

Chapter 8

Integrating Family History Into the Post–Pandemic Elementary Learning Space: Reducing Childhood Trauma

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted existing inequities as a result of zero tolerance and exclusionary policies that disproportionately impacted the world's learners living in poverty, people of color, and those experiencing special challenges. Under the existing educational system, marginalized students often feel devalued and without a voice. Integrating family history and genealogy into the elementary school learning space provides a methodology and framework that focuses on the historical conditions that promote healthy dialogues and sustain discourses connecting to other historical events. The process of creating positive experiences with family history, improving the classroom environment, effectively communicating, rapport and trust building, and strengthened socio-emotional skills reduce childhood trauma. The six recommended strategies include introspection and reflection, navigating parallel time periods, valuing genealogical tools, encouraging an environment of hope, normalizing authenticity, and transforming the learning environment.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-5713-9.ch008

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INTRODUCTION

Although hugely disruptive, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted more than 1.6 billion learners worldwide in more than 190 countries (Chaturvedi et al., 2021). While the disparities predated the pandemic, COVID-19 further exposed and amplified existing inequities in the global education system (Sahlberg, 2020). The inequities including zero tolerance and exclusionary policies were especially disastrous for segments of the world's learners living in poverty, minority populations, and those experiencing special challenges. These inequities in the educational system further marginalize disadvantaged minority youth who are often overrepresented among those most harshly disciplined (Wald & Losen, 2003), exposing them to childhood trauma and the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP). The school-to-prison pipeline has more recently been referred to the school-to-prison nexus (Nunez-Eddy, 2022). Under the existing educational system, marginalized students often feel devalued and without a voice. Integrating family history into the curriculum along with the recommended strategies create a more inclusive learning space that encourages sharing personal histories that reduce childhood trauma by introducing positive experiences, increasing authentic communication, promoting resilience, and building a sense of personal identity and belonging (International Schooling, n.d.).

By integrating family history and storytelling into the elementary school curriculum, it serves as a transformational tool that encourages a deeper understanding of experiences, connectedness, and empathy. While some studies have sought to make students uncomfortable intentionally to undertake authentic discourses with older students (Case & Ngo, 2017), the focus with elementary students is sharing common histories and normalizing family experiences. Additionally, the strategies encourage the development of trauma-informed responses from elementary educators by creating safe, secure learning spaces, promoting self-awareness, and trusting relationships that reduce trauma and mitigate exposure to the school-to-prison nexus.

CHILDHOOD TRAUMA AND THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON NEXUS

The Center for Disease Control and Kaiser Permanente (1995) conducted one of the largest studies involving childhood abuse, neglect, and household challenges that negatively impacted the well-being of children with generational consequences. Plaguing the educational system is its response to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) which are traumatic events that occur prior to age seventeen (Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 1995). Childhood trauma, whether physical, sexual or emotional, has consequences that may create lifelong challenges (Stavrianos et al., 2011; Maniglio, 2009). The effects of trauma increase the risk for violent

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and aggressive behavior and criminality in adulthood creating a nexus between childhood trauma and the criminal justice system (Kalmuss, 1984; Straus et al., 1980; Widom, 1989). ACEs have both personal and environmental factors. Personal ACEs may include violence, abuse, neglect, witnessed violence, or exposure to suicide. Environmental factors that may contribute to childhood trauma by undermining feelings of safety, stability and bonding. While none originated with the pandemic, ACEs were accentuated with the disruption of educational system and social stability.

The racial disparities within the educational and judicial systems are so similar that it becomes impossible not to recognize the linkage between the two (Wald & Losen, 2003). Among those incarcerated, rates of childhood and adult trauma are high (Wolff & Shi, 2012), creating a portal between the STPP and mass incarceration. Terms such as prison track, school-to-prison nexus have been used to describe the trend toward mass incarceration (Wald & Losen, 2003). In addition, childhood trauma is associated with the risk for emotional disorders (e.g., depression and anxiety) and co-morbid conditions such as substance abuse and antisocial behaviors in adulthood (Wolff & Shi, 2012). Subsequently, reducing trauma enhances the health of young people within the educational system by lowering the risk to associated conditions.

The school-to-prison nexus is the result of disproportionate discipline and exclusionary policies that ultimately circumvent students, especially Black and Brown students, out of school systems and ushers them into the criminal justice system (Basford et al., 2020). Generations of exposure to these disciplinary and exclusionary policies may result in students being relegated to a permanent underclass without the ability to access the necessary tools to break free of its constraints (Alexander, 2010). The difference between being able to overcome and succumb to childhood trauma is simply having a trusting relationship with someone who believes in, values and respects the child (CDC, 1995). The system must be reshaped to encourage development of individuals with trusting relationships inclusive of all students – even those who seem to struggle the most with behavioral difficulties as a result of traumatic events. By reducing the negative effects of disruptive behavior, reducing delinquency, and managing emotions, the exposure to the student-to-prison nexus is mitigated (Wald & Losen, 2003).

Mitigating childhood trauma begins with building a school culture that values the realities of racially diverse youth, promotes transparent practices, and integrates families and community members into the governance and decision making (Henderson et al, 2019). By encouraging youth to value their own uniqueness by sharing their family history, they become aware of their families' place and contribution to history. When schools integrate the lived experiences and cultural realities of youth and promote a high degree of educational excellence, young people are likely to demonstrate academic performance and sense of belonging (Borreno et al., 2016; Dobbie & Fryer, 2011).

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In learning spaces, students who have experienced trauma may elicit a multitude of responses. For example, responses to trauma may include anger, aggression towards others, and self-destructive and suicidal behaviors (Brodsky et al., 2001; Dube et al., 2001; van der Kolk et al., 1996). Educators that understand these responses and are equipped to respond to the behavior may alter the trajectory of their student's outcomes. Mental disorders associated with childhood trauma include depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, dissociative disorders and psychosis (Chapman et al., 2004; Stein et al., 1988; Springer et al., 2007). Childhood abuse also has been found to significantly predict adult arrests for alcohol and/or drug related offenses (Ireland & Widom, 1994). Those exposed to the school to prison nexus carry trauma into adulthood.

For many people, family history and genealogy are the same thing. However, Durie (2017) offers a useful distinction that critical family history builds on. According to Durie, "Genealogy is the retrieval of vital and familial data from records of various types, and its ordering into meaningful relationship patterns" (p. 2). Family history "takes the basic data of genealogical investigations, and includes the surrounding historical, economic, social, political, and other contexts to build a connected narrative" (p. 2). For the purpose of this chapter, genealogy may be thought of as a subset or part of family history.

After 22 years of working with underrepresented populations in the federal probation system, the author became concerned with the plight of the educational system and its connection to mass incarceration especially following the pandemic. This led to research involving the question of how family history could be used as a pedagogical tool to increase student engagement, encourage empathy, reduce trauma and mitigate exposure to the school-to-prison nexus. Introduction at the elementary grade level was pursued to normalize authenticity of shared narratives and common histories, not an attempt to make students intentionally uncomfortable.

INTEGRATED FAMILY HISTORY

Genealogy and family history provide critical methodology which focuses on the historical conditions that produce dialogue, how individuals have been shaped in a given time and space, as well as the mechanisms of power that produce and sustain such dialogues (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008, p. 91). Researchers with diverse global perspectives recognize the power and influence of critical family history as a pedagogical tool of transformation that includes deeper introspection gleaned from one's family history (Mokuria et al., 2020). Transformational power lies in the ability to understand each person's unique experiences and integrate them into the curriculum to connect and engage on a deeper level. With greater understanding

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and knowledge of responses related to trauma, educators may be more impactful in recognizing and circumventing student behavior away from the school-to-prison nexus. Through deeper introspection, learning becomes more meaningful and engaging (Gay, 2000, 2002). These opportunities for positive experiences, rapport building and effective communication reduce the effects of childhood trauma (International Schooling, n.d.).

Mitigating race-related trauma begins by building a school culture that values the cultural reality and authenticity of racially diverse youth, advocates transparent practices, and integrates family and community members into shaping the learning experience and decision making (Henderson et al., 2019). Teachers learn motivate their students to reach for success using best classroom practices for elementary school students based on child development and how their brain learns (Education Staffing Space [ESS], n.d.). Family history in the elementary learning spaces is a starting place to begin integrating a personal family connection and providing positive sharing in the broader learning process. Research suggests schools that increase opportunities for teachers and students to communicate with each other in restorative circles and learn from these shared experiences report a reduction in discipline referrals (Fronius et al., 2017; Anfara et al., 2015), which restricts exposure to the STPP.

There is no one size fits all approach to integrating family history into a learning space to gain its benefits. An important point is to start with the teacher, educators, and school staff in valuing family history because they cannot pass on to their students what they do not understand or value. This is why it is so important teachers remain open-minded and willing to learn from the lives of their students (ESS, n.d.). For Sleeter (2015), a central idea of critical family histories for researchers is to locate their own families within the class structure, asking how family members came to be located where they were, analyzing their place in the larger world economy and examining their interest in it. Recognizing that all have a history creates a deeper connection to the greater historical tapestry.

A focus on training school personnel to identify responses to trauma may promote healthier learning spaces among racially diverse populations where educators may be positioned to serve as advocates in changing the school's culture (Henderson, 2019). Healthier learning spaces promote more engaged students. For example, coordinating best practices in elementary learning spaces such as multisensory learning through multiple modalities including visual, auditory, reading, writing or and kinesthetic activities increases learning effectiveness (ESS, n.d.). Trauma-informed practices that seek to eliminate inequities by promoting discipline and exclusionary policies that lessen immediate harm from disciplinary referrals and connect youth to resources and caring adults (CDC, 2021).

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The path of family history exploration revealed common traumatic threads with connections to significant historical events that provided a deeper understanding and connectedness, leading to greater empathy and resilience. Resilience and skills were strengthened by seeking to understand family history and the trauma experienced. The knowledge and skills gained were transferable to other aspects of life, reducing anxiety, increasing self-awareness, and producing a greater sense of well-being. The three narratives referenced serve as exemplars that were found to contain common historical threads that guide the six strategies developed for integrating family history into the elementary curriculum.

Personal Tragedy Narrative

Research using newspaper inquiries unearthed a little-known tragedy that had not been passed down from the author's previous generations. A *Muskogee Times-Democrat* (1913) newspaper article indicated that ten-year-old William "Billy" Markham, the author's great uncle, was shot and killed on October 24, 1912, by an intoxicated neighbor. Like many other families, previous generations may have sought to protect later generations by not sharing the traumatic experiences of the past (Mokuria et al., 2020). The directly impacted generation carried the burden and trauma of the child's death while shielding future family members.

This tragic event occurred five years after Indian Territory became the state of Oklahoma in 1907. During that time, the newly established state struggled to maintain law and order. Studying parallel time periods lends context to the time period examined and assisted with gaining a deeper understanding of events through a personalized connection with family ties. Teachers should have knowledge about cultures that are represented in their classrooms to be able to adjust their teaching accordingly (Rychly & Graves, 2012). Transcripts from the *Alberty v. State* (1914) case indicated that the Markham family, including the child's mother and four siblings, testified during the trial. This was fairly unusual because, during that time, African Americans were not always allowed to testify in a court of law. Former enslaved people were often relegated to a position of property or less than full citizens. Students gain confidence through collaboration and a deeper connection with their peers (ESS, n.d.). Studies find that many people seek a sense of belonging to place and community, reporting that knowledge of the family's history deepens their sense of personal identity (Bottero, 2015; Kramer, 2011).

Although not atypical, the story of William "Billy" Markham had been hidden or lost to succeeding generations. Many families believed they were protecting their children by hiding secrets from them, and oftentimes those secrets remained hidden (Mokuria et al., 2020). In this case, a child's tragic death may have contributed to the author's family's response to sheltering their children by failing to talk about

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events that create great sadness and grief. Direct and indirect family members were exposed to the emotional and physical effects of this violent event. The author gained insight into who, where, and how the family beliefs came about and their responses to them. This journey reduced the trauma experienced with more recent events because of the resilience exhibited by the previous generation's response to trauma.

Historical trauma may cause parents without the skills to effectively guide their children to rise and overcome the situation as a survival mechanism (Moore, 2022). However, trauma experienced by earlier generations can influence the structure of genes in later generations, making them more likely to "switch on" negative responses to stress and trauma (Pember, 2016). Much research is being done on epigenetics and its impact on later generations, but much more is needed. By understanding where and how trauma presents in later generations, it clarified and reduced the risk of additional trauma in the author's family. Teachers equipped to respond with trauma-informed practices to disruptive behavior in response to traumatic events reduces disciplinary actions and their students' exposure to the school-to-prison nexus.

The science of epigenetics proposes that more is passed along with DNA in our genes, suggesting that genes carry memories of trauma experienced by our ancestors and can influence how individuals react to trauma and stress (Pember, 2016). For the Markham family, the trauma experienced with this critical incident may have predisposed later generations to negative responses to stress and trauma. Similar to the Markham family, the COVID-19 pandemic left students, parents, and educators ill-equipped to respond in its aftermath. Understanding previous generations has helped the author become more self-aware of responses to tragedy and grief. This phenomenon is not a new concept to some cultures. Folks in Indian Country wonder what took science so long to catch up with the traditional Native knowledge of intergenerational trauma being passed to later generations (Pember, 2016).

Tulsa Race Riot Narrative

The Tulsa Race Riot, which occurred in 1921 (Tulsa City-County Library, 2022), engages and resonates differently when known ancestors were directly involved and impacted. The race riot reportedly began with an incident involving a White elevator operator named Sarah Page and an African American man named Dick Roland (Tulsa City-County Library, 2022). There are differences of opinions about what actually happened between the two, but in the end, many lives were lost, businesses burned, and the Tulsa community was changed forever.

Prior to embarking on genealogy research, the author's family had never discussed this tragic event in relation to their family connections. Little had been written about this tragedy in Oklahoma history books available in school. However, family research revealed connections to the event that were previously unknown. Genealogy sites

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were used, including *ancestry*, *my heritage*, *family search*, *national archives*, and *Library of Congress*, among others. Historical databases proved invaluable to the research process. Research indicated that several of the author's family members were living in and around Tulsa in 1921 and survived the tragedy by sheltering with other families in the surrounding community. While the history was not shared with later generations, historical trauma can give rise to insecure parenting in later generations (Moore, 2022). This may have impacted an ancestor's propensity to parent in fear of repercussions when speaking out about injustices. This knowledge of the event brought about deeper understanding because family members were directly impacted as the result of the tragedy and personal accounts of their stories and their survival now persist and provide examples of resilience.

With the pandemic's negative impact on the educational system, new opportunities were presented to explore whether family genealogy could benefit the post-pandemic learning environment. Research indicated that teachers may build their knowledge base by learning about various elements of students' culture ranging from tangible culture or family experiences, artefacts, and events to intangible culture such as values, traditions, language, and identity through their own research and meaningful relationships with their students (Morrison et al., 2008). Integrating family history into the elementary curriculum is not an attempt to circumvent the teacher's own research on their students' culture, but an opportunity to learn first-hand about history from the students' perspective. There are also a multitude of ways that students' may share their history including reports, presentations, paintings, sculpture and other multisensory activities.

In order to circumvent the school-to-prison nexus, greater opportunities are needed to reengage students with activities that generate discussion supplemented by strategies and practices that reduce trauma. For example, allowing students to present their families' history encourages confidence, authenticity and healthier relationships with peers and teachers. With a wealth of information available on the newest technology, children may possess different skills than their parents did while preparing them for their future (ESS, n.d.). By appealing to their curiosity and giving them the proper tools and support, teachers are empowering their students to be engaged and self-directed learners (ESS, n.d.).

Integrated family events have been linked, blending the past and present and transforming the future with a personal historical connection. This more personalized approach to integrating historical events has multiple benefits, including shared understanding, integration of personal history into larger historical events, increased engagement, and a more global connection to a broader community (Mokuria et al., 2020). Students accompanied by their parents or guardians sharing their family stories may be critical in changing how students view history, critical thinking,

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and narratives in their learning spaces. As a result, students and teachers become curriculum drivers for the changing needs of their students.

Slavery Narrative

History books often minimize the contributions made by enslaved people to the United States and romanticize historical figures (Sandler, 2017). By introducing family history in elementary school, the conversations about unique family histories and their contributions are normalized preparing them for deeper future dialogues as they mature. Time and again, dialogues involving genealogy returned to some fascinating new piece of family history uncovered and how the knowledge of that information served to shift an understanding of the past – particularly around the “peculiar institution” of enslaving people of African descent that has never been fully addressed, acknowledged, dealt with, or squarely faced by most contemporary Americans (Mokuria et al, 2020, p. 3).

The author descends from Cherokee slaves that traveled to Oklahoma as part of the Trail of Tears, the forced relocation of Native Americans from 1830 to 1850 (Pauls, 2021). Little was spoken about the day-to-day living conditions within the institution of slavery among Native Americans. History books made brief mentions of this trek involving the Native American people and less about their slaves. Having a personal connection to the event created greater interest, introspection, and authentic sharing related to this two-level tragedy. First, the Native Americans were forced to relocate, leaving behind most of their belongings. Although slaves were considered property, they were forced to relocate while still in bondage. Second, the injustice experienced by Native Americans was even more oppressive for their slaves, human beings without the capacity to protect themselves or their families. Many Native Americans and their slaves died during the journey (Pauls, 2021).

Transformational learning was gained through the resilience of several surviving ancestors, giving rise to later generations. Parker-Drabble (2022) stressed the therapeutic value gleaned from hearing and discovering ancestral stories. The author found similar results. William Markham, Sr., an emancipated slave of the Cherokee Nation, operated a water ferry across Fort Gibson Lake near Wagoner, Oklahoma. His entrepreneurial endeavor in the wake of such personal tragedies was a testament to perseverance and resilience. He is remembered as one of the heroes among his ancestors. Recognizing the value of understanding an event from multiple perspectives enhances understanding, empathy, and the capacity to explore each person’s humanity. Although not always easy to discuss, authentic sharing that improves effective communication helps with healing trauma (International Schooling, n.d.). Promoting social-norms that protect against violence and adversity

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through public education raises awareness and offers practical strategies to reduce trauma (CDC, 2021).

Family history, technology, and the capacity to learn from previous generations provided a foundation that may be used to further engage students in the educational system promoting a deeper understanding of their families' contributions to our global history. The knowledge gained strengthened the author's connection following emancipation from the manacles of slavery. Scientific developments such as epigenetics offer exciting new insights not only into how our bodies react but also into how we manage to survive it (Pember, 2016). Gene expression and regulation are also important influences on the behaviors of organisms (Dias et al., 2015). Future research may change the way many perceive generational trauma.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING INTEGRATED FAMILY HISTORY

The worldwide community must work together if we are to resolve the issues left in the aftermath of the global pandemic. The challenge is to innovate and implement an enhanced educational system and assessment strategies (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021) that connect and engage students. Genealogy and family history have recently gained popularity and offers opportunities to increase self-identify, gain a broadened historical perspective, and increase effective communication that reduces childhood trauma and provide tools to mitigate exposure to the school-to-prison nexus. Family history provides a vehicle for students to both learn about their personal families' histories, while simultaneously connecting histories with the broader political, historical, criminal justice landscape (Mokuria et al., 2020, p. 5).

Educators that understand themselves, their values and beliefs may assist their students similarly by remaining open-minded to learning more about other's culture and beliefs. Teachers who can take the perspectives of their students are able to better understand their students' different needs and adapt their instruction and curricula to match those needs (Darling-Hammond, 2000; McAllister & Irvine, 2002). If students are to be successful, they will need the joint support of educators, parents, guardians, family and the community to prepare them adequately. It is a joint venture to reshape the existing educational system. Drawing on relationships with professionals, colleagues, and students' families for continued guidance and support further enhance the learning environment (Institute of Education Sciences [IES], 2008). The six recommended strategies combine the efforts and relationships of students, teachers, parents and community advocates in an effort to reduce trauma and mitigate exposure to the school-to-prison nexus.

*Integrating Family History Into the Post-Pandemic Elementary Learning Space***Strategy 1: Introspection and Reflection**

For Sleeter (2015), a central idea for those researching focused on locating their own families within the class structure, identifying how their ancestors came to be located where they were, and assess how they engaged in the nation's economy and their vested interests in it (p. 3). This provided a means to connect from a historical perspective during the time period in which the family member existed and engaged. Integrated family history allows for a personalized connection, reflection, and empathy by listening and connecting with others. These skills are especially important in the post-pandemic learning space where students and educators may feel separated and disconnected. It becomes important to promote opportunities to connect and learn from one another. Diversifying school culture by increasing the number of professionals in the school environment who represent the cultural backgrounds of the students is also important to improving how schools reduce bias (Dobbie & Fryer, 2011).

Research indicates young people who possess a positive racial identity are more likely to perform better in school and possess a high level of assuredness and confidence in their social relationships (Sellers et al., 2006). Each person has a unique history, culture, and story to tell. Introspection and reflection on their personal values and historical background reflect a deeper dive into the past, gleaning greater self-awareness, perspective, and a deeper appreciation for ancestral roots. Comparatively, interactions with institutional and symbolic racism negatively influence how young people see themselves and how society characterizes them (Henderson, 2019). Educators may start the process of introspection and reflection to model these concepts to their students to create a positive experience which reduces childhood trauma (International Schooling, n.d.).

Working with school professionals in addressing their biases to respond to culturally and racially diverse youth is invaluable to potentially improve student-teacher relationships and increase school connectedness (Osher et al., 2012; Anafara et al., 2015). If educators do not value the process, they may be unable to transfer its importance to their students, parents, guardians, or administrators. Integrating family history into the curriculum assists teachers in actively collaborating with one another at a local level to improve teaching methods (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Teachers and school staff introduce students to the processes using specifically designed school assignments that integrate the processes into the curriculum. Not only do students learn about how they fit into the broader history, but they gain perspective and self-confidence and value their uniqueness (Mokuria et al., 2020).

For example, student research into their family's history may culminate in a book, video, or slideshow, which is presented to their classmates (Mokuria et al., 2020). The potential challenge is that the students become vulnerable to the responses of

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their classmates. A learning space where the strengths of each child are celebrated, respected, and heard helps them feel safe in a psychologically supportive environment (Pickens & Tschopp, 2017). A personalized response to education allows each student's needs to be addressed because they have a voice, feel empowered with authentic sharing, and know that they will be supported. Family history allows the student to tell their own story crafted with their unique family and presents their history to classmates. Awareness of ACEs and potential areas of trauma including emotional or emotional abuse helps to create an atmosphere of emotional and physical safety may reduce trauma and positively impact both their personal and academic lives (CDC, 1995).

Strategy 2: Navigate and Integrate Family History Using Parallel Time Periods

Developing knowledge and understanding from parallel times periods allows students to learn about family history, assess decisions made during applicable time frames, review the consequences of actions and gain historical perspective. Approaches aimed at improving school and classroom environments, including reducing the negative effects of disruptive or distracting behaviors, can enhance the chances that effective teaching and learning can occur, both for the student exhibiting disruptive behaviors and their classmates (IES, 2008). The effects of childhood trauma on psychological functionality can be reduced with effective communication that transmits a sense of empathy to the child making them feel more loved and heard (International Schooling, n.d.).

For example, if the targeted time period is between 1907 through 1915 in the United States, historical events involving family members from this period may be coordinated with a broader historical event of interest, such as Tulsa's race riot. Because every student's history and backgrounds are different, some may not be able to access family information in every case. In that situation, students may research newspaper articles and other information from the time period of interest to gain perspective of the time frame from people that lived during the targeted time period. The goal is for students to form personalized ties based on the information and circumstances that they research and relate to their family. They learn to analyze information critically, assess the sources of information, and conduct comparative studies of other information gleaned from the time period. The collective sharing and learning expand perspectives and exposure to different cultures, who may not have the same experiences during the same time period.

Educational professionals play a critical role in helping children heal from trauma by ensuring that they have predictable routines and safe places to learn limiting settings to those that are appropriate for their current level of functioning (Bartlett

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& Smith, 2019). Educators who understand how their student functions and values family history may be able to develop guiding principles in the learning space based on respect, authentic learning, and a bully-free zone. Learning to listen without judgment may assist with receiving new information, broadening understanding of others and empathizing with their experiences. Family history is the bridge between the past and the present that may be interwoven into a fuller historical tapestry.

Strategy 3: Teach the Value of Genealogical Sites

Shaw (2020) observes that “Family history research, identified as one of the top three leisure pursuits in the world, is a multibillion-dollar industry with literally millions of participants around the globe” (p. 109). Learning about technology and genealogical tools expands and enhances the learning process. Educators that have learned to use these tools in their own personal journey are more likely to share them with the students because of their familiarity. By integrating family history into the school curriculum, teachers and students work collaboratively to become curriculum makers. Family history also brings about clarity and an understanding of self, classmates, family, and others using the tools and websites familiar to family historians. If students know, understand, and value their personal histories, their confidence is heightened while broadening the historical perspective and available tools. Making online teaching creative, innovative, and interactive through user-friendly tools is critical to research and development (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021).

Genealogy and family history have become more popular instilling a sense of identity and pride in diverse cultures. Learning to use new technology increases available skillset and helps students connect to the subject matter. After all, learning should be fun reducing anxiety and increasing confidence in using new technology. Research indicates that there is a need to increase the use of culturally responsive practices and representativeness in schools (Borreno et al., 2016). By allowing students and teachers the opportunity to become curriculum drivers, they become more engaged and responsive to the needs of the student and their learning processes.

Using creative, innovative, interactive, and user-friendly tools enhances research and development in family history (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Software provided by companies such as Ancestry, Genealogy, and Family Search, among others, may offer a platform to interpret historical records. No one knows what will happen in the future; however, incorporating new tools prepare the educational system to respond to uncertainties and resources in the future (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Transformation in the educational system occurs when teachers are allowed to integrate assignments that change the landscape of their learning space. Incorporating family stories, heroes, heroines, beliefs, and cultures unique to their families broadens the historical foundation. For example, teachers as curriculum drivers should intentionally

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incorporate family history or storytelling to integrate a personalized approach to assignments to promote critical thinking, authentic sharing, and collaborative learning.

Enhancing skills and technologies that are familiar and relevant assists students with assimilating new information, promoting friendship formation, prosocial interactions, and support for others learning. Strengthening student social-emotional skills reduces or prevents trauma (CDC, 1995) and increases alternative responses to potentially upsetting circumstances. Several recent studies suggest that schools that engage and keep students engaged can serve as powerful deterrents to delinquency (Wald & Losen, 2003). By reducing delinquency and engaging trauma-informed practices, exposure to the school-to-prison nexus is reduced.

Strategy 4: Encourage an Environment of Hope

Students and teachers have an active role in creating an environment of hope, a belief that the future can be brighter and better than the past (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). Integrated family history weaves past and present together to strengthen skills and tools available to navigate the future educational system. Educators too have a role to play in creating a positive environment of hope. Working with school professionals in addressing their biases to respond to culturally and racially diverse youth in valuable ways potentially improve student-teacher relationships and increase school connectedness (Osher et al., 2012; Anafara et al., 2015). Research suggests schools that increase opportunities for teachers and students to communicate with each other in restorative circles and learn from these shared experiences report a reduction in discipline referrals (Fronius et al., 2016; Anafara et al., 2015).

A positive learning climate supports students' academic accomplishments (Sherblom et al., 2006) and helps to improve social-emotional well-being (Way et al., 2008). Teachers and school staff should find ways every day to encourage and praise their students, make an effort to reinforce their efforts to build character, celebrate efforts to complete tasks and assignments, and cheer efforts to help others (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). Positive experiences can help reduce the traumatic events of the past and increase a sense of belonging and being emotionally supported (International Schooling, n.d.).

Instilling positive energy inspired by hope into the classroom environment whether in-person or virtual requires intentionally contributing resources to accompany their changing needs physically and psychologically. Teaching and increasing familiarity with the language of hope can assist students in recognizing and using the language, which encourages a shift in thinking (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). Students share their unique family history results with their classmates while engaging in authentic discussions to promote dialogue and empathy toward others. Differences should be acknowledged, celebrated, and valued for their collaborative learning opportunity.

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Race, ethnicity, heritage, cultures, and other characteristics should be given the same opportunities to succeed despite their differences (Horner, 2019). Creating a student-centered environment where students share the stories that make them unique and valued helps to develop balanced human beings.

To prepare for collaborative sharing, teachers and students together may co-create rules for etiquette in the classroom. Allowing students to voice concerns and assist with creating classroom rules empowers and develops their self-confidence in the creative process. Sharing information in the form of videos, slideshow presentations, art, or alternative means allows creativity for the student to express their family history. This is also a building block component that can be incorporated into higher-level learning as the assignments become more complex and comprehensive.

Strategy 5: Normalize Authenticity for Genuine Sharing

Creating a powerful inclusive social-emotional climate helps students to feel more at ease when they express personal opinions and experiences (Cuseo, 2000). Genuine sharing of history promotes authenticity and reflects on the realities experienced by the student. Students are encouraged to “keep it real” even if they fear negative responses from their classmates. Family history provides the conduit for students to normalize authentic sharing, present information that makes them unique, and collaborate with classmates on an area of expertise. Learners know themselves and their families better than any other instilling self-confidence and value to their ancestral roots. This collaborative sharing of knowledge and past experiences in pursuit of learning objectives and problem-solving is empowering. Improving authentic, effective communication and rapport building reduces the psychological effects of childhood trauma (International Schooling, n.d.).

Collaboration with parents or other family members offers an opportunity to filter information that they do not want publicly discussed in their child’s classroom. For example, learning that a family member was committed to a debtors’ prison or mental health institution should be accepted as historical facts instead of points of judgment against the family. Disclosure of this or any other sensitive information should be approved or filtered through the parent or guardian. Having a relationship with a student’s family encourages an open exchange of information. Being able to facilitate authentic discourses with cultural elements assists with gaining skills to respond to behavior related to traumatic events in their learning spaces.

Strategy 6: Transform the Learning Space

Regardless of whether the learning space is in person or virtual, research indicates that schools that integrate the lived experiences and cultural realities of youth and

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promote a high degree of educational excellence, demonstrate increased academic performance and a sense of belonging (Borreno et al., 2016; Dobbie & Fryer, 2011). The education of each child is too important for any to be neglected or ignored. Developing a healthy culture in learning spaces depends on integrating overlapping systems that include the family and advocates from the community in reshaping the educational system (Henderson et al., 2019).

Students in high-poverty, high-minority schools are routinely provided fewer resources, fewer qualified teachers, and fewer advanced-level courses than their more affluent peers (Brennan, 2002). As a result, they experience lower rates of high school graduation, lower levels of academic achievement, and higher rates of college attrition (Wald & Losen, 2003). Understanding that this may be happening does not negate the fact that it creates a disadvantage for the students within its educational sphere. This creates the urgent need to develop educators that understand child development and exemplify a growth mindset (ESS, n.d.). When educators take an active role responding to the needs of their students, they change the trajectory of their student's lives.

Because trauma, whether physical, mental, or sexual, may present itself in an array of behavioral responses, it is imperative that educators recognize and respond with trauma-informed skillsets. Each child deserves to reach their potential within the educational system which requires reshaping the current system to intentionally reduce trauma and mitigate exposure to the school-to-prison nexus. It will require that all levels of the educational system respond at the level at which they exist to contribute to the holistic success of each student in their learning space. Expanding understanding, providing supportive trauma-informed training and adjusting policies to meet the needs of each student will require that value be placed at all levels and that everyone contributes to making the system better.

CONCLUSION

By focusing on integrated family history, genealogy and storytelling at the elementary school level, their exposure to their family's contribution to the historical landscape becomes more prominent, familiar, and impactful. However, there is no one size fits all approach to integrating family history into the learning space (Carey, 2020). Different subjects and age groups require different approaches to learning based on the functionality of the student (Doucet et al., 2020). The important point is to start with teachers, school staff, and educational leadership in valuing family history because they cannot pass on to their students what they do not understand or value (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). A holistic approach to assessing and integrating personal history with broader historical events unifies the historical tapestry, making it more

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inclusive. The benefits of sharing family stories include increased introspection, expanded capacity to empathize, and a more impactful pedagogy (Mokuria et al., 2020). When youth have access to cultural models and messages that reinforce positive racial socialization, they begin to develop a positive racial regard (Hughes et al., 2006).

Exposure to the school-to-prison pipeline is mitigated by teachers and educators establishing trusting relationships in the classroom with clear expectations and instructions, increasing parental contact on positive student accomplishments, and providing alternative trauma-informed responses to disruptive behavior. For example, parent or guardian support may be increased by calling the parent when the child does something awesome in the classroom or asking the question “why is this happening?” in response to outbursts instead of suspensions or referrals. Implications for school health include working with school districts and personnel to evaluate school policies and practices that lead to racial inequity, strengthen collaborations across multi-systems, and build culturally responsive and representative schools (Henderson et al., 2019).

The need of the hour is to innovate and implement an alternative educational system and assessment strategies (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Genealogy provides a critical methodology which focuses on historical conditions that produce meaning discussions, how each person has been shaped in a given time and space, and the mechanisms of empowerment that sustain the discussions (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). The United Nations (2015, p. 19) suggested that we “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” Justice can be achieved only all learners are given an opportunity to be the best version of themselves. Inequality, inequity, and injustice are deeply rooted in human society (Xiao, 2021). It is unrealistic to imagine that they can be eliminated; the best we can do and hope for is to enhance equality, equity, and justice (Xiao, 2021). We must look to today’s students to reach their potential as tomorrow’s leaders. However, to reach their potential, they must be given opportunities to learn, grow and thrive. Lifestyle changes that include interacting with friends and family while releasing thoughts that rob the mind of peace help reduce the effects of childhood trauma (International Schooling, n.d.).

In a post-pandemic educational environment, integrated family history reshapes the schema of the learning space, allowing students to work collaboratively in building relationships. Family histories have become an important contributor to public and social histories exploring and publicizing the micro-narratives of the past (Shaw & Donnelly, 2021). Integrating family history becomes the bridge to connect personally with macro historical narratives. A focus on training school personnel to respond to diverse student populations may place educators in a position to serve as advocates in changing the school’s culture. A dynamic list of six strategies for integrating family

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history into the elementary school curriculum is recommended as a starting place because they introduce positive experiences, increase authentic communication and rapport building, promote resilience, and build a sense of personal identity.

The six recommended strategies are as follows. First, introspection and reflection help students to become self-aware in gaining valuable insights into an integrated family history. Second, navigation and integration of history using parallel periods creates a personalized approach to a more inclusive curriculum. Creating a positive experiences and effective communication reduce or prevent childhood trauma (International Schooling, n.d.). Third, teaching the values of pedagogical tools and genealogy increases familiarity and transportability of the concepts. Fourth, encouraging an environment of hope enhances a student's potential. Fifth, normalizing authenticity in genuine sharing within the learning space promotes empowerment. Building rapport, strengthened socio-emotional skills, and resilience reduce trauma and provide tools to managing behavior that mitigates exposure to the school-to-prison nexus. Finally, transform the educational system by intentionally integrating assignments that incorporate family stories, heroes, heroines, beliefs, and culture to encourage authentic sharing and collaborative learning. Table 1 summarizes the strategies for integrating family history into the elementary learning space; the acronym *INTENT* can assist in memorizing the information.

Table 1. Strategies for integrating family history into the learning space

Designation	Strategies for Implementing Family History
I	Introspection and reflection
N	Navigate and integrate family history using parallel time periods
T	Teach the value of genealogical sites
E	Encourage an environment of hope
N	Normalize authenticity for genuine sharing
T	Transform the learning environment

FUTURE RESEARCH

With increased interest in DNA testing and family history, there is an opportunity for empirical studies to assess the role that the knowledge of ancestors and previously unknown relatives plays in mental health and well-being (Moore, 2022). Junhong Xiao (2021) argues that the new normal for all should be a package of solutions able to cater to learners of various types, minimizing inequality and inequity to allow as many people as possible to access quality education. Family history presented as

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a pedagogical tool enhances equity and inclusiveness by valuing personal history and student narratives facilitating the need for evidence-based research. In all cases, research is needed at varying ages, grade levels, genders, and motivations to increase equity in educational alternatives, especially for younger students.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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*Integrating Family History Into the Post-Pandemic Elementary Learning Space***KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS**

Constructivist Learning Theory: An approach to learning that is based on people building their own knowledge from the learner's experiences.

Epigenetics: The study of changes in organisms as a result of modification of gene expression as opposed to the alteration of the genetic code.

Family History: A study exploring the identities and backgrounds of ancestors.

Fixed Mindset: A belief that the ability to acquire knowledge and skills are immovable.

Genealogy: A line of decent traced continuously from a forebear.

Growth Mindset: A belief that a person's ability, skills, and talents have the capacity to improve.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: A theory that proposes that human needs may be organized into a hierarchy ranging from basic survival needs such as food and water to abstract concepts such as self-actualization.

School-to-Prison Pipeline: A theoretical construct resulting from disproportionate disciplinary and exclusionary educational policies that are especially harmful to disadvantaged students who may be circumvented into the criminal justice system.

Story-Telling: An expression of oral or written stories.

Trauma: An emotional response to an upsetting experience, situation, or natural disaster.