Testing and Explaining a Social Emotional Learning Program and the Intersection of Trauma in Urban, Low-Income Students: A Mixed Methods Study

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Johanna has been working with the non-profit Wediko Children’s Services since 2000, from direct care counselor to Senior Clinical Supervisor, including ten summers in the Wediko Summer Residential Program. Since 2007, Johanna has worked in the New York City public schools with different non-profits in the role of Director, most recently co-founding the Wediko New York School Based branch providing social and emotional services in 20 different schools. Further, Johanna has maintained an evening individual and family therapy private practice and teaches two Master’s level social work classes online in family therapy and trauma at University of Nebraska Omaha. Beyond her clinical background, she has experience in program evaluation, program development, staff training, grant writing, and financial management. She holds an M.S. from Columbia University in Social Work and a B.S. in Neuroscience from Colorado College. Currently, she is ABD towards a Ph.D. in Clinical Social Work at Smith College and will be teaching the first fully-online UT Austin Social Work class in Financial Management for Non-profits in the fall of 2015.

John W. Creswell, Ph.D., has recently accepted an academic appointment in the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Michigan. He is a widely published author and leader in mixed methods. He is currently the Past-President of MMIRA, is a founding co-editor of the Journal of Mixed Methods Research, has been a Senior Fulbright Scholar to South Africa and Thailand, and has been on the faculty of the University of Nebraska and served as a Visiting Professor at Harvard’s School of Public Health. His most recent book, A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research (2014) is available from SAGE Publications.

Abstract

This investigation evaluates the impact of a social and emotional learning (SEL) and trauma program for middle-school students in one urban, low-income school in New York City (NYC). The program was provided by the non-profit, Wediko Children’s Services New York, a school-based program for assisting low-income students and schools in the NYC area. SEL programs have been found to be highly effective in teaching social and emotional skills to students, reducing problem behaviors, and promoting mental health (Payton, 2000; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011). However, SEL school
programming has yet to take into consideration the direct link between trauma, SEL skill-building, and consequences at school (NYS-TEACHS, 2012). This research illuminates the first-hand experience of urban, low-income youth in school-based programming, via their voices, in one of the most impoverished Congressional districts in the United States. An advanced mixed methods intervention explanatory-sequential design was used (Creswell, 2014): a quasi-experimental design (pre-test, post-test survey) with a qualitative follow up (individual interviews) to help explain student outcomes. Student-based results showed significant increases in the social skills, decreases in problem behaviors, and the moderating effects of trauma on social skills and problem behaviors. While the follow-up interviews lead to students identifying the following themes: how SEL supports their lives, the benefits of Wediko’s program, and how the school supports success. Student-centered outcomes will lead to improved programming for urban, low-income youth and better trauma counseling. Innovative mixed methods implications for the study are in the visual model for the intervention design, the joint display arraying the quantitative and qualitative data of integration, and in the challenges collecting data with urban, low-income youth.

No handouts were provided for this presentation:

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