

Trauma-Informed Practice and Pedagogy

The term “trauma-informed” has become more commonly heard terminology in recent years, especially due to recent events highlighting trauma’s impact and prevalence in North America and beyond. What constitutes ‘trauma’ *itself* has also further developed and its definition widened as research has surfaced and evolved from earlier understandings of psychological trauma (Brandell & Ringel, 2020).

Trauma may result from violence, racism and oppression, war, natural disasters, childhood adversity, or a variety of other events and experiences. While individuals may experience traumatization from events and circumstances as indicated in the above definition, it is also possible for groups to experience trauma collectively. Trauma can also be historical and intergenerational, as seen in Canada’s history of the brutalization of Indigenous populations and the American slave trade involving African Americans (Linklater, 2014; Leary, 2005). Research has shown trauma to impact individuals in a variety of ways including development, attachment, behaviour, learning, health, and more (Burke-Harris, 2018; Cole et al., 2005) This knowledge of trauma and its impact is also a call to action for sectors that provide support and services to people of all ages and backgrounds.

The term and concept of “trauma-informed” has evolved significantly throughout the last two decades since its onset in the field of healthcare in 2000 (Harris & Fallot, 2001). In 2009, Harris and Fallot developed five principles for trauma-informed systems that included: ensuring safety, establishing trustworthiness, maximizing choice, maximizing collaboration, and prioritizing empowerment (Carello & Butler, 2015). Since then, the term trauma-informed has been adopted throughout several other fields including mental health, child welfare, justice, and education (Thomas et al., 2019). Educators have joined the movement to ensure educational institutions are also using a trauma lens for the students they serve. Trauma-informed teachers understand trauma and its potential impact, the importance of safe classroom environments for all, the essential focus on relationships and connection, and the need for preventing re-traumatization (Brunzell et al., 2019).

While being trauma-informed recognizes the adversity many children face that result in challenges for them in their schooling and lives, it is not necessary to establish trauma histories amongst students, nor is it helpful to associate all life adversity with traumatization. In fact, the approach is one that is universal, knowing this awareness to be beneficial for all students (Brunzell et al., 2019; Rodger et al., 2020). Using a trauma-informed lens that is equity-centred allows teachers to view and approach behaviour in the classroom through a more inclusive lens, rather than one that focuses on deficits within an individual (Rodger et al., 2020). It is strengths-based and student-centred. This also includes a movement to change the systems themselves that will help to prevent and perpetuate both adversity and trauma (Venet, 2021). Part of that change is the way we teach and how we respond to student behaviour and needs in our classrooms and schools.

Students come to school with a significantly wide range of experiences that relate to their health, life adversity, ability, and readiness for learning (Rodger et al., 2020). Teachers have demonstrated an interest in learning about trauma’s impact and how to respond as they manage the daily challenges of teaching all students. Research has indicated that teachers who engage in

training on trauma and violence informed care had significant gains in knowledge, attitudes, and self-efficacy for teaching impacted students (Rodger et al., 2020).

For the complexities of what students need and how they learn most effectively, highly trained teachers with explicit knowledge in providing equitable educational opportunities that include being trauma-informed, are essential. The opportunity therefore exists to change the course of children's lives while providing them with high quality education (Rodger et al., 2020). This can take place when teachers are provided with knowledge and understanding, and when they are given the tools to effectively do so. A new vision for what it means to be *truly* equitable and inclusive in our schools is upon us.

Trauma-informed classrooms have:

- Teachers with knowledge of trauma and its impact on learning
- Relationships and positive regard at the centre
- Real and felt safety (predictability, routines, consistency, calm and organized environment)
- Voice and choice
- Restorative and reparative discipline
- Culturally responsive and anti-racist practices
- A strongly built classroom community
- Connections with caregivers

Websites and Resources

<https://www.nctsn.org/>

<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/schools-and-trauma>

<https://www.samhsa.gov/child-trauma/learning-materials-resources#educators>

https://casel.org/sp_faq/mental-health-trauma-and-well-being/

<https://extension.wsu.edu/clear/resources/>

<https://traumasensitiveschools.org/>

<https://ofifc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Trauma-Informed-Schools-Report-2016.pdf>

<https://www.alberta.ca/trauma-informed-practice.aspx#jumplinks-3>

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