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Bringing Sanctuary to School: Assessing School Climate as a Foundation for Culturally Responsive Trauma-Informed Approaches for Urban Schools

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Abstract

Decades of federal economic policies that have concentrated poverty into isolated communities have devastated urban education, and expose youth and families to high stress and trauma. Disproportionately negative outcomes for students of color and those who are economically disadvantaged can be understood as manifestations of negative racial school climate and inadequate responsiveness to students' trauma. As part of a school–university partnership to inform culturally responsive trauma-informed pedagogy, this study assessed the climate of a racially diverse high-poverty elementary school. Findings explored the application of the trauma-informed Sanctuary Model to address students' trauma and a social justice response for urban education.

Keywords

disproportionality, school climate, poverty, trauma, trauma-informed, Sanctuary Model, color-blind, race

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Urban communities and their schools have been negatively affected by decades of federal economic policies that have concentrated poverty into isolated communities, with devastating consequences for urban education (Anyon, 2014). People who live in financially poor communities are frequently exposed to a range of traumas and losses that affect individuals, families, and schools (Abramovitz & Albrecht, 2013). Students who arrive at school burdened with stresses associated with poverty are significantly more likely to have mental health and social-emotional challenges (Howell, 2004), yet live in communities that typically lack adequate mental health services. Limited access to mental health services may be one contributing factor to the school-to-prison pipeline, as troubled children are punished for behavior that stems from stress and trauma, placing the onus on schools to identify and respond proactively to student mental health needs (Tate et al., 2014). In this context, urban schools must develop creative strategies to reach and teach students who are often burdened with trauma and stress that intersect with social oppression.

While all students need to experience school as a safe and welcoming environment, students managing stress and trauma also need schools that support healing and resiliency as children learn and grow (Bloom, 1995; Cole, Eisner, Gregory, & Ristuccia, 2013). Although these struggles can be found in rural, urban, and even suburban communities, urban communities are characterized by greater ethnic and cultural diversity and are often challenged by high transience among students, making urban education unique (Milner, 2008).

Pedagogy that is both relevant to the students and responsive to their social and family circumstance demands specialized skill sets (Milner, 2011). Culturally responsive pedagogy understands the nature and extent of social oppression and its impact on communities and translates this understanding into engagement and teaching strategies. Teaching strategies that deepen relationships with students and build upon students' individual strengths and the strengths of their families and communities are central tenets of culturally responsive education (Gay, 2014). Strengths-based, relationship-centered approaches are also fundamental to schools that are sensitive to students' trauma and stress (Cole et al., 2013). Helping White and middle-class teachers, whose primary exposure to diversity and inequity takes place in the classroom, to see strengths in adversity and build relationships with diverse students is one of the important challenges facing urban schools (Matias & Liou, 2015).

Using a community-based participatory research (CBPR) paradigm, this study focused on engaging with and understanding the perspectives of school personnel in a small urban district. The study was a first step in developing

culturally responsive trauma-informed approaches to improve school climate and education. CBPR is a collaborative process among researchers and community partners who come together to design and implement research focusing on a concern affecting the community (Hacker, 2013). In school–university CBPR collaborations, researchers are able to approach issues in new ways, generating creative thoughts and new approaches to entrenched problems (Maheux & Roth, 2013), and inform school climate initiatives to support student social-emotional well-being (Mulvaney-Day, Rappaport, Alegria, & Codianne, 2006). Findings from this study are used to explore the application of the trauma-informed Sanctuary Model (Bloom, 1997) to a school setting.

Culturally Responsive Trauma-Informed Schools

Both culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices rely on ethical and moral principles that are often difficult to translate into practical skills until the full theoretical concepts are embraced (Bloom, 1997; Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012). It is important not to conflate the two concepts. Membership in an oppressed or marginalized group can expose people to adversity and subject them to structural oppression, but this is not to label them as "traumatized." The negative consequences of childhood trauma occur when there are events or circumstances that overwhelm the child's ability to cope and there is no supportive network of adults to help the child make sense of the adversity (Shonkoff et al., 2012). The negative impacts of child trauma and toxic stress are more likely in financially poor communities because the adults in the community are also more likely to be affected by trauma and loss (Abramovitz & Albrecht, 2013; Wade, Shea, Rubin, & Wood, 2014). As communities of color are disproportionately affected by poverty (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014), there are important reasons to consider the intersection of structural oppression, including racism, and trauma, and to understand how these manifest in school settings.

Racial School Climate

Classroom teaching does not take place in isolation; it occurs in the context of school climate, and the school exists in the context of community and society. Oppression and privilege are structurally imbedded and affect everyone. The dynamics of oppression and privilege are grounded in social constructions of race, and racism is manifest in the outcome of systems. From this perspective, discussions of White students and their concerns revolve around issues of race as much as discussions of students of color and their concerns (Milner, 2013). Racial school climate matters for all students as it

informs how children experience their school and where they are likely to be positioned in relation to social constructions of middle-class Whiteness.

Positive school climate supports students' academic achievement (Sherblom, Marshall, & Sherblom, 2006) and improved social-emotional health (Way, Reddy, & Rhodes, 2007). Students of color and those who are economically disadvantaged, however, have disproportionately more negative school outcomes in multiple areas (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2012). These disproportionally negative outcomes can be understood as reflecting school climates that are not responsive to and inclusive of students of color and those who do not fit expectations based on middle-class White culture (Silva, Langhout, Kohfeldt, & Gurrola, 2015). Racial school climate (Voight, 2013) and the impact of stress, trauma, and loss that are often present in communities with high rates of poverty (Wade et al., 2014) are important considerations to support the success of all students.

Students of color and White students experience school differently, making it essential to consider race when assessing school climate (Shirley & Cornell, 2011). Racial school climate considers the norms and interactions around race and diversity within the school context and examines the connection between school climate and race (Voight, 2013). Students of color often receive harsher and more punitive consequences than their White counterparts resulting in disproportionate discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions (Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). These discipline disparities have led to a racial climate within schools that ultimately disadvantages students of color (Hope, Skoog, & Jagers, 2014), contributing to other negative outcomes such as lower attendance, test scores, and graduation rates.

Black students in particular are less likely to feel engaged or supported by their teachers and, as a result, are more likely to perceive their schools' climate negatively (Shirley & Cornell, 2011). In their interactions with teachers, students receive messages about their acceptance or rejection into the school community (Hughes, McGill, Ford, & Tubbs, 2011). Racism-related stress adds to the overall stress burden and negatively affects children's well-being (Priest et al., 2013). Teachers immersed in color-blind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Ullucci & Battey, 2011) may not understand the racial disconnections in school settings and unwittingly gravitate toward explanations that contribute to deficit thinking and stereotyping (Tanner, 2013).

Poverty, Trauma, and Toxic Stress

Living in a community with high rates of poverty can expose children of all races and cultures to a range of stressors. Communities of color, however, are

disproportionally affected by poverty, with approximately 3 times more poverty in Black communities compared with White (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014). Financially poor communities often have high concentrations of people who have endured multiple traumatic losses, including unemployment; loss of life due to murder, suicide, and accidents; long-term hospitalization; incarceration; foster care placement; and eviction or foreclosure, among others (Abramovitz & Albrecht, 2013; Wade et al., 2014). These traumatic losses create significant challenges for all community members, and children can be exposed to stressors that overwhelm their ability to cope.

Strong, frequent, or prolonged exposure to stress results in over-activation of the body's stress management system, making children vulnerable to multiple mental health and behavioral difficulties (Shonkoff et al., 2012). Toxic stress can also directly affect learning and school achievement as it contributes to cognitive and learning challenges (Cortiella, 2014) and difficulties with attention and concentration (Gutteling et al., 2006). The development of the brain's executive functioning capacity is inhibited in children exposed to toxic stress (Jensen, 2009; Shonkoff et al., 2012) which can in turn contribute to behaviors that are problematic in the school setting. Deficits in attention, impulsivity, hyperactivity, conduct problems, and antisocial behavior have all been linked to children's toxic stress (Danese & McEwen, 2012).

Stressors faced by children who live in poverty may affect their development, stress response, and relationships with adults and peers. Children who are dealing with toxic stress will carry this emotional burden to school, and when a school has many children managing toxic stress, school climate can be affected. Therefore, it is important to consider ways to address trauma and stress as part of universal student supports (Blitz & Lee, 2015; Ko et al., 2008). Trauma-informed schools recognize the impact of trauma and toxic stress in the lives of the students, respond by helping children build resiliency, and develop discipline practices that teach prosocial behavior rather than risk re-traumatization through harsh punishment (Bath, 2008).

Method

Description of School and Study Participants

This research was designed as an exploratory study of school climate to establish a baseline to inform the development of culturally responsive trauma-informed practices as a whole-school approach. Teachers and staff at an elementary school,[1] grades kindergarten through fifth grade, in the Northeast United States participated. An assessment of school climate via the observations and perceptions of school personnel provides robust evaluations

that are consistent with student perceptions (Brand, Felner, Seitsinger, Burns, & Bolton, 2008). The community is in a region that once prospered due to manufacturing industry jobs that left the area in the 1990s, contributing to economic decline, population loss, and urban decay, giving this area the characteristics of larger urban communities and placing new demands on schools (Milner, 2012).

The school had just under 1,200 students divided into two cohorts of primary (Grades k-2) and intermediate (Grades 3-5) students. The school employed 80 teachers, including general education, special education, and arts enrichment teachers, and 40 paraprofessional classroom staff. Almost all school personnel were White. The average class size was 18 students. All teachers had a valid teaching certificate, and all but one had been teaching for more than 3 years. The state assessment of teacher performance included four ranked categories: highly effective, effective, developing, and ineffective. Approximately 75% of the teachers rated "highly effective" overall by state standards, putting them in the highest rank, and the rest rated "effective," the second highest rank. In teacher assessments tied to student test scores, however, only half scored as "highly effective" and about 10% were rated as less than "effective."

School district data show that approximately 35% of the student population was students of color, and more than 70% of all families in the district were economically disadvantaged. Mandated state testing results for 2012 indicated that only 60% of third-grade students and about half of fourth-grade students scored "proficient" or better in English language arts. Less than 70% of third-grade students and just more than 60% of fourth-grade students scored "proficient" or better in math. Data for the past several years show disproportionally negative test scores and higher discipline referrals and suspensions for students of color and those who are economically disadvantaged.

The Research Team

Using a CBPR interprofessional partnership approach (Bermúdez Parsai, González Castro, Marsiglia, Harthun, & Valdez, 2011), the study was developed and implemented by an interdisciplinary team consisting of university faculty, school district administrators and teachers, and community members partnering with the school district to provide professional development workshops on cultural responsiveness. Establishing a positive school climate requires building relationships so that all members of the school community feel safe, supported, engaged, and connected. Engaging with teachers and other school personnel through CBPR allowed the research team to begin the process of building trust necessary for transformative change (Barnett,

Anderson, Houle, Higginbotham, & Gatling, 2010). The first step was to identify concerns and hear perspectives that are valuable to developing a culturally responsive trauma-informed school.

School and community members of the research team completed the online research ethics course developed by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative and were added to the research protocol approved by the university's institutional review board. The team developed the instruments collaboratively, reviewed data for initial analysis, and discussed implications for the school. One member of the team worked with the university faculty to conduct deeper analysis.

Data Collection

Mixed methods were employed to collect data. Data collection included two surveys, one online (with an option to complete it in hardcopy) and a follow-up paper survey, and unstructured interviews with school personnel. Approximately 85% of personnel completed the surveys. The original survey was conducted via SurveyMonkey, an online survey tool, during the last week of May 2014 ($n = 105$). The follow-up paper survey was administered during the last week of school in June 2014 ($n = 100$). Short unstructured interviews with approximately a third of the teachers and classroom staff ($n = 39$) were conducted during the first weeks of June 2014, which provided an opportunity to learn more about their perspectives and needs.

Survey instruments. To assess the perspectives of school personnel on racial school climate and social-emotional responsiveness, the interdisciplinary research team utilized principles identified by Teaching Tolerance to eliminate the "school to prison pipeline" (Teaching Tolerance Toolkit, n.d.). Teaching Tolerance is a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center that provides online resources for teachers and school administrators. The principles developed by Teaching Tolerance were designed to give school districts information to help them enhance school climate and pedagogy and eliminate disproportionally negative outcomes for students of color and students from economically disadvantaged families. The research team used these principles to provide a conceptual definition of a culturally responsive trauma-informed school environment and identify areas for future growth and development.

The original online survey identified five principles. Four of these were adapted from Teaching Tolerance: (1) adopt a social-emotional lens, (2) know the students and continually develop cultural responsiveness, (3) move the discipline paradigm from "punishment" to "opportunities to teach desired behavior," and (4) resist the criminalization of school behavior. Trauma-informed

Table 1. Principle 1: Adopt a Social-Emotional Lens (n = 105).

I see the adults in the school . . .	*M* (*SD*)
Responding appropriately to instances of illness, neglect, or abuse.	4.21 (0.91)
Not using hurtful words when talking to a student.	4.07 (0.81)
Leading by positive example.	3.89 (0.87)
Developing relationships with each student.	3.88 (0.88)
Setting an expectation that hurtful words will not be accepted from students.	3.85 (1.1)
Paying attention to whether the students' basic needs are being met.	3.84 (1.0)
Responding to signs of distress (anger, sadness, anxiety) by helping the student to become calm and emotionally centered before putting expectations on her or him.	3.75 (0.95)
Understanding the environmental and relational stresses with which the students struggle.	3.71 (0.93)
Encouraging students to access counseling services provided at the school.	3.15 (1.2)

Note. M = 3.82, Cronbach's α = .94.

approaches must attend to how the adults experience the school as their workplace to support their ability to care for vulnerable children (Bloom, 1995, 2010). Therefore, Principle 5, maintain an inclusive, cohesive, and nurturing professional work environment, was developed by the research team to assess the workplace climate. Preliminary analysis of data from the original survey revealed a need to further understand school personnel's responsiveness to race and culture, so a sixth principle was added and distributed as a follow-up paper survey, focusing on (6) address culture in the school.

Each principle was operationalized by the interdisciplinary research team. Through a series of discussions reflecting on an evolving vision of the qualities and components of a culturally responsive trauma-informed school, the team defined behaviors that would demonstrate each principle in action. These behaviors became questions for the survey that provided baseline data and specific action steps to inform school climate development. In an attempt to reduce social desirability bias, survey questions asked what respondents observed from other adults in the building, rather than asking them to report on their own behavior.

Tables 1 through 6 provide the questions asked for each principle. All survey questions asked school personnel to identify how frequently they noticed the behaviors demonstrated by adults in their school building using a

1 to 5 scale. A score of 5 indicated that the behavior was *always or almost always* observed; 4 indicated *usually or with most students*; 3 indicated *about half the time, or with about half the students*; 2 indicated *sometimes or inconsistently*; and 1 indicated *never or rarely observed*. A score of 0 indicated that the respondent did not have enough information to assess. The Cronbach's alpha for the total instrument, which was piloted in this study and has not been revised, was .94, indicating high reliability; the reliability scores for the scales that represent each principle are included in the tables.

Unstructured interviews. Unstructured interviews occurred over 2 days in early June 2014, when members of the research team, a multiracial group including both men and women but excluding school administrators, spent several hours in the teachers' lounge at the school. Consistent with CBPR, the design of the unstructured interviews served to both gather data and engage with members of the school community. The school principal announced that school personnel were invited to drop by during their break to meet briefly with the researchers. During these meetings, researchers introduced themselves as those who had conducted the school climate survey and told respondents that the school would be receiving trainings on culturally responsive trauma-informed approaches. Respondents were asked to share their thoughts on how issues of race, culture, and trauma affected their students. Interviews typically lasted 5 to 7 min, but a few lasted up to 15 min. Each member of the research team took notes on their conversations and checked with the person being interviewed to ensure that responses were recorded accurately.

Data Analysis

Survey data. The mean scores for each item on the survey, grouped according to principle, were calculated. Scores of zero, indicating that the respondent did not have enough information to comment on the behavior, were treated as missing data in the analysis. As the focus was on overall school climate, differences among respondent groups were not explored. The full set of behaviors within each principle was defined as necessary to express the ethic it represents; thus, an aggregate mean for each principle was calculated to identify the overall impression of how often the collection of behaviors measured by each principle were observed. The means of individual items were calculated to identify areas for professional development.

Qualitative data. Notes from the unstructured interviews taken by the researchers were typed and organized for analysis by a graduate student assistant from the university. As school personnel could potentially be

identified by their responses, the typed notes were analyzed by a subgroup of the research team that did not include school district administrators. The purpose of the interviews was to understand perspectives on (a) race and culture and (b) the impact of trauma and stress on students, so these concepts were used as a priori codes. Further analysis consisted of (a) open coding to condense the data into categories, (b) axial coding to identify concepts that cluster together and examine connections between evidence and concepts, and (c) selective coding to identify themes and make comparisons and/or contrasts (Strauss, 1987).

Findings

The Six Principles

The findings for each principle are summarized in Tables 1 through 6, and they paint a picture of what survey respondents observed from other adults in the school. The items within each table and the tables themselves are presented in descending order from the highest mean to the lowest. The standard deviations for each item indicate that there was considerable variance in school personnel's experience, which is to be expected in an organization of this size. In most cases, less than 10% of the respondents indicated "never or rarely" for a given item, and the frequency of "always or almost always" was typically between 20% and 30% for a given item.

The aggregate mean for Principle 1, adopt a social-emotional lens (Table 1), was 3.82, the highest of all principles, which indicates that school personnel perceived that adults are "usually" responsive to the social and emotional needs of students. The highest scores within the principle were for responding appropriately to illness, neglect, or abuse ($M = 4.21$) and not using hurtful words when talking to a student ($M = 4.07$), indicating that these behaviors are consistently, but not always, observed. Encouraging students to access counseling services at school was the lowest item ($M = 3.15$), indicating that this was only observed about "half the time."

Principle 2, maintain an inclusive, cohesive, and nurturing professional work environment (Table 2), was divided into two parts, one dealing with what respondents observed with their colleagues and one focusing on supervisors. The combined aggregate mean was 3.42. The aggregate mean for the items relating to coworkers was 3.54. The two items that received the highest scores related to collegial respect ($M = 3.96$) and support to help a coworker understand their negative reactions or potential biases ($M = 3.91$), indicating that these actions "'usually" occur. Coworkers' giving supportive corrective feedback to another adult who had spoken harshly to a student was reported

Table 2. Principle 2: Maintain an Inclusive, Cohesive, and Nurturing Professional Work Environment (n = 105).

My colleagues . . . (M = 3.54)	M (SD)
Consistently demonstrate respect for one another.	3.96 (0.89)
When necessary, support one another to explore and understand negative reactions, assumptions, and/or potential biases about students or their families.	3.91 (0.89)
Come together as a team to work together and support one another during stressful times.	3.80 (1.1)
Regularly seek out one another for advice and/or input for skill development.	3.62 (0.92)
Value the people who work here, regardless of their job position or role.	3.61 (1.1)
Help each other develop creative, strengths-based responses to difficult problems or issues.	3.42 (1.1)
Give supportive corrective feedback when witnessing an adult speaking harshly to a student.	2.48 (1.3)
Supervisors . . . (M = 3.27)	**M (SD)**
Consistently demonstrate respect for all school personnel.	3.71 (1.2)
Hold themselves to the same principles and ethics that staff are expected to demonstrate in educating and supporting students.	3.53 (1.3)
Regularly offer feedback on job performance that is strengths-based and useful.	3.25 (1.3)
Consistently offer support and show that they care about the workplace environment for adults.	3.08 (1.3)
Teach me or offer me opportunities to develop job-related skills that help me increase my effectiveness.	3.07 (1.4)
Understand the real challenges and stresses of my position.	2.99 (1.5)

Note. M = 3.42, Cronbach's α = .97.

as being observed inconsistently (M = 2.48), the lowest item for this principle. The aggregate mean for questions relating to supervisors was somewhat lower (M = 3.27). Again, respect was the highest rated item (M = 3.71). The sense that supervisors understood the real challenges of the job rated lowest (M = 2.99).

Principle 3, move the discipline paradigm from "punishment' to "opportunities to teach desired behavior" (Table 3), received an aggregate mean of 3.35 indicating that these behaviors were seen "about half the time." There was very little difference in the scores among the six items in this principle. Frequently praising students was the highest (M = 3.54), placing it between

Table 3. Principle 3: Move the Discipline Paradigm From "Punishment" to "Opportunities to Teach Desired Behavior" (n = 105).

I see the adults in the school . . .	*M* (*SD*)
Praising often and praising publicly.	3.54 (1.1)
Creating routines and rituals that celebrate students' success with awards and recognitions.	3.50 (1.1)
Including celebrations of success and incentives as part of the intervention repertoire.	3.34 (1.1)
Identifying specific behaviors or qualities when giving praise rather than only global or general acclaim.	3.32 (1.0)
Adopting the "warm demander" stance, showing both caring and high expectations that are non-negotiable.	3.31 (1.1)
Using positive intervention strategies that build students' capacity to manage their own behavior (e.g., 3-min cool-out, peer mediation, conflict resolution training, behavior contracts, etc.).	3.10 (1.1)

Note. M = 3.35, Cronbach's α = .95.

something that is observed "half the time" and being "usually" observed. The lowest, using positive interventions to help students manage their own behavior, was not far behind (M = 3.10).

Principle 4, resist the criminalization of school behavior (Table 4), had a combined aggregate mean of 3.34. This principle was divided into two sections, one dealing with school personnel (M = 3.02), and one focusing on legal officials who come into the school, such as police or child protective workers (M = 3.82). Among school personnel, addressing behavioral disruptions respectfully (M = 3.50) and welcoming a student back to class after an offense (M = 3.47) rated highest. Addressing truancy through partnerships with family and community members from diverse and marginalized groups rated lowest (M = 2.48). Legal officials who come into the school were perceived as "usually" respectful of privacy (M = 4.18) and developed supportive caring relationships with students (M = 4.02). Approaching all but the most extreme situations from a social-emotional perspective was seen only about "half the time" (M = 3.32).

Principle 5, know the students and continually develop cultural responsiveness (Table 5), was only observed about "half the time" with an aggregate mean of 3.22. The highest rated items in this principle related to respect shown to family and community members (M = 3.95) and affirming the strengths of each student (M = 3.78). Two of the lowest rated items related to students' culture and individuality. Adults talking about the impact of oppression on students' lives (M = 2.76) and encouraging students to bring

Table 4. Principle 4: Resist the Criminalization of School Behavior (n = 105).

I see the adults in the school . . . (M = 3.02)	M (SD)
Addressing behavioral disruptions in a way that respects the dignity of the student.	3.50 (1.1)
Welcoming the student back after being sent out of class, regardless of the offense and location of the incident.	3.47 (1.1)
Using multiple strategies to address disruptive classroom behavior, limiting out of classroom discipline to extreme situations.	3.40 (1.2)
Engaging in open dialogue with colleagues and administrators to understand and address the problem(s) when disparities are discovered.	2.72 (1.4)
Regularly examining the enforcement of discipline policies for patterns, both in the classroom and across the school, to identify disparities by gender, race, sexual identity or orientation, or other factors.	2.56 (1.4)
Addressing truancy through active school–community partnerships that include students, parents or primary caregivers, and community members representing marginalized groups to examine the root causes and propose solutions.	2.48 (1.3)
When police or probation officers, attorneys, child protective service workers, or other legal officials are in the school, they . . . (M = 3.82)	**M (SD)**
Respect the privacy of the student and family	4.18 (0.88)
Develop supportive and caring relationships with students	4.02 (0.90)
Limit restraint and removal of students to serious violent offenses	3.74 (1.1)
Approach all but the most extreme situations from a social-emotional learning perspective	3.32 (1.2)

Note. M = 3.34, Cronbach's α = .96.

meaningful objects to class to connect with lessons (M = 2.72) were seen less than "half the time."

Principle 6, address culture in the school (Table 6), received the lowest aggregate mean at 3.16. The highest rated item within this principle was noticing the race and culture of the students (M = 3.79), followed by adults demonstrating an awareness of how their own history and experience influenced their pedagogy (M = 3.43). The lowest ranked of this principle, however, were two items directly related to understanding structural and racial oppression. Respondents observed that their colleagues demonstrated an understanding of how racial microaggressions can affect relationships between White people and people of color less than "half the time" (M = 2.77). Similarly, an understanding of how parents raising children of color need to teach their children

Table 5. Principle 5: Know the Students and Continually Develop Cultural Responsiveness (n = 105).

I see the adults in the school . . .	*M* (*SD*)
Exhibiting a sense of respect and humility when they engage parents, guardians, families, and community members.	3.95 (0.98)
Knowing the strengths of each student and affirming these with them regularly.	3.78 (0.97)
Regularly inviting students to talk about what they know.	3.67 (1.1)
Demonstrating self-awareness and self-reflection about their assumptions and potential biases.	3.34 (1.2)
Gearing instruction toward helping students understand how the lesson will support their goals.	3.27 (1.2)
Regularly asking students what they are learning from the lesson and how they will use this in their life.	3.10 (1.2)
Learning and affirming the students' home culture and integrating those assets into instruction and/or other teachable moments.	3.06 (1.1)
Being open to identifying areas of their thinking and practice, and/or identifying school policies and practices, that are not strengths based.	3.03 (1.1)
Talking about how members of marginalized groups are affected by oppression and bias in their lives outside of the school environment.	2.76 (1.4)
Asking students what they would like to learn or what they would like to be better at doing.	2.76 (1.2)
Encouraging students to bring meaningful objects or other materials to class, discussing what they symbolize, and connecting them to the lesson.	2.72 (1.2)

Note. M = 3.22, Cronbach's α = .96.

different social or life skills than parents raising White children was also seen less than "half the time" (M = 2.62).

Qualitative Data

Four themes emerged through analysis of the qualitative data. The first two were a priori codes reflecting key issues the study sought to understand perspectives on: (a) race and culture and (b) trauma, loss, and stress in the students' lives. Two additional themes emerged: (c) attributing students' disruptive behavior to poor parenting and (d) mutuality and partnership among administrators, teachers, and classroom staff. These broad themes contained subgroups, and examples of quotes are provided to illustrate concepts.

Table 6. Principle 6: Address Culture in the School (n = 100).

I see the adults in the school . . .	*M* (*SD*)
Noticing the race and culture of the students.	3.79 (0.91)
Being aware of how their personal history and life experiences influence classroom decisions about instruction or teaching style.	3.43 (0.98)
Demonstrating an understanding of how sociocultural factors related to diversity could influence relationships with students.	3.30 (1.2)
Demonstrating an understanding of the cultural qualities of groups other than their own.	3.25 (0.97)
Accepting and affirming students' usage of non-standard English.	3.17 (1.2)
Demonstrating an understanding of how subtle forms of racism, including unintended cultural bias, may influence how parents interact with them.	3.13 (1.0)
Demonstrating an understanding of the relationships among society, schools, and ethnicity or race as they affect the communities of color in our community.	3.13 (1.0)
Demonstrating an understanding of how subtle forms of racism, including unintended cultural bias, may influence how students interact with them.	3.10 (1.0)
Demonstrating an ability to explain how culture enhances students' learning of academic content.	3.04 (1.0)
Demonstrating an understanding of how frequent, often daily, subtle insults related to race or culture, called microaggressions, can affect relationships between White people and people of color.	2.77 (1.0)
Demonstrating an understanding of how parents raising children of color need to teach their children different social or life skills than parents raising White children.	2.62 (0.92)

Note. M = 3.16, Cronbach's α = .89.

Theme 1: Race and Culture

Color blindness. The concept of color blindness is noted as a finding primarily because of the absence of responses directed toward race, even though respondents were asked their thoughts on race and culture. Only about a third of the respondents spoke directly to issues of race. Of those who did, many emphasized they did not see differences based on race or color and tended to disbelieve school data that showed that students of color had significantly higher discipline rates. A typical response was a teacher who stated, "I don't necessarily see this as about color" and then talked at length about the school's discipline practices and the need for more character education. Most respondents moved directly into talking about concerns with students'

difficult home lives. The few who did talk about race and culture reflected both stereotyping and awareness of differences that needed to be bridged.

Stereotyping. Some respondents appeared to associate problematic classroom behaviors with ethnicity or race, often linking race, poverty, and difficult home lives. For example, one teacher noted, "Students are more social, especially those from ethnic and low economic groups. They're talking, off task . . . not able to function in the classroom." Other comments were more difficult to interpret. For example, another teacher stated, "We have behavior problems split between boys and girls, but more students of color are acting out." This comment is not necessarily stereotyping, but data showing more students of color receiving discipline referrals for subjectively interpreted infractions (i.e., insubordination; this district and nationally, Skiba et al., 2002) call to question whether the students of color are genuinely acting out more often or whether the school personnel perceive their behavior as acting out. A different teacher referred to some students being "targeted," possibly identifying stereotyping within the school, "Most kids targeted are of color and have difficult home life struggles."

Awareness of differences. Although most respondents denied or minimized differences between school personnel and the students, a few respondents spoke about their awareness of differences in culture or experience related to race. One classroom aide noted that more students of color are identified as having learning disabilities and expressed a need to learn about diverse families. A teacher stated, "We are a bunch of middle-class White women that have never had these issues of class and do not know how to respond." Another teacher identified a need to learn culturally responsive skills: "I need training on how to talk to families and students in a culturally responsive way without coming off as a privileged young White woman."

Theme 2: Trauma, Loss, and Stress in the Students' Lives

All the respondents commented, often at length and with concern and compassion, about the stressful conditions in which their students live. Although they did not always know specifics of the circumstances, the teachers and classroom aides maintained beliefs that their students were subjected to trauma and hardship. Findings in this area fell into three subgroups: (a) secrecy about home life, (b) awareness of adversity in the lives of students, and (c) teaching personnel do not know how to address the problems their students face.

Secrecy about students' home life. Teachers and classroom aides frequently made reference to parents being guarded and students being told not to divulge information about their home life. One teacher stated, "The kids are often told at home not to talk to teachers or adults so they don't tell us what happening." Another teacher assumed that parents and students are concerned that disclosure would lead to a child protective services report, "The parents are very private and guarded and students know the process; they're thinking 'don't tell the teacher the bad stuff or they will make a CPS call.'"

Awareness of adversity in the lives of students. Nearly all the respondents spoke about adversity experienced by their students, often demonstrating strong emotion. Several indicated that they believed that the majority of their students lived in difficult circumstances. When explaining extremes, one teacher stated, "Four or five of my students have parents who are in and out of jail, split families, moms who left, everything." One teacher generalized, "A lot [of students] have deplorable living conditions and not much parental support at home." Another gave more specific information, "When we've done home visits we have found families that dumpster dive for food. They have no doors on bedrooms . . . sheets dividing the apartment, plug in heaters." Another teacher shared her sense of how the children are emotionally affected by their families' struggles:

> The kids are so sad. They look like they come in sad and emotionally drowned. They are taking care of younger siblings because problems in the family . . . dads are in jail or heading there, mom is in the hospital. It's a lot for them to handle.

Teaching personnel do not know how to address the problems their students face. While their compassion and concern for their students was evident, it was also clear that many school personnel did not feel prepared to effectively respond to their students' adversity. As one teacher said, "I want to know why the kid is missing school, but I wouldn't know how to handle extreme situations." Another teacher shared, "All the students are struggling with life at home. I hear stories that are hard to hear, abuse—physical and verbal. I don't know what to do."

Theme 3: Attributing Students' Disruptive Behavior to Poor Parenting

Many school personnel believed that poverty was linked to poor parenting and that both were major factors in students' disruptive behavior. Students'

homes were perceived as undisciplined, and it was felt that parents were not teaching respect for education and teachers.

Undisciplined homes. Several of the school personnel equated poor discipline with financial poverty. One noted, "Kids are coming from poor homes with less discipline," and another stated, "Students from low income have little trust and defiant attitudes . . . the behaviors of students are not personal, it's just the way they were raised." Others made reference to parenting styles that failed to teach cooperation: "[The students] have this refusal type of upbringing where they are taught to say no." Still others assumed that adults at home were exhibiting violent behavior that was then replicated in the school: "Students need to find alternatives to violence that may have been modeled for them."

Lack of respect for education and teachers. Coupled with the perceived lack of discipline in the home, many teachers and classroom aides expressed feeling that the value of education was not taught at home. One teacher stated that she believed, "Schooling isn't valued or reinforced at home." Another felt, "There is a lack of respect overall. Lack of respect for education. I've had parents yell at me, threaten me, it's a society thing not just school. No respect for life, or other people—there's a breakdown." Still others seemed to convey a sense of hopelessness: "Students see no futures for themselves. Students and their families do not seem to value education as a priority."

Theme 4: Partnership Among Administrators, Teachers, and Classroom Staff

Several of the respondents felt they did not experience the type of administrative support they wanted, contributing to struggles with staff morale. Many expressed feeling that current discipline practices in the school were inadequate and inconsistent, and they wanted clearer punishment for students' rule violations.

Need for administrative support and leadership. Some of the respondents expressed feeling that they were alone in reinforcing positive school behavior. One classroom aide spoke about feeling that paraprofessional staff were often targeted by students and that teachers tried to intervene but did not have the support from administration: "Teachers try to enforce rules and respect for aides . . . [but] problems are not addressed." A teacher noted that the lack of follow-through from administration was then reflected in how classroom staff responded to students' behavior issues: "Some non-teaching staff don't

want to step up consistently because it's not valued or rewarded." On a different aspect of the need for leadership, one teacher commented on issues that cross multiple themes: "We need support from administration to talk about issues that students are bringing up: racism, homosexuality, poverty, and stinky armpits."

Want consistent discipline and harsher punishment. Perceived lack of consistency in discipline practices was repeated by several respondents. Some school personnel expressed that the discipline practices were not harsh enough. As one teacher noted, "Administration does not do enough with discipline; there should be more severe consequences." Others expressed feeling that the current system rewarded negative behavior: "I would like to see more discipline instead of rewarding bad behavior." Another teacher expressed a similar sentiment relating it to the message sent to other students: "Our consequences are seeming more like rewards. Kids who do their job don't understand why kids doing wrong are being rewarded." Yet another teacher expressed concern that desired behavior was not being taught: "The punishment does not fit the crime . . . kids aren't being taught reformative behavior."

Discussion

Many of the findings from this study endorse findings from previous research, confirming that this school is typical of small urban schools struggling with disproportionally negative outcomes for students of color and those who are economically disadvantaged. Using these findings to inform the development of a culturally responsive trauma-informed school culture provides important insights on what is needed in terms of the structure of a model and highlights some of the potential challenges for implementation.

A culturally responsive school uses students' culture, ethnic heritage, and experiences of oppression as cornerstones of pedagogy (Gay, 2014) and teaches students about the structural foundation of poverty and how it can be dismantled (Milner, 2013). A trauma-informed school is one where school personnel recognize the prevalence of trauma in children, knowing that this can lead to on-going emotional, cognitive, social, and behavioral school challenges (Shonkoff et al., 2012). Trauma-informed schools understand the physiological and relational impact trauma has on students and school personnel and use this understanding to inform universal supports, assuming that all students are affected directly or vicariously (Cole et al., 2013). As culturally responsive pedagogy teaches students how to interpret and ultimately challenge an oppressive social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995), trauma-informed

pedagogy teaches self-determination and resilience (O'Connor, Mueller, & Neal, 2014).

Given what school personnel reported in this study about the painful circumstances of some students, it is clear that students in this school experienced profound difficulties. It was also clear that school personnel did not feel equipped to respond to students' social-emotional needs, indicating that despite their compassion they did not know how to help students build their coping capacity. School personnel were also not talking openly about how members of marginalized groups are affected by oppression. Although when asked directly in the survey, the personnel indicated that they noticed students' race and culture, it was also evident that they did not understand the role of racial oppression in family and community struggles. Thus, while they may recognize that a student has brown skin, they dismissed race as an important factor in students' experience. Inability to understand the impact of structural oppression and translate that into empowerment-oriented pedagogy makes the school personnel poorly qualified to help students of color and those who are economically disadvantaged make sense of their circumstances and develop resilience (Condly, 2006; O'Connor et al., 2014).

Trauma-informed schools work to reduce re-traumatization of students by adopting practices that promote healing and growth rather than punishment and exclusion (Cole et al., 2013). Frustration with student discipline practices was clearly evident in our findings. With no training or information on viable alternatives to promote prosocial behavior, personnel were asking for harsher punishments for students. Thus, without understanding the consequences, they expressed a desire for more of the type of practice that has been shown to increase negative outcomes for students of color and those who are economically disadvantaged (Skiba et al., 2014), and which could re-traumatize vulnerable children.

The Sanctuary Model for a Culturally Responsive Trauma-Informed School

As a whole-school approach, trauma-informed methods offer structured ways of responding to vulnerable students that support the well-being of all members of the school community and cultivate a healthy school climate (Cole et al., 2013; Ko et al., 2008). The trauma-informed Sanctuary Model (Bloom, 1997) offers ways to understand the impact of trauma on school climate and provides guidance for schools to promote healing and resilience for all members of the school community. The Sanctuary Model supports culturally responsive practice and aligns well with other school climate and character education initiatives (Stanwood & Doolittle, 2004). Organizational commitments to non-violence,

including psychological and moral safety, and appreciation for emotional intelligence, social learning, and social responsibility, are key aspects of the model (Esaki et al., 2013). Sanctuary also encourages open communication and democratic processes for decision making that validates the perspectives of all those involved with the school, including teachers, staff, students, and family members, which can promote culturally responsive practice.

Each of the Sanctuary commitments are designed to improve workplace climate and address items our survey noted in Principle 2. The role of leadership is crucial: Trauma-informed systems need strong yet flexible leaders (Esaki et al., 2013). Teachers in this study did not have much confidence that administrators understood the daily pressures of teaching and classroom management. School personnel wanted school leaders to play a larger role in creating a school climate conducive to teaching and learning, indicating that growth in leadership capacity may be needed. It is also important to recognize that the experience of isolation and disempowerment—the sense that I am alone, helpless, and the ones who could help are not doing so—is a common expression of secondary trauma (Bloom, 2010). Sanctuary promotes attention to secondary trauma for school personnel (Bloom, 1997, 2010), providing ways for adults in the school to understand their reactions to students' adversity and respond to their own social-emotional needs. The emphasis on open communication and moral safety can promote dialogue on the nature of trauma and social oppression and encourage collegial support and family engagement.

Scores on Principle 1, adopt a social-emotional lens, indicated that school personnel are compassionate and concerned about students' emotional struggles, but qualitative finds showed that they lacked skills to address the problems. Central to understanding the impact of trauma and overwhelming stress on individuals is to recognize that the amygdala, responsible for emotional management, is over-stimulated and the pre-frontal cortex, the place of higher order executive functioning, is inhibited (Shonkoff et al., 2012). Thus, children and youth who are growing up in the context of continual stress need additional support to help them recognize and manage emotions and stimulate development of the parts of the brain responsible for abstract and conceptual thoughts. Sanctuary's focus on four domains, safety, emotions, losses, and future (Esaki et al., 2013), guides this understanding. Adapting these domains for schools to safety, emotions, learning, and family (Blitz & Lee, 2015) informs school personnel and guides teaching, learning, and discipline practices.

Safety and Emotions

Trauma-informed approaches seek to understand students' motivation behind behavior rather than acting only to stop the behavior. Disruptive student

behavior may jeopardize the safety of others, but the student being disruptive may be feeling unsafe and has no way to communicate this except through his or her behavior (Jensen, 2009). Furthermore, young people who live in situations that require constant vigilance may not have developed the capacity to attenuate their alertness and perceive threat at every turn. Items in Principle 3, moving discipline away from punishment, are actions schools can take that can improve students' ability to feel psychologically safe, reinforcing the Sanctuary commitment of non-violence.

When students managing high stress or trauma are disciplined, they may feel unfairly punished and not learn from the process, making the items in Principle 4, resisting criminalization of school behavior, particularly important. Students' ability to name and manage their own emotional responses may be limited, and talking through confusing or upsetting interactions may be particularly difficult. If the student is a person of color or marginalized by social status, the behavior may also reflect resistance to oppression that has not yet found productive expression. A discipline response that ignores the meaning of structural inequities risks reifying oppression. In our study, Principles 5 and 6, which both provide action steps to promote cultural responsiveness, indicated a need for development in this area. To build racial and cultural knowledge, teachers need to develop an understanding of their own values and beliefs and appreciate the socio-political context of urban communities (Howard & Milner, 2014). Helping teachers to understand historical and structural oppression in culturally grounded ways, specifically talking about the underlying trauma and social justice issues, can facilitate creative uses of effective discipline processes that focus on discipline through relational practices (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

Learning

Understanding how trauma affects the brain provides teachers with knowledge they need to adjust their teaching strategies. Because trauma and continual stress affect executive functioning (Jensen, 2009; Shonkoff et al., 2012), students may struggle with remembering new information, reasoning through an issue, and recognizing cause and effect relationships. Students' abilities at problem solving, planning for the future, and paying attention may also be affected. Effective teachers already have strategies for improving their students' skills in these areas, as was evident in our findings by the absence of statements relating to a need to enhance teaching skills. When the role of trauma in students' lives is understood, classroom practices can respond with flexibility to the students' learning needs, teach self-determination, and promote resiliency (Condly, 2006). Recognizing cultural distance between the

student and the teacher can help teachers move to strategies such as project-based learning that engage students in culturally grounded, real-life problem solving and learning (Cross et al., 2012).

Family

Evidence of "othering" (Pollack, 2013) was clear as a predominantly White, middle-class teaching faculty held ideas about the identity and lives of students and their families that made them seem vastly different and apart from the school personnel's world. While respondents expressed sincere compassion for students who live with poverty, their attitudes toward their parents were judgmental and they seldom partnered with diverse family or community members to address school problems. School personnel's lack of understanding about the socio-political, economic, and historical factors that have resulted in entrenched urban poverty (Anyon, 2014) may also contribute to the tendency to blame parents for their circumstance. Participants in this study frequently reported that parents of their students with economic disadvantage did not value education. It is possible that these assumptions are misinterpretations of observed behaviors and interactions with parents. School personnel may understand that some parents are unable to attend conferences or other school functions because of work obligations or transportation issues. It may be more difficult to understand why phone calls are not returned or homework is not completed, and this may be interpreted as a lack of interest in their child's education. Parents from low-income communities are often painfully aware that school personnel think that they do not care about their children and their children's education (Blitz, Kida, Gresham, & Bronstein, 2013). Strained relationships between school faculty and parents can cause distrust, frustration, and anger, furthering the divide.

The Sanctuary domain of family encourages engagement with families that can bridge this divide and build solidarity that supports education and builds alliances to oppose structural inequity. Furthermore, understanding the tendency to look at troubled children and families as "others" who bring problems can also be understood as a manifestation of secondary trauma, where adults exposed to the students' trauma begin to take on the stress as their own (Alisic, 2012). Without clear methods of understanding and responding to complex problems, the impulse is often to reject those who seem to represent the problem. Integrating Sanctuary through the lens of race and culture can provide structured ways to understand and respond to complex family situations and the secondary trauma that may be triggered.

Limitations

The study has limitations that are important to consider. The instrument was locally developed with school personnel and community partners and could contain inherent bias and assumptions not validated by previous research. Procedural bias may also exist as the online survey may have discouraged participants not comfortable with the online format. Selection bias is a particular consideration for the unstructured interviews because only about a third of the school personnel participated in the unstructured interviews. This group of school personnel may have had different views or experiences than those who did not participate. Additional bias is possible because analysis was conducted collectively with school and community partners. These partners have unique insight into the school climate which can both provide nuanced understanding of issues and potentially create biased interpretation of findings. The study only included the perspectives of school personnel. A more complete assessment of school climate would include the perspectives of students and family members.

Implications and Conclusion

This study offers important insights on the application of the Sanctuary Model as a culturally responsive trauma-informed approach to enhancing school climate. Students of color and students with economic disadvantages continue to experience disenfranchisement and attend schools that fall short of understanding their racial and social reality. Strategies are needed that recognize and respond to students' individual and collective experience, support the most vulnerable, and enhance educational opportunities. Trauma-informed approaches emphasize strengths-based and systems-focused interventions (Blitz et al., 2013) that can challenge stereotyping and deficit thinking while directing supportive responses that teach prosocial behavior and build resiliency. Sanctuary offers a viable approach that focuses on school climate and culture and informs pedagogy.

Aspects of the organizational commitments of Sanctuary may already be established in schools through existing school climate and bully prevention initiatives and discipline practices. In these cases, Sanctuary should be seen as informing the existing initiatives rather than being used as a competing approach. Strong, well-informed school leaders are needed to guide the process of integrating Sanctuary to ensure that issues of race, culture, and social justice are deeply incorporated into all aspects of school culture. Professional development for school personnel is needed to promote deeper understanding of the role of trauma and structural inequities to help school personnel effectively utilize school discipline processes that include students in a healing- and justice-centered way, rather than punishing and excluding them.

Helping educators to gain color-conscious perspectives offers a way to learn about the racial reality of people of color and understand the influence of overt and covert forms of racism in the routine experiences of students of color and their families (Ullucci & Battey, 2011). Therefore, professional development that focuses on historical and structural oppression in the context of historical and intergenerational trauma (Brave Heart, Chase, Elkins, & Altshul, 2011) is crucial to prepare the foundation for culturally responsive trauma-informed pedagogy. Grounding culturally responsive practices in a trauma-informed approach can create a climate that actively promotes growth and resiliency for all members of the school community.

The operationalization of the Teaching Tolerance principles developed for this study can be a guide for understanding aspects of school climate and culture. The survey tool thus becomes a guide for action, highlighting specific areas and behaviors that can direct professional development and be used as benchmarks for progress. Creating professional learning community workgroups that are intentionally composed of people at varying stages of readiness for change can help develop motivation and illuminate potential sources of resistance. Through this process, heightened racial awareness and responsiveness to the impact of trauma and toxic stress within schools can contribute to more meaningful opportunities for all students. Furthermore, expanded dialogue on the impact of structural racism and the structural components of poverty can breakdown stereotypes and promote engagement in social justice actions that can lead to meaningful systemic change.

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