Chapter 1–Creating Havens of Healing, Health & Well-Being
The Urgency of Now

Pain The trauma, stress and crises in life can be overwhelming for students and for teachers, and dramatically impede learning, outcomes and futures
Hook Whether wounded emotionally, physically, or psychologically, children can be helped by schools
Strategy School leaders and educators can become the catalyst for creating a school family - a place of safe haven

Caring - The 30,000 Foot View

> *I feel the capacity to care is the thing which gives life its deepest significance.*
>
> *– Pablo Casals*

Based on his research into the factors that have the largest effect and the most impact on positive learning outcomes, John Hattie (2012) indicates that teachers need to be "directive, influential, caring, and actively and passionately engaged in the process of teaching and learning." (p. 19). Caring, what does it mean to care? How do teachers demonstrate their caring?

It is our premise that a paradigm shift is critical. Educators will only optimize the learning success of children when we shift from a focus on academics and learning in academic environments to a more balanced understanding of the children in our classrooms. The children we are teaching will only thrive and flourish when we meet children where they are, when we teach with a full realization of how to mindfully instruct in a way that pulls each child into the excitement of learning. It isn't so much about teaching academics as it is about teaching children. We consider this book as a primer, providing the basics for this paradigm shift.

While many students are raised in environments with love, kindness, and caring, far too many come from homes with abuse. A significant number of children in America live in a culture of violence, bullying and trauma. By as early as age four, over one-quarter of America's children have experienced trauma that impacts their lives and their learning (Costello, Erkanli, Fairbank & Angold, 2002). The epidemic of violence on streets and on campuses, (McDaniel, Logan, & Schneiderman, 2014; Schoen & Schoen, 2010), whether these incidents occur on college or elementary/secondary school campuses, and the pervasiveness of school and cyberbullying, furthers the urgency to find creative solutions to violence and stress that go beyond academic

reforms (Adelman & Taylor, 2014; Sugai, Horner, & Gresham, 2002).

Are We Doing Enough?

When considering the short and long-term effects that a host of intolerable stressors associated with trauma and other life conditions such as poverty can have on a student's potential, performance and future, we are forced to ask ourselves: *Are we doing enough*?

The increasing needs and challenges that children and families must face on a daily basis have become far too overwhelming due to the intolerable stressors associated with trauma. Overwhelming, both for students, who are required to focus and concentrate throughout the school day, and also for teachers, who are responsible for teaching and imparting wisdom and knowledge to the young. As teachers where do we even begin?

The magnitude of trauma and challenges that play into the learning equation each and every day throughout classrooms and schools across America is often daunting.

The stark reality of our times causes us to pause and reflect, considering the children who come to school hungry. Children who *arrive at school uncertain about their next meal.* Children who leave school each day wondering *if they will have a safe place to lie their head for the night.* Children *whose safety is their primary concern.* Where do academics fit in this equation?

One Size Does Not Fit All

No longer is it adequate to approach education solely from an academic standpoint. The complexity, complications and conditions of many children's lives require a much more holistic, all-encompassing approach. If we are to succeed at achieving the intended gains in all areas of a child's life then a whole child approach—one that addresses a child's academic, social- emotional and physiological needs all at once-- is critical. This solution begins with us, in our classrooms, and in our school communities if we are to change the trajectory of the lives we serve.

If we are to succeed at preparing students for college, career and most importantly, life, our approach to education can no longer be one size fits all or we risk losing too many children, marginalizing their potential and compromising their future.

"Be the change you want to see in the world.
- Mahatma Gandhi

Catalysts of Protection and Healing

The reasons for writing this book are many, but no more important than our unwavering belief

that each and every school leader and teacher has a unique opportunity to help children to heal. We believe that healing can be delivered as a significantly integral part of children's school experience and day. And, with healing, comes the opportunity for children to grow, to develop and thrive as positive, contributing adults in our communities and world.

Anchors of Support

As educators, we have the ability to not only attend to children's basic needs, but also the capacity to mediate their overall desperations and ensure healthy growth and well-being. More importantly, we have the power to help circumvent the displacement, hurt, loss and violence that threaten children's normal development when we learn to be *more aware* ourselves and *in-tune* to a child's circumstance on any given day.

Schools can provide safe, secure and nurturing learning environments; foster positive, caring, and long-lasting relationships, and build strong, responsive and supporting networks and resources that value student voice, build self-confidence, celebrate cultural relevance, and provide a safe haven from the intolerable challenges of life.

Educators can become anchors of strong supports. Whether wounded emotionally, physically, or psychologically, **children can be helped at schools.** And, we believe this can be done without compromising a strong focus on academic achievement and preparation for college and careers. In fact, there is evidence that with some consideration of children's emotional and psychological needs, teachers may even be able to reduce the impact of stress and actually accelerate learning simultaneously.

Why Healing?

Good Health and Healing. Healing is the "process of making whole (or sound) again" (Oxford Dictionary) and as such implies damage, action and progress. Certainly for the students who have experienced trauma, there has been damage. Additionally, other words we sometimes use in education such as "nurturing" or "fostering," while implying action, provide no indication of possible damage, or the impact or result of the effort. We are intentional in our use of the word "healing"- we use it because it implies action and impact. With healing we do not stop at nurturing or fostering, but rather stimulate healing through our actions, our words, and our caring. With healing we see a path to progress and restoration. Many children come to school "broken" in the sense that they need to regain a sense of self- esteem. An important part of what teachers do goes far beyond the academics. The human connection is critical. A kind word, a caring presence, is easily delivered in schools where children spend so many hours each year.

As *caregivers outside the home,* teachers have a unique opportunity to help children heal everyday through classroom routines, activities and experiences.

By focusing on healing instead of trauma, calm instead of agitation, pleasure instead of pain and love instead of hate, we capitalize on our potential as human beings to strive in achieving positive emotional health and wellbeing.

Teachers as Mediators: The Heart of the Solution

Teachers can be at the heart of the solution, serving as the catalyst of protection and as healing agents for those children affected by trauma, violence and crisis. We see teachers as agents of mediation. The word *mediate* is derived from the word *middle*. Mediation is a process through which the teacher provides support and experiences to assist students in moving from coping with stress to thriving and flourishing.

> *When you change the way that we look at things, the things you look at change.*
> *-Wayne Dyer-*

For some students, an agent of mediation is someone listening to their fears and concerns; for others it is someone helping them problem solve or learn new ways to handle situations and conflicts. In this book you learn how to naturally embed vital mediation into your classroom so that it becomes part of common practice and daily routine. You will see evidence of healing already happening in classrooms and how true cultures of health and well-being can transcend the walls of the classroom and permeate throughout the school building to the playgrounds, bus rides and beyond. And finally, we will provide information regarding why more healing is both required and possible.

Where Do We Begin to Understand the Complexity of a Child's World?

Understanding the complexity of a child's world and circumstances should cause us to *pause, examine and be reflective regarding the course of action we choose.* After all, the circumstances of today's child often require schools to offer a *whole* lot more than previous generations. While there are endless opportunities for children today, there are also more distractions, dangers and stressors that riddle their young lives.

> *We must do more and provide more if we are to make true and meaningful gains in the lives of our students.*

> **Further…the epidemic of violence on streets and on campuses, (McDaniel, Logan, & Schneiderman, 2014; Schoen & Schoen, 2010), whether these incidents occur on college or elementary/secondary school campuses, and the pervasiveness of school and cyberbullying, furthers the urgency to find creative solutions to violence and stress that go beyond academic reforms (Adelman & Taylor, 2014; Sugai, Horner, & Gresham, 2002).**

Whether it is domestic violence, divorce, or a death or long-term illness of a loved one, many children live in a culture of violence, bullying and trauma, (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014).

Understanding the stressors associated with today's young children and families is the beginning of our quest to understand the complexity of the world in which our children find themselves. Addressing this complexity requires the collective collaboration of a *whole village approach* to meet the reality of where our children in order to achieve the outcomes for productive, healthy lives they deserve.

Considering the Reality of the Children We Serve

While many students are raised in environments with love, kindness, and caring, increasingly more children are living in homes that perpetuate fear or insecurity, and far too many come from homes with abuse or with crisis. A significant number of children of all ethnicities live in a culture of violence, bullying and trauma as well as abject poverty and a myriad of stressors attached to their living circumstances.

The gap between potential and performance that is being demonstrated on achievement tests for students living in the most and least affluent homes has widened by 40% since the 1960s (Reardon, 2011), leading to greater disparities in terms of not only demonstrated educational achievement but also post-school opportunities.

Trauma. By as early as age four, over one-quarter of America's children have experienced trauma that impacts their lives and their learning (Costello, Erkanli, Fairbank & Angold, 2002).

Poverty. Approximately 21% of children in the US ages 5 to 17 years old are from families living in poverty and an alarming 51% of students on average are now living in low-income homes (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). (See figure 1.1). Further, 63% of students whose parents immigrated to America live in low-income homes.

PERCENT OF LOW INCOME STUDENTS IN U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOLS 2013

National Average: 51%
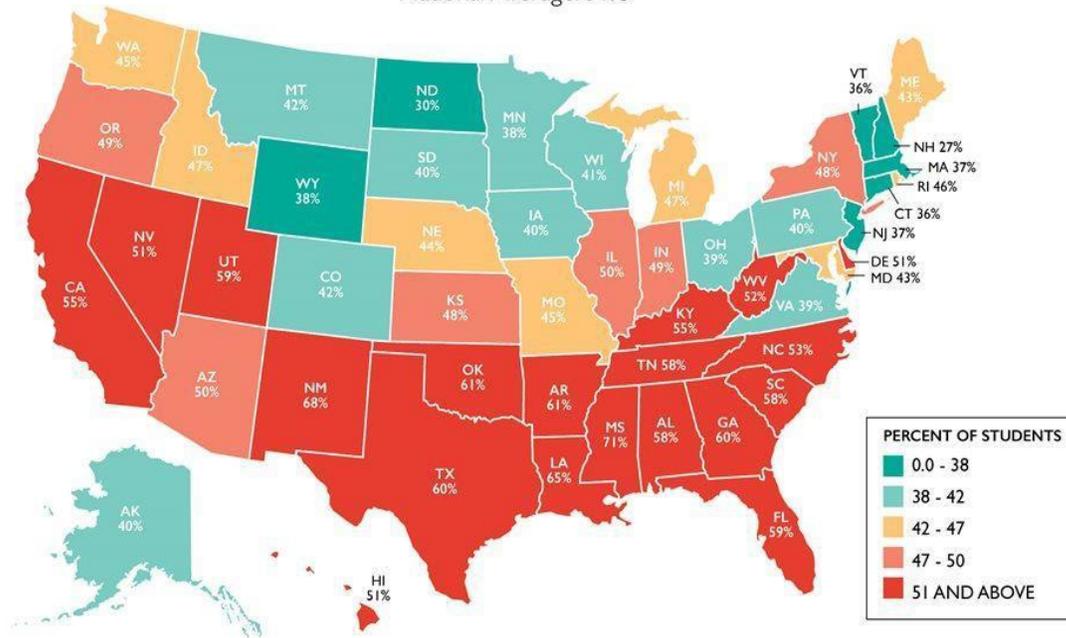
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Data Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data

Fig. 1.1 Families living in poverty in the US.

Numbers only Tell Part of the Story. These numbers represent individuals with different histories, interests, and capabilities. Some students come from large families with a traditional mother and father. In other cases, students are raised by same-sex parents. In far too many instances, students are raised in single parent homes, or by extended families. Or, students are raised by a series of foster parents or are wards of the court. While some students are raised in families where one or both parents work, others come from families where parents have experienced difficulties finding or keeping jobs.

Environmental Access and Supports. For some students, environmental access and supports have situated them so that academic learning comes easily. Other students, struggle. Some excel in math and others in English/Language Arts, science, art, history, music, or PE. Some are taught by excellent teachers, others, and particularly, students in urban areas, may unfortunately suffer with some of the least-prepared teachers. Even under these conditions, some students overcome incredible odds to graduate, go to college, and get top-notch jobs. Others seem to be in limbo, almost like fish out of water, as they try to find their way in the world.

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Who Schools Serve

To reach students it helps to begin with understanding something about them. Approximately 98,500 public schools in America are currently serving over 50.1 million students. America is a land of great diversity. The percentage of Caucasian students is declining. In 2012, 51% were Caucasian and 16% were Black. In 2012, the percentage of Hispanic students was 24% and is projected to increase to 29% by 2024. In 2012, there were 2.6 million Asian/Pacific Islander students, .5 million American Indian/Alaska Native students, and 1.5 million students are of two or more races. About 20% of these students have immigrated from other countries; 78% speak a language other than English at home (Camarota, 2012).

Varied Abilities and Needs. The interests, skills, abilities and needs of students also vary widely. Despite the excellence in America, some basic data suggest that students have undeveloped or underdeveloped potential. We believe that significant contributing factors to this undeveloped or underdeveloped potential are lack of adequate nutrition, threats to the emotional and psychological well-being of children (including racism and low expectations), and an instructional paradigm that has disregarded the strengths and needs of the individual child*.*

Some Children are at Heightened Risk for Academic Failure. Some students are raised in conditions outside and inside school that are favorable for learning and other students face innumerable challenges that heighten the risk for academic failure. Eric Jensen (2015) in a recent article for ASCD described some of the most prevalent conditions associated with poverty that impact academic risks are listed in **Figure 1.2**.

Just as some physical environments with rich soil and irrigation better support growing crops and other environments support grazing, children arrive in school with an array of experiences, some nurturing and others contributing to feelings of unworthiness, mistrust, and low self-esteem. Children living in poverty, lacking mediated enriching experiences that cultivate interest and attention, are more likely to display short attention spans, have difficulty monitoring the quality of the work, and struggle with problem solving.

Negative Effects on Learning: Each of the previously mentioned factors negatively affects attendance, attention, behavior, energy, reasoning, learning, memory, and cognition.

Figure 1.2

Jensen (2015) provides substantial research concluding that children in poverty:
- Enter school with a less developed vocabulary, resulting in barriers to learning.
- Are less likely to exercise, get proper diagnoses, receive appropriate and prompt medical attention, or be prescribed appropriate medications or interventions.
- Have a higher likelihood of ear infections resulting in hearing problems, undiagnosed vision problems, greater exposure to lead, higher exposure to asthma, and greater problems with their immune systems.
- Are less likely to have breakfast and more likely to eat less nutritious food.
- Are more likely to experience acute and chronic stress, often related to their parents' stress, poverty, and living conditions.

Do the Math: The Promise Mediation Holds

Let's consider a simple equation: How many hours do children spend in classrooms between the ages of 5 and 18?

Assuming 9 months of schooling, with perhaps the equivalent of a month of vacation,
Classes from 8:30-3:30, with an hour off for lunch and recesses
this amounts to:

> 5 days a week,
> 4 weeks a month,
> 6 hours a day for 8 months
> or

6 hours a day x 5 days x 4 weeks x 8 months = **960 hours a year** x 13 years or **12, 480 hours**.

This does not include years in preschool or time in summer sessions… a staggering amount of time. Where else, other than at home, do children spend as much time?

Our School Family, A Place of Safe Haven

With this amount of time, a precious gift, we have such an opportunity. When children are in crisis, when their egos are shattered, and their sense of self-worth is minimal, the most hazardous measure is to ignore the pain. Despite research showing the importance of a caring adult, too often children's anguish is ignored. To begin the process of healing, we must provide children more time for mediation from a caring adult - some time to pursue something where they excel and some guidance to help them understand their pains, develop self-compassion, and empower them to heal from within (Cole et al.,2005; Ritchhart & Perkins, 2000; Semple, Reid, & Miller, 2005; Singer & Bolz, in press).   When we spend more time helping

children through their crises, we find that as their brains are functioning more optimally their academic achievement comes more easily.

When we mediate the learning environment for our children and create a safe, supporting and nurturing school climate with rich learning experiences, our students leave behind the daily stressors of life, and if only for a few hours of the day, are transported to a safe haven, a place of calm, anchored with a boatload of tools to help them chart their course and get ready to sail the seas of life.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary and Secondary Education," 2002–03 and 2012–13; and National Elementary and Secondary Enrollment Projection Model, 1972 through 2024. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2014*, table 203.50