Conclusion: A Trauma-Informed Instructional Design

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Design   Instructional Design   Trauma-informed

Most instructional design practices are founded on relatively systematic, linear models which tend toward pseudoscientific determination of learning goals, measurable objectives and outcomes. However, this special issue's contributors reveal design approaches that transcend lock-step models. Collectively, their accounts center practices that are humanity-centered, co-constructed, and adaptive to learner needs. In this vein, a move toward a trauma-informed practice of instructional design will focus on the importance of collaboration, communication, and care. Care involves listening to learner preferences, recognizing learning needs, anticipating potential barriers to learning, embedding targeted tools and supports, and remaining adaptive to the population served.

Introduction

Care involves listening to learner preferences, recognizing learning needs, anticipating potential barriers to learning, embedding targeted tools and supports, and remaining adaptive to the population served. Designers should explicitly promote the importance of care across their design practices when considering populations that are likely to be significantly impacted by trauma. Additionally, designers should be seeking out ways to reduce learner stress and isolation as a part of their designs under a trauma-informed approach. Careful, thoughtful, and sparing use of tools such as pre-recorded video asynchronous modules, discussion forums that ask for more performative than authentic engagement, or exercises that are designed to be completed in isolation should be carefully considered. In and of themselves, these tools are increasingly shopworn in the post-pandemic education landscape. This special issue has focused on the importance of integrating mentoring, ungrading and other high-touch, low-stress tools in cases where trauma can be assumed.

Findings from Special Issue Articles

Lawless & Bogard, in their exploration of the impact of case-based instruction in use with preservice teachers, advocated for resiliency both among learners and as models in teachers' lives. By building resilience at the micro level, through situational, case-scenarios, they found that the supports needed for protective factors are within reach for schools, leaders and teacher education programs. Because of this, finding ways to consider resilience as a guiding principle in design processes makes sense. Herman & Gill consider how designers can support social-emotional-academic-learning (SEAL) within a virtual setting. In this piece, principles of equity, personal growth and development are emphasized within the design process. LaDuca suggests a planning framework for university faculty development that includes principles such as safety, trust, transparency, support, connection, collaboration, mutuality, empowerment, voice, choice, social justice, resilience, growth and change. Similar to several other papers in this special issue, LaDuca points to the importance of collaboration between organizational leaders, designers, and learners with a focus on the necessity of including leadership.

Perhaps among the most clear links to a possible design principle, Turcotte exposes the positive impact of ungrading in terms of reducing stressors, a critical aspect of trauma-informed design. Turcotte finds that ungrading can express care for the learner and the learning. Even in a trauma-informed scenario ungrading can be freeing for students. Trauma-informed teaching is the focus for Thomas' piece. Like Lawless and Bogard, their focus is on pre-service teachers. They find that intentionally introducing information about trauma, giving opportunities for self-care, as well as slowing the pace to allow for reflection and focusing on communities created much stronger alignment for preservice teachers with their own trauma and that of their future students. Plum et al. found that student isolation was common and the need for social-emotional learning is high and like LaDuca, the importance of leadership coordination is emphasized by Plum et al. Cook-Sather & Nguyen point us toward the appropriate use of tools in trauma-informed settings. Here we see a move away from traditional tool use focused on cognitive load support, and instead focused on life-affirming learning. They ask us to consider tool use to advance the cause of empathy, healing and growth for our learners through shared co-creation in Google Docs. Here again we have a very specific way to consider the instructional design process differently within a trauma-informed frame.

Final Thoughts

Our daily practices within instructional design necessarily need to change and shift as our culture changes. Throughout our history, the field of learning design and technology has seen only a few inflection points, such as when constructivism was introduced into the consciousness of designers. Today we are in, perhaps, one of the largest inflection points in a generation. We are seeing the beginning of the end of the pandemic as the American government moves to end the official status of the COVID health emergency. While COVID is not gone and vulnerable populations must remain vigilant, and health experts warn of future potential pandemics in the near term, nevertheless, it is time to take stock of the trauma that the pandemic has left in its wake. We can see now that the "normal" is gone, the way we have practiced in the past will have less and less relevance as we increasingly recognize the impacts of COVID on those we design learning for. The articles in this special issue have given us all much to consider in terms of ways that we can explicitly and intentionally attend to trauma in our design work through new principles, different ways to use tools, and innovative assessment processes. Given the impacts that the twin pandemics have had on all of us, isn't it time?

> "Coronavirus is constantly attacking society's vulnerable classes and spaces. We must shake off the fantasy that we can go back to the past we were accustomed to." – Park Won-soon

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