

How Schools Can Improve

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SPEAKERS

Seth Perler

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Seth Perler 00:01

What is up parents, teachers, and therapists? My name is Seth Perler, I'm an executive function coach which means that I help struggling students navigate this thing called education so that they can have a great life. And in this video, I'm going to talk about the number one most important thing in my opinion that I think schools need. So as we know, schools are filled with a lot of incredible well-meaning, awesome, hardworking teachers that are often underpaid, under resourced, overworked, have too many students, etc, etc. We know the story. And these teachers are working within the confines of a system that is oftentimes archaic and outdated. Oftentimes, it's full of awesome innovation. But we really have basically the same model that we've had for way too long, and we don't really challenge or change things, or think even think about things and the things that we should be changing. We just don't do that. Why not? I don't know. But there's so many ways to improve schools.

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Seth Perler 00:58

If I were to ask, I run an expert summit every year with a bunch of experts, like 25 experts, if I were to ask each of them every year, "What do you think is the number one thing that we could do?" They would all have different answers about how to change schools. If I were to ask them to pretend that schools never existed, and they were part of a team, and what they say helps to drive how to create schools, these things called 'schools,' they would all have different ideas about that. So what I want to look at, though, is, given how things are now, let's say that not a lot of things change, because they're not likely to. What is the number one thing, and the reason I'm telling you, this parents, teachers and therapists, is because knowing this one thing, if you agree with what I'm saying, and I really don't care if you do or not, I do this to be of service and if you don't like it then fine. But if you agree with this, then I think that this is something that you can learn how to apply to the kids that you care about, if you're a parent and it's your own kid, if you're a teacher and it's the kids that you're working with, if you're a therapist, a tutor, a para, or whoever. So what is that number one thing? The number one thing if I could change anything about schools, that would change if I could only pick one thing.

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That number one thing is I would have all schools in the entire world on the planet, I would have all schools be what's called 'trauma informed.' We would have trauma informed teachers, trauma informed administrators, trauma informed schools. parents would be learning what trauma informed means. And here's what trauma informed

informed schools, parents would be learning what trauma informed means. And here's what trauma informed means. Here's how I am going to explain it to you, and I'd be very thrilled to hear in the comments, particularly from you therapists who have a lot of experience with this stuff. Let us know how you would define it because that will help all of us have a better understanding of it. But here's how I look at trauma informed work, and this is a big part of what I do. As an executive function coach, I'm not just trying to get kids good grades, who cares about grades if life doesn't feel real good, and it's always a slog, and you're struggling with stuff.

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Seth Perler 03:05

Trauma informed to me means that there are these two main areas that I talk about. I talk about the story and I talk about the body. What the heck does that mean? That means that all of us human beings. There's something called Big T trauma and little T trauma. Big T trauma is what a lot of people think of with a huge event, like if there was a burglary, or you were in a war, or a car accident, like those are big T traumas. But little T traumas are very subtle. They're happening often, repeatedly over a long period of time, these little T traumas that all of us, all of us have had these experiences. But we just don't know it because we're not trauma informed. And when you have a classroom, where you have kids who have had trauma, and you have teachers who are completely unaware of trauma, and they're completely unaware that these students may be going through experiences in their very classroom that may have nothing to do with the teacher or the class at all, but that they are having actual physiological experiences in response to traumas that they've had or they're having, and we're not aware of it. And we're just going on like clockwork, and just trying to do what the school expects us to do with our smart goals and our curriculum and our standards and all our standardized tests and all the expectations that are put on teachers. How do we help? So I look at so we have, the big T and the little T. But I look at the body and the story. Here's what I mean by that.

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The story is the narrative or story or thoughts that play out in our mind. It's our perception or our attitude about a thing. That's what the story is. The story is the narrative, it's the mind, its thoughts. It's the narrative about the situation. So two people can be in the exact same situation, right? Let's say that you have somebody who is a snake handler and there is a poisonous snake, and they're calm as a cucumber, and they're able to catch it and get the venom for an anti-venom for somebody or whatever, right. And then let's say somebody has a horrible fear of snakes and they're in the same room, these two people can be having a completely different situation, even though they're having the same experience. In fact, the person handling the snake is more at threat. So what happens is, is that we have a narrative and a story, we have a narrative about, "Oh, my gosh, I have a test coming up right now. I forgot, I totally forgot to study for that test. Oh, my gosh, I did study for the test. But I'm totally nervous during this test, I'm going to fail this." That's a narrative and a story. "Oh, my gosh, I have a test. I'm so ready for this, I feel so good about this. Oh, my gosh, I'm so excited to see my friends. Oh, my gosh, everybody's judging me. Oh, my gosh, all my teachers hate me." We have stories and narratives in our head, about the world. So when we've had these traumas, which we all have, as I said, we have stories. And the problem is sometimes the stories are not proportionally sized to the actual threat of the situation. So our nervous system is designed to help us stay safe, perceive threats, but sometimes we perceived threats that aren't necessarily threats. So if we're really afraid of that test, but the test isn't going to hurt us, but we can still have fear and a reaction to that.

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So we have the story, the narratives, the stories and the mind, but we also have the body. And what that means is that when we have a perception of threat, or a perception that we're not safe, when our when our brain tells us or our mind or story or narrative tells us we're not safe, or we're being threatened, that could even be parents saying, "Hey, you said you're gonna do your chores, when you're gonna do it?" A kid might fly off the handle, because there's a

perception of a story. "I don't want to do this, I feel threatened and attacked right now." What happens is, is that story can tell a part of the brain called the amygdala, can send a message the amygdala that says, "Yo, we're being threatened, we're not safe." And the amygdala just says, "Cool," the amygdala doesn't check to verify that the story is accurate. The amygdala just says, "Cool. Got this, thank you." The amygdala sends a message to the adrenals on top of the kidneys, and the adrenals send adrenaline the heart, sends down to the body for fight, flight or freeze. And you can look up something of polyvagal theory as well. I love polyvagal theory if you want. But basically, we're having a physiological response. Now in a classroom, you might have 20, 25, 30 kids. And kids might be having sensations of their traumas or experiences or feeling uncomfortable or unsafe, or threatened even in the classroom because they're having thoughts and stories and narratives. But their body's having experiences. And the body responds in many different ways. So a person can look totally chill, but they're actually having an experience. And when we are not trauma informed, we're not addressing this unless you've got brilliant, intuitive, caring teachers who are attuned, they don't even know what attunement is, and they've never heard the term before, but they know how to do it like a master, like a Jedi. There are people who are really attuned, and just brilliant teachers who really understand nervous systems, even if they couldn't articulate it.

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But essentially, when we are not trauma informed, and when we're not self-aware, or self-reflective, or metacognitive, or introspective or reflective, what happens is that we tend to live very automatically. We react to life, rather than respond to life. The more trauma informed we are about ourselves or about others, the more we can respond. So we can say, "Oh, wow, I just had the story, this narrative this thought," and we can go to a friend and bounce it off. "I'm just having the story. I just want to check, am I crazy here or what? Like, I'm having this narrative in my mind and here's what I'm thinking, what do you think about that?" So we can like bounce the story off someone but we don't have to just say, "Oh my gosh, I had a thought must be true." There's a saying I use with my students a lot, "Don't always believe everything you think." You can't always believe everything you think. So we can be ruled by those thoughts, but we can also be ruled to the story and the body. We can also be ruled by the feelings, the emotions. We have a feeling of fear, we have a feeling that we're being threatened. Our body feels uncomfortable because we have this narrative, this story, this perception that we're not safe, and our body feels uncomfortable.

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Now when our narrative, our story, and when our body, when we have these uncomfortable experiences, and we just react, and we are not responding, we make bad choices, or I hate using the word 'bad' but maladaptive, often dysfunctional choices that aren't necessarily in our best interest. So again, the more trauma informed we are about ourselves, and the more trauma informed a school is and all these people, the more everybody is aware that we are often making decisions based on false narratives. Based on narratives and stories and sensations and feelings and emotions and the nervous system responding to things. We're often making them based on just how we feel.

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I'm going to stop in a second here. But I do have to say that when we're dealing with the narrative, and the story, and the mind, and I'm not going to get into detail on this, this is for another video. But you might want to know that we also have these things called 'biases,' or cognitive distortions. You can research biases, or cognitive distortions, but that means that a lot of times we believe what we want to believe, so that it's not necessarily reality. In fact, that's one of the big problems with all the misinformation and disinformation that's in the world today, we're just saturated with so much of it. We tend to gravitate towards things that seem to make sense to us, without verifying the truth about it. That really scares me for kids, because I want them to be conscious beings who think for themselves and

think things through. But when we do just react to life, and when we don't respond mindfully, and when those cognitive biases or cognitive distortions influence us too much, again, we're not having the quality of life that we want. We really want our kids to have a great quality of life, that is why we do what we do.

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Anyway, I hope that helps you. Again, my name is Seth Perler, I'm an executive function coach, and I help struggling students navigate this thing called education so that they can launch a great life. If you like what I'm doing, give it a thumbs up, give it a like, subscribe to it, share my work with somebody, please. If you like this, go ahead and snag the link and share it with someone right now, that really helps me get my message out. And I have a bunch of freebies on my website, SethPerler.com, or you can check out my other site ExecutiveFunctionSummit.com. My real wish for you today, what I hope for you as you're leaving this video right now, my number one hope for you is that you have peace of mind, peace of heart today, and that you go connect with the people that you care about and spend time with that because that's the most important thing ever. Have a great day. Take care.