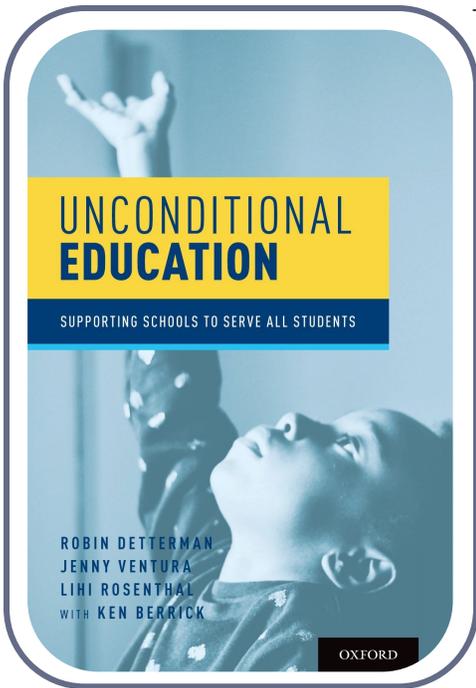


Unconditional Education: Supporting Schools to Serve all Students



This book aims to engage education leaders around the principles and practices of Unconditional Education (UE): a belief in working tirelessly to protect the rights of those students who are most readily disenfranchised by the existing education system. These students are living in poverty, exposed to chronic stress and trauma, and sometimes involved in the child welfare or probation system; they are often English Language Learners, and students with disabilities and/or mental health diagnoses. There is ample evidence that our current education system is failing these students.

The theoretical underpinnings of the UE model have been informed by Seneca Family of Agencies' more than 30 years of experience providing special education and mental health services to children and families facing the most complex barriers to success. Over the years, Seneca has tested and refined the agency's core practices that guide our interventions with youth and families in need.

Seneca's treatment approach integrates systems, attachment, and learning theories to provide tools to assess and address youth's complex ecological, relational, and behavioral needs. What is unique about the approach is that it rests not only on operationalizing these three theories, but also on capitalizing on their intersection. UE applies this holistic treatment approach to the school setting, conveying a set of beliefs that students whose experiences are shaped by poverty, social injustice, chronic stress and trauma are capable of healing when they:



ARE SURROUNDED BY A STRONG NETWORK OF SUPPORTS
EMBEDDED IN THEIR NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS



EXPERIENCE SECURE RELATIONSHIPS THAT PROMOTE A SENSE OF
SAFETY AND BELONGING



ARE SYSTEMATICALLY TAUGHT NEW SKILLS AND MINDSETS

BOOK CONTENT OVERVIEW

UE is a data-informed, multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) that pairs evidence based academic, behavioral, and social emotional interventions with an intentional focus on overall culture and climate. This book shares stories about students, teachers, and school leaders in their moments of both triumph and trial. It identifies critical processes that have enabled meaningful change in schools that have adopted the UE approach. The book is divided into two parts: theory and practice.

Part I provides the theoretical underpinnings. **Chapter 1** traces the roots of the Unconditional Education from its predecessor, Unconditional Care, telling the story of how direct care experiences in the mental health field have informed the development of a macro-approach to school transformation. **Chapter 2** looks at the UE model through the lens of systems theory, which promotes the idea that sustainable change is enabled by the creation of strong and coherent systems that can be implemented by multiple stakeholders who lend their transdisciplinary expertise to a shared purpose. **Chapter 3** examines attachment theory and the crucial role of supportive and trusting relationships in promoting environments primed for change, even when that change is terribly difficult. **Chapter 4** examines behavioral learning theory, including the importance of clear, actionable goals and planning and the realization that transformative change is not always linear.

Part II introduces the framework of the UE model more concretely, providing a roadmap for practitioners by reflecting on key features and enablers of successful implementation. **Chapter 5** provides a framework for the UE approach, exploring a concrete conceptualization for a system of school supports. **Chapter 6** delves into the deeper process required for rigorous service coordination. **Chapter 7** outlines the formative and summative assessment process that informs high-quality program planning and implementation, and measures the extent to which the model promotes positive outcomes for students and schools. **Chapter 8** examines the strategic implementation phases involved in adopting this model and provides insight into the blended funded structure that makes it possible. Finally, with a fuller picture of this model in mind, **Chapter 9** discusses implementation challenges inherent within the framework and key lessons we have learned in the process of implementation. In both parts of the book, we return to the key tenets of UE:

Tenets of Unconditional Education



INTENTIONAL RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

The level of relational trust present within a community has a substantial impact on the everyday experiences of its members. A specific approach to building, sustaining, and repairing relationships is needed for effective change.



EFFICIENCY

Efficiency does not necessarily mean spending less but, instead, strategically allocating resources toward responsive supports that will have the greatest impact at the most opportune point in time.



CROSS SECTOR RESPONSIBILITY

Opportunities for meaningful collaboration between professionals in education, mental health, social welfare, and wellness are essential in addressing the complex issues facing communities that are highly impacted by poverty and trauma.



LOCAL DECISION-MAKING

Local context matters. The role of professionals is to share expertise while providing structures in which participants can choose approaches likely to be effective in their own community.