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Time for Silence to End

F. Todd Goodson
Kansas State University, tgoodson@ksu.edu

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Time for Silence to End

F. Todd Goodson

This issue of *Educational Considerations* explores the complex territory where teachers meet children impacted by trauma. Human traumatic experience is a topic that has been underreported, unacknowledged, and misunderstood for too long by too many. As we confront trauma, we quickly come to the realization that all teachers at all levels need a better understanding of the scope and impact of trauma on their classrooms and pedagogical strategies grounded in our best available understanding of the needs of all students.

Obviously, this is a challenge larger than one article or journal issue or staff development presentation or book. The rapid growth in the interdisciplinary field of trauma studies speaks to a new willingness on the part of scholars, educators, policy makers, and society at large to face lived experiences too long ignored and an unwillingness of experiencers to continue to be silent, even in those instances when the public revelation of traumatic experience is inconvenient to those with power.

This is also a personal issue, as all of our lives have been affected by trauma, either directly in our own lives or indirectly in the lives of experiencers in our communities. Even if we are unaware of another person's trauma, those experiences shape lives, first and most obviously the lives of those who experience the trauma, but by extension, traumatic human experience radiates out invisibly in ways we cannot yet map or even fully comprehend through the lives surrounding experiencers.

Uncomfortable is not the same as unimportant. Traumatic human experience is hardly comfortable, but we will never create healthy communities until we can create safe communities capable of caring for every member. This journey toward individual and social wholeness will require contributions from everyone, from policy makers to police, but schools and teachers occupy arguably the most essential space within this process. It is taken as a given that schools reflect communities, but the reverse is true as well. Schools must respond to the full range of toxic realities students bring with them from their communities, but schools also have the opportunity and the responsibility to model back to the community what a healthy space might be. With this issue, *Educational Considerations* offers such space for a range of voices to approach how we might move toward healing.

The Key Conversations interview featured in this issue is with noted author of young-adult novels Chris Crutcher. Since the publication of his first novel, *Running Loose*, in 1983, Crutcher has established himself as a writer willing to tackle the darkest aspects of coming of age in America today. In addition to his work as a novelist, Crutcher has worked as a therapist, and his novels are rich with wisdom gathered through hours invested helping other humans confront their demons. Speaking directly to those of us who teach, Crutcher makes the case that teaching should be first about building relationships with vulnerable students:

It's possible . . . we spend too much time on methods and evaluation and not enough on relationship. If you're a teacher, you may be the one adult in some kid's life who holds the tether for them. Teacher prep programs need to identify that tether and need to give their students as many relationship strategies as traditional teaching strategies.

While teachers and schools have traditionally been quick to argue we are student-centered, Crutcher points us in the direction of what that term really could mean if we have the courage to confront the often-hidden experiences our students bring to our classrooms. The contributions to this issue from Alex Shevrin Venet and Gregory J. Benner serve as excellent companion pieces as they examine current best practices for teachers and communities.

The other voices represented in this issue explore, in various ways, the intersection of the personal and the professional in terms of trauma. Kara Lasater retraces key moments from her history as a school counselor and scholar when she faced a dark aspect of human nature in critical professional moments—the temptation to pass judgment on those we are sent to serve. These personal narratives are as instructive as they are brave. Lasater notes aptly, “The sharing of personal stories is an intimate act,” and I appreciate her courage as she holds up for analysis her own professional history.

The editor of this issue, Lori Goodson, offers an unflinching examination of her confrontation of childhood abuse in her own life and her challenge to the pre-service teachers in her classes to build strength as teachers on foundations of personal pain. Seth and Amanda Licktieg describe their experiences becoming foster parents, and Sarah E. Broman offers a powerful case of an immigrant's journey. Each of these voices provides another piece of the puzzle awaiting our attention.

Thirty years of reform efforts in American education based on an application of standards, assessments, and sanctions have taught us we need to consider more than what we want students to learn, how we will know when they have learned what we want them to learn, and how we will punish schools and teachers when students have not learned what we want them to learn. We also need to consider the students themselves—their lives; their interests; and all too often, the traumatic experiences shaping their lives. I will close with the words of Elie Wiesel. Holocaust survivor and Nobel Laureate, Wiesel's words could serve well as a guiding principle for all of us engaged in the work of public education:

I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.

It is time for silence to end.

F. Todd Goodson is Professor and Chair of Curriculum and Instruction and Assistant Dean of Teacher Education and Accreditation at Kansas State University. He serves as Executive Editor of *Educational Considerations*. @tgoodson tgoodson@ksu.edu