed*

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to people unfamiliar with the concept, I often hear responses like, “Yeah, those trauma kids need more help,” or “Is that when you have a calm-down corner?” Like the grocery shopper comparing tomatoes, all too often we see only the surface-level characterization and not the system of values and beliefs underneath.

Yet the values and beliefs behind trauma-informed practice are essential to articulate. What are we trying to accomplish, and why? In this chapter I answer these questions, both exploring trauma-informed education as it is widely practiced and providing a new definition for moving equity to the center of trauma-informed education.

Narrow Definitions

What is trauma-informed education? This should be easy to answer. After all, trauma-informed education is a hot topic for educators as they attempt to address the needs of students in a traumatic world. But there is no universally agreed-upon definition of trauma-informed education (Thomas et al., 2019; Stratford et al., 2020). The good news: no one company or individual “owns” trauma-informed practices. The bad news is that, in conversations about trauma-informed education, we are not always talking about the same thing.

There are some common threads. Let’s look at three definitions of trauma-informed practice:

- In Jim Sporleder and Heather T. Forbes’s book *The Trauma-Informed School* (2016), *trauma-informed* “refers to all of the ways in which a service system is influenced by having an understanding of trauma and the ways in which it is modified to be responsive to the impact of traumatic stress” (p. 33).
- Susan E. Craig, author of *Trauma-Sensitive Schools* (2016), wrote that the term *trauma-sensitive schools* “describe[s] the school climate, instructional designs, positive behavioral supports, and policies traumatized students need to achieve academic and social competence” (p. 9).

- According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, a trauma-informed approach “realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization” (2014, p. 27).

These definitions, and ones like them, share something in common: they focus on meeting the needs of students *already* impacted by trauma. As an educator who has been implementing trauma-informed practices for over a decade, I think we need a shift. I agree that we need a great deal of change in our education system to better support students impacted by trauma—but this is not enough. One of the limitations of definitions like these is that they imply our role in schools is to address the *impact* of trauma without addressing the *causes* of trauma. They suggest that we can help students who struggle with trauma but that we can’t do much about the fact that trauma happens in the first place. I disagree.

To understand this disagreement, we have to look at how educators usually define trauma. Too often, teachers perceive trauma as something that comes from “outside of school.” They point to events in the home or place the blame for trauma on neglectful parents. Many education texts on trauma rely on an outdated definition that trauma is caused only by interpersonal violence, such as child abuse or assault, or by big, one-time tragedies, such as terrorism or natural disasters. Trauma is often framed as “all about the brain,” and education-focused texts emphasize behavioral impacts of trauma—it’s not unusual to see “trauma” and “challenging behavior” go hand in hand. In short, much of the research and writing on trauma frame it as an individual experience, resulting from factors schools cannot control. When we accept that definition, what is our role as educators? To respond to trauma and to mitigate its effects on learning.

But this isn’t the only way to understand trauma. Let’s look at what we know about trauma and then consider how it plays out in schools.

Adding Complexity

Trauma is a complex concept, with no simple definitions. Literacy professor Elizabeth Dutro, who focuses on trauma and literacy, has cautioned educators to resist oversimplifications and the use of *trauma* as a label to sort and categorize children: “[*Trauma*] is not a word to be used lightly, to toss around” (2017, p. 327). I second Dutro’s caution and also recognize that we need some common language to talk about trauma. Therefore, consider the information in the text box as a snapshot of a moving object, and recognize that understandings of trauma continue to expand and evolve.

TRAUMA: A FEW BASICS

What Is Trauma?

Trauma can be both an individual and collective response to life-threatening events, harmful conditions, or a prolonged dangerous or stressful environment. Not all stressful experiences are traumatic to individuals. For those who do develop a trauma response, the impact can be intense, pervasive, and disruptive, affecting both the mind and the body.

Trauma and *posttraumatic stress disorder* are not interchangeable terms. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is defined by a specific set of symptoms identified by psychologists, but not all people who experience trauma will be diagnosed with PTSD, and not all indicators of trauma align with PTSD symptoms. A more expansive definition of trauma goes beyond a pathological/medical definition and understands trauma as a collective and sociopolitical concept.

What Types of Events or Conditions Cause Trauma?

Judith L. Herman, a leading voice in the literature on trauma, wrote that “traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life” (1992/2015, p. 33). The modern concept of trauma was developed through the activism of Vietnam War veterans and women survivors of domestic violence (Herman, 1992/2015; Van der Kolk, 2015).

Since that initial wave of activism and research, our understanding of trauma has expanded greatly, and it is now recognized that many types of events and circumstances can cause a traumatic response, including abuse, neglect, bullying, racism, natural disasters, and more.

Trauma can also be understood from a collective lens, as when a community undergoes a shared trauma (e.g., the Jewish community and the Holocaust). Historical trauma refers to the collective impact of trauma throughout generations (Brave Heart et al., 2011). And we can also understand trauma as an ongoing environment. Educator and healing justice advocate Shawn A. Ginwright (2016, p. 3) has pointed out that for many youth of color there is no “post” as in posttraumatic stress disorder; instead they experience a persistent traumatic stress environment.

Who Experiences Trauma?

Anyone can experience trauma. Researchers estimate that between half and three-quarters of all children will experience a potentially traumatic event prior to age 18. Whether or not a specific child experiences an event or condition as traumatic depends on many factors, including age, temperament, social support systems, and the intensity and duration of the event or condition. Protective factors that buffer the effects of trauma include a strong community support system and relationships with reliable adults and caregivers (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2012; Masten 2018).

How Does Trauma Impact a Child?

Trauma affects everyone differently. The stress of a trauma response can impact our minds and bodies. Symptoms of a trauma response can include depression, anxiety, anger, aggression, hypervigilance, physiological changes such as disrupted sleep or appetite, and more. Trauma research groups like the Child Trauma Academy (<https://www.childtrauma.org/>) are studying how the timing and duration of early-life stress can impact cognitive and social functioning, as well as how social connections mediate these effects. The impacts of trauma can also be invisible to others or delayed until adulthood.

A Structural Lens

In expanding our definitions of trauma, we must make sure we see trauma as a structural issue, not just an individual one. Scholars now recognize what people from marginalized communities have always known: oppression, bias, and discrimination cause trauma (Haines, 2019; Becker-Blease, 2017; Khasnabis & Goldin, 2020). Racism causes trauma. Islamophobia causes trauma. Heterosexism causes trauma. Transphobia causes trauma. And I'm not just talking about visible incidences of hate crimes. Oppression causes trauma through the ways it is built into the everyday structures of school and society and how these structures have persisted throughout generations. Trauma doesn't just happen at home—students can be traumatized by conditions and events in schools, and schools can cause trauma (I unpack this idea fully in Chapter 2). And trauma's effects can be passed down through generations and spread through communities.

In schools, a structural lens means that we stop seeing trauma as a problem affecting only certain children. Instead, we start recognizing the role that schools have to play in causing and worsening trauma because of the role of schools in perpetuating oppression. Most professional development about trauma-informed education addresses only the individual nature of trauma, providing tips about how to support students who are stressed because of adversity. This would lead us to believe that we are trauma-informed if we provide students with caring teachers, flexible academic structures, and counseling, or if we change our approach to classroom management. These are important considerations, but trauma-informed solutions need to address not just these individual students but also the structures, systems, and inequalities that cause trauma (Khasnabis & Goldin, 2020). For example, a student is bullied for being poorer than her classmates. Typical trauma-informed education suggestions would be to intervene with the student's classmates to stop the bullying and then provide support to the affected student. This might look like inviting her to a lunch bunch to build positive social connections or teaching her self-regulation skills to manage her distress. These are necessary first steps. But those interventions address only the individual causes of the student's trauma. We

also have to ask: What were the conditions in our school that created the bullying in the first place? How do our students understand one another's relative incomes and family structures? How might school be contributing to inequities between students or drawing attention to poverty? What are we doing to help students and families access resources? By focusing only on the student's coping skills, we may be sending the message that it's more important to cope with your own marginalization than to work to end the factors that are marginalizing you. As educators Debi Khasnabis and Simon Goldin wrote, "Treating trauma *only* as an individual-level problem, when it is not, has the unfortunate and perhaps somewhat predictable effect of blaming children and families for challenges they did not cause" (2020, p. 46).

Schools can also contribute to the larger social conditions that cause trauma. A student is sexually assaulted by her boyfriend over the weekend. Is the school responsible? That specific school may not be, but in a broader sense schools are social institutions and one of the primary places where children learn about social norms. Sexual assault against women and girls is not a collection of individual acts made by individual boys and men. Instead, sexual violence is understood as existing within a culture that normalizes male violence and sexualizes young girls. Schools are responsible for their role in either actively disrupting these messages or allowing them to perpetuate. If a school provides support for a sexual violence survivor but also refuses to teach comprehensive sex education, can we call that school trauma-informed?

A New Definition

With our expanded understanding of trauma comes an expanded role that educators can play. When we recognize that trauma originates from both inside and outside of schools, we realize that it is not simply our job to respond to trauma or to reduce potential triggers inside of school. Instead, we become key agents in ending the trauma that happens within our schools and our education system. When we recognize that social, historical, and political factors shape trauma, we can imagine ways that schools can influence these factors in pursuit of a better world.

To reflect this expanded role, I propose a new definition for trauma-informed education:

Trauma-informed educational practices respond to the impacts of trauma on the entire school community and prevent future trauma from occurring. Equity and social justice are key concerns of trauma-informed educators as we make changes in our individual practice, in classrooms, in schools, and in district-wide and state-wide systems.

In a trauma-informed approach, we use our understanding of trauma and its impact on children to shift our approach to education in classrooms, schools, and broader systems. This transformation is not straightforward. In learning more about trauma, it has become clear to me that our current educational system is not set up with the needs of trauma survivors in mind. Worse, school systems and individual educators can be the *perpetrators* of trauma. A trauma-informed lens requires that we also critically think about the status quo in education and be willing to make significant changes to the ways we do things.

This expanded definition reflects our hopes for trauma-informed education to be more than a response to challenging student behavior. Educators Shantel D. Crosby, Penny Howell, and Shelly Thomas wrote about the potential for trauma-informed teaching to advance social justice: “Rather than blaming and punishing students for their reactions to their circumstances, trauma-informed teaching has an embedded social justice perspective that seeks to disassemble oppressive systems within the school” (2018, p. 20). This *embedded* perspective needs to be highlighted every time we talk about trauma-informed education, so we never lose our focus.

(A note on language: Throughout this book I use *trauma-informed education* and *trauma-informed practices* interchangeably to refer to *trauma-informed educational practices*).

Shifting Equity to the Center

At the heart of the new definition of trauma-informed practice is a focus on equity. Simply put, *educational equity* is the work of ensuring that

all students have access to a high-quality education and the resources they need to be successful in school. (Chapter 2 does a deeper dive into defining equity and the connections to trauma-informed practice.) Equity is sometimes understood as a component of social justice. In this book I use *social justice* to refer to the larger task of addressing and ending oppression in the world, and I use *equity* to refer to this work in the context of school.

To understand why we need to focus on equity, we first must acknowledge that our current education system in the United States is not (and has never been) equitable. While our system is supposed to serve all students, the reality is that many students are left behind and pushed out through no fault of their own. For example, students who live in high-poverty areas usually attend schools with far less funding, and lower school funding typically leads to worse school outcomes for students (Semuels, 2016). School funding is not in the control of any student, yet students' futures are affected by this inequitable allocation of resources.

In Chapter 2 I explain that inequity in schools can cause or worsen trauma. Yet, too often, trauma-informed education is considered separately from equity concerns. For example, many trauma-informed texts recommend that teachers collaborate with school counselors. Yet almost one in five students does not have access to a school counselor at all, and students of color and poor students are less likely to have access to a counselor (Education Trust & Cratty, 2019). Lack of counseling support in school is an equity issue, and if we merely say "be more trauma informed" without addressing the larger equity issue, we are missing a big part of the picture. This is just one example of many that speak to the need for bringing equity to the center.

So where is equity now, if not in the center?

- *On the side:* Equity work is often relegated to a committee that meets only a few times a year and spends more time studying equity than taking action to bring it about.
- *Underground:* Equity work is taken up by only a few teachers, often teachers of color, who implement antiracist and other equity-focused practices behind closed doors for fear of rocking the boat.

- *In the ether:* Equity work is talked about only in the abstract or used as a buzzword in the school's mission statement. No one ever actually talks about what inequity looks like, concretely and at their own school, or how to fix it.
- *Nowhere:* In too many schools equity is never talked about at all.

With the knowledge that inequities contribute to trauma, equity needs to be at the center of trauma-informed practices. This means that conversations about instructional design, social-emotional learning, sports, and even the cafeteria include equity considerations. Equity at the center means always asking, Does this practice, policy, or decision help or harm students from marginalized communities? Because the same factors that cause inequity (e.g., bias and discrimination) also cause trauma, we can't unlink the two.

I've read too many books on trauma-informed practice that fail to mention race in more than a passing way or that ignore the reality that systemic issues contribute to trauma. I've visited (and worked in) too many schools where administrators say "we're trauma informed" but refuse to address the equity issues that students and teachers say are harming them. In a research review of 20 years of studies related to trauma-informed education, Adam Alvarez found that researchers tended to ignore or minimize issues of race and racial equity in their work: "Trauma may be one of the most underexplored racial equity issues in education" (2020, p. 31). We show our values through what we choose to include. It's time to stop excluding equity from our visions for trauma-informed schools.

My goal in this book is to help educators and education leaders build a vision of equity-centered trauma-informed schools. This means that schools are *informed* by an understanding of trauma, both *responding* to the impact of trauma on the school community and *preventing* trauma at school. These schools also place equity at the center instead of treating it as an initiative or an extra.

This vision of equity-centered trauma-informed schools is based on six principles. Table 1.1 describes each of these principles, along with the key understandings on which they are based and the steps equity-centered trauma-informed schools can take to put the principles into action.

Table 1.1: Principles of Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education

<p>Principle 1: Antiracist, antioppression—Trauma-informed education is antiracist and against all forms of oppression.</p>	<p>Key understanding: Racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, transphobia, and all forms of oppression <i>cause</i> trauma. Inequity in schools causes trauma.</p> <p>Task of equity-centered trauma-informed education: Begin by examining and understanding how oppression harms students within our schools. End the school conditions and practices that cause trauma.</p>
<p>Principle 2: Asset based—Trauma-informed education is asset based and doesn't attempt to fix kids, because kids are not broken. Instead, it addresses the conditions, systems, and structures that harm kids.</p>	<p>Key understanding: Children have an inherent capacity to survive, thrive, and heal. Trauma is a normal response to threat, so there's nothing to fix about trauma-affected children. Instead, we fix the inequities that cause and worsen trauma, and we build systems of support.</p> <p>Task of equity-centered trauma-informed education: Create equitable school environments that are safe and affirming. Rid ourselves of any savior mentality that causes us to discount the agency and self-determination of students.</p>
<p>Principle 3: Systems oriented—Trauma-informed education is a full ecosystem, not a list of strategies.</p>	<p>Key understanding: Classroom practice, institutional culture and norms, and systems-level policy are all interconnected, and sustained equity requires change at all levels. Students need an entire trauma-informed environment, not just a trauma-informed teacher.</p> <p>Task of equity-centered trauma-informed education: Implement trauma-informed practices across an entire school, as well as district-wide and state-wide education systems. Change policy as well as classroom practice.</p>

<p>Principle 4: Human centered—Trauma-informed education means centering our shared humanity.</p>	<p>Key understanding: Dehumanization causes trauma. Educational equity isn't actually equity if it rests on dehumanizing attitudes and policies. Healing requires being fully human, with all of the mess and complexity that entails. Standardization and depersonalization are antithetical to human-centered education.</p> <p>Task of equity-centered trauma-informed education: Rid schools of dehumanizing practices and policies. Resist one-size-fits-all and zero-tolerance approaches. Don't allow a focus on the trauma to cause us to lose sight of the person.</p>
<p>Principle 5: Universal and proactive—Trauma-informed education is a universal approach, implemented proactively.</p>	<p>Key understanding: Identifying and labeling "trauma kids" causes inequity and creates further marginalization. Trauma-informed practices benefit all students, and the best time to implement them is before trauma has occurred.</p> <p>Task of equity-centered trauma-informed education: Don't wait for a tragedy to provide trauma-informed education. Avoid approaches that label or sort children. Pair proactive strategies with responsive supports, and eliminate barriers to access.</p>
<p>Principle 6: Social justice focused—Trauma-informed education aims to create a trauma-free world.</p>	<p>Key understanding: Responding to trauma that has already happened isn't enough. Ending current harm is a good first step. The ultimate goal of trauma-informed education is to not need trauma-informed education.</p> <p>Task of equity-centered trauma-informed education: Don't view equity and social justice as strategies to reduce disparities or lower suspension rates. Instead, keep perspective on the larger goal of creating a more just world and working for collective liberation from oppression.</p>

The Four Shifts We Need

How do we move from the schools we have today to the schools that are fully trauma-informed and equity-centered? One approach is “burn it all down and start over,” and in some ways I’m a proponent of that approach. Some schools and, more broadly, some education practices are so harmful that no amount of tinkering can fix them. For example, simply tweaking the funding in a school that has been underfunded, poorly maintained, and segregated for generations isn’t likely to make impactful change. For this reason, many education activists have called for abolition of the current system and rebuilding a new one (see, e.g., Love, 2019). Others see the potential in making a transformation within our current education landscape.

However you approach school change, I hope this book gives you some places to start the transformation. In Parts II–V I describe four shifts that bring us from a traditional approach to school, where trauma-informed practice is an add-on and equity is on the side, to a more integrated approach where *equity-centered trauma-informed* is a lens informing every aspect of our work:

1. Shift from a reactive stance, in which we identify who has been traumatized and support them, to a proactive approach. Trauma-informed practices are universal and benefit everyone (Part II).
2. Shift from a savior mentality, in which we see ourselves as rescuing broken kids, to unconditional positive regard, a mindset that focuses on the inherent skills, capacities, and value of every student. Educators shouldn’t aim to heal, fix, or save but to be connection makers and just one of many caring adults in a child’s life (Part III).
3. Shift from seeing trauma-informed practices as the responsibility of individual teachers to embedding them in the way that we do school, from policies to practice. Trauma-informed teachers need trauma-informed leaders (Part IV).
4. Shift from focusing only on how trauma affects our classroom to seeing how what happens in our classroom can change the world. We can partner with our students as change makers for a more just society (Part V).

I use the pronoun *we* to refer to the larger community of educators but recognize that many teachers and schools already have made at least some of these shifts. Some teachers never needed to make these shifts in the first place because their practice has been grounded in love and liberation from the start. I hope these readers will feel affirmed as they recognize their powerful practices described in these pages.

My definition of equity-centered trauma-informed practice and these four shifts are aspirational. I don't know of any school, program, or individual (not even me) who currently implements trauma-informed practices perfectly, because there is no perfect implementation or checklist to be completed. Instead, trauma-informed practices should evolve continuously as our understanding evolves. These four shifts also don't capture the be-all and end-all of trauma-informed practices. Real change is complicated, messy, and never truly done. Consider these four shifts as a starting place for growing your practice. In redefining trauma-informed practices in education, I hope to help propel this field forward with equity at the center.

Changing Practice, Pedagogy, and Policy

Throughout this book I offer suggestions for transformation across all major aspects of schooling: practice, pedagogy, and policy:

- *Practice:* We need to expand our mindsets. We can sharpen our lens of understanding and apply it to our individual daily practice of interacting with our students and our colleagues. Developing our lens is not simply so we know better but so we are prepared to do better.
- *Pedagogy:* School change happens most immediately in the classroom. We can shift both what we teach and how we teach it. Shifting our mindset isn't enough; we also need to put our understanding into action in our classrooms.
- *Policy:* Schools also have work to do at a systems level. Even if I work hard to change my own mindset and translate that into classroom practice and pedagogy, I'm still just one teacher in a larger school. In turn, my school is just one part of a much bigger system.

School leaders must shift policy and procedures so that there is change that outlives any individual member of a school staff.

These three layers are all important, and an equity-centered trauma-informed approach requires that we learn to be good jugglers of all three at once. It's not enough to simply change our mindset, for example, if we continue teaching in the same way we always have. It's also not enough to transform individual classrooms if the school as a whole is shaped by harmful policies and rules. Becoming an equity-centered trauma-informed school requires that we take action in all three arenas.

We can think about this using the concept of an equity-centered trauma-informed *ecology* (Crosby, 2015). Just like in nature, a healthy ecosystem relies on the interactions among many interwoven elements. An equity-centered teacher needs an equity-centered leader, and they work best together when the policies support their efforts. If any element is out of place, it can be difficult to make progress.

These recommendations are woven through the text. They are also highlighted at the end of most chapters, as action steps that correspond to each of these three areas, to underscore the importance of change at multiple levels within a school system:

- Developing our lens (practice)
- Transforming our classrooms (pedagogy)
- Shifting the larger systems (policy)

I hope you will consider these steps not as a checklist but as a menu. Choose something that you can influence and go from there. The important thing is to begin.

Start Where You Are

Depending on your role in your school and your sphere of influence, you may be wondering how you can make change in the complicated education ecosystem. It's okay to start where you are. It can be tempting to say, "Well, I need to wait until my coworkers are on board," or "I

can't do anything until my principal changes how he leads." These are real problems, but there is always a way to begin in our own roles. In her book *Leadership and the New Science* (2006), Margaret Wheatley wrote about making change from within a system:

Acting locally allows us to be inside the movement and flow of the system, a participant in all those complex events occurring simultaneously. . . . Activities in one part of the whole create effects that appear in distant places. Because of these unseen connections, there is potential value in working anywhere in the system. We never know how our small activities will affect others through the invisible fabric of our connectedness. (p. 45)

There is value in all of our work, anywhere in the system. At the same time, it can be pretty darn frustrating to feel like we're doing all of that work and not seeing any of the larger issues go away, year after year.

There comes a point in almost every workshop or graduate course that I facilitate when a teacher raises her hand and says, "You keep talking about this system-wide stuff, but what am I supposed to do in the meantime? I can't change our district policy or the state requirements." I love this question.

In reply, I hold up one hand and say, "There are always going to be actions you can take right now, tomorrow morning in your classroom, that start to make change for your trauma-affected students." Holding up the other hand, I continue, "And then there are the bigger-picture changes that need to happen at the school, district, state, or even national level. There are pieces of our US culture and values that would need to shift for there to be a truly equitable experience for our students." Then, I bring my hands together back to back, rubbing my knuckles together to demonstrate the friction. "What I want is for you to notice that tension and accept that it's there. There are no easy solutions or quick fixes, and you *should* feel frustrated at the size and complexity of the systems that need to change. My life's mission is that, if enough educators feel that friction, we can start a revolution and overthrow the inequitable systems." (I smile when I say that, but I'm not really joking.)

If you are reading this book and you have control and influence over larger pieces of our educational system, I encourage you to use your influence to embed equity and trauma-informed practices into policies and systems. If you're reading this and you're a classroom teacher who feels you have little influence over the big picture, don't feel discouraged. You do have enormous influence in the lives of your students, and as we'll explore throughout this book, those individual relationships matter a great deal.

Start where you are. In this book I point to many inroads for making change. Some will be out of your control, but many will be squarely within your influence. There is value in your work anywhere within our school system as we work for equity-centered trauma-informed change.

ACTION STEPS

The suggested action steps for this chapter focus on creating connections and expanding your understanding about trauma. Partner with students, community groups, and experts to make trauma-informed practices both responsive and proactive.

Develop Your Lens

- Foster connections with local organizations, nonprofits, and community organizers who are working with and for survivors of trauma in your area. This might include youth shelters, community mental health organizations, anti-sexual-violence organizations, or foster agencies. These organizations have institutional knowledge, awareness of resources, and often the ability to provide consultation or support to schools. For example, I knew that a local organization near me had a hotline for people experiencing sexual violence, but I was surprised to learn that teachers could also call the hotline to consult with trained staff about how to support their students when talking about dating violence. This organization also offered training for schools, as well as youth leadership opportunities. Schools can provide stronger support for students when we create connections within our community.

- View yourself as a life-long learner when it comes to trauma. Keep up-to-date on developments in the trauma studies field, resisting static frameworks or remaining stuck on outdated recommendations. In my research for this book I've been fascinated by how much the collective understanding of trauma and trauma-informed practices has changed and evolved even over the past 20 years. You can stay up-to-date through following researchers and authors on Twitter, joining newsletters or Facebook groups focusing on trauma, or subscribing to academic journals.

Transform Your Classroom

- Consider how to incorporate trauma prevention into your curriculum. Connect with your school's health teacher or school counselor about initiatives like bullying prevention, substance use prevention, and relationship violence prevention. Often there are ways to weave these into your academic content: look at the evolution of bullying laws in your state as part of a civics unit, investigate the effects of substances on developing brains in science, or analyze characters in whole-class novels through a lens of healthy and safe relationships. I discuss more about classroom approaches in Part V.

Shift the Systems

- Evaluate your current implementation of trauma-informed practices through the lens of "respond and prevent." Equity-centered trauma-informed practices both respond to trauma that's already happened and prevent future trauma from occurring. If your school is currently implementing trauma-informed practices, make a list of these practices, pedagogical tools, and policy shifts. Then go through your list and mark whether each item responds to students who have already experienced trauma, builds a culture of trauma prevention, or both. What do you notice and wonder about your list?