

# Introduction to the Special Issue

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Instructional Design

Trauma

Learning

Trauma-informed

Social Emotional Learning



*This special issue of JAID begins to bridge the gap between the theories of social emotional learning/trauma informed learning with instructional design offering specific cases of design and development projects that illustrate the confluence of these two broad areas. We share these articles with our ID community in the hopes of creating principles for “compassionate instructional design” (Thomas et al., 2019) through a collection of practitioner cases and research articles on applied instructional design practices that are responsive to trauma-affected learners, and which highlight the complexities of the learning context of the learners being served.*

## Introduction

In the face of significant trauma across PK-12 through adult learner populations due to pandemic, racial injustice, climate change, and increasing global political division, education has increasingly become *the* tool for significant societal change. Tools to reach these lofty goals have historically included strong instructional design approaches and, more recently, attention to social emotional learning (SEL), but rarely have these tools been intentionally connected. Bridging these methods to advance teaching and learning practices is urgently needed as schools and other institutions serve learners who are increasingly affected by trauma.

Due to the past three years’ trauma, the skills associated with trauma-informed learning alongside good instructional design now offer many opportunities not only for the application of reflective practice, but to advance the field into true trauma-informed instructional design. It is important to reflect on instructional design practices that are sensitive to learners with traumatic histories and that lessen the trauma’s negative effects on learning, which may include delays in social, emotional, and cognitive development and impairment of self-regulation, organization, comprehension, and memorization (Wolpow et al., 2009). Although more and more educational professionals are contending with the impact of trauma on learning through “building emotionally healthy school cultures,” there is not a clear consensus nor is there a body of literature for what it means to have a “trauma informed” or “trauma sensitive” approach to instructional design (Thomas et al., 2019).

This special issue of JAID begins to bridge the gap between the theories of social emotional learning/trauma informed learning with instructional design offering specific cases of design and development projects that illustrate the confluence of these two broad areas. We share these articles with our ID community in the hopes of creating principles for “compassionate instructional design” (Thomas et al., 2019) through a collection of practitioner cases and research articles on applied instructional design practices that are responsive to trauma-affected learners, and which highlight the complexities of the learning context of the learners being served.

As we began this journey to address trauma-informed instructional design, we had hoped that this special issue would address questions such as:

*In what ways have instructional designers drawn upon the domains of SEL for supporting learners who have been affected by traumatic situations and environments?*

*How are experiences with supporting/teaching trauma-affected learners shifting instructional design practices?*

*What are the moves instructional designers make in attending to learners with traumatic histories? What are the effects of these practices on learning outcomes?*

*How might instructional design practices advance an institutional culture of care?*

*What systems of support or scaffolds in the learning environment might be considered with designing instruction for learners who are trauma exposed?*

As we examine the works that were submitted, reviewed, and accepted into this special issue, we find that many of these questions along with several new ones have been unsurfaced and addressed. Answering all of them may take a bit more in-depth examination in some cases, but this contribution is a good beginning to thinking through adjustments that are vital to the instructional design process as we understand it post COVID.

This special issue includes 7 articles, 1 interview and a conclusion in which we examine the possibility for a trauma-informed instructional design model. The first article, Lawless & Bogard, is an examination of the use of trauma-informed case-based instruction in a preservice teaching program at the University of Dayton. This research looked specifically at the impacts of a special topics course focused on trauma-informed instructional practices among a teacher education summer study abroad group of learners. When controlling for the abroad experience, which can of course also impact preservice teachers’ perspectives in significant ways, the trauma-informed group of preservice teachers had significant increases in resiliency measures among those students who experienced the trauma-informed course option. Because this was a case-based course focused on trauma informed practices, these findings are significant in pointing to specific ways that universities preparing teachers can approach the increased needs for trauma-informed pedagogies among new teachers.

Continuing the focus on case-based trauma-informed approaches, Herman & Gill take up a design case within K-12 schools to look at supporting virtual students. Online learners who were particularly highlighted during the pandemic, need significant support and do not usually enter their online learning space with belongingness already established. Explicitly embedding social emotional academic learning (SEAL) training within online courses as part of the design process increases the likelihood of learner success. This design case helps to begin a design model that is focused on trauma-informed practices.

Another possible strategy beyond training within online courses is the potential for learning communities to bolster the trauma-informed framework. LaDuca’s conceptual paper proposes the use of “innovative and collaborative trauma-informed learning community” in order to overcome the existing burnout among faculty and staff in higher education (although the lessons can be adapted to a variety of contexts). LaDuca offers a Learning Community Planning Framework (LCPF) that supports resilience (similar to Lawless & Bogard’s concern), and also attends to the sense of belonging highlighted by Herman & Gill. This conceptual framework accounts for many of the primary concerns for traumatized learners including reflection, collaboration, patience and the luxury of time. LaDuca rightly recognizes the

importance of leadership support for some of these practices which may be seen as less than sustainable over time. Engaging with these difficult realities of trauma-informed practices must be accounted for in our work as instructional designers as we increasingly engage and encounter traumatized learners.

Turcotte, McElfresh, and Meehan extend the idea of questioning the canons of sustainability and teaching by asking graduate students to share their understandings of ungrading. Couched within the understanding that we must attend to care for students and their well-being as part of a trauma-informed approach. Turcotte et al. finds that this is a potential tool for decreasing stress for all learners and asks us to re-think the way we understand assessment more generally. While respondents in this study did not focus on their own trauma, they clearly indicated increased excitement and engagement in their learning as a result of ungrading.

Thomas approaches the question of how we address student and learner care in teacher preparation through a focus on community as a tool for trauma-informed care. In this piece, some of our assumptions about trauma are challenged, as are the assumptions of preservice teachers. Thomas challenges us as designers to use tools that move toward intentional attention to trauma-informed learning communities. Thomas outlines ways that they have provided tools to support reflection and ongoing processing of preservice teacher experiences.

Plum, Plum, and Conceicao take up the very real barriers to implementation of SEL approaches and discuss a district-wide implementation via a case study in a K-12 district. The pandemic clearly has increased attention on trauma-informed pedagogy and this case looks at the realities of teachers' experiences in the midst of the pandemic. According to Plum et al., teachers saw that students were isolated and teachers knew that they needed to do more to help with student care. However, the barriers to this are real and as Plum et al point out, leadership support and stakeholder coordination is essential to effectively address the needs for SEL.

In terms of specific tools, Cook-Sather and Nguyen point to Google Docs as a way to educate the whole person, affirm each learner, and address the negative impacts of the pandemic. Seeing Google docs as a way to allow for co-creation and ongoing trust building, this paper lays out the various ways that the tool is used and the impacts it had on a course focused on change in higher education. What is most compelling about this paper is the use of language like love, trust, life-affirming, care, affirmation, and grace. Seeing the tool interpreted in this powerful way is an exciting interpretation of what others may see as a "dry" or ubiquitous piece of technology that has been recast in a powerful way.

Prior to proposing a trauma-informed instructional design model, we close this special issue with an interview with Catherine Biddle & Mark Tappan authors of *Trauma-responsive schooling: Centering student voice and healing*. This text has a number of important lessons for those who want to look carefully at the ways that trauma-responsive approaches can be implemented. Among some of the lessons from the text, we found the connection between trauma and equity, re-examining assumptions, student voice and the pre-eminence of relationship were critical to our deciding to further explore this text with the authors. We were honored to be able to spend some time plumbing the depths of their work and thinking on trauma-informed pedagogy.

The final piece of the trauma-informed ID puzzle is a new model that will inform instructional designers who are dealing with traumatized learners specifically. While there are already a good number of ID models, and many would argue we do not need new ones, the twin pandemics of COVID and racism have had deep and lasting impacts. Drawing from all of the work submitted to the special issue as well as our understandings of the needs of both instructional design models and trauma-informed pedagogy, the model focuses on the importance of a number of issues that are not typically addressed in traditional instructional design models—things like love, care, relationship.

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