

# Preface

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**D**edicated teachers are experiencing increased dismay and frustration over mandated educational policies that focus exclusively on students' intellectual performance. Increasingly, a student's academic future is determined by a single test.

Many educators recognize that the increased pressure to perform academically is directly correlated to student acting-out behaviors, reduced motivation, and diminished hope for a fulfilling future. The alarming increase in bullying in and around schools is not surprising when considered in this context.

In our nation's economic system, students who drop out of school or receive a certificate of completion that does not equate to a graduation diploma actually become throwaways, cast aside by a society that does not want to invest in them or their futures. I find this unacceptable. The human costs of such a reality are enormous and rob our nation of the ultimate societal contributions of countless citizens. The financial costs over the next decades will be monumental.

As a retired educator, I have the opportunity to read; more specifically, I have the opportunity to read cross-disciplinary research, which has convinced me that the neurobiological literature on which this book is based holds the promise of hope for educators and students.

In my current capacity as an educational and child trauma consultant, I deliver workshops to more than 4,000 Midwest educators every year and fully appreciate their prevailing concerns over student behaviors and academic achievements. The current achievement gap that exists for many minority students is not diminishing despite concerted efforts by both teachers and youngsters. The problem is not that failing students are unable to learn; it's that our educational system does not know how to reach and teach them. The mandate of America's schools is to teach CHILDREN, not academic subjects.

The neurobiological research that serves as the foundation of this book offers insights into the complex causes of underachievement and behavioral issues. More important, it affords educators proactive solutions for these classroom, school, and community challenges.

As the academic pressures continue to mount for students, teachers, and schools, behavioral issues will increase, and academic achievements will continue to disappoint. I believe solutions will evolve out of understandings of the root causes, which are neurologically shaped by the early experiences of students, experiences over which young children have absolutely no control or choice.

The behavioral changes and developmental issues of youngsters today challenge not only educational institutions but community recreational and afterschool programs as well. The prevention of drug abuse and violence is a related issue to which

the strategies of this book can be applied. Because of these broad but shared issues, this book points to current neurological research as a rationale for the featured trauma-defusing activities.

The Introduction offers a brief overview of societal shifts that have changed childhood for many youngsters. Chapter 1 provides a brief but concise explanation of recent neurological research made possible through remarkable advances in electronic imaging. Although this greatly expanded base of knowledge has been available for a decade, regrettably it has received little attention in the field of education.

The importance of enabling stressed youngsters to access their neocortex when they perceive threat is set out in Chapter 2. The implications for academic achievement and classroom climate are profound. Integrating these recommendations into school and classroom management styles is demanding because they refute so many assumptions promulgated over the years through teacher texts and training.

These opening chapters are intentionally brief to encourage busy educators and program directors to read them before going on to the specific strategies and transformative activities.

Chapter 3 offers very specific classroom activities that can alleviate the stress and perceived helplessness generated by previous losses and traumatic experiences. The activities are designed to defuse memories of fear and vulnerability through symbolic activities suited to the skills and interests of students in Grades 4-8.

By providing seed ideas for journaling, teachers furnish the metaphorical topics through which students can address and overcome the hidden barriers to their ability to focus and solve problems. Journaling offers an enriched medium for this personal and private recovery process.

Other psychomotor activities that fit into the core curriculum subjects of language arts, social studies, and history are included. Incorporating art into creative writing activities may motivate students who are less inclined to enjoy writing.

Today's youngsters are very engrossed in electronic media. This natural interest can be used to motivate students to engage in the psychomotor activity of writing, and it provides multiple advances in building resolutions, literacy skills, and personal ability to rally against perceived helplessness. Writing interview scripts for fictional radio or video programs offers multiple growth opportunities and curriculum enhancements.

The opportunities for generating resiliency in youngsters are abundant in after-school and recreational programs or clubs. Freedom from the constraints of curriculum and schedule affords favorable environments for transforming activities. Chapter 6 offers expanded activities for recovery that might not fit classroom structure.

The issue of violence prevention within schools has become significant for educators in the last decade and is the subject of Chapter 5. Elementary and middle schools have a profound opportunity to intervene in the trajectory of aggression in young students.

Recognizing the implications of the neural development of infants and children living in turbulent environments provides a new framework for violence prevention. Children who live with violence learn survival. Redirecting these innate drives requires transformation and recovery, not threats and punishments. The

educational dilemma of stress buildup and the bullying epidemic that it has generated make this chapter's message more vital than ever before as schools experience changes in student behaviors, making learning and achievement uncertain.

The information in this book and its ultimate implications may seem to breach our basic understandings of the educational process as we know it. For those educators who have sensed that today's students do not seem to learn or perform in expected ways, the insights offered in the next chapters can lead to alternative strategies for generating academic achievement for students and pride and renewal for teachers.