Creating Spaces for Trauma-Informed Care in Higher Education

SESSION 1: CREATING A COMMON LANGUAGE

Janice Carello, PhD, LMSW
Questions to be addressed

💡 What does it mean to be trauma-informed (TI)?

وجد Why does being TI matter, especially during times of crisis?

👀 What does being TI look like in higher education?

✔️ What are you already doing that’s TI?

💡 What can you do to become more TI?

💻 What are some resources for becoming more TI?

❓ What questions do you have?
What does it mean to be trauma-informed (TI)?
Some terms you may have heard

Trauma-Informed
Trauma-Aware
Trauma-Sensitive
Trauma-Responsive
Compassionate Teaching
Compassionate Pedagogy
Zoom Poll 1

What do you think of when you hear the term *trauma-informed*?

Select all that apply.

- Asking students to share their trauma history
- Acting as a friend or counselor to students
- Avoiding teaching sensitive or difficult topics
- Teaching mindfulness
- Lowering standards
- Coddling students
- None of the above
Being TI does not mean:

- Being a superhero
- Doing things the “right” way
- The same thing in all contexts
- Reaching a destination
Origins of TI Approaches
TI Approaches in higher education

- **Realize** the widespread prevalence and impact of trauma
- **Recognize** signs and symptoms of trauma in students, faculty, and staff
- **Respond** by integrating knowledge about trauma into educational policies and practices
- **Resist** re-traumatization and promote learning and growth

(adapted from SAMHSA, 2014)
Defining trauma

“Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning.”

(Herman, 1997)

(SAMHSA, 2014)
### Types of trauma

**Acute Trauma/PTSD**
- Short-term, unexpected event
- Examples: one-time rape, car accident, natural disaster

**Complex Trauma**
- Sustained, repeated ordeal stressors
- Examples: ongoing abuse, combat, DV, human trafficking, torture

**Continuous Traumatic Stress**
- Ongoing, systemic oppression
- Examples: racial trauma, sexism, anti-Semitism, ableism, transphobia

(adapted from Kira et al, 2013; SAMHSA, 2014)
Remember

Trauma

Upset or Discomfort
PTSD symptoms

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

- Avoid Thinking of the Trauma
- Avoid Talking of the Trauma
- Easily Frightened
- Negative Mood
- Negative Thinking
- Always on Guard
- Avoiding Places
- Avoiding Activities
- Flashbacks
- Cannot Concentrate
- Aggressive Behavior
- Loss of Interest
- Feeling Guilt or Shame
- Substance Abuse
- Sleeping Difficulty
- Bad Dreams

(https://newstartrecoverysolutions.com/what-is-ptsd)
Complex PTSD symptoms

**Emotion Regulation:** persistent sadness, suicidality, anger

**Consciousness:** forgetting traumatic events, feeling detached

**Self-Perception:** helplessness, shame, guilt

**Distorted Perceptions of Perpetrator:** preoccupation with perpetrator or with revenge

**Relationships:** isolation, distrust, search for a rescuer

**System of Meaning:** loss of faith, sense of hopelessness or despair

([http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/PTSD-overview/complex-ptsd.asp](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/PTSD-overview/complex-ptsd.asp))
Limitations of a PTSD-oriented framework

- Overlooks non-immediately life-threatening events (e.g. child abuse, DV, chronic illness, combat, refugee status)
- Overlooks non-PTSD symptoms or responses (e.g. depression, anxiety, dissociation, substance abuse, self-harm, parenting difficulties)
- Overlooks policies and procedures that lead to symptoms
- Overlooks symptoms as attempts to cope
To experience trauma is also to

- Feel terrified, confused, and betrayed
- Experience physical and/or emotional violation
- Be the object of another’s rage, neglect, or cruelty
- Feel powerless, helpless, damaged
- Lack agency or control

Events, situations, environments, or relationships that recapitulate these experiences may be perceived as retraumatizing

(Adapted from Butler, Critelli, Rinfrette, 2011)
Characteristics of Abusive Relationships

(Harris & Fallot, 2001)

• Betrayal occurs at the hands of a trusted caregiver or supporter

• Boundaries are violated & reimposed at the whim of the authority figure

• Secret information & relationships are maintained and even encouraged

• The voice of those less powerful is unheard, denied, or even invalidated

• Those in a subordinate position feel powerless to alter or leave the relationship

• Reality is reconstructed to represent values and beliefs of those in power

• Events are reinterpreted and renamed to protect those in power
Resilience

The ability to recover quickly and return to the level of functioning that was present before an adverse experience occurred.
Stress-Related Growth

The perception or experience of benefiting from coping with a **stressful** event

Results in a higher level of functioning than one had prior to the **stressful** event
Posttraumatic Growth

The perception or experience of benefitting from coping with a traumatic event

Results in a higher level of functioning than one had prior to the traumatic event
SRG happens in response to non-traumatic situations and is not the same as PTG

(Kira et al, 2013)

| Type I Traumas                        | -Survival & secondary (indirect) traumas  |
|                                     | -When a traumatic event happened once and stopped (e.g., car accident) |
|                                     | -Positively associated with PTG |

| Type II Traumas                      | -Personal identity & attachment traumas |
|                                     | -When a traumatic event happened several times in the past and stopped (e.g., physical and sexual abuse) |
|                                     | -Not associated with PTG |

| Type III Traumas                     | -Collective identity traumas |
|                                     | -When a traumatic event happened, continued to happen, and did not stop (e.g., discrimination and racism) |
|                                     | -Negatively associated with PTG |
Why does being TI matter, especially during times of crisis?
Trauma prevalence rates

66-94% college students report lifetime exposure to one or more traumatic events

60% men experience at least one trauma in their lives

50% women experience at least one trauma in their lives

8 million adults have PTSD in any given year

> millions trauma survivors develop sub-syndromal symptoms or other disorders

(Frazier et al., 2009; Read et al., 2011)

https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/common/common_adults.asp
Risks of trauma exposure

- Direct
  - PTSD
  - Depression
  - Substance abuse
  - Adjustment problems
  - Lower GPA
  - Dropout

- Indirect
  - Burnout
  - Secondary traumatic stress
  - Vicarious trauma

(Bride, 2007; DeBerard et al., 2004; Duncan, 2000)
Impact on learning and behavior

- Memory
- Speech
- Thinking
- Judgement
- Information processing

(Groner et al., n.d.)
Impact on emotion regulation

(Adapted from Schupp, 2004)
## (Re)traumatization rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Role (n)</th>
<th>Full Sample</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number</strong></td>
<td><strong>%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer Not to Say (3)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>66.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD Students (12)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSW Students (103)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Educators (49)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty (14)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff (5)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (186)</strong></td>
<td><strong>60</strong></td>
<td>32.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Carello, 2018)
## Sources of (re)traumatization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiences Within Program</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy/Policy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Work</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video/Lecture/Readings</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Discussion</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field/GA Supervision</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Death</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Experiences Outside Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiences Outside Program</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Death/ Illness of Loved One</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault/Injury/Bullying</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client Death</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
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(Carello, 2018)
(Re)traumatization is often about conflict between educators & students

- Threatening
- Abusive
- Oppressive
- Neglectful
- Abandoning
- Unfair or disproportionate punishment

(Carello, 2018)
Learning & recovery are often about connection between educators & students

“When this event happened I asked for an extension from two of my professors. One of them said absolutely, no problem. The other professor I had addressed how I was, if I was receiving services, reported the incident and asked that I receive follow up from [school] services. The last thing she addressed was that I could have an extension for longer than I asked for, and told me to call her if I needed further assistance. That meant a lot more to me than I could have guessed it would.”

(Carello, 2018)
What does being TI look like?
Trauma-Informed ≠ Trauma Specific

Trauma-Informed

Understanding the effects of trauma on educators & students and practicing methods that promote resilience & prevent further harm

Trauma-Specific

Treating specific symptoms or syndromes related to traumatic experiences
Being TI means shifting our focus

INDIVIDUAL

What is wrong with you?

Trauma as disorder

INDIVIDUAL IN ENVIRONMENT

What has happened to you?

Trauma as injury or disability

(Bloom & Sreedhar, 2008; Harris & Fallot, 2001)
Being TI means making learning accessible

“Disability in and of itself is not a problem, but the environment in which we ask people with disabilities to function often is.”

(Harrison, 2006, p. 152)
**Being TI is a journey, not a destination**

“Trauma-informed care is conceptualized as an organizational change process centered on principles intended to promote healing and reduce the risk of retraumatization for vulnerable individuals.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trauma Aware</th>
<th>Trauma Sensitive</th>
<th>Trauma Responsive</th>
<th>Trauma-Informed</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Have become aware of how prevalent trauma is and have begun to consider that it might impact their clientele and their staff.</td>
<td>• Have begun to: 1) explore TIC principles; 2) build consensus around the principles; 3) consider the implications of adopting the principles; 4) prepare for change.</td>
<td>• Have begun to change their culture to highlight the role of trauma. • At all levels, staff have begun re-thinking the organizational routines.</td>
<td>• Have made trauma-responsive practices the norm. • Work with other partners to strengthen collaboration around being trauma informed.</td>
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(Bowen & Murshid, 2016; MO Dept. of Mental Health and Partners, 2019)
Being TI means applying trauma-informed principles

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<tr>
<td>Creating an environment that respects and accepts all class members and helps them feel safe, including when they make mistakes.</td>
<td>Making course expectations clear, ensuring consistency in practice, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and minimizing disappointment.</td>
<td>Connecting with appropriate peer and professional resources to support academic, personal, and professional success.</td>
<td>Acting as allies rather than as adversaries and creating opportunities to share power and make decisions.</td>
<td>Building in opportunities to make choices, be heard, build skills, and develop confidence and competence.</td>
<td>Striving to be aware of and responsive to forms of privilege and power and respecting one another’s diverse experiences and identities.</td>
<td>Recognizing strengths and resilience and providing feedback to help each other grow and change.</td>
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(Principles adapted from Fallot & Harris, 2009; SAMHSA, 2014)

https://traumainformedteaching.blog/resources/
What are you already doing that's TI?
Physical, Emotional, Social, & Academic Safety

How do you create an environment in which people feel safe, accepted, and respected, including feeling safe to make and learn from mistakes?

Examples:

• Allowing zoom participants to change screen name, use virtual background, or turn camera off during synchronous sessions

• Not requiring disclosure of personal trauma experiences

• Giving feedback to aid revision before final evaluation
Trustworthiness & Transparency

How do you make your expectations clear, ensure consistency in practice, maintain appropriate boundaries, and minimize disappointment?

Examples:

• Responding promptly to email
• Applying policies consistently
• Avoiding all-or-nothing or zero-tolerance policies
• Using evaluation rubrics
Support & Connection

How do you connect students and colleagues with appropriate resources to help them succeed academically, personally, and professionally?

Examples:

• Providing referral information for campus and community resources such as counseling, health, and tutoring services
• Announcing community events
• Inviting guest speakers
• Introducing people, groups, forums (e.g., listservs, social networks)
Collaboration &
Mutuality

How do you help students and colleagues provide input, share power, and perceive you as an ally rather than an adversary?

Examples:

• Developing community guidelines together
• Integrating self-evaluation
• Helping others identify and correct their own errors vs. correcting them
Empowerment, Voice, & Choice

How do you empower students and colleagues to make choices, advocate for themselves, and develop confidence and competence in their knowledge and skills?

Examples:

• Building in choices where possible (e.g. readings, topics, font, presentation mode)
• Allowing multiple attempts
• Making space for 1:1 conversations
• Soliciting questions, concerns, and complaints
Social Justice

How are you responsive to issues of privilege and power, and how do you acknowledge and respect students’ and colleagues’ diverse experiences and identities?

Examples:

• Asking for and using correct name and pronouns
• Addressing microaggressions
• Integrating content from diverse scholars and sources
• Creating spaces where people can speak using non-standard dialects and writing conventions
Resilience, Growth, & Change

How do you recognize students’ and colleagues’ strengths and resilience and provide feedback that helps everyone grow and change?

Examples:

• Pointing out what was done well or is improving

• Using language that recognizes improvement is possible (e.g. “Remember to ...”)

• Soliciting feedback to improve current course/service delivery as well as future course/service delivery
What can you do to become more TI?

What else can we do to help (re)establish a sense of control, connection, and meaning?
Prioritize Self-Care

- Sleep, exercise, have fun
- Set healthy boundaries, including reasonable work hours
- Take breaks, including breaks from technology
- Don’t let the perfect be the enemy of the good
- Connect with supportive family, friends, and colleagues
- Ask for help
Recognize Signs of Stress

- You can’t get out of bed or look for reasons to stay there all day.
- You dread opening your email.
- You think you will go insane unless people stop chewing so loud.
- You consider caffeine a part of a balanced diet.
- You always assume the worst.
- You feel worse when you try to relax.
Chat box:

What are signs educators are stressed?
Chat box:

What are signs students are stressed?

**211**: Call 211 to get referrals for local community services or visit the [211 website](https://www.211.org) for more info.

**Therapist Finder**: Psychology Today hosts a [therapy finder database](https://www.psychologytoday.com/therapy-finder) where you can find detailed listings of mental health professionals in your area.

**Crisis**: The [National Hope Line](https://www.nationalhopeline.net) provides free 24/7 confidential crisis support in the US: call or text 1-877-235-4525. The [Crisis Text Line](https://www.crisistextline.com) provides free 24/7 crisis support in the US: text HOME to 741741.
Be Predictable

- Strive to keep well-organized
- Post weekly announcements, overviews, or summaries
- Limit changes and document all changes in writing
- Avoid surprises
- Respond promptly to emails and questions posted in forums
Be Flexible

Focus on 1-2 objectives rather than all of them

Adapt activities that might be affected by stress such as tests and presentations

Develop no questions asked late policies
Foster Connection

- Regular check-ins
- Video/audio
- Rituals
- Social Forums
- Small group activities
- Interactive sessions
What are some resources for becoming more TI?
Due to the covid-19 crisis, I have been getting more inquiries about trauma-informed teaching in higher education. So I created a video presentation to provide both a general overview of trauma-informed teaching as well as some specific tips and strategies that can be adapted by college educators now and in the future.
Books

- *Bandwidth Recovery* by Cia Verschelden
- *Race, Equity, and the Learning Environment: The Global Relevance of Critical and Inclusive Pedagogies in Higher Education* by Tuit, Haynes, & Stewart (Eds.)
- *Incorporating Diversity and Inclusion Into Trauma-Informed Social Work* by Laura Quiros
- *Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education* by Alex Shevrin Venet
- *Connected Teaching* by Harriet Schwartz
- *What Happened to You?: Conversations on Trauma, Resilience, and Healing* by Oprah Winfrey & Bruce Perry
- *Trauma and Human Rights* by Butler, Critelli, Carello (Eds.)
Self-Care

- Self-Care Starter Kit
- Self-Care in the Digital Age
- Self-Care for Educators
Course Design & Web Accessibility

- Quality Matters Rubric
- Web Accessibility Guidelines
Psychological First Aid

- Psychological First Aid for Schools (PFA-S)
- Psychological First Aid Listen, Protect, Connect (PFA-LPC)
Racial Equity

- But I Didn’t Mean It That Way: Microaggressions
- Why #BlackLivesMatter in Your Classroom Too
- Dear White Anthropology Grad Students
- Microaggressions in the Classroom
- Like death by a thousand cuts’: How microaggressions play a traumatic part in everyday racism
- Talking about Race
- 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge
LGBTQ Awareness & Allyship

- The Trevor Project
- Safe Zone Project
- Venture Out
- GLAAD
- GLSEN
- PFLAG
- Straight for Equality
K-12 and Other Resources

- Adolescent Provider Toolkit—Trauma and Resilience
- Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative
- ACEs Connection Network
- ACEs in Higher Education
Coming Up Next

- Q & A
- Session 1 Evaluation
- 10:30 - 12:00 Session 2: Creating a Trauma-Informed Climate
  - Climate Assessment pp. 4-5
What questions do you have?
Let’s connect!

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Blog: traumainformedteaching.blog
FB: @traumainformedteachers
Twitter: @janicecarello
References


• Schupp, L.J. (2004). *Assessing and treating trauma and PTSD*. Eau Claire, WI: PESI.

• Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *Trauma and violence.* (SAMHSA, 2019). Retrieved from https://www.samhsa.gov/trauma-violence