

**JACK, JOSEPH AND MORTON MANDEL
SCHOOL OF APPLIED SOCIAL SCIENCES
Innovations in Field Instruction: A Trauma Informed Approach**

Case Vignettes

Instructions: Read the vignette assigned for your group. Consider, discuss and be ready to share your answers to the following questions:

- What conclusions might be drawn about the behavior of this student when NOT using a trauma lens?
- How might your view of the student be different if a trauma lens is applied?
- What trauma-informed skills or strategies might be useful with this student?
- What supports might you need? From your agency? From the Mandel School?

Vignette 1 - Tara

Tara is a first year student from an upper middle class family in NE Ohio. She has entered the social work program with an undergraduate degree in psychology saying she wants to “learn how to help people”. When you initially interviewed her for the placement, Tara expressed reservations about conducting home visits, so her first semester placement is in an elementary school. One of her first assignments is to co-facilitate a group for children who have been referred for help with emotional regulation, and then to work individually with two boys, aged 10, who have both been involved in fights with other children, and are facing suspension.

When Tara meets with you to discuss her work, she expresses extreme frustration that the boys are “always angry” and “just won’t listen”. Her assessment of the boys and of the children in the group are that they are “already too damaged” and questions whether they can really be helped. She has tried to explain to them that if they don’t stop fighting they will not be able to stay in school. She reports that she has also left phone messages for the parents but has had no response. She can’t understand why the children and their parents “just don’t care” and asks you to assign some different children to her who “really want help”. She says she is beginning to wonder if social work is the right profession for her.

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Vignette 2 - Maria

You work in a nursing home setting and are pleased to have a bilingual second year student from Texas who states she has “always wanted to work with the elderly”. Maria appears to be hard working, and pleasant, and the residents in your facility seem to respond quite positively to her presence. Whereas she initially seemed to genuinely enjoy working with all of the residents, you’ve noticed that she has been spending more and more time with one of the patients, Mrs. Garcia, and has not been meeting with others of the residents according to the schedule on which you all had agreed. You learn that Mrs. Garcia’s health is rapidly deteriorating and she is now on hospice care. Mrs. Garcia’s family has been told that she has only weeks to live, but they all live out of state and have not been able to visit recently.

In supervision today, Maria begins sobbing when talking about this patient. She is furious that Mrs. Garcia’s family is “abandoning her to die alone”. Maria tells you that she plans to come in on her off hours to spend extra time with Mrs. Garcia, and asks if she can have a cot placed in the patient’s room so that she can spend the nights there as she has seen family members do with other patients.

Rather than talking with Maria about the Code of Ethics and boundaries, you decide to inquire what it might be about Mrs. Garcia that Maria finds to be so compelling. Maria’s sobbing intensifies.

After a few minutes, she appears to regain enough control and tells you that she has never told anyone before but that her mother’s boyfriend abused her physically and sexually from the time she was 4 until she ran away from home at the age of 15. They only time she had felt safe was when she would stay with her grandmother in Cleveland during the summers. She credits her grandmother with “helping me stay sane even though she didn’t know what was going on with me”. She says she’s “over it” now and that what happened to her “doesn’t bother” her. However, she expresses deep regret that by the time she was able to return to Cleveland as a young adult, her grandmother had passed away.

Maria begs you not to tell anyone about her history of abuse. She also insists that Mrs. Garcia wants her to be with her and that if anyone tries to interfere, the student says she will drop out of school so that Mrs. Garcia is no longer her client.

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Vignette 3 – Zacchia

Zacchia is a beginning student in the online program, who works part time at a call center while she is going to school. You have agreed to take her on as an intern at your community based agency which provides a variety of services to neighborhood citizens who have been deeply affected by poverty, the foreclosure crisis, and increasing rates of violent crime. The agency has served this community for over 100 years but it too is struggling. The building is in considerable disrepair with a leaky roof, sagging floor joists, bathrooms that are often out of order, and huge potholes in the parking lot. You have worked in the agency for over 20 years and are the only social worker. Even though you have multiple responsibilities and feel very overworked, you've always enjoyed taking students because you see it as a way of staying connected to the profession.

When you interviewed Zacchia she said that she wanted to work with children and requested to be placed either in your school based or your family-to-family programs. She said that she had been in foster care for a brief period before being adopted by her aunt and that her goal is to open up a group home once she graduates. The student is very quiet, seems timid, and appears to be a very concrete thinker. You think she would do better to be placed in the agency's hunger center at first to get a feel for agency work, and since this is to be her generalist placement, you think it will give her a wider variety of learning opportunities at all levels of practice. The Mandel School field advisor agrees.

Right before the fall semester starts, your agency director resigns and you are named acting director. You meet with the student and try to set up a schedule for supervision but find that you are often called away to attend to other agency business so ask the student to contact you to reschedule. She does not. When you do meet with her, Zacchia complains that she is not learning anything either in her course work or at the agency and says that what you are asking her to do is "not social work". She is absent frequently, and when she is at the agency, she sits on the sidelines and does not engage with clients or other staff.

It is time to meet with her field advisor for the field conference. As you meet to try to review her learning contract, you learn that she has not worked on it. Zacchia tells you she has been too busy with other things to work on it. She reluctantly discloses that she has lost her job at the call center, is living in her car, and has just learned she is pregnant.

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Vignette 4 - Owen

You are the field instructor for Owen a Caucasian second year community practice student at a Community Development Corporation. Your agency has recently become interested in trauma informed care and you have asked the student to conduct a community assessment concerning the level of violence exposure among community members and to identify risk and resilience factors that are present among them.

As part of this project, your agency has established an advisory group of community residents who have been asked to provide guidance and consultation on the process. As a way of “getting to know each other”, Owen asked each of the board members to publicly share information about their own trauma history “so they could understand what the issues were”. One of the members of the advisory group is an older African American man who was quite forthcoming about his own extensive trauma history, much of which he attributes to white representatives of public institutions (e.g. discrimination in school, police harassment, etc.).

Owen reports, despite all of his efforts to accommodate the community representative’s “demands”, the board member is now challenging him at every step of the process, and criticizing him as “a representative of white supremacy”. Other board members are also becoming difficult, and your student is worried that this is impacting the workings of the group and interfering with his ability to complete the assessment.

Owen vacillates between declaring that the community member in question is impossible to work with, and saying that he knows that the gentleman needs therapy for his trauma. In supervision, Owen suggests that perhaps he should have some one-on-one sessions with him and asks you how to go about working with this gentleman “through a trauma lens”.