Attachment-centered, team-based care:
How a therapeutic nursery program transforms trauma for children, caregivers, and professionals

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Outline

- The Wild Frontier: Education & mental health
- Growth & the dilemma of trauma
- Therapeutic classroom: Searching for safety
- Layers of Regulation: Child, parent, staff
- Championing Resiliency: Containment & team care
- Research in the “Real World”
- “Fun” with funding
Children’s Pressing Needs

- Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health
  9.5%–14.2% of children birth to 5 years old experience emotional, relational, or behavioral disturbance (Zero to Three)

- 107% increase in referrals for “behavioral support” at the pre-K and kindergarten levels (MD State Department of Education)

- ACES

- Parent/Caregiver/Workforce Impact
Nurturing Mind & Heart: Core Therapeutic Values

Therapeutic Nursery Program

1996 onward
Therapeutic Nursery Program

- Year-round preschool program, ages 3-5
- Integrated early childhood education and mental health program (social-emotional development)
- Referrals: parents, daycares, child welfare services, pediatricians, clinicians, school system
- Delays in social-emotional functioning related to trauma, sensory challenges, anxiety, depression, etc.
- Family-focused: Support caregivers
TNP Children’s Circumstance

- 3-year-old girl referred by Child Welfare with history of neglect/abuse, multiple placements, indiscriminantly with strangers, lack of boundaries with peers

- 5-year-old boy referred by daycare due to severe aggressive outbursts, sensory sensitivities, anxious; very bright and curious

- 4-year-old boy referred from hospital inpatient stay at discharge due to self-harming behaviors, withdrawal, high conflict parental divorce
Trauma: A Story of Regulation

- Consensus on how to treat trauma
  - Telling the story
  - Mastery, emotion and behavior regulation, corrective relational experience

- Yes, the story will be told…

- How will the story be expressed?
  - Symbols, words vs. Action, behavior
  - Relationship quality: to self and other
Disrupted Regulation in Class

- Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon Free Play (Dee:5)
- Playground free fall (Janeece:4)
- Circle time dread (Abdul:4)
- A state of undress (Maria: 4)
- “Who can help…Nobody!” (Jose:5)
Core TNP Features

- Community: A place designed with you “in mind”
- Long-term, concentrated “dose” effect
- Attachment: Circle of Security & Learning
- Emotional Attunement/Availability
- Comprehensive assessment / observation
Core TNP Features (continued)

- Safety: CPI, Family plans, Psychiatrist on-call
- Rupture-Repair in relationships
- Individual Weekly Reflective Supervision
- Multidisciplinary team meetings
- Resiliency matters (Ordinary Magic): Experiential history x stress x supports
The Architecture of Attachment

Parents/Teachers/caregivers work together to rebuild children’s attachment architecture:

- Safety
- Affect modulation
- Exploration
- Mastery
Circle of Security
Powell, Cooper, Hoffman, & Marvin (2009)
Scenes from TNP

1. “Being With”

2. Around the Circle we go!
Promoting connection

- “Transitional objects”: Actively identify and develop meaningful relationships with special objects
  - Travel between home and school
  - Pictures
  - The five senses
  - Creative use of linking objects
    - Safety
    - Soothing
    - Mastery
The Empathy Bucket

- Decorate own bucket: Represents self
- Attune to other’s thoughts, feelings
- Link own feelings to other’s feelings (serve and return)
- Joint attention, shared pleasure
- Safety within relationships (repetition)
- Co-create: with peer (Context teachers)
Repairing relationships

- Drawing a picture when one hurts another
- Restore regulation to all involved first
- Pictures (non-verbal) + verbal
- Attune to other’s thoughts, feelings, and intentions
- Safety within relationships: Co-create: with teacher
- Bridge home to parents and home
Elephants & Traffic Lights
Separation, grief, and loss

- Activate attachment system: stress
- Separation is the key stress
- Specificity of relationships
- Safety in face of sad, mad, worried
- Continuity of relationships (repetition) – pictures in the classroom (who’s missing?)
- For teachers … parents… families: picture books!
Bye-bye Twinda.
Bye-bye Twinda.
Bye-bye Twinda.
We're happy that you came!
Parents, Caregivers, Families…
Community

- Arrival: “Sent apart”
- Parent Coffee: Reconnect
- Crisis support
- Circle of Security - Parenting
- Family Field Trips; Family Cultural Expressions
- Play Dates and Birthdays around Town
- Family Celebrations: Halloween Parade, Family Carnival
- Graduation: Celebrating unity (“wholeness”)
- Parents Speak Up: Outreach and Advocacy
TNP & Lourie Center Staff

Michelle C. Brennan, Lead Teacher
Twinda Harvey, M.A., Assistant Teacher
Bill McNulty, M.A., L.C.S.W. - C., TNP Social Worker
Mark Hassoun, Driver
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Provision Catering; Georgetown Bagels
Ledos; Trader Joe's
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Lilly Magilly's Cupcakes
George Bregman; Raj Mehta
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Graduation
2013
Reginald S. Lourie Center
What TNP Parents Say

“Since enrolling in the Therapeutic Nursery Program, Jack's progress at home and in the classroom has been remarkable. Jack is learning how to communicate with his family and his peers in a way that helps him build confidence, feel secure and establish trust.”

“The Lourie Center is a permanent part of our lives. The early intervention the TNP provided has helped us everyday.”

– Monica Petteway

– Jennifer Howard
Layering Regulation: Systems-in-Relation

- Separate parts work to form a whole: Let the Orchestra Play!
- Semi-permeable boundary (Flexible with boundaries)
- Regulator: Thermometer
  - Child
  - Mother/Father-child system
  - Family system
  - Neighborhood
  - Classroom team system
  - LC Leadership team system
  - AHC system
  - Community
  - World community
The Crowded Classroom

- Context for learning
- Who is in the classroom?
- What emotions/memories are in the classroom?
  - Cumulative positive experiences
  - Cumulative difficult experiences (especially trauma)
Being a “Container”

- Development on our side!
- Natural unfolding of developmental process
- “Good enough” caregiver

- “Holding environment” (“container,” facilitating environment)
  - At birth: in arms, eyes, sound, smell, taste
  - distal sensory: eye contact, voice – reflect early experiences
  - “held” in relationships all through lifespan:
    cell phone use, face time, water bottle, holding hands
  
(Winnicott)
The Container List

Energy flow: Information + emotional charge

Excitement, Joy, Sadness, Anger, Rage, Fear, Hate, Terror, Anxiety, Despair, Depression, Hopeless, helpless, Delight, Pride
“The Container Effect”

✧ How deep is your container?
✧ How often does it fill to the top?
✧ Where do you pour it out?
✧ When does it spill?
  ✧ Time of year; sleep/eat pattern; holidays
✧ Who does it spill out on?
  ✧ Particular child, parent
  ✧ Friends
  ✧ Pets
Constructing Your Best Container

- Conferences
- Multidisciplinary team
- Team outings
- Visiting friends and family
- Exercising
- Vacations
- Reflective Practice
Team Care

- Hiring process
- Training
- Team approach
- Staff appreciation
- Reflective practice
- Supervision
- EAP
“The Transformational Classroom”
Evaluation Study

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Stephanie Olarte, Ph.D.
The Lourie Center for Children’s Social and Emotional Wellness
Research in the Real World

Clinic, LCS, TNP (10 years)

- Examined Multi-Modal Data Sources
  - Educational outcomes
  - Emotion regulation and behavioral
  - Social information processing
  - ACES
  - Parent-child relationship, Insightfulness
  - CLASS
  - Longitudinal Lens
FINDINGS
Current Impact & Visions for the Future

* Implications
  * Local
  * State
  * Federal
* Public Policy
* International Lens
“Fun” with Funding

- “Blended” funding: Educational, mental health, private
  - Federal Pre-K Expansion
  - State – Early Childhood Division
  - County (Montgomery) – Behavioral Health
  - Employee Giving
  - Private/Family Foundations
  - Individual donors
Early Intervention: Care-giving together

- Community of co-workers: Modeling positive relationships
- Playfulness, respect, cooperation, harmony
- Flexible problem-solving, emotion regulation, and perseverance
- Unity beneath diversity
- Process of striving together: Staff, children, families, volunteers
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