Alex Shevrin Venet’s Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education–A Book Review

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Alex Shevrin Venet’s Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education–A Book Review

Cover Page Footnote
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Alex Shevrin Venet, the author of *Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education* (2021), writes from the lens of a former school leader and teacher at an alternative therapeutic high school (About Alex, 2020). As an educator and professional development facilitator, she focuses on trauma-informed teaching, learning, and changing classroom systems. Venet’s focus revolves around equity and trauma, restorative practices, and social/emotional learning. Elizabeth Dutro (Noble, n.d.) states, “Venet centers antiracism and social justice as fundamental to trauma-informed schooling, making this a vital resource for educators.” This book serves as a catalyst for conversations around equity-centered and trauma-informed education. As many states require for all educators in K-12 schools to recognize the prevalence of adversity and traumatic childhood experiences within the classroom, it is necessary to equip teachers and staff with the knowledge to enable recognition of trauma and develop strategies to support those students who experience trauma. With about half of all children in the U.S. expected to experience at least one probable traumatic event before they turn 18, this book allows all teachers, elementary to college level, to understand what trauma-informed education is and how equity needs to be at the center. Venet (2021) asserts that “trauma-informed education is antiracist and against all forms of oppression” (p. 13). The book is broken into five parts, starting with defining trauma-informed education and equity, with each part after that described as a “shift.” Venet proposes four shifts that will move schools closer to an equity-centered trauma-informed environment. The first shift focuses on the practical implementation of informed practices. The second shift focuses on relationships with our students with consideration to boundaries and ensuring that as teachers we do not position ourselves as saviors, and the fourth shift focuses on the support of school leaders and necessary changes in school policy. Lastly, shift five calls for teachers to create change from inside their classrooms, developing a need for student initiative and involvement.

Venet provides additional resources at the end of each chapter by asking practitioners to take action steps towards equity-centered trauma-informed education. These action steps are divided into three areas: developing your lens, transforming your classroom, and shifting the systems. For Parts II through V, the author provides an overview of each shift described above and includes research, personal experience, and information on which of the six principles of equity-centered trauma-informed education align with the shift discussed for that particular part. Throughout the book, Venet provides the readers with exploration activities with
concept basics, background for consideration, and guided reflection questions. Providing these resources allows educators to conduct professional development courses, book groups, etc. Additionally, Venet provides her website, www.unconditionallearning.org, which includes additional information about the book, service and event opportunities, her newsletter, information about the author, other works by Venet, and her blog. The remainder of the book review will focus on how the author develops her argument for equity-centered trauma-informed education.

Venet develops a compelling argument for attending to teacher wellness as a co-requisite for students’ access to equitable, effective teaching and student wellness. Educators at all levels can read this book focused on a perspective relevant to their context and goals. Whether focused on supporting student outcomes, teacher effectiveness, teacher-educator effectiveness, or effective school leadership, the lens developed by Venet advances a meaningful focus on proactive, intentional approaches to increase equity and wellness for students. She also highlights the need for teacher wellness, supported by school leadership and policy, as a fundamental component with a compelling role in achieving student equity. Venet provides a clear direction for supporting equity in education through teacher development, the integration of proactive intention, and responsive compassion as essential practices for equitable teaching and learning.

This book is a valuable resource for educators throughout PK-26 education in the US, where many students struggle to access equitable learning through the educational opportunities presented in public schools. Venet centers the question of how teachers can serve as role models for students, creating equity-centered trauma-informed school environments while teacher wellness remains elusive. Teachers tackle this challenge daily, responsible for supporting student health, wellness, and safety in schools, while professional teachers also need support for their health, wellness, and even safety. Trauma-informed education centered on equity for all students is a timely response to the current needs evident in schools nationwide. Venet advances the call for equitable access to education nationwide to include attention to equity for all students and educators who support students within a school, including those who have experienced trauma and those who continue to experience trauma within schools.

The author develops a clear vision of the complex nature of work needed to achieve equity in education. Teachers are responsible for developing an equity lens and honing that perspective into appropriate professional practices while navigating the systems and policies that define public education. If teachers are expected to provide learning environments that enable equity for students, students must feel supported and safe. A student’s sense of well-being in the classroom is affected by the well-being of the teacher modeling practices for the learners, so teachers, too, must feel supported and safe with a sense of well-being. The five shifts suggested in the book facilitate moving toward equity in education include:

1. Redefine equity as inclusive of individuals affected by trauma.
2. Reimplement a universal approach with proactive intention.
3. Reconsider the role of the educator as a role model, caring guide, and supportive mentor, expanding student connections and access to resources with unconditional positive regard.
4. Recognize teachers as human agents of change who need
support to move the field from equity-based mindsets to meaningful changes across the US educational system.

5. Recognize the power teacher agency has to change the world, engaging students, disrupting harm within schools, and doing the work needed to activate change.

These five shifts guide a reader’s recognition and understanding of the challenges in the field as the first step toward healing trauma from within school settings. Venet lays out a pathway for access to a new, optimistic vision of what a school environment could be if equity-centered and trauma-informed education were implemented effectively, with support at all school levels, including both policies and administrators supporting teachers, so teachers can best support equitable learning for students.

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Resources

