

The Journal of Applied Instructional Design

Trauma-Informed Instructional Design Practices

February 2023

Treavor Bogard and Alison Carr-Chellman

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About the Journal

During the past 50 years, journals in the field of instructional design have been responsive to the changing needs of both scholars and to a lesser degree, the practitioner. We have seen an evolution of AVCR to ECTJ, the emergence of JID, and finally the merging of ECTJ and JID to form ETR&D. ETR&D is a widely recognized, scholarly journal in our field that maintains rigorous standards for publications.

During the past 50 years, we have also witnessed a change in the field due in part to the success of instructional design in business and other nonschool environments. The number of instructional designers working outside the university has dramatically increased. Of particular importance is the rise in the number of instructional designers with doctorates who consider themselves practitioners, but not necessarily scholars. This growing group of designers might be best described as reflective practitioners who can make a significant contribution to the knowledge of our field.

This growth and success in the application of instructional design has also changed the field. From the early days of the field until the mid-1980's, the theory and practice of instructional design was almost exclusively influenced by the academic community. With the growth of instructional designers, the theory and practice of the field is now defined by both academics and practitioners. There is a need for greater communication between the scholars and the practitioners in a scholarly journal that will support innovation and growth of our knowledge base.

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Goals

The purpose of this journal is to bridge the gap between theory and practice by providing reflective practitioners a means for publishing articles related to the field. The journal establishes and maintains a scholarly standard with the appropriate rigor for articles based on design and development projects. Articles include evaluation reports (summative and formative), lessons learned, design and development approaches, as well as applied research. The articles are based on design and development projects as opposed to pure research projects and focus on lessons learned and how to improve the instructional design process. Rigor is established through articles grounded in research and theory.

A secondary goal of this journal is to encourage and nurture the development of the reflective practitioner in the field of instructional design. This journal encourages the practitioner as well as collaborations between academics and practitioners as a means of disseminating and developing new ideas in instructional design. The resulting articles inform both the study and practice of instructional design.

Philosophy

This journal will provide a peer-reviewed format for the publication of scholarly articles in the field of applied instructional design. The journal recognizes the role of the practitioner in the work environment and realizes that outside constraints may limit the data collection and analysis process in applied settings. The limitations of real-world instructional design of the practitioner can still provide valuable knowledge for the field.

Sponsoring Organization

JAID is a publication of the [Association for Educational Communications and Technology](#) (AECT).

JAID is an online open-access journal and is offered without cost to users.

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About AECT



The [Association for Educational Communications and Technology](#) (AECT) is a professional association of instructional designers, educators and professionals who provide leadership and advise policy makers in order to sustain a continuous effort to enrich teaching and learning. Seizing opportunities to raise awareness and leverage technology, our members may be found around the world in colleges and universities, in the Armed Forces and industry, in museums, libraries, and hospitals, and in the many places where educational change is underway. Our research and scholarly activity contribute to the knowledge base in the field of Learning. We are on the cutting edge of new developments and innovations in research and application.

AECT is the premier organization for those actively involved in the design of instruction and a systematic approach to learning. We provide an international forum for the exchange and dissemination of ideas for our members and for target audiences. We are the national and international voice for improvement of instruction and the most recognized association of information concerning a wide range of instructional and educational technology. We have 24 state and six International Affiliates all passionate about finding better ways to help people learn.

Since 1923, AECT has been the professional home for this field of interest and has continuously maintained a central position in the field, promoting high standards, in both scholarship and practice with nine Divisions and a Graduate Student Assembly that represent the breadth and depth of the field. Other journals sponsored by AECT include [Educational Technology Research and Development](#) and [TechTrends](#).

The Journal of Applied Instructional Design (JAID) is a refereed online journal designed for the publication of scholarly articles in the field of applied Instructional Design. The purpose of JAID is to provide the reflective ID scholar-practitioners and researchers a means for publishing articles on the nature and practice of ID that will support the innovation and growth of our knowledge base. The journal is for practitioners, instructors, students, and researchers of instructional design.

Call for Submissions

JAID is for reflective scholar-practitioners, who through documentation of their practice in ID, make significant contributions to the knowledge of our field. Authors are invited to submit articles documenting new or revised approaches to ID; the processes of ID including in-depth documentation of analysis, design, and development, implementation and evaluation; design-based research; as well as applied research. Articles must be based on instructional design projects as opposed to pure research projects and focus on documented processes, lessons learned, and how to improve the overall process of ID. Articles must be grounded in research and theory connecting the intellectual foundations of the ID field and how these foundations shape its practice.

The journal will establish and maintain a scholarly standard with the appropriate rigor for articles based on design and development projects. A secondary goal of this journal is to encourage and nurture the development of the reflective practitioner in the field of ID. This journal encourages the practitioner as well as collaborations between academics and practitioners as a means of disseminating and developing new ideas in ID. The resulting articles should inform both the study and practice of ID.

[Submit an Article](#)

Article Types

JAID currently accepts submissions of three article types.

Instructional Design Practice

This is an applied journal serving a practicing community. Our focus is on what practitioners are doing in authentic contexts and their observed results. These articles cover topics of broad concern to instructional design practitioners. The articles should represent issues of practical importance to working designers.

Research Studies on Applied Instructional Design

JAID is interested in publishing empirical studies exploring the application of instructional design principles in applied settings. Quantitative and qualitative studies are welcome.

Instructional Design/Performance Design Position Papers

JAID also accepts position papers that attempt to bridge theory and practice. Examples may include conceptual frameworks and new ideas facing the instructional design community. The paper must also provide enough information to allow the replication of the innovation or continuation of the research in other settings. Position papers must be based in the context of a theoretical framework. Efficacy data is strongly preferred, but not always required, contingent upon the potential generalizability or value of the innovation.

Submission Guidelines

The journal will focus on in-depth applications of the ID process and publish a variety of articles including case studies of the ID process; application articles that go beyond a mere how-to approach that provide implementation insights, guidance and evaluation of a process; evaluation articles that focus on the viability of a product or process; applied research resulting from evaluation of materials, studies of project implementation, articles on ways to improve the ID process from the perspective of the practitioner, and short essays that provide a scholarly debate of relevant issues related to the application of ID and relevant book reviews. When applicable, articles should include supplementary materials including examples of ID products, evaluation instruments, media files, and design artifacts.

The articles in the journal will be from the perspective of the scholar-practitioner rather than from the researcher. However, the manuscripts must demonstrate scholarly rigor appropriate to applied manuscripts.

Articles, including tables or figures, must follow APA 7th edition formatting and be submitted in a word or doc format using at least 12-point New Times Roman font. Each article must have an abstract (75-100 words) and a list of keywords. While there is some flexibility in the length of an article, 4,000 to 5,000 words is a best-guess estimate. If in doubt, contact the editor prior to submitting the article. Identifying information must only be located on the cover page including contact information for the first author.

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Introduction to the Special Issue

Treavor Bogard & Alison Carr-Chellman

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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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Building Preservice Teacher Resiliency with Trauma-Informed Case Based Instruction

Catherine Lawless Frank & Treavor Bogard

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Preservice Teachers

Trauma-informed

Case-based Instruction



At least one in four children in the United States has experienced one or more traumatic events (National Child Traumatic Stress Network Schools Committee [NCTSN], 2008). Children exposed to trauma bring a host of psychological and physical stressors to the classroom. Teachers can positively impact a student's ability to cope with these events and develop resilience (Brooks, 1994), but not without a physical and emotional toll on their well-being. This paper investigates one teacher education program's attempt to better support preservice teachers (PTs) in meeting these challenges by examining the impact of trauma-informed case-based instruction on PTs self-reported resilience and efficacy with Trauma Informed Instructional Practices (TIIP). Before partaking in a teacher education summer study abroad program, 26 PTs completed both the Conner-Division Resilience Scale-10 (CD-RISC) and Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES) to determine baselines for resilience and efficacy. During the program, eight PTs participated in a special topics course on trauma-informed practices utilizing case-based instruction (treatment group). At the completion of the program, all 26 PTs were reassessed on both scales. Results indicated that PTs made significant gains on both measures, but those who were in the trauma-informed case-based instruction group had significantly greater gains in resiliency than the control group. The findings support the use of case-based instruction for enhancing PTs' resiliency. Implications are provided for embedding resiliency scaffolds for case-based reasoning through a trauma-informed lens.

Introduction

At least one in four children from birth to 18 in the United States has experienced one or more traumatic events (Burke et al., 2011; Kerker et al., 2015; NCTSN, 2008). Early exposure to trauma impacts brain development and can have lasting negative influence on a child's physical, behavioral, and mental health (Sciaraffa et al., 2018). Trauma-responsive schools support educators in recognizing signs of trauma and mitigating its impact on student learning and development (Bethell et al., 2019). Using trauma-informed instructional practices (TIIP), educators create instructional scaffolds and learning environments that provide trauma-affected students "buffering protection" with "stable,

responsive relationships” (Garner & Shonkoff, 2012, p. 225). In doing so, TIIP supports students’ ability to cope with toxic stress and achieve academic success.

In the post-pandemic education landscape, students’ learning and wellness needs are greatly intensified, leaving educators overwhelmed and under-equipped to support trauma-exposed students. It is incumbent upon teacher education programs to advance instructional practices that are responsive to the behavioral and academic challenges of trauma-exposed learners. Within a social-emotional learning framework, preservice teachers (PTs) must be prepared to integrate TIIP in their administration of the teaching-learning cycle, classroom structure, and routines—all while managing their own stress (Alisic, 2012; Howard & Johnson, 2004), as the emotional labor of TIIP often leaves teachers “overwhelmed and exhausted” (Hall & Souers, 2022, p. 56). Given this increased job complexity, it is important that teacher prep programs employ practice-based approaches for TIIP in a manner that enhances resilience and self-efficacy for supporting trauma-affected learners. In this vein, we examine the use of case-based instruction for building PTs’ resiliency and self-efficacy in addressing student-centered problems of practice through a TIIP lens.

Literature Review

What Are Trauma Informed Instructional Practices?

Trauma-informed Instructional Practices (TIIP) mitigate the negative impact of trauma on student learning and development (Thomas et al., 2019). Using TIIP, teachers establish positive student relationships and classroom structures that provide cognitive, social, and emotional support for learning (Hanover, 2019; Wolpow et al., 2009). This may include providing instructional support for reducing cognitive load and increasing attention. It may also include scaffolds for regulating negative emotions, coping with anxiety, and maintaining positive peer relations. TIIP, therefore, focuses not only on supporting cognition, but also the intra-personal (self-management skills) and inter-personal (social skills), all being dimensions of learning that trauma impedes (Thomas et al., 2019). Consequently, the learning environment and instruction may incorporate tools, structures, and routines for reducing anxiety, cognitive load, dissociation, and maladaptive coping behaviors that impair learning and social-emotional development.

Currently, TIIP encompasses a generalized set of cognitive scaffolds, supports for social-emotional learning, tips for building positive teacher-student relationships, strategies for deescalating trauma responses, and adoption of schoolwide frameworks for trauma informed care (Hanover, 2019; Wolpow et al., 2009). In practice, there is no single uniform instructional design model for implementing TIIP within the teaching-learning cycle. More often, frameworks for TIIP include a combination of instructional and relational supports tailored to individual student, classroom, and school-wide needs (Thomas et al., 2019; Wolpow et al., 2009). In this regard, being a trauma-informed educator involves recognizing signs and symptoms of trauma, hypothesizing cognitive/social/emotional supports, and discerning which combination of instructional supports produces the best results. In doing so, educators approach trauma-induced barriers to learning “through an equity and inclusive education lens, rather than an individual deficits-oriented lens” (Rodger et al., 2019, p. 1800).

When supporting trauma-affected learners, however, teachers are susceptible to vicarious trauma, secondary trauma, and compassion fatigue that result in them feeling overwhelmed, burdened, and in need of support (Chow et al., 2015; Mayor, 2021; Tobin et al., 2018). They often struggle to balance staying emotionally distant with becoming too emotionally involved and having the emotional burden impacting their lives outside the classroom.

Resilience and Self-Efficacy for Supporting Trauma-Affected Learners

Because implementing TIIP increases instructional complexity and the emotional labor of teaching, teachers, like students, need to learn strategies to build their own resilience to increase effectiveness (Bobek, 2002). It is vital that teacher preparation programs provide practice-based learning experiences that develop their self-efficacy and resilience for imparting TIIP (Sharifian et al., 2022). Self-efficacy refers to a teacher’s belief in his or her ability to succeed (Bandura, 1986). When teachers believe they can be successful, they are more likely to persevere through challenges. Teachers with high self-efficacy may demonstrate commitment and effort in adopting approaches such as TIIP to

support a diverse range of students (Delale-O'Connor et al., 2017), including when implementing strategies for instruction, classroom management, and student engagement (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

Teachers' self-efficacy can enhance their resilience—the ability to recover from persistent challenges and setbacks amid shifting cognitive, emotional, and social conditions in the environment (Beltman et al., 2011; Brunetti, 2006). Resilience is multifaceted. It includes building and sustaining supportive relationships (personal/professional support networks), maintaining wellbeing and positive outlook in the wake of difficulty, as well as maintaining motivation and regulating emotion during repeated setbacks (Mansfield et al., 2016). Given the complexity and scope of TIIP, it is perhaps not surprising that TIIP incorporates many areas where teachers are most tested in developing resilience and self-efficacy. These include being proactive with classroom management, de-escalating disruptive student behaviors, differentiating instruction, meeting needs of disadvantaged learners, and coping with a heavy workload and lack of time (Beltman et al., 2011; Gu & Day, 2007).

From an instructional design perspective, self-efficacy for practices such as those associated with TIIP develops through repeated mastery of related tasks in an authentic problem context; observing peers and mentors accomplishing comparable tasks in that same context; receiving constructive feedback from peers/mentors; and self-regulating emotional states during task completion (Bandura, 2012; Park, 2018). Resilience can be developed with tools for managing task complexity. For example, providing tools for accessing personal and contextual resources (e.g., peer support, collaboration, information resources) and employing adaptive coping strategies (e.g., time management, self-regulation) are some ways that resiliency can be enhanced during problem solving (Mansfield et al., 2016).

Developing Resilience and Self-Efficacy with Case-based Instruction

In order to better prepare PTs for supporting trauma-affected learners, it is important that teacher preparation programs structure opportunities for PTs to practice TIIP in a manner that promotes self-efficacy and resilience-building. Tait (2008) suggested that resilience and self-efficacy can be developed through case-based instruction in which PTs respond to challenging teaching situations. Case-based instruction engages learners in reasoning through a complex problem that is anchored in a real-world scenario. Learners engage in an iterative cycle of providing interpretive explanations of the problem, recalling similarities of the problem to prior cases, strategizing/applying a solution, and evaluating the results (Riesbeck & Schank, 1989).

There are two types of case-based instruction approaches: goal-based and design-based. A goal-based case presents a real-world scenario and places learners in a professional role in which they are required to achieve a goal. As the case scenario unfolds, learners acquire requisite knowledge and skills for goal completion (Schank, 1996). For example, a goal-based case for TIIP might engage PTs in recognizing signs of a trauma affected learner, infer causes and effects of the student's trauma-responses, and make recommendations for behavioral, cognitive, and environmental supports. The other type of case utilizes a design-based scenario (Kolodner et al., 1998). Activities are organized around building a product or completing a project. What is designed becomes an artifact of one's learning, a representation of applied knowledge and skills acquired in-situ (Savery, 2018). A design-based case focused on applying TIIP might guide PTs in the development and implementation of an intervention plan for supporting a trauma-affected learner, resulting in a case record for addressing similar situations in the future.

Several features of case-based instruction may support the development of self-efficacy and resilience. One feature, for example, is that the problem context is imbued with tools for elevating one's thinking and enhancing persistence as a scenario's complexity unfolds. PTs can be prompted in "identify and practice coping strategies, reframing skills and other resilient behaviors of thinking" (Ee & Chang, 2010, p. 329). Additionally, resilience and self-efficacy may be enhanced by case-based reasoning approaches that provide tools for collaborative problem solving, including tools for gathering relevant information, comparing case histories, developing/testing hypotheses, and reflecting on the results to inform next steps (Tawfik & Keene, 2013). With these tools, it is possible for PTs to develop a sense of self-efficacy and resiliency with solving problems of practice through a TIIP lens.

Another feature of case-based instruction that may support development of self-efficacy and resilience is that it centers failure explanations as the driving force for learning (Tawfik & Keene, 2013). Rather than focusing on being correct,

case-based reasoning regards failed approaches as necessary for disrupting assumptions and re-framing the problem from a new perspective. In a case-based approach, learners' failure explanations contribute to reformulation of the problem and development of mastery learning orientations (Kolodner, 1993). When teachers' expectations for implementing TIIP fail, they want to explain what happened so that they can gain perspective and re-strategize their approach. As their knowledge and expertise increase, they are better able to interpret and respond to the current problem. They add the experience to their memory that will serve them in future situations.

Therefore, a well-designed case will embed prompts for reflective reasoning that heighten the agency of the problem solver. Guided reflection helps learners connect information and variables affecting the case to discern patterns of cause-effect to form an integrated problem-solution narrative (Riesbeck & Schank, 1989; Tawfik & Keene, 2013). Structured opportunities for reflective learning is yet another feature of case-based instruction that may enhance self-efficacy and resilience. Generally, learners (a) identify and describe a problem that they had encountered; (b) describe their solution to the problem; (c) say what worked, what didn't work, and what they had learned from the experience; and (d) anticipate the kinds of situations where a similar solution might be useful (Turns et al., 1997). Often, this reflective commentary becomes a record of case-based reasoning, documenting the surface features of the problem, the root causes/underlying issues that were not initially obvious, the approaches taken to solve the problem, and an account of the failures that eventually lead to a breakthrough or success.

Research Focus and Method

As teacher educators, we wanted to know if case-based instructional scenarios focused on trauma-affected learners had any significant impact on PTs' self-efficacy toward classroom management, instructional strategies, student engagement, and their own personal resilience. This project attempts to address the following questions through a quantitative analysis of the candidates' growth.

Q1: Does the inclusion of case based TIIP significantly increase the candidates' self-reported resilience and efficacy toward teaching?

Q2: Is there a difference between those receiving case-based TIIP in PTs resilience and teacher efficacy when compared to those who did not receive case-based TIIP?

Participants

The participants were 26 pre-service teachers (PTs) who took part in a four-and-a-half-week study abroad in London, England. All PTs were from the same Midwestern private university in their third or fourth year of a four-year teacher preparation program. Twenty-five of the participants were female, and one was male. All were between 18-22 years of age and studying to be early childhood (grades pk-5), middle childhood (grades 4-9), adolescent/young adult (grades 7-12), and/or intervention specialist (grades k-12) teachers. During the project, PTs registered to take two of three offered courses. All participants (n=26) chose a course on educating diverse student populations in inclusive settings, 16 chose one on children's literacy (control group), and eight chose a special topics course focused on developing trauma-informed instructional practices (treatment group).

Treatment Group

The treatment group of eight PTs examined TIIP through a case-based instructional approach. The first phase of the course engaged them in a goal-oriented scenario addressing a real-world problem of practice. The PTs were to select from a prior field experience a learner that presented patterns of disruptive behavior and/or cognitive/emotional challenges. They then analyzed the case from a trauma-informed lens to make recommendations for instruction. The instructor assisted the PTs in narrowing the case focus to a specific situation with the student that had perplexed them and could serve as a case for identifying symptoms of trauma for relating TIIP. Examples of cases they selected from their prior field experiences included a withdrawn middle schooler whose parents were getting a divorce; a child struggling with emotional regulation; and an autistic teen triggered by touch, noises, and transitions between activities.

The second phase of the course engaged the PTs in developing a goal-based scenario using the focal student as a case. Then they engaged their classmates in exploring the issue from a trauma-informed lens. An example of one of the PTs case scenarios presented for analysis follows:

Each morning James arrives at school we never know what he will be feeling like. Some days, like most kids, he is excited and wants to see his friend. However, most days tend to be frustrating for him. His parents work long hours at their jobs at the local hospital. James and his siblings get up early, eat a quick breakfast, and are headed to before-care around 6AM. When his dad drops him off, he tends to be more relaxed and transitions into the school routine without much issue. When it is his mother, he gets angry and acts out. It is mostly on these days, when things don't go his way, we see him say whatever his is thinking (most often negative comments) and defy any adult. He sometimes hits other students over toys. The behavior is most extreme after being dropped off at school.

The PTs, having gathered information and analyzed the case during the first phase of the inquiry, now poses it as a problem of practice for their peers. The leader of the case scenario asks for interpretive explanations for the causes and potential issues of the behavior and adds additional factors and information to the case based on the questions they receive. In the iteration of the case analysis, the PTs draw upon their own prior knowledge that they have gathered from their own inquiries into trauma-informed practices. They list all the potential issues that could be relevant to the situation, possible strategies to apply based on what they know so far about the case and similar cases they have encountered, and questions that point to the information they need to gather to increase their insight and perspective.

Data Collection and Instruments

To measure the effect of this case-based approach, all participants electronically completed the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) and the Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC-10) on separate occasions before traveling abroad. While the surveys were considered part of the course, participation in the research project was voluntary, and the university's Institutional Review Board granted approval. The TSES measures self-efficacy through a self-rating 24-item Likert scale ranging from one (lowest) to nine (highest) with three subscales of eight questions each: Efficacy in Student Engagement, Efficacy in Instructional Strategies, and Efficacy in Classroom Management. The TSES has been used extensively to measure teacher efficacy and prompts participants to evaluate “How well can you . . .” in “things that create difficulties for teachers in their school activities” (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001, p. 1). A factor analysis for construct validity was conducted, and it has published reliabilities of 0.91 (instructional strategies), 0.90 (classroom management), and 0.87 (student engagement). The CD-RISC-10 is a self-rating 10-item five-point Likert scale with scores ranging from zero (lowest) to four (highest) with total scores ranging from 0 to 40. It is used to identify a person's ability to respond to setbacks and “bounce back.” The instrument has extensive psychometric research to establish validity and reliability and can be used to measure growth in resilience over just a few weeks (Davidson JRT, 2022). On the final day of the courses, all participants again electronically completed both the CD-RISC-10 and TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001; Swan et al., 2011).

Analysis

Results of both the TSES and CD-RISC-10 assessments were analyzed through a Paired t-Test for Two Samples with groups of equal size and a t-Test for Two Samples Assuming Unequal Variances for the comparison between the control and treatment groups due to unequal sample sizes. Both analyses used a significance rate of $p < 0.05$. Questions with responses left blank (three in total) were discarded and not tabulated in the results.

Results

This study examined whether case-based instructional scenarios focused on trauma-affected learners impacted PTs' self-efficacy toward classroom management, instructional strategies, student engagement, and their own personal resilience. It addresses the following research questions:

Q1: Does the inclusion of case based TIIP significantly increase the candidates' self-reported resilience and efficacy toward teaching?

Q2: Is there a difference between those receiving case-based TIIP in PTs resilience and teacher efficacy when compared to those who did not receive case-based TIIP?

Teacher Self Efficacy

Results indicated that all participants, as well as the control and treatment groups independently, made statistically significant gains in overall self-efficacy and for each of the three subtests of classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement. There were no significant differences though in a comparison between the control and treatment groups. Both groups made significant gains on the TSES but neither group made significantly greater gains.

Table 1 shows the results of Q1 in terms of the impact of case based TIIP on candidates' self-reported efficacy toward teaching. The table indicates average pre and post test scores for all participants (N = 26) as well as the control (N = 16) and treatment (N = 8) groups. The results of a dependent sample t-tests ($p < 0.05$) reveal significant increases in general efficacy scores for all participants ($t(622) = 21.42, p < .001$), as well as the control ($t(431) = 19.58, p < .001$) and treatment ($t(191) = 9.79, p < .001$) groups. All groups also made significant gains in each of the three subtests of classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement.

Table 1

TSES Pre and Post

	All participants (n = 26)		Control group (n = 16)		Treatment group (n = 8)	
	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)
	t df p value		t df p value		t df p value	
General efficacy	6.06(1.64)	7.58(1.21)	5.78(1.53)	7.34(1.21)	6.77(1.68)	8.11(1.02)
	21.42 622 $p < .001$		19.58 431 $p < .001$		9.79 191 $p < .001$	
Classroom management	5.94(1.69)	7.40(1.24)	5.59(1.53)	7.17(1.18)	6.70(1.79)	7.94(1.22)
	11.77 206 $p < .001$		11.42 142 $p < .001$		4.74 63 $p < .001$	
Instructional strategies	5.98(1.56)	7.74(1.12)	5.61(1.40)	7.51(1.15)	6.81(1.58)	8.25(.87)
	15.01 207 $p < .001$		14.68 143 $p < .001$		5.94 63 $p < .001$	
Student engagement	6.33(1.65)	7.59(1.25)	6.13(1.59)	7.33(1.29)	6.78(1.69)	8.16(.93)
	10.60 207 $p < .001$		8.44 143 $p < .001$		6.42 63 $p < .001$	

The results for Q2 in whether there is a difference in pre and post self-efficacy scores between those receiving case-based TIIP (treatment group, N = 8) and those that did not (control group, N = 16) are detailed in Table 2. The results of a t-Test of Two Samples Assuming Unequal Variances indicate that both the pre ($t(337) = 6.95, p < .001$) and post ($t(430) = 8.27, p < .001$) scores were significantly different. In both instances, the control group scored higher, but the resulting change in scores between the two groups was not significantly different. These results were consistent in general efficacy and for the three subtests.

Table 2

Comparison of Pre and Post Scores Between the Control and Treatment Groups TSES

	Pre test		Post Test		Change pre-post	
	Control (n = 16)	Treatment (n = 8)	Treatment (n = 8)	Control (n = 16)	Control (n = 16)	Treatment (n = 8)
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)
	t df p value		t df p value		t df p value	
General efficacy	5.78(1.53)	6.77(1.68)	8.11(1.02)	1.56(1.66)	7.34(1.21)	1.35(1.91)
	6.95 337 p<.001		8.27 430 p<.001		1.31 325 p=.192	
Classroom management	5.59(1.53)	6.70(1.79)	7.94(1.22)	1.57(1.65)	7.17(1.18)	1.23(2.08)
	4.31 106 p<.001		4.24 118 p<.001		1.15 100 p=.253	
Instructional strategies	5.61(1.40)	6.81(1.58)	8.25(.87)	1.90(1.55)	7.51(1.15)	1.44(1.93)
	5.23 109 p<.001		5.12 156 p<.001		1.67 100 p=.098	
Student engagement	6.13(1.59)	6.78(1.69)	8.16(.93)	1.20(1.71)	7.33(1.29)	1.38(1.71)
	2.60 114 p=.011		5.20 164 p<.001		.675 121 p=.501	

The results indicated that while both groups made significant increases in self-efficacy, there were no statistical differences in the results. The control group made greater gains in general efficacy (M = 1.56, SD = 1.66) than the treatment group (M = 1.35, SD = 1.91), and in the subcategories classroom management (M = 1.57, SD = 1.65 vs. M = 1.23, SD = 2.08) and instructional strategies (M = 1.90, SD = 1.55 vs. M = 1.44, SD = 1.93). These differences were not considered significant. The treatment group made greater mean gains in student engagement (M = 1.38, SD = 1.71 vs. M = 1.20 vs. SD = 1.71), but again the differences were not significant.

Resilience

The CD-RISC was used to assess changes in the participants' resilience. All participants, and the control and treatment groups, had statistically significant gains from the pre to post scores. In comparing pre and post scores between the control and treatment groups, the pretest results did not indicate a significant difference, but the post-tests did. The treatment group made a more significant gain on the CD-RISC than the control group. There was no significant difference in resilience between the two groups at the start of the program, and while both groups made significant gains, the treatment groups' gains were significantly greater.

Table 3 shows the results of Q1 in terms of the impact of case based TIIP on candidates' resilience. The table indicates the average pre and post test scores for all participants (N = 26) as well as the control (N = 16) and treatment (N = 8) groups. The results of a dependent sample t-test ($p < 0.05$) reveal significant increases between the pre and post scores for all participants ($t(257) = 7.57, p < .001$) as well as both the control ($t(179) = 5.15, p < .001$) and treatment groups ($t(79) = 5.39, p < .001$).

Table 3

CD-RISC-10 Pre and Post

	Pre M(SD)	Post M(SD)	t	df	p value
Overall	3.00(.844)	3.43(.773)	7.57	257	<.001
Control	2.97(.831)	3.34(.828)	5.12	179	<.001

	Pre M(SD)	Post M(SD)	t	df	p value
Treatment	3.05(.876)	3.70(.635)	5.39	79	<.001

All participants, the control and treatment groups, had statistically significant increases in the pre and post-scores on the CD-RISC-10.

The results for Q2 in whether there is a difference in pre and post resilience scores between the treatment group (N = 8) and control group (N =16) are detailed in Table 4. The results of a t-Test of Two Samples Assuming Unequal Variances indicate that the pre-test score ($t(145) = .616$, $p = .538$) between the two groups was not significantly different, but the post test scores ($t(213) = 4.08$, $p < .001$) were significantly different.

Table 4

Comparison of Pre and Post Scores Between the Two Groups CD-RISC-10

	Control	Treatment	t	df	p value
Pre M(SD)	2.97(.831)	3.05(.876)	.616	145	0.538
Post M(SD)	3.34(.828)	3.70(.635)	4.08	213	<.001
Change M(SD) (post-pre scores)	0.36(.92)	0.65(1.00)	2.14	139	<.001

There was no significant difference in resilience between the two groups at the start of the program, but there was a significant difference after the program. The treatment group made statistically more significant gains in the pre to post scores than the control group ($M = .65$, $SD = 1.00$ vs. $M = .36$, $SD = .92$). The difference between the pre and post scores of the two groups was also significant, again indicating greater gains in the treatment group ($t(139) = 2.14$, $p < .001$).

Discussion and Implications

In terms of self-efficacy for teaching, as measured by the TSES, participants made significant gains over the course of the program. Still, there was no significant difference between the control and treatment groups, which held true for the overall assessment results and the three subtests relating to classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement. The researchers had expected to see greater gains in teaching efficacy from the treatment group compared to the control group, especially in classroom management, as it related trauma-informed instruction more directly. That was not the case. Both groups made significant gains regardless of the content, indicating that trauma-informed instruction using a case study approach may potentially increase a teacher's self-efficacy, similar to a traditional academic content-driven course. The sample size of this study was too small to determine any conclusion and indicates an area for further research.

In terms of self-reported resilience, as determined through the CD-RISC-10, both groups again made significant gains, but the treatment group made greater statistically significant gains. There was no significant difference between the pretest scores between the two groups, but there was in the post-test scores, with the treatment group making statistically greater gains in pre and post-scores. This difference may indicate that using a case-based, trauma-informed approach may help better facilitate a PT's overall self-resilience. This finding is important as Sharifian et al. (2022) identified that teacher training programs are essential in helping teachers develop protective factors that increase their resiliency through practice-based learning, as found in the case study approach. Our findings suggest that a case-based approach that engages PTs in problem solving instructional practices through a trauma-informed lens is a promising method for building resiliency needed for imparting TIIP.

Although this study did not examine the instructional design features that resulted in resiliency gains, we point to two features that we believe set conditions for resilience building. The first feature is prolonged inquiry into a situated

problem of practice that can serve as a locus of resilience building and that is complex enough for critically framing professional skillsets, dispositions, discourse practices, and interpersonal relations. PTs in the treatment group recalled a situation from a prior field experience that involved a trauma-affected student that had left them with lingering uncertainties and concerns about how to support the student. The situation each PT identified became the locus of inquiry into TIIP and the source material from which they developed a case scenario to solve with their peers. Thus, a three-phase case approach emerged that provided a meaningful structure for sustaining case-based reasoning: Phase 1). goal-based inquiry into one's own problem of practice; Phase 2). Using the perspectives gained from phase 1 to develop a case scenario for others to solve; Phase 3). Presenting the case to peers and engaging them in isolating the underlying issue and addressing them from a TIIP perspective.

The other feature we believe was important for optimizing resilience building is a collaborative learning environment that honors the sharing of challenges and failure stories around the cases presented. PTs fostered collaboration in sharing failure explanations that initiated new avenues of thought and application of TIIP. Collective perspectives around failure forged insight into factors that increased the nuance and complexity of the case. Once solved, the case provided a record of reasoning indexing situations for which the case informs or might leverage future applications of TIIP.

Case-based instruction enhances opportunities for resilience building by providing sustained, situated inquiry into authentic problems of practice alongside cooperative supports and structures for leveraging failure for deeper learning. However, instructional designers will need to expand learning tools and cognitive scaffolds for problem solving to include tools for building and modeling resilience. Instructional designers, for example, can embed prompts, videos, case libraries, concept databases, collaboration tools, and problem-solving heuristics to guide students through problem solving processes. These might include tools that map to the different facets of resilience building. For example, to leverage personal and contextual resources, tools can be provided for reflecting and discussing with peers, mentors and teachers. For promoting self-regulation and management of task complexity, tools for goal setting, time management, help-seeking, reframing failure, and managing emotions can be integrated into the learning environment and demonstrated throughout the problem solving process. More research is needed to discern how these and other scaffolds may be embedded within case-based instruction and used to build PTs resilience as they gain and apply knowledge as they work through the case scenario. In doing so, PTs may be more prepared to model resilience building and support within the teaching-learning cycle as part of their TIIP.

These findings contribute to the research in providing PTs with a case based TIIP approach may have the potential to increase self-efficacy to a similar degree and increase resilience to a greater degree than a traditional academic content-driven course. Further research is needed to identify how this collaborative approach supports building resilience. Further research into developing resilience through instructional methods and teaching approaches could also result in better design of case-based scaffolds.

Limitations

While this study indicated the benefit of implementing a TIIP case study approach to promoting self-efficacy and resiliency in PTs, it is not without its limitations. Further research would benefit from using a larger sample size for both the control and treatments group. Due to constraints on the program, the shorter version CD RISC-10 was used. The more extended version, CD RISC-25, may indicate a more nuanced view of resiliency which was not possible using the CD RISC-10.

It is also possible that the treatment group was further along in their four-year program than the control group. While not all treatment group members had taken the children's literature course provided to the control group, some had. This does not negate the gains made but may indicate a greater maturity in the treatment group, which may impact scores.

Designing a similar study using a mixed method approach that incorporated the PTs' voices could also further the research into trauma-informed practices and building resilience which this study failed to do. PTs' voices could allow for a greater understanding of the overall results.

Conclusion

Developing resilience in teachers is essential to their implementation of TIIP. Teachers' behavior impacts students' behaviors, and teachers who model resiliency promote resilience in their students. Teachers must be resilient to expect students to be resilient (Hall & Souers, 2022). The "support and encouragement of protective factors . . . are easily within the power of individual schools, education bureaucracies and teacher education faculties to provide" (Howard & Johnson, 2004, p. 416). The TIIP case study approach better facilitated the "support and encouragement" to develop PTs protective factors in this research project.

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Building Belonging into the System

A Design Case

Kristin Herman & Michelle Gill

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Instructional Design

Design Case

K-12 Schools

Trauma-informed

Socio-emotional Learning



This design case documents how a K-12 district took steps to systemically support virtual student wellness and belonging. Plans for course design to support social-emotional-academic learning (SEAL) competencies, increase perception of belonging, and create safe, predictable learning environments characteristic of a trauma-informed approach to teaching and learning are shared. The assumption virtual learners are not looking to experience belonging and cannot be successful unless they already have strong SEAL skills is challenged. Rather, the positioning of SEAL competencies as learning objectives rather than necessary prerequisites to access online learning proved to contribute to more equitable learning opportunities.

Background

An effective approach to trauma-informed, social-emotional-academic learning (SEAL) includes providing space for students to develop and practice key SEAL competencies—such as those related to self-awareness and self-regulation—while building and maintaining strong and supportive relationships in the classroom and across the school (Frydman & Mayor, 2017). As part of a larger trauma-informed SEAL framework, this approach contributes to the creation of safe, predictable learning environments where students are empowered and supported to manage the adverse effects of trauma while adults’ awareness and sensitivity help avoid the perpetuation of trauma throughout the school day (Frydman & Mayor, 2017; Ngo et al., 2008). For learning pathways that occur in online environments, too often some demonstration of a cited level of attainment of these SEAL competencies is required, gatekeeping students deemed “not ready” from online learning pathways. Moore (2021a) reframes this relationship, suggesting when SEAL competencies are positioned as learning objectives rather than necessary prerequisites, access to more equitable learning opportunities become available to all students.

This design case highlights how Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding allowed a K-12 public school district in southeastern PA prioritize two initiatives as students returned from emergency remote modalities due to the COVID-19 pandemic: growth of online learning pathways and opportunities for SEAL competency development. While these roles are traditionally siloed in K-12 organizational structures (Smith et al., 2020), the intentional collaboration and critical co-reflection between the two coordinators of these initiatives led to the implementation of programming designed to address a root issue sometimes overlooked in trauma-informed education: societal inequity (Venet, 2021).

Four specific design considerations inspired by Whitbeck's (1996) conceptualization of ethics as design, are described: (1) embracing uncertainty despite the use of external representations, (2) iteration of design elements and implementation over the course of the academic calendar year, (3) the development of feedback loops from all invested participants, and (4) the need to balance fidelity with flexibility in the creation of a resilient system. Designer reflections are also shared as a critical part of the intentional documented record of design practice (see Boling, 2010).

Documenting design cases allows for a rich explanation of design practice in authentic environments (Smith, 2010). While not intended to be generalizable, design cases present practical application precedent (Gray & Boling, 2016) and make explicit ways in which core values influence design decisions (Gray et al., 2015). The focus of this design case is on how centering equity as a core design value drove the development, implementation, and planned evaluation of opportunities for SEAL competency development over the course of a calendar year within the district's 100% asynchronous virtual learning environment.

Design Positionality

Our design team consisted of two Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funded individuals: our Online and Digital Learning Coordinator (first author) and our Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning Coordinator (second author). ESSER funds were awarded by the US Department of Education to a variety of educational agencies to address the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on various educational programming (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education [OESE], 2022). The nature of funding is relevant here as ESSER funds stipulate schools have three years in which to use the funding, throughout which documented steps need to be provided on how district initiatives are being made endemic to existing systems. Using this revenue stream for positions provides an interesting perspective to district initiative planning—anything we built needed to be fully developed at the end of three years and sustainable, possibly without continued direction from the individuals responsible for design.

Design Context

Centennial School District (CSD)

Centennial School District (CSD) is a suburban Philadelphia K-12 school district of approximately 5500 diverse learners. In our district, 39 different languages and 43 countries are represented. Forty-nine percent of our student population qualifies for free and reduced lunch. Notably, in the return to in-person learning for the 2021-2022 school year, 130 CSD students chose to remain in a virtual placement, necessitating the creation of the Centennial Virtual Learning Academy (CVLA), a fully asynchronous online learning pathway. Hanover Research (2019) consistently advocates for red flags for trauma to be handled via consultation with certified mental health professionals. Importantly, CSD has expanded their counseling team to include two certified mental health counselors. What is shared here was designed intentionally for Tier 1 intervention.

Online and Digital Learning

As we move to an increasingly endemic phase of the pandemic, approximately 60 students, Grades K-12, have chosen to remain completely virtual for the 2022-2023 school year. Additionally, in response to growing demands for students who want virtual opportunities without being siloed into a completely virtual pathway, a blended schedule pilot for

Grade 12 students only was offered this year. Seniors can take up to four credits virtually, with the remainder of their required credits being offered via traditional face-to-face modalities. Fifteen students have chosen to take part in this blended learning pathway.

Also new for the 2022-2023 school year, CSD teachers are responsible for the facilitation of courses for our Grade 12 students, both those involved in our blended schedule pilot and those remaining in a 100% virtual pathway. This shift has allowed us to use our own learning management system (LMS), Canvas, for course delivery. Curriculum continues to be provided by a third-party partner but is aligned to district standards and level of rigor.

Social Emotional Academic Learning

In creating a position specifically dedicated to social-emotional learning, district leadership was deliberate in adding an “A” to what is traditionally known as “SEL,” creating the initiative title “Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning” or, “SEAL.” Conceptually, this addition was to position social, emotional, and academic skill development as all being equally important, reflecting research outcomes showing the academic benefits for students who participate in evidence-based social-emotional programming (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2022). In practice, this title set the trajectory within the district for prioritizing classroom practices that integrate social-emotional learning into academic content instruction.

Upon starting the new position with CSD, the SEAL Coordinator conducted a front-end needs analysis (FEA; see Harless, 1970) of past and current SEAL implementation and practice within CSD. The results of this FEA directed the SEAL Coordinator to first ensure a common mission and vision for SEAL implementation district-wide with both central and building administration teams. Prioritizing a distributive leadership model, a district SEAL team, including seven building-level faculty liaisons, was convened. Together, these individuals conducted stakeholder surveys, a climate and culture survey, and a review of discipline referral data. Triangulation of this data identified implementation and outcome goals aligned to four identified district priority areas: creating and maintaining a supportive climate and culture; systematic social, emotional, and academic skill development; fostering adult social and emotional wellness; and family engagement and partnerships. An implementation rubric and ongoing climate and culture survey tools will determine progress toward goals.

Perspective from our Silos

For the 2021-22 school year, both the Online and Digital Learning coordinator and SEAL coordinator worked within the vertical structures of their respective departments—online and digital learning was housed in the Office of Teaching and Learning and SEAL was housed in Student Services—to establish goals and frameworks for implementation. This intradepartmental focus, while necessary to some extent, can create initiative silos defined by myopic focus on departmental goals (Smith et al., 2020). In our case, continued development within our individual silos as we entered year two of our tenure, would have perpetuated inequities wherein students in the brick-and-mortar setting would be given access to opportunities for SEAL skill development and belonging, while those in the CVLA program would not. CSD’s mission, vision, beliefs, and values (CSD, 2022) set the intention to support and prepare all students for post-secondary college, career, and life-readiness and as such, the coordinators chose intentional collaboration as a way to integrate the initiatives.

Intentional Collaboration

In-Person SEAL Action Steps

Beginning in the 2022-23 school year, the elementary and middle schools evaluated and refined their approaches to schoolwide positive behavior supports. In-person elementary students began to participate in a daily Morning Meeting and in-person middle school students participated in regular SEAL activities during a new “What I Need” time. The high school established a schoolwide focus on building positive relationships along with clear shared expectations. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning’s (CASEL) (2022) Three Signature Practices are being phased into classes K-12 and used by administrators when leading meetings. District leaders are collaborating to

integrate SEAL into existing systems; for example, staff are encouraged to choose a SEAL focus for their evaluation pathway.

Design Opportunity- Virtual SEAL Action Steps

In planning for the 2022-2023 academic school year, a design opportunity became apparent: how could we provide opportunities for SEAL competency development to virtual learners via inherent design elements of our new in-house virtual learning pathway? Moore (2021a) alludes to the idea that online learners, by nature of their chosen learning pathways, are often assumed to already be proficient in various SEAL competencies. Furthermore, the growing body of research on K-12 SEAL competency development (Brackett et al., 2010; Jones et al., 2014) focuses primarily on in-person learning. Assuming or unintentionally excluding a growing population of online K-12 learners from developing these career-ready skills (Pennsylvania Department of Education [PDE], 2022), creates both an inequitable learning environment (Tawfik et al., 2021) and may lead to diminished future opportunities for students who have elected or had circumstances elect this learning pathway. The need for virtual learners to have equitable opportunities to develop SEAL competencies became our design opportunity.

Conceptual Framework- A Trauma-Informed Systems Approach

Smith (2010) suggests a priori theoretical and conceptual frameworks may not actually be appropriate for design cases which are useful to the field simply because they establish design precedent in real-world contexts. However, within the real-world context of a school system, policy often drives the need for design. True et al.'s (2007) punctuated equilibrium model suggests that policy change is incremental and arises when new understandings, theories, or ways of thinking about policy problems come to light. As such, sharing theory that shaped the policy driving the need for this design case is relevant.

Venet's (2021) conceptualization of trauma-informed education suggests a focus on the educational ecosystem instead of the individual classroom or, worse, a need to "fix" the individual student. District policy, school climate, and classroom practice should all be aligned to provide a trauma-informed environment (Venet, 2021) as opposed to individual trauma-informed experiences amidst a system that may unconsciously continue to perpetuate inequities.

Within the unique system of a K-12 school district, school boards are responsible for setting policy; school administrators (such as ourselves) are responsible for development of procedures to carry out set policy. In Fall 2021, the CSD school board adopted a policy to direct district staff to develop and implement a trauma-informed approach to education, with special attention called to reviewing procedures on attendance, opportunities for relationship building, and opportunities for curriculum and instruction development with embedded social emotional learning. Inherent in this policy is the district's conceptualization of a trauma-informed practice which seeks to recognize trauma, respond without retraumatizing, and build both individual and systemic resilience (CSD, 2021). Moore (2022) suggests a reconceptualization of resiliency as the ability of systems to be flexible in varying situations. This reminder that resiliency is a systems issue, as opposed to a trait we seek to develop in individuals, allowed for an important reframing of our design opportunity (Svhila, 2020). Instead of suggesting students' trauma was a problem that needed fixing, or positioning ourselves (and training faculty) as fixers of trauma, we sought to develop a system that would not perpetuate traumas and could allow students flexibility while still helping to develop college and career readiness-related skills. Restorative practices, culturally responsive practices, and embedded SEAL opportunities are all mentioned within the policy as tools for reviewing current district practice and implementing a more trauma-informed approach; however specific implementation recommendations are not defined.

Embedding a trauma-informed practice into the domains of SEAL is common practice for public school systems across the nation (Thomas et al., 2019), which have not, by and large, adopted formal frameworks or even common definitions of "trauma-informed approach" (Hanson & Lang, 2016; Maynard et al., 2019). Furthermore, some educational leaders have suggested a focus on trauma-informed practices is distracting from the need to engage in larger-scaled equity work within public school systems (Venet, 2021). In Spring 2022, CSD also adopted an educational equity policy, with

the directive that CSD students should be provided with not just equitable access to educational opportunities but also that CSD staff should develop and implement programming to best ensure equitable student success.

With district policy in place, but perhaps a lack of an operational implementation plan for a trauma-informed approach, we made the decision to center equity as the core design value (Gray & Boling, 2016) in a system redesign intended to provide opportunities for SEAL competency development for virtual learners throughout the scholastic year. Centering equity as a core design value to our growing conceptualization of a trauma-informed approach led to the realization of a need to build a resilient system that would be flexible enough to adapt to individual needs.

Design Process

With our design opportunity reframed, the Online and Digital Learning Coordinator and SEAL Coordinator scheduled dedicated weekly meetings to this design project. These meetings gave us time to share perspectives from our individual silos to understand district needs beyond what might be obvious to us in our specialty areas. As overlaps emerged, this collaborative time also allowed us the opportunity to design a series of interventions that could provide opportunities for SEAL competency development among our virtual learner population.

Infusing equity throughout the design process required our team to look outside of traditional instructional design models for our process (Moore, 2021b). Our team had concerns that traditional prescriptive design models (Dick et al., 2005; Gagné et al., 2005; Morrison et al., 2013), which make little to no mention of the importance of societal context and the responsibility of design to promote equity, would fail to honor our commitment to our core design value. Whitbeck's (1996) approach to ethics as design, while not an instructional design model, provided us with four broad considerations guiding constant reanalysis of systemic constraints at multiple points of our iterative design process. These considerations encouraged us to: 1.) embrace uncertainty, 2.) iterate, 3.) develop ongoing feedback loops, and 4.) balance flexibility with fidelity to our core design value. As equity is both an ethical issue as well as a design problem (Moore 2021b), reframing Whitbeck's considerations as our "design model" provided a loose framework to focus on building resilience in our systems as opposed to requiring it of our individuals.

Consider: Embracing Uncertainty

While designers go through multiple processes to help resolve uncertainties that surround design opportunities (Stefaniak et al., 2022; Tracey & Hutchinson, 2018), Whitbeck (1996) suggests waiting to act until one is certain is a "license to avoid action" (p. 13). Strategies such as reflection-in-action can help designers mitigate uncertainty (Tracey & Hutchinson, 2018) and continue moving through the design process.

One of the major sources of uncertainty surrounding our design opportunity was selecting the correct localized context of use (Baaki & Tracey, 2019; Herman et al., 2022) within our system. Our objective was to create opportunities for students to practice SEAL development— but who would support these opportunities? Should students need to self-regulate and reflect—two skills we were hoping to develop but not require as prerequisites? Should faculty need to collect and analyze data on student progress on top of navigating content dissemination and course facilitation in a new modality? Could we embed opportunities for SEAL competency development directly in the virtual curriculum or course design?

The use of external representations as a part of reflective practice can help resolve uncertainty (Baaki et al., 2017; Stefaniak et al., 2022). Vision concepts and other forms of external representations are already familiar tools to the instructional design field, particularly those utilizing a dynamic decision-making approach (Stefaniak et al., 2021). External representations can assist the design team to engage in reflection in action while undergoing a fluid design process, capturing their (perhaps varied) interpretations of how the design is progressing (Stefaniak et al., 2021). Capturing iterations of the design process on paper (or via models) allows for dialogue between the design team and the design, and gives the design itself a seat at the table.

In communicating the need for ongoing virtual programming to our school board and community, a persona of a virtual learner from the Centennial School District had been developed (see Figure 1). This persona suggested a typical virtual student who was juggling school, work, and home responsibilities and needed the flexibility of time and place inherently available in online learning.

Figure 1

Virtual Learner Persona

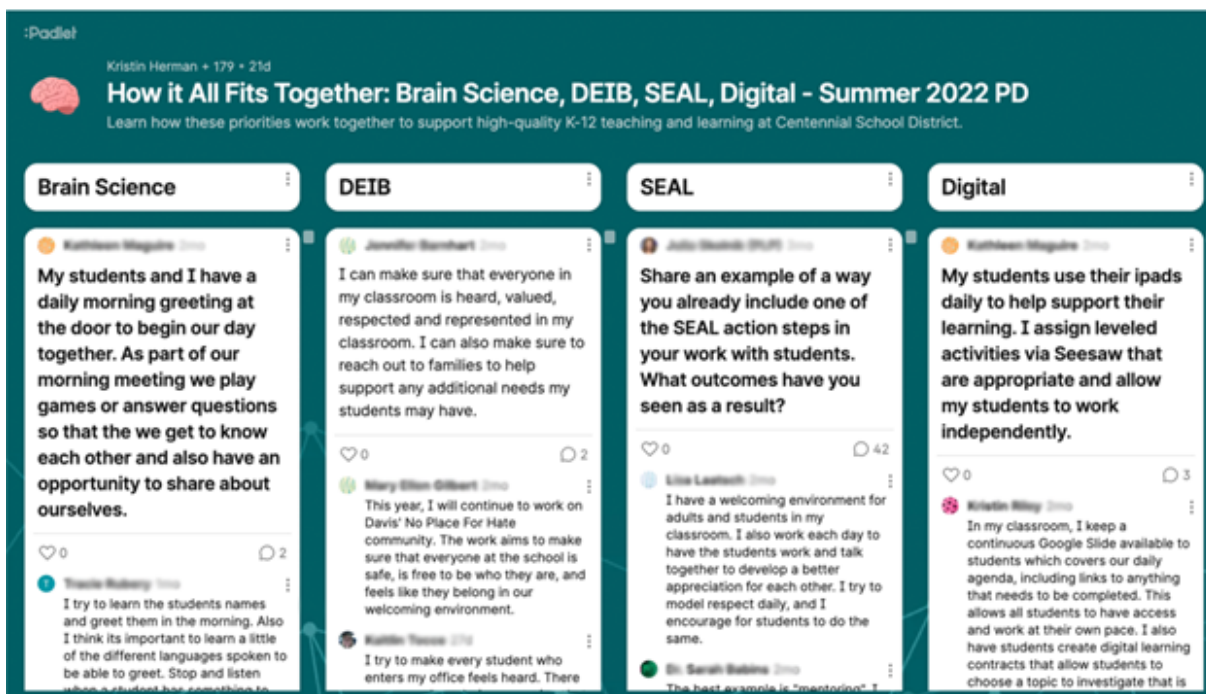


An empathy map shows a teenage boy named Alex in the center. Surrounding him are words he says, thoughts he has, actions he takes, and feelings he has around his education.

A discussion board for faculty in response to a summer professional development on how the district envisioned the intersection between equity, SEAL, and digital learning (see Figure 2), provided a second external representation. This artifact allowed us to reflect on where faculty were with district initiative implementation, examined on Freire's (1970/2000) name-reflect-act continuum of critical consciousness.

Figure 2

Faculty Reflections on the Intersection of Equity, SEL and Digital Learning



A portion of a digital discussion board populated by faculty during professional development is shared. Faculty are responding to questions on how brain science, DEI, SEL, and Digital Learning integrate to inform teaching practice.

Preliminary analysis of this discussion board uncovered that faculty were, by and large, still in the naming stage (see Freire 1970/2000) of conceptualizing an operational definition for equity at CSD and not yet ready for reflection or action. A trauma-informed practice requires a shift in approach from a deficit model, such as “What’s wrong with this student?” to a more supportive model, such as “What internal and external factors are affecting this student?” (Thomas et al., 2019). While our centering of equity had allowed our design team to internalize this shift, examination of our second external representation suggested that perhaps faculty at large needed more time to understand and be ready to implement a trauma-informed practice. As such, we decided to narrow our focus on elements of course design that could impact virtual learning experience without necessarily requiring any additional action from either students or faculty. Literature suggests that creating and maintaining an environment of belonging can be more empowering than specific interventions that address trauma explicitly (Thomas et al., 2019). While we do not intend to imply that belonging can be created solely via course design and devoid of a larger focus on relationships, elements of course design have been found to support belonging (Ko, 2021).

Consider: Iteration

Uncertainty has been shown to promote an iterative design process (Stefaniak et al., 2022). Whitbeck (1996) encourages those working on ethical dilemmas to not hesitate in taking action as long as they are simultaneously willing to revise or combine design solutions as implications of the design case more fully emerge.

The front-end needs analysis (FEA) of past and current SEAL implementation and practice within CSD allowed us to pull recommendations from several existing frameworks including CASEL and the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). With the formal adoption of our equity policy, however, there was a need to move beyond recommendations and into a cohesive implementation plan. Initially, we began iterating design around the CASEL framework (see Figure 3), with the goal of creating an opportunity for each SEAL competency development to be addressed at some point during the scholastic year.

Figure 3

The CASEL Framework for SEAL competency development

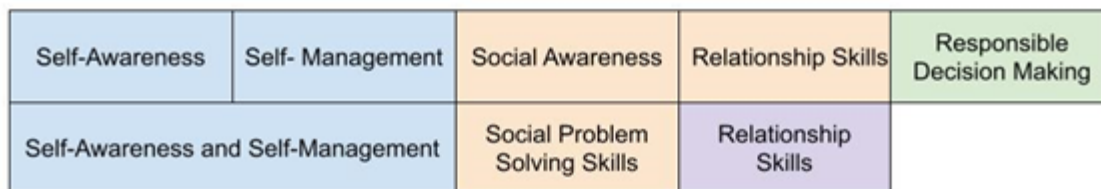


The CASEL framework is presented as a single bar divided into five sections. Self-awareness and self-management are seen as overlapping as are social awareness and relationship skills. Responsible decision making is the fifth stand-alone section.

As our plans for in-person implementation evolved, a shift from the CASEL framework to the PDE framework occurred. In considering other members of our system, such as our school board and community, grounding our implementation in recommendations from the state provided concrete alignment back to our district mission and vision in a way that using a third-party tool could not. This caused a collapse of self-awareness and self-management into a single competency, refocused social awareness as social problem solving skills, and omitted responsible decision-making, at least as an explicit component of the framework (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

CASEL Framework (top) as compared to PDE SEAL Framework (bottom)



CASEL SEL Framework is laid on top of PDE SEL Framework. Again self-awareness and self-management combine. PDE conceptualizes social awareness as social problem solving skills and separates relationship skills. Responsible decision-making is dropped.

Another area of uncertainty our team embraced concerned rollout timeline. Our high school operates on a modified block schedule with full credit courses meeting every other day for an entire year and half credit courses meeting every other day for a semester. Established research did not provide precedent on the various efficacy of adhering to one timeline over another during implementation beyond guidance that SEAL competency development should be explicit, systematic and focused (Jones et al., 2014).

Initially, we conceptualized a rollout that would allow students opportunities to develop each PDE SEAL competency twice per year—once during fall semester and once during spring semester. This would allow students opportunities to engage in social problem solving, self-awareness and self-management, and relationship skills across multiple course disciplines at multiple times in the calendar year. However, in reflecting on data from our FEA, it was decided that in-person learners would benefit from a slower rollout with larger chunks of the scholastic year dedicated to each individual competency. In wanting to align implementation timeframe across modalities, rollout for virtual learners adopted this plan. The second iteration of our implementation timeline allowed us to provide deeper engagement with each SEAL competency before moving on (see Figure 5) albeit in an extended two-year rollout cycle.

Figure 5

Iterated Timeline of Rollout

Month	SEL Competency (Initial Iteration)	SEAL Competency (Y1)	Projected SEAL Competency (Y2)
August	Overview of SEL competencies	Relationship Skills (emphasis on belonging)	Social Problem Solving Skills (emphasis TBD)
September	Relationship Skills		
October	Social Problem Solving Skills		
November	Self-Awareness and Self-Management		
December	Review of SEL competencies		
January	Overview of SEL competencies	Relationship Skills (emphasis on Active Listening)	Self-Awareness and Self-Management (emphasis TBD)
February	Relationship Skills		
March	Social Problem Solving Skills		
April	Self-Awareness and Self-Management		
May	Review of SEL competencies		

A projected calendar for SEL implementation is shared. Initially, it was thought a different SEL competency could be focused on each month; in revision, it was decided to focus primarily on Relationship Skills alone for Year One.

Within our distributive leadership model, our SEAL faculty liaisons collaborated with our district equity team to recommend an entire year focusing on relationship skills with two sub-focus areas to help communicate implementation to faculty and students. Sub-focus areas, such as belonging, built off of previous district initiative work of our equity team and as such, are expected to have an operational level of understanding across buildings, departments, and students. Tying relationship skills to belonging allowed for a natural entry point into development of this SEAL competency.

Consider: Developing Ongoing Feedback Loops

Whitbeck (1996) describes feedback as a collaborative process. As design is refined by this feedback, new design elements may stimulate new questions prompting additional feedback loops.

Artifact Design and Development

With a timeframe now in place, we turned our attention to artifact development. Hanover Research (2019) suggests consistent and predictable learning environments are building blocks of trauma-informed SEAL practices. As such, it was of paramount importance that any artifact we designed for building belonging in virtual courses was both consistent across subject matter and provided predictable learning pathways for virtual students.

To promote self-management and self-awareness, we developed mandatory pacing calendars inherent in our school learning management system (LMS), Canvas (see Figure 6). These pacing calendars suggested completion dates for assignments so as to help students manage time throughout the semester but do not necessarily penalize students for late submissions. (Late policies were left up to teacher academic freedom for this iteration; most teachers set a two-week window of accepted submission post pacing calendar date). Hanover Research (2019) recommends clear expectations for helping to promote psychological safety; a pacing calendar provides a visual of these expectations while offering more flexibility than a list of traditional inflexible due dates. Assignments are scheduled daily as opposed to weekly to further help students start to conceptualize how they may need to think about time management when developing a virtual learning schedule for themselves.

Figure 6

Pacing Calendar Example

11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	Properties of Paralle...	Apollo and Shuttles ...	Angles and Lines Ex...	Angles & Triangles ...	Proportions Assign...	
	American Democrac...	Apollo and Shuttles ...	Apollo and Shuttles ...	Showing Congruenc...	Apollo and Shuttles ...	
	Apollo and Shuttles ...	Applications Involvi...	Apollo and Shuttles ...	Showing Congruenc...	Apollo and Shuttles ...	
	Apollo and Shuttles ...	Calculating Percent ...	Calculating Percent ...	Modeling and Solvi...	Float, Double, Char ...	
	Apollo and Shuttles ...	Limits of Free Speec...	Choose an Activity: ...	Module 1 Exam	Linear Inequality As...	
	DVR - Commercial ...	Lines in the Coordin...	Module 1 Exam	Module 2 Pretest	M2 Lesson 1 Assign...	
	Line and Angle Proo...	Module 1 Assignment	Module 1 Homework	Solving Equations w...	M2 Lesson 1 Quiz	
	M1 Lesson 8 Quiz	Module 1 Journal	Solving One-Step E...	The History of Educ...	Ratio & Proportion ...	
	Proofs Involving Lin...	Percent Problems A...	The History of Educ...		Solving Linear Inequ...	
	Solving Percent Pro...	Short, Int and Long ...			The Structure of Ou...	
	The History of Educ...	The History of Educ...				
		The History of Educ...				

A screenshot of the calendar view in Canvas is shared. Assignments are listed by due date.

Building intentional opportunities for students and teachers to define and build relationships is another critical element of a trauma-informed approach (Hanover Research, 2019). Our second mandatory design element was a generic course landing page for each fully virtual course, designed to establish belonging and provide opportunities for students to develop relationship skills in a virtual learning environment. Landing pages included teacher name, course name, teacher image, and teacher contact, as well as our three school-wide SEAL goals for the year, developed by our building administration team (see Figure 7). Again, wanting to balance agency and ownership with our teaching staff, teachers were allowed to customize elements of the landing page to include a link to a daily agenda or a weekly check-in board.

Figure 7

Course Landing Page Template

Aeronautics and Space Travel (NEW CVLA Master)

William Tennent High School

Dr. Julia Henrich

Principal

Mr. Ryan Mulford

12th Grade House Assistant Principal

For the 2022-2023 school year, we strive to make decisions which:

improve ourselves

improve each other

improve our WTHS community

COURSE TITLE

INSTRUCTOR NAME

INSTRUCTOR IMAGE (OPTIONAL)

INSTRUCTOR EMAIL

Welcome! When you are ready to get started, please click the "Syllabus" link in the left navigation menu.

A screenshot of the course landing page is shared. The course landing page includes name of school, name of teacher, name of course, and teacher contact as well as language listing our school wide three SEL objectives.

Each landing page also contained a water-cooler type discussion board where students could crowdsource answers to questions regarding course content while simultaneously developing relationship skills.

One artifact shelved for later iteration was the use of an optional LMS feature that would create student profile pages, to help promote social awareness. As this design element would require engagement from students, it was ultimately decided that this feature did not belong in our initial rollout but could be introduced mid-year if feedback loops suggested students were open to taking more ownership of their course design.

Feedback Loops Throughout the System

An initial feedback loop came from a design reveal with members of both building administration and central administration. Open-ended feedback was solicited for each design element. In particular, the administrative team was very supportive of the pacing calendar with suggested due dates. In response to a request for more tools to promote self-awareness and self-management, sequential ordering was shared. This is an inherent LMS feature which requires students to complete assignments in a teacher-specified order. Students cannot jump ahead in the assignment sequence. After robust conversation, this feature was ultimately left off, as it was determined that such a granular level of assignment management would actually hinder learners from developing SEAL skills in self-management. Hanover Research (2019) supports the idea that students benefit from some choice which allows them opportunities to develop self-control over their environment.

Due to our school calendar, our primary source of student feedback came once courses had started, as there was not an opportunity to pull a focus group together over the summer months. (It is worth noting that on a block schedule for the scholastic year, student feedback in fall semester can inform spring course design). Students were asked a series of Likert-style questions (delivered via Google Form) to determine the extent to which various elements of course design led to an increased perception of belonging. Students were explicitly directed to consider their online learning experience holistically so as to avoid specific reactions to one teacher or course. Two open-ended questions were also included in the survey to prompt reflection on student agency as well as to collect feedback on additional arenas in which the system could have provided more support. Those specific questions were as follows:

Open-Ended Q1: What else, if anything, did you do to increase your sense of belonging in your virtual courses this month?

Open-Ended Q2: What else could have been provided for you to increase your sense of belonging in your virtual courses?

We visited hybrid classes at the beginning of the semester to inform students about the intentional design elements of the course. Wildman and Burton (1981) contend informing participants about the purpose of design elements ahead of asking them to evaluate the impact of those elements can actually lead to more accurate feedback. Our survey was distributed via school email to all virtual learners, both full-time and blended, at the end of the first month of virtual classes.

A broader scope for community feedback on culture and climate is also planned for this scholastic year. Virtual students and their families participate in our annual Climate Survey (developed and empirically validated by Hanover Research) and data is disaggregated based on learner modality. Such data provides broad stroke feedback on learner sense of belonging and can point to directions for future collaboration.

Consider: Balancing Flexibility with Fidelity

Whitbeck (1996) suggests remaining open to the idea that the parameters of design opportunities, especially those with a moral component at their center, may change over the course of time. As such, there is an inherent need of the design team to stay open to change, particularly in regards to context. The iteration of this design is specific to our current context, in which we are continuing to use a third-party digital curriculum to facilitate virtual learning. As our district seeks to develop and digitize its own digital resources, there may be additional avenues through which SEAL competency development can be embedded within our very curriculum. Dusenbury et al. (2015) suggest an approach where SEAL competency development opportunities are embedded in curriculum can be equally effective to adding or layering on an entirely separate curriculum.

Furthermore, this iteration was by-and-large implemented and owned by our administration team. This was intentional and due to the two-fold newness of both our initiatives: faculty were being asked to facilitate 100% virtual learning for the first time and were still uncovering how to conceptualize their own social-emotional learning needs and their relationship of those needs to a trauma-informed practice. Brackett et al. (2010) have found faculty who have a deeper understanding of their own social-emotional needs are better equipped to model and provide social-emotional learning opportunities for their students. Continuing professional development in both digital course facilitation and SEAL may allow our faculty the opportunity to develop greater agency and ownership of trauma-informed course design.

While the scope, design team members, and points of access to our audience may change as both our digital learning and SEAL initiatives continue to evolve, what endures is our commitment to designing for equitable SEAL competency development regardless of modality.

Designer Reflections

As design cases are intended to provide precedent to the field (Boling, 2010) we will try to summarize major lessons learned from our practice, while acknowledging that design cases are not typically intended to speak to the universal (Gray & Boling, 2016). Despite our commitment to de-siloing our roles as a unified design team, we still felt the need for additional perspectives that could contribute to both richer front-end design and increased feedback loops. As we were still developing an understanding of the district's intentions to operationalize a trauma-informed approach, we chose to center equity as our core design value. However, a key perspective missing from our design team was the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, a position that was vacant within the district at the time of this design. While it was reassuring to realize a commitment to equity lives within our school systems as opposed to any one individual, including those with a formal background in inclusive educational practices would have benefited the initial framing of our design opportunity.

Additionally, while we included secondary students' feedback about the impact of the design elements on their feelings of belonging, future iterations could be strengthened by including their perspectives in the actual design phase, using a participatory design approach (Konings et al., 2014). Finally, building on the distributive leadership model used in CSD, a richer approach to design and feedback would include the perspectives of district teacher leaders, the Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council and the Superintendent's Student Advisory Council.

Centering equity as a core shared organizational value also safeguards the system against varied levels of individual commitment. Surveying our faculty to capture their personal conceptualization of the intersection of equity, SEAL, and digital learning, uncovered a group that was open to learning but not yet ready to implement change. Although we desired increased participation at the design table, understanding faculty needs allowed us to approach their reticence with a trauma-informed lens ourselves. Furthermore, by being open and transparent about our "top-down" design plans, faculty who were ready to participate ended up adding their own unprompted elements for SEAL competency development to courses—such as weekly check-in Padlets and open office hours specifically for the logistics of online learning.

When working within a system with so many components, it is essential for communication to be clear and for what is being communicated to be reflective of the audience's background knowledge and implementation readiness. While collaboration allowed us to share our expertise in digital and social-emotional learning with each other, developing new vocabularies for both of our proverbial silos, our relationships with additional members of the system uncovered a varied level of understanding of our work. For example, in sharing our ideas for a common course landing page design, we discussed how accessibility considerations led us to use text to direct students to common navigation paths instead of a series of buttons. This discussion led the central leadership team into a rich discussion of their understanding of accessibility, ultimately expanding it to include elements of digital accessibility. This was an important reminder that for us to increase opportunities for students to experience belonging, we needed to ensure all members of the system felt as if they understood our vision and belonged to it first.

Conclusion

As K-12 learning modalities expand beyond traditional face-to-face classroom offerings, systems must be redesigned (or designed anew) to provide places of belonging for online learners. When SEAL competency training is integrated into online learning environments as they are developed, opportunities to foster personalized student growth and development become inherent. The purpose of this design case is to help begin establishing precedent on how a trauma-informed approach can inform online course design with the specific intention of allowing opportunities for SEAL competency development. Centering equity as our course design value, we turned to the field of ethics to help guide our design process. In explicitly breaking down this process to highlight both challenges and opportunities encountered during design, this case adds to the growing body of practical application research on trauma-informed approaches.

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Trauma-Informed Learning Community (TLC) for Educational Professionals

A Conceptual Framework for Developing a Trauma-Informed Learning Community for Faculty and Staff

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Faculty

Trauma

Faculty Development

Learning

Learning Communities

Framework

Trauma-informed Practices



This paper seeks to provide a process for developing a trauma-informed faculty and staff learning community using Lenning et al. (2013) adapted, 4-part Learning Community Planning Framework (LCPF) as a foundation for implementing Imad's (2021) trauma-informed education framework. This innovative and collaborative trauma-informed learning community aims to disrupt an overburdened educational system for faculty and staff, guided by a trauma-based pedagogy and a collaborative structure for discretionary caring of emotional, mental, and professional needs (Gaard & Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2022). The goal of this paper is to introduce how the four phases of the LCPF leverage the trauma-informed education framework as a collaborative strategy that can be modeled across university campuses to develop their very own faculty and staff led, trauma-informed learning community; which this paper is calling the TLC for Educational Professionals.

Introduction

This paper proposes a design for a trauma-informed learning community for faculty and staff (herein called educators) called the TLC for Educational Professionals (e.g., The TLC). This learning community's design will partner two frameworks to provide a shared positive, life-giving, and enriching environment between faculty and staff experiences (Lenning & Ebbers, 1999):

- Blessinger's (2015) Learning Community Planning Framework (LCPF), adapted from Lenning et al. (2013),
- Imad's (2022) trauma-informed education framework.

Through a structure for community, identity, meaning, and practice, this educator learning community aims to support and respect the resilience of all faculty and staff in higher education by delivering a sense of belonging through the communal facilitation of trauma-informed curricula, connection, and collaboration for isolated and disheartened educators (Cox & Richlin, 2004).

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has pressed higher education leaders to shuffle modalities and create ambiguous, ever-evolving policies over semesters of uncertainty and disorder. As higher education administrators work to address a slew of evolving factors, the imprecise decision-making and need to react quickly to discern which challenges are most immediate continue to add pressure on educators across all institutions of higher education, thus creating an uneasy environment (Chesley, 2021). For university faculty and staff to survive and thrive in the face of such ambiguous factors, a collaborative process to support an educator's sense of belonging and mental health should be developed.

Research continually highlights that stress among higher education faculty and staff contributes to overall dissatisfaction and can lead to burnout (Williams et al., 2022). A resilient educator learning community would provide a collaborative opportunity for colleagues to recognize how the experiences of all faculty and staff are connected and use trauma-informed teaching and learning to decrease isolation and restore self-efficacy for educators (Feng et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2022). A learning community for thoughtful practices, guided by a trauma-informed pedagogy and a collaborative structure for discretionary caring of emotional, mental, and professional needs, can disrupt an overburdened educational system for educators (Gaard & Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2022). The development of self-worth and self-esteem and the chance to make constructive contributions to their institution's learning community are all essential for educators' emotional well-being (Turner & Braine, 2013). A new sense of affirmative connection will provide a positive emotional balance of resilience and mental health for faculty, staff, and student success.

This conceptual paper provides a foundation for understanding how the LCPF phases provide the framework for trauma-informed education to address the experiences of loneliness, isolation, and low morale felt by faculty and staff. This collaborative concept can provide institutions of higher education with a model for how a trauma-informed learning community can support the need for building a supportive work environment focused on safety, empowerment, community, and meaning.

TLC for Educational Professionals in Practice

Step One:

LCPF Analysis Phase (Purpose and Situation) + Trauma-Informed Education Strategy (Safety)

1. Leverage communication to help forge
2. Make intentional connections to cultivate community.

In the analysis phase, the educators should establish a distinct objective for their learning community. Those educators leading the analysis should develop a clear purpose that should question how the idea for the community started, why the community exists, what the goals are, and what the mission or purpose statement of the community is (Lenning et al., 2013). The cultivation of a safe learning environment connected through trust-building and transparent relationships with and among educators is the recommended first step in developing the TLC for Educational Professionals (Imad, 2021).

It is not surprising that higher rates of stress, burnout, low morale, and job discontent have been reported by college students, teachers, and staff in all areas of American higher education since the onset of COVID. Uncertainty, isolation, and the loss of meaning continue to be emotional triggers that all members of the higher education academy have

continued to combat since March 2020 (Imad, 2021, p. 7). University faculty and staff have been facing a prolonged state of stress on their physical, emotional, and social existences (Imad, 2021). This increased exhaustion from actions due to COVID and the mental health pandemic has disconnected faculty and staff from their original motivations for joining the higher education community. Still, the stress and chronic overwork that were already plaguing so many faculty and staff members pre-pandemic have seemingly been accepted as ordinary in many institutions across the nation, which are eager to return to what “once was” (Gaard & Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2022).

Since the start of 2022, multiple reports have been published highlighting the mental health status of the nation’s higher education community. The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee 2021 campus survey of students, faculty and staff on the impact COVID-19 had on them showed that 72% of the faculty, and staff surveyed showed positive signs of at least one post-traumatic stress symptom (Gronert et al., 2021). What followed were a trauma informed care toolkit and workshops for students, faculty, and staff to carve out time out of their already busy schedules. In the spring and summer of 2020, the American Council on Education polled college and university presidents to better understand how they and their institutions were handling the COVID-19 pandemic. What emerged as the most pressing issue in the first (February 2021) and second (April 2021) distributions of survey results was students’ mental health. Faculty and staff’s mental health was second in the February results but was replaced by emerging enrollment concerns in the April results (Taylor et al., 2021).

Workshops, videos, and toolkits for faculty and staff to help support stronger trauma-informed learning environments for student success are needed. But like many of the recent surveys that placed great emphasis on students, faculty and staff support of their own trauma and stress is lacking. In most cases, the trauma-informed strategy is for teaching students or engaging classroom spaces for student use. Rarely are the tools and systems in place to help faculty and staff members foster a safe and connected learning environment. The lack of intentional connection between educators has become nationally pervasive and continues to elevate the necessary need for academic interdependence in stressful times (Imad, 2021). Trustworthy communication and cultivating community will help to connect how trauma-informed approaches can support the purposeful development of a trauma-sensitive faculty/staff learning community.

The goal of faculty learning communities is to provide a sense of belonging to higher education while also connecting and collaborating with other educators who may be working in isolation (Cox & Richlin, 2004). Though it seems simple to assume that the stakeholders for the TLC for Educational Professionals would be inclusive of all faculty and staff on a university campus, any sense of uncertainty could prevent educators from feeling confident in their pursuit of peer-to-peer support. Analyzing the steps needed to create a trusted and transparent process for the development of the TLC for Educational Professionals can strengthen confidence in a “safe space” that aims to tackle professional obstacles and reduce the uncertainty faculty and staff stakeholders are feeling (Imad, 2021).

Step 2:

LCPF Design Phase + Trauma-Informed Education Strategy (Empowerment):

1. Reduce uncertainty to help foster a sense of safety.

The design phase aims to determine what kind of learning community is needed, with a focus on membership, delivery, duration, and disciplinary formats (Lenning et al., 2013). The design process should focus on balancing regular communication with interested campus colleagues around the “how” and “why” of the community and what is expected of faculty voice and choice in the TLC learning outcomes (Imad, 2021, p. 12). To design the TLC for Educational Professionals with such balance, educators must first decide whether the TLC will be cohort-based or topic-based (Cox & Richlin, 2004).

Cohort-based faculty learning communities address the teaching, learning, and development needs of educators that have been especially affected by isolation, fragmentation, stress, neglect, or a cold climate in the academy (Cox & Richlin, 2004). The curriculum of a topic-based learning community is designed to meet a particular campus teaching and learning need, concern, or opportunity (Cox & Richlin, 2004). TLC for Educational Professionals aims to foster safe

connections and self-advocacy among faculty and staff on a campus. The TLC is focused on trust and combating educators' feelings of isolation and stress (Cox & Richlin, 2004). This specific faculty learning community, in collaboration with trauma-informed educational practices, should be designed as a face-to-face cohort-based community.

The TLC will be long-term, open to all faculty and staff, and flexible enough for all colleagues to come and go as they feel they need the support. If any attempt to create a vulnerable community focused on shared trauma is to have any sustainability, it is important to be open and nimble. The community leadership should respect that any time commitment could be a barrier for certain educators. A pilot educator learning community may have difficulty leveraging course reprieves for faculty or professional excuses for staff colleagues. Leadership should not get bogged down in the details and settle on a day and time with the opportunity to revisit after the pilot semester.

The TLC for Educational Professionals design should be communicated through all university educator channels (i.e., listservs, web pages, campus bulletins). In the early communication to faculty and staff, a first draft structure of goals and outcomes should be shared that focuses on the "team aspect" of support (Cox & Richlin, 2004, p. 9). This communication should highlight how the design of the TLC connects trauma-informed educational practices to faculty learning community best practices to create a framework for assisting educators in reaffirming their purpose, reforming deliberate relationships, and reconnecting with the specific meaning and community that sparked their initial purpose to be educators (Imad, 2021).

In that same early communication, examples of potential topics and strategies, intrinsically connected to the practice of trauma-informed education, could be included, but they should not be meant to be prescriptive in the emerging cohort-driven design. The educators leading the early design of the TLC should also consider providing examples of pedagogical approaches that could be explored within the learning community. For example, a biweekly, 8-session TLC for Educational Professionals schedule aligned with trauma-informed educational practices, could introduce the strategies around "reducing uncertainty to help foster a sense of safety" (Imad, 2021, p. 9) in the first session. In session two, the TLC can help educators focus on strategies for understanding what educators can "control and balance" (Imad, 2021, p. 11).

By simply introducing evidence-based strategies such as gratitude journals, "done" lists, and focusing on the process versus the outcomes of positive mental health, the educators leading the design can model through transparent communication the building, development, and core values that are expected within this learning community (Cox & Richlin, 2004).

Step 3:

LCPF Implementation Phase + Trauma-Informed Education Strategy (Community):

1. Leverage communication to help forge
2. Reaffirm or re-establish goals to create meaning.

The implementation phase is where culture is developed, core values and norms are determined, as are policies, roles, and resources (Lenning et al., 2013). The previous phases of analysis and design implement very specific trauma-informed practices to build trust and provide choices to combat the potential ambiguity that may surround such an ambitious educator learning community. At the implementation phase, early stakeholders have been identified, and the initial community experiences have begun. The TLC for Educational Professionals will provide faculty and staff with consistent professional and personal development days or hours so they can design a growth and learning culture for themselves (Gaard & Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2022). Understanding the actions and initiatives that support faculty and staff's sense of belonging is imperative for a faculty learning community to thrive. Educators should take the initiative to discover the shared desires and motivations surrounding their trauma.

In order to begin implementation, faculty and staff colleagues in the community have to discover the "whys," desires, and "motivations" surrounding their trauma as educators and then move into the "how" through the principles of

trauma-informed pedagogy (Gaard & Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2022). To implement the collaborative teaching and learning structure for the TLC, educators should consider using Lombardi's emerging "construction of understanding" framework for active learning possibilities (Talbert, 2022). This person-to-person approach provides an operationalized model that gives educators in the community control of their learning through active reflection and agency (Talbert, 2022). The "construction of understanding" framework aims to implement a system of dialog to help educators find meaning in their work as they might connect to trauma-informed educational practices.

To understand how Lombardi's system might work within the developing TLC for Educational Professionals structure, compare traditional learning, which takes place in a model where learning funnels through the teacher, or head of the class. In the "construction of understanding" system, educators develop their understanding through direct interaction with all the components of learning in that week's trauma-informed session, while surrounded by the ecosystem of academics and staff in the learning community (Talbert, 2022). The faculty and staff can explore the different ways they can engage with trauma-informed educational practices while providing the agency to "intentionally make things happen by one's actions" (Badura, 2001; Lombardi & Shipley, 2021, p. 15).

The "construction of understanding" framework aims to implement a system of dialog to help educators find meaning in their work as they might connect to trauma-informed educational practices. The system provides communication connections between all educators while building self-efficacy and assisting in their commitment to their own personal wellness and growth (Guin, 2004; Spurgeon & Thompson, 2018). Giving educators options and empowering them to speak up can remind them that their diverse experiences benefit everyone's learning (Iman, 2022). Educators will benefit from this structured process for active, peer-to-peer learning that provides great empathy towards their colleague's current state of mental health. Additionally, it gives the faculty and staff a sense of personal power and helps them work toward getting back to a healthier mindset (Hanson, 2018; Levine, 1997, p. 123; Imad, 2021, p. 6).

The TLC for Educational Professionals should not demand any experience in clinical psychology or social work to use this trauma-informed approach (Imad, 2021). The learning community should be human-centered, focused on the well-being and care of their faculty and staff colleagues, and in order to do that, getting the community members to meet on a regular basis is imperative.

Step 4:

LCPF Assessment Phase + Trauma-Informed Education Strategy (Meaning):

1. Reduce uncertainty to help foster a sense of safety.
2. Leverage communication to help forge trust.
3. Reaffirm or re-establish goals to create meaning.
4. Make intentional connections to cultivate community.
5. Center well-being and care.

The final phase of the LCPF asks the community to decide what evidence will be provided, what assessment format will be applied (summative or formative), and the general design of the program evaluation report (Lenning et al., 2013). The educators who take on the early leadership roles of analyzing, designing, and implementing the TLC should also take on an early leadership role in developing goals and outcomes that will guide all currently involved educators (and educators who engage later). The short-term and long-term learning community goals should be identified and then mapped to trauma-informed educational practices.

The TLC for Educational Professional's learning outcomes and goals (see Table 1) would be influenced by a similar learning community developed at California State University San Marcos (California State University San Marcos, 2021). Once created, the current educators within the TLC should communicate with the larger campus community of educators as a way to continuously communicate the invitation of the learning community to all faculty and staff members.

Table 1

Outcomes, Practices and Strategies for the TLC for Educational Professionals

Outcome	Trauma-Informed Educational Strategy (Meaning)	Initial Support Strategies
Demonstrate an understanding of how trauma can affect faculty and staff behaviors and responses within and outside the university setting.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reduce uncertainty to help foster a sense of safety 2. Make intentional connections to cultivate community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help faculty and staff identify what they can control. • Help faculty and staff recognize and leverage the power of relationships.
Understand faculty/staff behaviors from a trauma-informed lens.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Center well-being and care 2. Reaffirm or re-establish goals to create meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intentionally and explicitly engage in positive emotions such as gratitude. • Help faculty and staff identify short-term goals that connect to their long-term "why"
Integrate trauma informed care practices into university policy and practices to reduce re-traumatization	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reaffirm or re-establish goals to create meaning 2. Leverage communication to help forge trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reframe obstacles to reaffirm meaning and purpose • Remind that small actions can make a big difference

To assess the impact of the faculty learning community's goals and outcomes, educators should map Carello's (2020) Creating Trauma-Informed Teaching and Learning Environments: A Self-Assessment Question for Educators to the TLC's outcomes. Carello (2020) has developed seven trauma-informed principles in support of students' trauma that can be adapted to evaluate key outcomes of the TLC educators focused on trust, connection, and educators' mental health (see Table 2):

Table 2

Draft adaptation of Trauma-Informed Teaching and Learning Environments: Self-Assessment Questions (Carello, 2020)

Principle	Key Question	Specific Question Example
Physical, Emotional, Social, and Academic Safety	To what extent does the learning environment ensure the physical, emotional, social, and academic safety of educators, including feeling safe to make and learn from mistakes?	Are you attentive to signs of educator distress? Do you understand these signs in a trauma-informed way?
Trustworthiness and Transparency	To what extent do learning policies and practices maximize trustworthiness and transparency by making expectations clear, ensuring consistency in practice, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and minimizing disappointment?	How do you handle dilemmas between role clarity and accomplishing multiple tasks (e.g., navigating working on a research project with a student or serving as both advisor and course instructor)?
Support and Connection	To what extent are educators linked with appropriate peer and professional resources to help them succeed personally and professionally?	How does the university facilitate peer activities that help educators connect with their peers and provide mutual support?
Collaboration and Mutuality	To what extent do educators share common goals and share power?	Is faculty and staff accountability or impairment handled in a way that conveys "What's happened to the educator?" versus "What's wrong with the educator?"
Empowerment, Voice, and Choice	To what extent are educators viewed as experts of their own experiences and learning and as such are empowered to make choices and develop confidence and skills?	Do educators get clear, consistent, and appropriate messages about their rights and responsibilities?
Social Justice	To what extent are policies and practices responsive to issues of privilege and oppression and	In what ways are policies and practices responsive to and respectful of educators' diverse experiences and

Principle	Key Question	Specific Question Example
	respectful of diverse individual and collective experiences and identities?	identities? To which experiences and identities are they responsive?
Resilience, Growth, and Change	To what extent do policies and practices recognize and facilitate student resilience, growth, and change?	Do learning and feedback emphasize faculty and staff growth more than student deficits?

Conclusion

According to research, trauma-informed teaching and learning increase faculty and staff capacity and experience, which lowers attrition while also reducing burnout (University of Michigan School of Public Health, 2022). The TLC for Educational Professionals will engage all faculty and staff on college campuses and provide ways for educators to put contemplative practices at the center of their academic lives (Gaard & Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2022). Through a model of discretionary leadership, this specific trauma-informed faculty learning community will develop a powerful group of people who can lead the practice of contemplation through collaborative dialog, trauma-informed practices, and an empathy-forward framework that, in the end, will aim to see transformational change for all faculty and staff struggling with mental health and a sense of belonging.

This learning community design focuses on the total wellbeing of the campus community using an evidence-based, effective educational framework that understands and makes use of the power of relationship through shared teaching and learning (Imad, 2021). Any evaluation of a trauma-informed faculty learning community should always take into account campus institutional policies and practices in order to ensure a positive and sustainable collective of educational professionals can thrive. Intentionality should be given to the tone and rhetoric of the university in relation to what emerges from the learning community's understanding of their own informed trauma (Gaard & Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2022). This collaboration between the educators who make time for the learning community and university leadership's understanding of the intended impact of the learning community must be collaborative, patient, and provide opportunities for shared reflection of the learning impact that will occur when the TLC for Educational Professionals is established on their campuses.

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"It's About the Journey, Not the Destination"

Graduate Students' Perceptions of Ungrading

Nate Turcotte, Kea McElfresh, & Melissa Rodriguez-Meehan

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Trauma

Feedback

Ungrading

Grade



In recent years, trauma-informed instructional practices have garnered significant interest among educators, researchers, and instructional designers, particularly as the Covid-19 pandemic ushered to the forefront the harsh realities many students were facing. As educators grapple with these challenges, we focus on a critical feature of a trauma-informed approach, specifically care and care for students' well-being. Current assessment practices that emphasize the role of grades in student learning cause grade-related traumas, including negatively impacting students' mental health and academic motivation. Through in-depth interviews with eight graduate students, this article reports on the students' perceptions of being in a course with grade-free assessments. Analysis reveals students perceived the ungrading process as a stress-free experience compared to their experiences with grades. More specifically, analysis of students' accounts identified that students perceived ungrading to foster collective reflection and feedback, encourage the pursuit of personal and professional interests related to course material, and restore a growth mindset toward assessments and learning, in general. We use this special issue as an opportunity to recognize ungrading as an assessment option in a trauma-informed approach and question how assessment, and instructional practices more broadly, fit within a system of care.

Introduction

Progressive, holistic education, "engaged pedagogy" is more demanding than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy. For, unlike these two teaching practices, it emphasizes well-being. (hooks, 1994, p. 15, emphasis added)

The Covid-19 pandemic, coupled with racial injustice, disrupted students' educational experiences and continues to do. During this time of trauma, scholars of learning are calling for a reimagining of educational practices, including pedagogical and design approaches that are equitable and justice-oriented (McKinney de Royston & Vossoughi, 2021), and some may even argue centered on care and love (hooks, 1994). McKinney de Royston and Vossoughi (2021) suggest that as society is eager to return to normal:

We must not seek to reestablish what was 'normal' [education]. 'Normal' education flattened learning to individual achievement and competition, and teaching to accountability. 'Normal' education ignored the deep disconnects between academic learning, well-being and the realities of social and political life. (n.p.)

Using McKinney de Royston and Vossoughi's (2021) comments as caution and their call to attend to what is considered "normal," we question how "normal" assessment can often ignore students' learning, well-being, and reality. Briefly, we position the term "normal" assessment in line with forms of assessment that prioritize the use of traditional grades and grading structures, in particular assessments with numerical grades that are supposed to account for students' learning. In many instances, traditional grading practices "treat students like a product, a vessel to be filled with knowledge as opposed to a person who is central to the learning process" (Ferns et al., 2021, 4502). As such, we use this article to introduce the concept of "ungrading" (Blum, 2020; Stommel, 2018) to the instructional design community broadly, as well as scholars and educators interested in trauma-informed instructional practices.

We view ungrading, also referred to as going gradeless or grade-free assessment, in opposition to more traditional assessment practices due to its holistic approach and emphasis on building teacher-student relationships (Blum, 2020; Ferns et al., 2021), and conceptualize it as a possible trauma-informed alternative to "normal" assessment. An ungrading approach to assessment is one that prioritizes narrative feedback. With ungrading, students receive narrative feedback aimed at fostering reflection and a purposeful connection to their learning, instead of numerical grades. The goal is to deemphasize the talk of grades in exchange for dialogic engagement with students' learning and personal and professional needs. As a result, assessments, and teaching and learning practices in general, become relationship oriented. Instead of creating a learning environment focused on points, students are relieved of stressors consisting of grade point average, class ranking, and whether or not they have made the "A" (Chamberlin et al., 2020). As such, this research contributes to a growing area of interest in alternative forms of assessment (Blum, 2020; Feldman, 2019; Sackstein, 2015), and we leverage this special issue as an opportunity to draw connections between ungrading and a trauma-informed approach. More specifically, in this article, we examine graduate students' perceptions of being in an ungraded course, paying particular attention to how they articulate their ungraded experience.

As alternative forms of assessment grow in popularity, researchers have begun to examine students' perceptions of ungrading. In a recent study, Gorichanaz (2022) interviewed students that had experienced multiple courses with him, experiencing both ungrading and more traditional grading systems. During the interview process, Gorichanaz (2022) found that compared to students' graded experiences, students felt that ungrading "de-gamified" their learning experiences, where their learning was less about making a specific grade in exchange for a better understanding of the material. Students also expressed that ungrading provided time to reflect and deepen their learning, creating a space for cyclical feedback and dialogue between students and the instructor. Additionally, students perceived ungrading to encourage a view of learning as a collective endeavor instead of an isolated and comparative event. Further, in an examination of asynchronous online undergraduate students' perceptions of ungrading in an eight-week course, Guberman (2021) found that students associated ungrading with a positive course experience and an increase in intrinsic motivation. However, Guberman (2021) notes that deeper qualitative analysis is needed to understand how students' experiences of ungrading can demonstrate the effectiveness of the approach. As such, we take this as an opportunity to qualitatively add to the literature on students' perceptions of ungrading. Given this interest, we ask the following question:

How do students in an online graduate course perceive their experience of being in a grade-free course?

To set the stage for ungrading as a trauma-informed approach, we discuss how the Covid-19 pandemic brought scenes of student trauma to the forefront and initiated discussions of how our educational systems need to change to better

suit learners in the following section. We frame the “pandemic pause” as an opportunity to address many of the challenges students face, in particular, the effect of grades on students’ mental health and well-being. Then, given the concerns of grading practices, we theorize how treating assessment as part of a system of care can better support students learning in times of trauma and can help to avoid retraumatization.

Covid-19 and Trauma

At the time this research was initiated, the Covid-19 pandemic was widespread, burdening students with a new form of trauma they were unequipped to deal with (Imad, 2021). In response, trauma-informed instructional practices are a growing interest among educators and educational researchers (Carello & Butler, 2014, 2015; Crosby et al., 2018; Minahan, 2019). So, as educators and designers, we must consider how these practices can be implemented in teaching and learning contexts.

Following Alvarez (2017), we view trauma as the fixed-term or “ongoing physical, social, and/ or psychological strain, which may disrupt a student’s everyday thoughts, feelings, and practices” (p. 54; see also, Hanover Research, 2019). Schools and classrooms are often sites where trauma can come to the forefront, and as educators, researchers, and designers, we must recognize how trauma can be caused by one’s environment and impact learning. One pedagogical strategy central to dealing with trauma is to refocus pedagogical practices on students’ well-being (Imad, 2021).

To frame ungrading as a practice that supports students’ well-being, and more generally as assessment in a system of care, we briefly discuss how “normal” assessment—assessment that prioritizes numerical ranking and quantification—further mental health and academic concerns. Then, we examine literature that explores the negative effects of grades and discuss how assessment, as part of a system of care, is critical to a trauma-informed approach. As such, we use this space to explore how ungrading fosters both a trauma-informed approach and one that centers on students’ needs and lived experiences.

Concerns about Mental Health and Stress

Even before the pandemic, grading practices and the effects of grades were a concern for educators and educational researchers (Kohn, 1999; Stommel, 2018). Of these concerns, two of the primary concerns have revolved around how grades affect students’ academic motivation and mental health (Chamberlin et al., 2020). For instance, Chamberlin et al., (2020) mixed-methods study exposed that students whose assessment was narrative-based experienced increased academic performance, while comparatively, students who received only grades as part of their assessments were likely to feel “anxiety, a sense of hopelessness, social comparison, as well as a fear of failure” (p. 11). Moreover, Chamberlin and colleagues’ (2020) research continues to support the notion that feedback is more effective for intrinsic motivation than grades by themselves. These outcomes are also well documented among medical students and have resulted in medical school programs forgoing grades for narrative-based approaches like pass-fail. For instance, Seligman and colleagues’ (2021) research with pre-med students found that medical students perceived the shift to a pass/fail system coupled with formative feedback from numerical-based assessment positively, especially in terms of student well-being. Even more, Seligman et al. (2021) suggest that in addition to significant increases in intrinsic motivation, formative feedback facilitated heightened engagement in their clinical experiences and patient care practices. Similarly, Lam et al. (2017) identified that instructors’ feedback on students’ work improved students’ intrinsic motivation and led to students’ increased engagement in learning activities outside of the course. So, why not just pair feedback with grades, since formative feedback is a well-known strategy for supporting students learning (Ruiz-Primo & Brookhart, 2018)? Our justification lies in Butler’s (1988) research that indicates that when formative feedback is accompanied by the presence of a grade, the feedback is often disregarded (Chamberlin et al., 2020).

While research continues to point to the mental health concerns associated with grades (Bejarano & Soderling, 2021; Brännlund et al., 2017), medical programs and schools are increasingly shifting to qualitative-based assessment. Indeed, according to a recent questionnaire conducted by the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC, 2021), the grading systems used in medical school have transitioned overwhelmingly to narrative-based assessments (e.g.,

pass-fail, honors-pass-fail), a shift that has been prompted by the stress and anxiety associated with grades (Seligman et al., 2021). This transition in medical school programs begs the question, what about the rest of higher education?

The effects of grades continue to wreak havoc on students no matter their academic interests or programs, and should be of serious concern (Burke, 2020; Eyler, 2022). According to Eyler (2022), rates of anxiety, depression, and even suicidal ideation have spiked dramatically in recent years, and academic stress tied to grades is the leading cause of this escalation. The pandemic has only exacerbated this problem, and as a result, students across the U.S. are advocating for a change in grading structures (Burke, 2020), and requesting a reimagining of what is considered “normal” assessment. As educators aware of these findings, we present ungrading as a possible solution.

Assessment as a System of Care

Not surprisingly, the last two years have brought about increased interest and discussion of alternative and more holistic forms of teaching and learning practices, including assessment methods (Veletsianos & Houlden, 2020). Indeed, as the pandemic hit, higher education witnessed universities across the country enact policies that removed grades from their classrooms (Basken, 2020; Burke, 2020), providing a moment to imagine new educational futures. Considering the effects the pandemic has burdened students with, Veletsianos and Houlden (2020) call for “radical flexibility” and an “educational environment in which the people participating and supporting education are understood to be and thus treated as holistic beings” (p. 857). Embedded in Veletsianos and Houlden’s sentiment is, as educators, researchers, and designers, we must be cognizant of the challenges and injustices students face and adopt pedagogical methods supporting students in their time of need. Inspired by this, we sketch out a possible future, one where assessment prioritizes care and well-being—assessment as a system of care.

Framing ungrading as trauma-informed practice, we are reminded of the literature that has explored teaching and learning practices, and education more generally, as a system of care. Nel Noddings (1988), for instance, inspires thoughtful dialogue around the role of care in education. Noddings (1988) reminds us that relationships are fundamental to an ethic of care, suggesting that “to shape such persons, teachers need not only intellectual capacity, but also a fund of knowledge about the particular persons with whom they are working” (p. 221). As such, the dialogic nature of ungrading espouses personal relationships with students and a commitment to recognizing their interests, histories, and experiences. This commitment is one that trauma-informed approaches are built on, and so, as students’ trauma continues to impact their learning, educators must be prepared to deal with these challenges and recognize their responsibility in mitigating the effects of trauma (Crosby et al., 2018). These traumas cannot be ignored either, as they are central to teaching. Alvarez (2017), for instance, documented the practices of an educator who responded to their students’ needs after a recent shooting in their community and found that as students’ traumatic experiences permeated the boundaries of classroom walls, the act of teaching is a part of a system of care. This demands the question: how do our assessment practices contribute to this system?

Imad (2021) argues that to meet students’ needs, educational practices must center on care and well-being as part of a framework for trauma-informed practices. Ingrained in these principles is a recognition that learning is a relational endeavor and process that requires educators to be empathic of students’ social realities. To develop these relationships, Ferns and colleagues (2021) suggest a care-focused approach requires personal knowledge along with sharing and empathizing with students. Meyers et al. (2019) define teacher empathy as the “degree to which instructors work to deeply understand students’ personal and social situations, feel caring and concern in response to students’ positive and negative emotions, and communicate their understanding and caring to students through their behavior” (p. 161). As such, a pedagogical approach that centers on care and well-being must include a willingness to embrace students’ needs and lived experiences. Indeed, Meyers and colleagues (2019) argue cultivating empathetic relationships with students is critical for developing high-quality student-teacher relationships and learning (p. 160). Further, Douglas (2020) advocates “we teach, assess, and refine so that ultimately, we have lesson plans that anyone can teach that will cover exactly the outcomes we want to address and yield uniform results in learning. But learning is never uniform” (p. 58). As such, what practices might educators enable to reflect the lack of uniform in learners’ realities? In that spirit, we present ungrading as an alternative to the “norm” and “uniform” that is positioned within a system of care by accounting for students’ needs, histories, and realities.

Method

Research Context and Course Design

This research took place at a large university in the southeastern United States. Graduate student participants included in this research were students in a graduate-level online Introduction to Educational Technology course taught by the first author in the fall of 2021. In total, 13 students were enrolled in the course, with eight willing to participate in interviews about their experience. Of the eight students, each of these individuals came with a range of educational experiences. For instance, some students had recently completed their undergraduate degrees and had moved directly into a graduate degree program, while others were more established in their careers. Moreover, out of the eight students who were interviewed, six had careers in PK-12 educational settings as classroom teachers or teacher assistants, one student was a graphic designer, and one student worked as a designer and trainer in IT cybersecurity. Significantly, given the diversity in the background of students, many came into the course with a range of educational experiences and beliefs about the function and purpose of grading practices.

To prepare students for the ungrading process, they were introduced to a range of resources at the beginning of the course, including Stommel's (2018) ungrading guide and Kohn's (1999) review of grading practices. As we navigated the course together, we used these articles as foundational readings for understanding the purpose and goals of ungrading. In addition to these readings, the first author developed a grading philosophy that was made public to students and served as a discussion piece, and started the semester with a virtual class session where he further elaborated on the grade-free approach, how it would work in their course, and provided students an opportunity to ask clarifying questions. Notably, before this course, not a single student had experienced a grade-free course or had heard of ungrading.

As expected, students were initially uneasy about the approach as it conflicted with their past educational experiences as well as with many of the practices the current teachers were utilizing in their classrooms. Moreover, some students were worried about receiving credit from the university and their workplace for taking the course. So, it was explained to students that similar to any other college course, they would receive a grade at the end of the semester, however, how that grade was determined would be a bit different. Indeed, instead of every assignment in the course having points associated with it, activities submitted were marked either "complete" or "incomplete," and accompanied by narrative feedback. Leveraging Canvas for the course made this design feature easy to organize and maintain for both the students and the instructor. The only assignments that had points associated with them were a series of three "process letters" and the capstone project for the course which was required to have a grade by the program and college. However, Canvas allowed the instructor to provide a grade on the student's course capstone projects and not have it count for this course grade, while still providing the program and college with the required data.

A core feature of the ungrading approach is the "process letters" that students write periodically throughout the semester. These letters serve as opportunities for students to engage in self-reflection and are designed to have students engage and discuss their learning in-depth. At the end of each process letter, students are asked to provide themselves with a grade (0-100) that serves as a conversation starter between them and the instructor. Essentially, as students discuss and reflect on their learning, they develop a detailed rationale for their grade while remaining focused on their learning and not just completing an activity to earn points.

Data Collection and Analysis

The research followed a qualitative case study approach (Yin, 2014) bound by graduate students enrolled in the ungraded and online Introduction to Educational Technology course. This study was approved by the University's Institutional Review Board of Research in the fall of 2021. Upon approval, the instructor informed the students that he would be conducting interviews after the semester to not interfere with their course experience or influence their perception and participation in the course in any way.

Once the semester was completed and grades had been submitted to the university, the instructor reached out to the students to solicit their involvement in the research. All 13 students enrolled in the course consented to have their

course artifacts (e.g., process letters) included in the study. However, our primary form of data collection was semi-structured interviews with eight students. These semi-structured interviews with students focused on their perceptions of being ungraded, including how they perceived ungrading to affect their learning. In many cases, students used their previous experiences with grades to contextualize how they felt about being in a grade-free course.

The recorded interviews took place on Zoom and ranged from 20 to 50 minutes. During the interviews, the research team took fieldnotes that were referred back to when analyzing the transcripts. Each interview was transcribed using an automation transcription service and then manually corrected by members of the research team. Next, the team analyzed the interviews, which included multiple rounds of iterative open coding, where interviews were first individually analyzed and then reviewed and discussed as a group (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After generating initial codes, the team met and discussed their codes, leading to a consensus on codes. Immediately, we recognized that students perceived ungrading as a break from the stressful and often anxiety-causing environment created by grades. As we further analyzed how students perceived this effect, we found three themes. Students perceived ungrading to: foster and encourage deep collective reflection and feedback; promote the pursuit of personal and professional interests related to course material; restore a growth mindset toward assessment and learning in general. Additionally, we used the artifacts students created for the class, including students' process letters to support our interpretation of their perceptions.

Findings

In the following, we report on the themes that emerged from our interviews with students. During our interviews, students spoke at great length about the concerning effects grades have had on their mental health and well-being. Recognizing ungrading as a stress-free endeavor and as an overarching theme, our analysis identifies how students perceived and experienced such a system.

Emphasizing Process over Product

Students perceived ungrading to be an approach that shifted learning and assessment from an isolated effort to a collective and reflective endeavor, more concerned about the process of what and how students learned than getting a specific grade. Specifically, we examine how ungrading encouraged deep student reflection, positioned learning as a collective endeavor, and resulted in students who are practicing teachers reflecting on their assessment practices. Similar to Gorichanaz's (2022) finding that students perceived ungrading to de-gamify the learning process, students' concerns about grades were often exchanged for excitement about reflection in our interviews.

Given the importance of narrative feedback to the ungrading approach, the instructor's feedback, in many cases, drove reflection. Lois [pseudonym], a current high school teacher, spoke to us about how this experience was much different from her experiences as both a teacher and student. Lois noted being in a gradeless class shifted her mindset from focusing on what she got as a grade on every assignment to what the feedback is, stating that "you are really thirsting for that [feedback]" because "even when you do almost everything correctly, there's still always room for improvement [in understanding]." As we talked with Lois about her desire for feedback, it was clear the feedback she received from her instructor drove her to consider alternative viewpoints and reflect on her understanding. Similarly, Nadia, a middle school teacher, suggested being ungraded lent itself to reflection opportunities, unlike previous experiences in graded courses where "I had to force myself to go back over the material . . . And if I had gotten an A on it, I never would have looked at the assignment again."

In general, the students' interest in reflection was not just felt by the current educators in the course though. Denise, a designer and trainer, suggested the lack of grades paired with increased feedback allowed her to "just really focus more on reflecting on what I had learned during the course." However, more importantly, these moments of reflection were not just isolated incidents, rather they were cyclical events Denise engaged in throughout the semester. For example, while discussing her experience writing the process letters, Denise stated:

It was a really nice way to build upon our knowledge . . . I found myself in the subsequent letter that I had written, going back to prior ones to do a deeper reflection and review of what I had already compiled and seeing how my viewpoint had shifted.

As we interviewed students, it became clear that part of students' reflective processes included ensuring they were meeting their own learning needs. This endeavor, helped students recognize shifts in their learning, and as Denise mentioned, placed students in a position to be responsive to their learning needs. As a result, Barrett, a graphic designer, stated:

[Being ungraded] was like looking in the mirror. 'Hey, you can step it up here.' Or 'hey, you can improve here.' Or, 'hey you need to read more or you need to study, or you need to spend more time in this area.'

Significantly, reflection was not just isolated to the process letters. Kris, a current high school teacher, suggested the reflection and feedback cycles that accompanied each assessment positioned his learning as a collective endeavor with the teacher. In comparison to getting comments on previous work where the emphasis was on what they had done wrong, Kris framed the feedback he received as "not telling us what to do. But you're getting us to engage with each other, and you're facilitating that navigation . . . like connecting the dots." Nested in Kris' response is that the feedback he received motivated reflection and encouraged him to make "connections" between class topics. Moreover, Kris positions this process as a collective endeavor that has cascading effects on students' learning practices. Lois, for example, suggests the emphasis on feedback encouraged her to provide feedback to her classmates in a way that would spark reflection. Specifically, Lois discussed her participation in asynchronous class discussions, stating "it was funny because I was waiting for somebody else's response like I was waiting for a sparring partner. I was waiting for someone to challenge what I was [writing] or for them to ask me about [my response]." For Lois, the emphasis on feedback promoted reflective processes she wanted to engage in with her fellow students.

Additionally, for the current and pre-service educators in the course, being ungraded led students to reflect on their assessment practices. Lois, for example, recognized how grading affected her students, recalling a situation with one of her students where they asked matter-of-factly "what is the least amount of work I can do to get a C?" This experience greatly contradicted many of the feelings Lois was having with ungrading, stating "this is my fault! I have done this to them" pointing to the lack of care her students have about their learning. Although Barrett's role in formal schooling practices is less prominent, he questioned the role of grades, asking "who's benefiting from [normal] assessment?!" suggesting it is not the learners. Nadia added:

I see firsthand as a teacher, kids that chase the 'A.' They're doing everything you're asking; you're giving them the A but they don't know the material. And, they don't understand the concepts because they're not taking the time to learn the concepts. They're taking the time to do whatever you want them to do by jumping through hoops.

Following Relevant Interests

Students perceived ungrading as providing them with more opportunities to make connections to their personal and professional interests. As students reflected on their experience of being ungraded, they suggested that not having to deal with the pressure associated with grades, reduced their anxiety related to participating in class activities. As a result, in some cases, students felt this lack of stress encouraged them to engage further with course topics related to their personal and professional interests.

Olivia, a pre-service educator, felt that being in a grade-free course encouraged her to participate and learn in ways that were much different from her previous class experiences:

I definitely noticed myself doing my assignments slightly differently . . . But, overall, I think it changed for me [comparing her experience to a graded course she was taking concurrently] because I did a lot more research. Like [in addition to] the resources I was provided within each module or even with the ideas provided by my peers in the class, I still went out of my way during my free time to read more about it [the

course topics] because once you're in college you get to dwindle down what you really want to learn and now that I'm in the education field, it's something I'm passionate about. And so, it was almost like a weight off my shoulders to know that 'okay grading isn't a huge priority in this course. I definitely did my assignments a bit differently, and I involved myself more in the content that was provided versus just doing the assignment and calling it a day.'

For Olivia, removing grades provided her with the space to pursue course topics in greater detail and at her own pace. She then went on to reveal "I ended up reading new resources and looking through new ideas and stuff like that and so I think, again, the focus is on your learning!" As such, Olivia's interest encouraged two forms of deeper participation in the course: searching out additional resources; and engaging in course content to understand it deeply instead of for a grade. Similarly, Denise perceived not being graded as an opportunity "to be more focused on the task at hand and do some deeper exploration into other topics that were closely aligned, but we're more suited for what I do professionally."

For other students, the removal of grades allowed them to feel like they could put their personal touch on the course. Ester, an elementary teacher, perceived her experience as an opportunity to be more engaged in the course, especially during asynchronous class discussions. Throughout the course, Ester went out of her way to engage as many of her peers as possible in class discussions because she was interested in their perspectives and work. Ester suggested how students interacted in this course conflicted with her previous experiences, recalling that "nobody's thinking about 'Oh if I have to do something, it's because I have to answer two peers, or it's because it's for a grade.'" Similarly, Lois found discussions without grades allowed her to add her personality to the class activity. Comparing her previous course experiences, and her interests in ungrading, she went on to say "Yeah, but I also didn't want to sacrifice my own creativity. I didn't want to sacrifice my out-of-the-box thinking, and I think it [ungrading] allowed that out-of-the-box thinking to shine more!"

Opportunities for Growth and Healing

Students perceived ungrading to be an opportunity for growth. Specifically, we share how students, particularly non-native English-speaking students, viewed ungrading to be less biased than their previous experiences with grades. As a result, we share how ungrading encouraged students to view class material as an opportunity for learning and not just assignments to complete.

As students who had never experienced being in a gradeless course, or a course deemphasizing the role of grades for that matter, they had been conditioned to think about grades and grading practices in a specific way, namely as extrinsic motivation and ranking. As revealed throughout our findings, grades, for many, were the source of various traumas related to stress, pressure, and anxiety that inhibited their learning. In addition to these perceived ill effects, several students mentioned ungrading seemed to overcome bias in grading practices. Kris, a non-native English speaker, shared that he felt graded assessments were often biased against him and his knowledge. Similarly, Ester, another non-native English speaker, spoke at great length about how she had often been marked lower compared to her English-speaking peers on writing assessments. She believed this to be the case not because she did not understand or demonstrate her knowledge of the content, but because she had trouble demonstrating the nuances of the English language. Considering these challenges, Ester expressed excitement for ungrading and Kris positioned it as creating a more "inclusive environment," where their experience was "much more honest" in terms of how students are assessed and how that assessment takes shape.

In addition to being more transparent for students, the release of pressure associated with getting a grade resulted in an opportunity for students to focus on their learning. Denise, spoke directly to this point in her interview, sharing:

It was a lot easier to just focus on the assignment and not be so tied up with what grade am I actually going to get, which alleviated a lot of anxiety . . . It was not putting so much pressure on myself to make a, you know, to make a grade or make sure that I am getting a grade. I really focused more on, just my overall grasp of the material and I think that was apparent in the way that I submitted my assignments. It's not that I didn't care—You know it's not that I didn't care about what I was submitting but I didn't [have to] care about getting graded. And so, I was able to just truly provide my take on what I was learning and not

thinking about like, 'Okay, how is this going to be perceived as, you know—Have I hit every checkpoint on a rubric that I needed to in order to get all the points that I could possibly get?' So, it allowed me to just really focus more on reflecting on what I had learned during the course.

For Denise, as well as for many other students, the removal of grades provided a sense of freedom. Significantly, this freedom did not result in taking advantage of the situation. Instead, as was exemplified by Denise's work, it led to greater effort on assignments and trying to deeply understand the material.

Similar to Denise, students saw ungraded assessments as an opportunity to grow their understanding. Lois, for instance, perceived the ungrading process to "feel like there was less pressure involved and it was more about what I needed. It was more about my own journey, instead of my own destination." Furthermore, Olivia, discussed how her experiences with grades have forced her to treat assessments in specific ways stating "I think that it really exemplifies how much grading is ingrained in the way we think about school and education," and thanks to the grade-free experience:

I have a larger growth-mindset because [I know] it's not going to count against me if I'm trying—And if I want to learn more and it's known that I want to learn more, versus a teacher simply going to put a number on it and that's it, you're done.

Olivia, both simply and eloquently, articulates her greatest perceived benefit of ungrading—it encouraged her to approach her learning and assessment with a growth mindset. More specifically, Olivia saw ungrading as an opportunity to further develop her learning and understanding of the material (Dweck, 2015), not just to cover it once and move on to the next topic. Similar to her peers' exploration of course content, Olivia viewed her learning as cyclical and as a process that could vary in depth depending on her interest. In this manner, students were focused more on the process of learning, often associated with a growth mindset (Dweck, 2015), than fixating on an end result.

Discussion

This article reported online graduate students' perceptions of being in a grade-free course. Similar to Gorichanaz (2022) and Guberman (2021), our students' previous experiences with ungrading and grades encouraged reflection of past trauma, from stress associated with an overt focus on ranking to anxiety and feelings of persecution associated with the way students expressed their ideas in writing assignments. However, as shown in our findings, students perceived ungrading to be a positive shift away from "normal" assessment and a more appropriate means for supporting their learning. Moreover, due to the holistic nature of ungrading, students: (1) desired to engage in feedback and reflection cycles, as was the case with Lois, Nadia, and Barrett; (2) tie their course learning to their professional and personal contexts, both inside and out of education, like Olivia and Denise; and, (3) complete assessments without the fear of making a mistake that would lose them points, similar to Kris, Ester, and Denise.

In many ways, grades created very traumatic experiences for a couple of students included in this research. One deeply troubling experience was shared by Ester while discussing how she felt some grading practices were biased against non-native English speakers. Ester shared that in her previous online courses, she would go back through the discussions and compare what she had written to what her peers had written. Frequently, she found that the theme of her posts were similar to her peers, and were often completed in greater detail. However, she typically received a lower grade, with points taken off for grammar and syntax. Although being able to communicate and write at a high-level is important, especially in graduate programs, we argue that the nature of traditional assessment completely ignores what ungrading champions, namely Ester's reality and learning of the content matter.

As interest in trauma-informed instructional approaches in educational settings garner more interest, ungrading is just one approach to assessment that prioritizes student well-being. We do not intend to position ungrading as the only approach to assessment that prioritizes student learning, but we do leverage our understanding of the ungrading practice to question how other forms of assessment can prioritize student learning and well-being. Even more, how might the intentions of ungrading, specifically its relational nature inspire pedagogical approaches more broadly? We

suggest that ungrading prompts an audit of educators' and designers' assumptions about assessment and assessment practices to uncover the implicit biases they might promote.

Conclusion

We began this article by sharing our concerns with assessment practices that prioritize grades over learning, suggesting that these assessment practices ignore the reality of students and the potential trauma grades reproduce. Thinking through how the pandemic has affected students, we queried, what would happen if assessment was pursued as part of a system of care. We suggest given the impact grades have on students' mental health and well-being, and educational experiences in general, encouraging approaches that deemphasize the presence of grades in students' academic endeavors are needed. Based on students' perceptions of ungrading in this article, we have positioned the ungrading method as one that leverages care for students and their learning, and can promote trauma-informed teaching practices by minimizing the stressful and anxiety-inducing effect grades manifest. Moreover, the intentionality of care in ungrading practices only furthers the alignment with trauma-informed teaching (Minahan, 2019). We find it most interesting given the context in which students were enrolled in this course and this study—amid a global pandemic—not a single interview participant discussed the hardships they were facing. Instead, their perceptions focused on how ungrading made them feel free, excited, and engaged in their learning.

Furthermore, ungrading is just one element in a system of care. As such, how might different forms of pedagogy, learning environments, and instructional design contribute to this system? It is unrealistic, at this moment in time, to expect grades to disappear in education entirely. However, we hope that this article and research encourages thoughtful discourse of where and when grades are necessary or even not needed.

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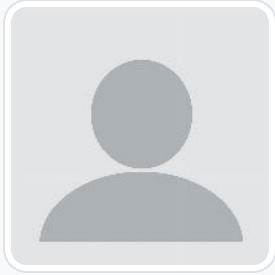
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Transforming Learning Communities Through a Transdisciplinary, Trauma-Informed Approach to Classrooms as Communities

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Teacher Education

Teacher Preparation

Trauma-informed Practices



We describe an intentional, long-term approach to community building from a trauma-informed perspective and evidence from an action research study on this approach. As the instructors and as members of a transdisciplinary team, including social work, English and rhetoric, and teacher education, we reframed a first-semester course on building classroom communities for undergraduate middle and secondary teacher certification candidates to include explicit attention to trauma-informed practices. Following the course, we facilitated a Professional Learning Community (PLC) during subsequent semesters to engage candidates in ongoing discussions around trauma-informed practices as they continued with their program. We examined data collected across the course and the PLC meetings to understand how candidates' thinking shifted around trauma-informed practice. Findings show that teacher candidates felt more knowledgeable about childhood trauma as well as how to incorporate this knowledge into their learning communities, yet they struggled with some aspects of the shift from the theoretical to the practical.

Introduction

How can teacher educators design instruction around trauma-informed teaching? We draw on the literature on trauma-informed practices (TIP) in teaching and more specifically in teacher preparation to describe an intentional approach to classroom community building from a trauma-informed perspective and evidence from an action research study on this approach. As the instructors and as members of a transdisciplinary team, including social work, English and rhetoric, and teacher education, we reframed a first-semester course on building classroom community, or as candidates refer to it, the classroom management course, for undergraduate middle and secondary teacher certification candidates. The course includes explicit, foundational attention to trauma-informed practices. Following the course, we facilitated a

Professional Learning Community (PLC) during subsequent semesters to engage candidates in ongoing discussions around trauma-informed practices as they continued with their program.

In this work, we invoke the term community to refer to specific constructs depending on contexts. First, as part of course design, individual classrooms are described as learning communities. This intentional language usage reflects ongoing concerns around the reductionist nature of classroom management. Second, the phrase building learning communities refers to the intentional processes teachers use to create safe, inclusive, supportive, and affirming environments that support all students' learning. It is also in the name of the course. Finally, professional learning communities (PLCs) refer to Stoll et al.'s (2006) notion of PLCs as

... an inclusive group of people, motivated by a shared learning vision, who support and work with each other, finding ways, inside and outside their immediate community, to enquire on their practice and together learn new and better approaches that will enhance all pupils' learning. (p. 1)

We examined data collected across the course and the PLC meetings to understand how candidates' thinking shifted around trauma-informed practice. Findings showed teacher candidates felt more knowledgeable about childhood trauma as well as how to incorporate this knowledge into their learning communities, yet they struggled with some aspects of the shift from the theoretical to the practical. Findings identified gaps in instruction and the need for better facilitation of shifts in candidates thinking about students affected by trauma. Many of the hallmarks of teacher preparation such as intentional integration of information, analysis, practice, and reflection were effective; however, we identified concerns with our instruction, along with areas needing more robust attention.

Literature Review

Attention to childhood trauma and the subsequent need for trauma-informed care has contributed to emerging discourses related to teaching practices, school climate, and the delivery of trauma-related in-service and pre-service teacher preparation (Cole et al., 2005; Day et al., 2015; Oehlberg, 2008). Psychological trauma, frequently experienced by school-aged children (Costello et al., 2002), includes experiences or events that are perceived as harmful, create intense distress, and impact an individual's overall wellbeing (SAMHSA, 2014). Traumatic stress in childhood can impede brain development and is associated with barriers to school performance (Perfect et al., 2016), negatively influencing students' capacity for self-regulation, organization, comprehension, and memorization (Wolpov et al., 2009, 2016). Consequently, students' behaviors may be perceived by their teachers as problematic, resulting in punitive teacher responses, classroom-based consequences, and a range of other disciplinary actions that may lead to disproportional detrimental consequences and the school to prison pipeline (Dorado et al., 2016). Literature across disciplines documents the impact of trauma on children in schools, the need for school and community-wide approaches (Walkley & Cox, 2013), and the dearth of empirical work in this area (Day et al., 2015). Nevertheless, within the educational research literature, the gap between research and practice continues (Alvarez, 2017; De Pedro et al., 2011) and trauma-informed teacher preparation in this area remains underdeveloped (Rossen & Hull, 2013; Wong, 2008) and under-researched (Day et al., 2015; Thomas et al., 2019).

Trauma-informed Teaching and Teacher Preparation

Empirical literature exploring TIP in education and teacher education or preparation outlets describe teachers' experiences teaching youth effected by trauma (Alveraz, 2017; Morgan et al., 2015), students' experiences with participatory action research (Mutch & Gawith, 2014) and parents' experiences with community programs (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012).

Recent studies frame TIP more specifically in teacher preparation. Reddig and VanLone (2022) found that five states require training in "trauma-informed pedagogy" which they define as 'a teacher's collective use of trauma-informed practices" (p. 2). They also found states often required elements associated with trauma-informed care, such as social-emotional learning and cultural responsiveness. That said, without an explicit policy directive, it remains unclear to what

extent teacher preparation programs are required to provide candidates information or training in trauma-informed teaching as well as the specific content and processes through which TIP is delivered.

Teacher educators in health and physical education note the “lack of emphasis in our teacher preparation programs and professional development opportunities” around trauma-informed practices (Walton-Fisette, 2020, p. 9). Walton-Fisette (2020) and Ellison et al. (2020) offer information and recommendations for candidates in health and physical education. Studies of preservice teachers in both Australia (Davies & Berger, 2019) and the United States (McClain, 2021) describe participants’ responses that their preparation programs did not prepare them with trauma-awareness nor responses to trauma. In the literature, preservice teacher and teacher candidate are used synonymously. We will use the term selected by the authors, but in our state, we typically use teacher candidates.

Preservice teachers who participated in Foreman and Bates (2021) study received instruction on trauma-informed care for the classroom during a single, 90-minute class meeting. Those in an Australian study completed by L’Estrange & Howard (2022) received a six-week unit. Surveys of participants completing the unit indicated that their knowledge increased, and they were responsive to the content. L’Estrange & Howard (2022) recommended preservice teachers “receive ongoing support to develop their skills into their early careers” (p. 1). Rodger et al. (2020) surveyed teacher candidates in Ontario who took an online, mandatory mental health literacy course including trauma-and-violence-informed-care. Findings indicated that the course increased participants’ attitudes and efficacy in using teaching practices to support children in schools. The tools and strategies included information about how trauma can affect students’ behavior and learning as well as resources on vicarious trauma. Findings across these studies confirms the need for trauma-informed practices in teacher preparation and the willingness of candidates to receive such content (L’Estrange & Howard, 2022; Rodger et al., 2020). They also point to next steps for research to explore how candidates make sense of the content in the context of the other elements in learning to be teachers.

Designing for Trauma-Informed Teacher Preparation for the Current Study

To create a research-informed framework for teacher preparation, we drew from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMSHA, 2014) guidance for a trauma-informed approach. This framework is intended for professionals in health specialties, but adaptable for other “sectors . . . that have the potential to ease or exacerbate an individual’s capacity to cope with traumatic experiences” (p. 13), and is used to push candidates toward shifts in thinking about how they build and maintain learning communities. Rossen and Hull (2013) emphasize the need for educators to build “a classroom climate of mutual respect and empathy and most importantly, to foster positive self-esteem and competency building for traumatized students” (p. viii).

Trauma-informed practice in schools requires educators to recognize the prevalence, impact, and indicators of childhood trauma and to respond to student behavior in ways that support traumatized youth without re-traumatization (SAMHSA, 2015). Derived from an interdisciplinary approach to students’ wellbeing in schools, trauma-informed school practice requires educators to receive basic training in childhood trauma including ways it may manifest in students’ behavior (Day et al., 2015). It also requires teachers demonstrate insight and flexibility in their classroom management and instructional practices. In essence, trauma-informed teaching seeks to acknowledge the ways a young person’s life course is affected by trauma and to use trauma-sensitive strategies in place of traditional, often punitive, and trauma-blind school practices-practices which have historically compounded the effects of students’ trauma (Craig, 2017). Previous research considering practicing teachers found teachers responded positively to information around trauma-informed practices and consequently felt comfortable implementing these practices (Dorado et al., 2016). As mentioned, work describing candidates’ experiences with trauma-informed teaching is limited. That said, RB-Banks and Meyer (2017) advocate for candidates’ early exposure to trauma-informed practices, regardless of the difficult nature of such experiences.

We were concerned as well that TIP content would be perceived by candidates as an add-on, a series of tricks or tips, and potentially confirm candidates’ deficit assumptions about marginalized communities (Milner, 2008). To that end, we

strived to scaffold candidates learning of the TIP modules around larger discussions of equity, cultural responsiveness, and systemic challenges.

To describe the learning processes, we explored two research questions: How do candidate develop perceptions of trauma-informed teaching as a component of building classroom communities? And how are they constructing those perceptions?

Theoretical Framework

Because of the educator preparation program's intent to foster a shift in candidates' perspectives around building classroom communities that are trauma-informed, this practitioner research informed by action research is grounded in a sociocultural perspective using a transformative design (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Sociocultural theory's inclusion of thought, language, and learning as dialogic, and the emphasis on human social and cultural interaction (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996), pushed us as instructors and researchers to examine if and how the resources we used, along with the instruction we provided, shifted candidates toward more informed perspectives and guided actions. Action research processes included intentional, critical reflection and self-evaluation of candidates' practice with emphasis on their roles in next steps, decision-making, and implementation of new learning (Sales et al., 2011). We intend for the findings of this study, as well as the insights offered by candidates, to improve the course and inform teacher preparation around trauma-informed practices.

In designing our study, we remained mindful of transformative paradigmatic assumptions. The transformative paradigm assumes ontological and epistemological stances that inform our study. Specifically, we recognize the inevitability of multiple, socially constructed realities that are also affected by power and privilege, necessitating explicitness regarding each of our values and positionalities. That is, our racial, gender, and other characteristics in addition to the power and privilege instructors hold over students must be transparent. Additionally, our epistemological assumptions recognize the nature of relationships among the instructors and students, and the ways those relationships and power relations inform the social and historical contexts for knowledge (Mertens & Ginsberg, 2008).

Collectively, our work intends to support candidates to inform practices around building learning communities (i.e., culturally responsive communities), create trauma-informed learning environments, improve teacher preparation for trauma-informed practice, and address a notable gap in the research regarding teacher preparation as a component of trauma-informed systems of care. Further, Mertens and Ginsberg (2008) describe transformative, qualitative approaches and action research as potentially complementary, if the participatory component is framed to involve transformational change. To that end, we include Brydon-Miller et al.'s (2003) definition of fundamental principles of action research to include "respect for people and for the knowledge and experience they bring to the research process, a belief in the ability of democratic processes to achieve positive social change, and a commitment to action" (p. 15). Our intentions with this study are to respect the perspectives and experiences of candidates while working with them to challenge deficit views of middle and high school students and explore more informed and transformational stances around trauma-informed teaching.

Methodology

As an instructional and research team, we viewed our work as an opportunity to problematize teacher preparation, more specifically, within a required course on building learning communities with newly added content around trauma-informed practices. Drawing from the conceptual umbrella of practitioner research (Cochan-Smith & Lytle, 2009) along with action research and self-study methodologies, we explored how teacher candidates developed and constructed their perceptions of trauma-informed teaching as a component of building classroom communities. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2009) frame practitioner research and practitioner inquiry as interchangeable, noting the significance of their choices of terms including practitioner as "an expansive and inclusive way to mean a wide array of education practitioners" (p. ix). Cochran-Smith & Lytle's (2009) descriptions of the features of practitioner research include several

relevant to our study. For instance, we each held dual roles of practitioner and researcher, and we collaborated with our partners who are “stakeholders” (p. 41) in the process of trauma-informed teacher preparation with a “problem of practice” (p. 42) as our central purpose.

Context

In Spring 2017, as a transdisciplinary team, we initiated a trauma-informed project in a required undergraduate teacher education course, addressing ways to establish and maintain a learning environment with specific attention to: cultural conflicts in the classroom (D’Haem & Griswold, 2016); racial literacy (Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2015); engaging students who are the hardest to reach; and explicit attention to childhood trauma and trauma-informed practice from a social work perspective (Wolpow et al., 2009, 2016). This project, titled Transforming Learning Communities (TLC), was informed with input from partners, including veteran teachers, school counseling staff, policy advocates, and recruitment and staffing personnel from the local public school system. The TLC project intended to better prepare candidates to establish and maintain productive learning environments by fostering learning communities that affirm and support diverse students, including those affected by trauma, through course redesign, field experience supports, and action research.

The TLC team’s primary task for the project was to revise an undergraduate teacher preparation course, Building Learning Communities (BLC), that was originally designed to engage pre-service teacher candidates to understand effective approaches to build and maintain learning environments that are academically, socially, physically and emotionally safe and productive. This course is one of the first taken by students enrolled in the undergraduate program and is taught onsite at one of the University’s partnership schools. As mentioned, candidates often refer to it as the classroom management class. The revisions to BLC’s focus on building learning communities were based on foundational principles of trauma-informed practices. Specifically, these included intentional and explicit foci on candidates’ constructions of their learning communities as trauma-sensitive. As a result of this shift, instruction emphasized creating classroom structures that are flexible, consistent, and responsive to the needs of all students, particularly those impacted by trauma.

Classrooms as Communities

We framed classroom communities as trauma-informed to direct candidates toward a philosophical shift in how they think about students’ behaviors and actions that, in turn, translates into decisions about how, as teachers, they establish and maintain a productive and safe learning environment. Through the inclusion of intentional content and structures around trauma-informed practices and asset-based frames, we aimed to support middle and high school teacher candidates’ development of foundational perspectives and understandings which recognize their needs to (re-)consider approaches to community building while asking fundamental questions that challenge assumptions about students and their experiences.

Educators who build and communicate a sense of community within classrooms create welcoming and productive learning spaces to benefit students and teachers. In these environments, students are more engaged, contributing to their sense of motivation and competence (Watkins, 2005). Calls for community within educational spaces harken back to the works of both Dewey and Vygotsky as these scholars viewed learning as a social process (Osterman, 2000). In P-12 classrooms, with explicit attention to community, students are involved participants who see themselves as members of a larger community. Through their relationships with others, in turn, they view their classmates as active, contributing, and valued partners (Watkins, 2004). Watkins (2005) explains how typical approaches to learning in teacher-centered classrooms, where the teacher transmits knowledge to students are replaced within community approaches, where “social relations and knowledge creation” (p. 48) are fundamental to learning. Watson et al. (2019) acknowledge learning occurs in community and note the critical nature of the teacher’s role in not only building such a community but also in sustaining it over time by fostering trusting and supportive relationships among members.

We also recognize challenges in building relationships and community with students whose prior experiences with teachers are negative while affirming the significance of the community building process for students’ socio-emotional and academic learning. To that end, teacher candidates need instruction modelling practices supportive of classrooms

as learning communities (D'Souza, 2017). Researchers have demonstrated how coursework can be a place where candidates experience community building firsthand. Cooper (2003) links community building efforts to positive outcomes with students. She also describes her efforts to build community in a pre-service course by modeling specific actions candidates might take in their classrooms. D'Souza (2017) also modeled strategies with candidates while connecting research and practice in a middle school methods course. Drawing from the work of Dweck (2007, 2010), Marzano (2003), and Rathvon (2008), D'Souza (2017) modeled strategies such as greeting students by name, attending to classroom arrangement, connecting with students' lives outside the course, and engaging in active learning. Candidates recognized these actions affected their learning and sense of belonging, viewing these actions as relevant for their future classrooms. Further, Gillies (2017) suggests modeling positive and supportive relationships in a classroom community at the college level "make(s) formal, complex environments seem more academically and socially supportive, which enables students to feel like they belong in higher education" (Johnson et al., 2007; as cited by Gillies, 2017, p. 20). As part of their own experiences, their sense of belonging within the pre-service classroom supports candidates' conceptualizations of the communities they wish to build with their students in the future.

During the first semester, we established baseline data, using The Trauma Survey (Crosby et al., 2016) as a formative assessment, while creating a sustainable course design to provide candidates with opportunities and tools supporting their ongoing learning, reflection, and action toward more inclusive classrooms. Instructors delivered content on trauma-informed teaching via four modules spread throughout the 14-week course with additional discussions woven in throughout the semester. Modules included directed readings, lectures, class activities and discussions, and reflective assignments focused on recognizing psychological trauma in childhood, and its multifaceted impact on youth functioning with ways include to address these in classroom settings.

The two teacher educators were listed as co-instructors of record for the course and were responsible for grading. The social work educator and the English and rhetoric educator were listed as instructors but did not have grading responsibilities. The course is included in an IRB allowing self-study for teacher preparation coursework that requires protections against coercion. Instructors for courses using the self-study protocol must explain the self-study process to candidates, reviewing an invitation to participate included in syllabi. The invitation explains instructional tasks and assignments may be used as data, and self-study is used by the program as a mechanism to improve courses and, more broadly, to advance teacher preparation. Candidates who chose not to participate in self-study can complete an opt-out form indicating their wishes. These forms are collected independently by an administrative assistant throughout the semester. Instructors do not know which candidates chose to opt-out or not to participate until after course grades are posted. Thus, data analysis procedures cannot and did not occur until the course ended. Candidates completed separate consent letters during the professional learning community semesters.

Positionality

The instructors include a Black social work educator, a Black English and rhetoric educator, and two white teacher educators. We all identify as female. Together, we form a multi-racial and multi-disciplinary group of scholar-activists with varying levels of relevant experience in schools and classrooms.

Participants

During the first semester, 17 candidates enrolled in the redesigned BLC course and participated in the research. Of the candidates, 12 out of 17 continued into the second semester PLC and research, and seven remained as members in the PLC and in the research for the student teaching semester. Six of these completed the full student teaching experience and one withdrew. Among the candidates in the first semester course, two identified as Biracial, one as Black, and the remaining as white. In the third semester, participating candidates identify as Black (n=1), Biracial (n=1), and the remaining five identify as white. We do not identify gender because of the low number of participants. Participants chose their own pseudonyms.

Data Sources and Collection

During the first semester, data include course assignments (see Appendix) along with candidates' reflections on their experiences. During the second semester, we facilitated the monthly PLC meetings to continue candidates' engagement with trauma-informed perspectives after the course. Using both written and verbal prompts, candidates used stimulated recall (Heikonen et al., 2017) in focus groups to revisit the topics and assignments from the first semester.

In the third semester, candidates met in the PLC focus groups to reflect on trauma-informed practices, and each of the seven candidates completed Critical Incident Descriptions (Angelides, 2001) twice; once at the midpoint of the student teaching semester and again at the end. The Critical Incident Descriptions were intended to engage candidates in critical reflection of elements of their student teaching, such as classroom climate, the behaviors and intentions of students, and the assumptions candidates may make about each.

Specifically, to deconstruct their assumptions and actions, candidates identified incidents in their classrooms and responded to prompts about the incidents. Consistent with Akpovo's (2019) perspective, we believed having candidates choose the incident, instead of the instructors, and prompting them to explain the significance of the incident could identify candidates' perspectives of why the incident was instructive to them. Akpovo (2019) suggests that "it is not the event itself that is important; it is how the teacher interprets the event, and the resulting actions and reactions based on these insights" (p. 148).

In Critical Incident Descriptions, each candidate described four different scenarios. Candidates described their perspectives and reflections on interactions with students who (a) acted out; and (b) shut down, as these are identified in the literature as behaviors presented by students who have experienced trauma (Baker et al., 2008). Importantly, they had to describe one incident of a student acting out that ended with a positive resolution as well as one incident of acting out that ended with a negative resolution. They repeated the process describing incidents of a student shutting down; one with a positive resolution and one with a negative resolution. To understand how candidates' perceptions changed during their first semester and again during student teaching, we asked them to complete the School Faculty/Staff Trauma Survey (Crosby et al., 2016).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using directed content analysis, a structured process using existing theory for predetermined codes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), with particular attention to thought, learning, and human development in the context of social and cultural interaction (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Along with attention to language and development, the transdisciplinary theories used to design the study directly informed the process of analysis and interpretation of findings.

Data analysis was a recursive process that began while we taught the course, prior to confirming the precise data set we would analyze. That is, as we assessed and discussed candidates' performance in the course and on their assignments, we logged our ideas and our questions about candidates' developing perceptions of trauma-informed teaching. More formal data analysis began once the course ended. We determined our final data set from the course, based on the candidates who had not opted out of self-study. Drawing from Saldaña (2015), we coded in two stages. As part of our first cycle codes, we applied codes across multiple passes of the data attending specifically to where candidates described that their thinking changed or where we saw shifts in their thinking. Our second cycle of coding included closed coding derived from our theoretical framework; returning to data chunked through those first codes, we next asked: what language did candidates use and how did their interactions with the content of trauma-informed practice, along with their interactions with students influence or change their thinking about building learning communities from trauma-informed perspectives? We reviewed our earlier logs written during the instruction along with the additional data. From all of these sources, we developed the categories around which we organized the findings: increasing awareness of trauma, exploring relationship building from a trauma-informed perspective, adding teacher moves, and reframing teacher behaviors.

Findings

The findings revealed how candidates shifted their perspectives of classroom communities as they recognized their need, as teachers, to be trauma-informed. With our attention to development in the context of social and cultural interaction (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996) the findings illuminate how, throughout the study, they co-constructed those perspectives.

Candidates Developing Perceptions of Trauma-informed Teaching

As part of our action research and to inform us, as instructors, whether candidates were developing perceptions of trauma-informed teaching, they completed the School Faculty/Staff Trauma Survey (Crosby et al., 2016) at the beginning and at the end of the course as well as at the end of the third semester after student teaching. Responses to the Trauma Survey administered the second week of class during the first semester and again at the end of that semester demonstrated candidates' changes in their responses to questions:

- *I can identify traumatic responses in students (11 or 64.7% agreed initially)*
- *I am mindful of how my verbal expressions impact a traumatized child (all 17 students agreed initially)*
- *I am mindful of the way my body language and nonverbal expressions impact a traumatized child (14 or 82.4% agreed initially)*

By the end of the class, all students enrolled agreed with these statements.

The other data sources revealed the nuances around these statements and how candidates' perspectives across each semester honed in around four actions. These actions serve as themes with respect to their perceptions of trauma-informed teaching within learning communities: a.) increasing awareness of trauma (distinct from trauma-informed teaching); b.) relationship building; c.) adding teacher moves; and d.) reframing teacher behaviors.

Candidates' reflections revealed how they constructed their understandings of these actions by framing course content and field experiences in support of learning trauma-informed practices. Candidates connected these to other relevant topics around classroom community. They also recognized that trauma-sensitive practices are "often overlooked . . . but teachers should always keep it in mind when managing a class . . . recognize signs of trauma and avoid actions that may re-trigger trauma." They continued to note that signs of trauma may be overlooked by teachers, and, in later semesters, noted potential instances in classrooms where that may have been the case. That said, as researchers who no longer had routine contact with candidates in a course, we wondered if they were inferring trauma as the single explanation for the behavior and academic challenges they encountered in classrooms.

During the first semester, while they were enrolled in the course, candidates' mentions of trauma were specific (and often mandatory because of the directions for assignments), and they referenced resources including readings and discussions. During the two later semesters, candidates often continued to explicitly mention trauma-informed practices without our prompting. At other times, they discussed topics that included responses that were often trauma-informed or trauma-sensitive without explicitly mentioning trauma. For example, in one of her Critical Incident Descriptions during student teaching, Jenny [pseudonym] wished that she had de-escalated a conflict with a student rather than escalating it. Jenny's reflection on this critical incident was similar to others' shifts and recognition of the significance of their decisions and actions. In short, Jenny's developing perceptions of community building from a trauma-informed perspective changed to include recognition that her actions might re-traumatize.

Increasing Awareness of Trauma

During the first semester, candidates enrolled in a course with intentionally explicit information regarding the pervasiveness and indicators of trauma, the impact of trauma exposure, and the responses to students' behavior that support students within learning communities and avoid re-traumatization. Candidates routinely documented that, as a

result of exposure to this information, they were aware of the signs of trauma, and they acknowledged that they needed to act accordingly. Hermione exemplifies this recognition of awareness in order to respond during a first-semester assignment where she also shares her perspective and owns her responsibility:

There are many types of trauma signs that span externally and internally. I feel like it's so easy for a child to fall through the cracks and go by unnoticed by those who can help. Not every child will react the same way or show equal signs. I need to be prepared to spot a potential child who is in need.

In describing her awareness of trauma, Hermione incorporates several key ideas from the course models about how trauma may manifest in students' behaviors in the classroom and positions herself to respond to a hypothetical student who has experienced trauma.

In later semesters, candidates also revisited what they learned about trauma awareness, why this was significant for them, and they articulated how they might respond as a result. For example, in the second semester, Anna reflected on what she learned about trauma informed practices and shared that "learning to understand how trauma affects students (by) looking from their perspective can help (teachers) be sensitive to their feelings/triggers." Anna recalled what she learned about how trauma may manifest in students' behaviors in the classroom and why that awareness was important.

During the final PLC conversation of the semester following the class, candidates were asked what they were still thinking about from the class. Margo responded:

I really liked learning about the trauma-informed teaching, because that's something that no one has really mentioned in any of my education classes before that and it's such an important thing . . . we're learning research behind it and how to affect every student and show that you care about that student, because you never know what's going on in their lives and that's so important.

At that point in the program, just prior to student teaching, Margo had completed almost all of her teacher preparation courses and related clinical experiences. Her awareness of trauma held throughout the second semester. That said, Margo's appreciation for exposure to the content which she described, "no one has really mentioned in any of my education classes before," reflected a trend across the candidates. They had never encountered information about the causes and impact of trauma, and, consequently, they needed time to process.

After she student taught during the third semester, Hermione reconsidered her earlier writings about awareness of trauma, including from the first semester:

I knew the right answer but I didn't know why that was the right answer. I think after having all the experience we have now, I can take this and push it in the right direction in a way that I understand why I'm doing it, and not just answering a question.

Over time, she realized she needed more than information and awareness about trauma. She also required additional opportunities for analysis and experience. As an instructional team, while we were encouraged by candidates' increasing awareness, we remained concerned that they were using trauma as a blanket explanation for everything they experienced in the classroom, with trauma-informed practices as the remedy. Had we potentially replaced one set of assumptions with another? We wondered if the central focus on community building was, in their minds, not as significant as the trauma-informed practices.

Relationship Building

During the first semester course, each candidate wrote a plan for their future classrooms that incorporated attention to student and teacher relationships, relationships with families, and relationships among peers. While they described relationships as key to safe, supportive learning communities, they did not initially frame relationship building specifically as a component of a classroom-based response to trauma. For example, in her plan, Melissa discussed relationships as one of the "core principles" of her philosophy of education. Similarly, Rose mentioned how important

she deemed relationships as she wanted her classroom to be an accepting environment. During student teaching, Rose believed that building rapport and connections was a proactive step toward creating and maintaining community, as well as a tool for addressing challenging student issues.

Later, during her student teaching semester, Rose more explicitly connected relationships in the classroom to trauma-informed practices. Rose states, as good practice, “I noticed that just making personal connections and building relationships was good.” She further considered how those relationships may have helped avert potentially problematic situations by indicating, “When I could joke with them or laugh with them, I was able to make that connection, and they respected me. And so then they would not go off into huge behavior issues.” Over time, and with experience, Rose’s perspectives on community became more explicit in terms of what relationships entailed.

Adding Teacher Moves

Many of the moves or actions candidates planned or performed during student teaching incorporated what they learned about the trauma-informed modules in the first semester as well as the broader concepts about building learning communities from the course as part of their response to trauma. For example, in an assignment completed during the course, Jessica planned to enact several different practices to ensure her classroom was trauma-informed. She wrote, “I will build a community [. . .] learn who my students are, be culturally and gender inclusive, have trauma sensitive practices [. . .] manage student behavior and manage instructional activities.” She also intended to create calm transitions and to make the shift from asking “what’s wrong with the child” to “what’s happening here.” Reflecting on her original plan after she student taught, Jessica realized that a great deal of the trauma-informed practices she planned for were actually plans for what she would do as a teacher. She also reflected on her practice and regretted, “I probably should have implemented these a little bit better when I was student teaching.” In essence, Jessica realized honest reflection is critical for breaking away from her earlier, more naïve conceptions in order to replace them with more grounded stances and explicit actions.

Reframing Teacher Behaviors

Candidates frequently mentioned they needed to avoid behaviors used as a means of surveillance or to connect with students. They realized they how these behaviors may trigger or re-traumatize students and named how they intended to reframe typical teacher reactions to potentially charged classroom scenarios. CJ was explicit during the first semester about his intention to “actively resist re-traumatization and escalation.” He described his plan by saying that he needed:

To be conscious of my actions and try to avoid those that may trigger trauma. For example, touching a student's shoulder can retrigger trauma if they've been sexually assaulted in the past . . . Escalation is another thing to watch out for . . . we as teachers have to understand that we could escalate situations by calling students out before knowing why they are doing what they're doing.

Like Jessica, after student teaching, CJ also recognized the need for teachers to revisit their earlier ideas, and if needed, revisit their plans and reframe their behaviors. He explained how important he believed learning about and implementing trauma-informed teaching is for teachers, recognizing it as a process requiring ongoing work. During a focus group in the final semester CJ acknowledged “The best thing we can do is continue to have these conversations and continue to revisit what we know about trauma-informed teaching” as mechanisms to support reframing teacher behaviors.

Constructing Perspectives

While they were enrolled in the class, candidates used the language and examples from the readings and discussions. Later, and particularly while student teaching, candidates were less likely to invoke the specific term trauma-informed. Instead, descriptions of their thoughts and practices were consistent with trauma-informed practices without specifically invoking the term. For example, during the PLCs in the second semester, candidates continued to focus on teacher actions, including deescalating situations, noticing facial expressions and body language of students, and

considering and re-considering their assumptions about the causes of student behaviors. Candidates reflected on what behaviors and decisions they might do differently next time they encountered a similar situation. They also found the opportunities to reflect on what they learned during the first semester in later PLCs, a practice they found helpful. Katie spoke to this, explaining, “I loved the trauma-sensitive practices conversations. These talks weren’t always particularly fun, but they were so important. It was a huge reminder to try and understand why certain behavior manifests, rather than condemning it as ‘misbehavior’.”

Candidates positioned trauma-informed teaching within the context of other elements of their communities, preparing to put what they learned into practice. During the PLC, one candidate shared, “I feel that as long as I consider the themes individual identity, a safe community, equitable opportunities, cultural and gender inclusiveness, and how to deal with trauma, and as long as I consider action steps for each.” As instructors, these types of responses referring to trauma-informed practices as a component of community building, helped us reconsider how we position trauma-informed practices. They reaffirmed our need to facilitate a shift in candidates’ thinking as opposed to providing them with prescriptive tools. Another candidate remarked in a focus group:

No one has really mentioned [trauma informed teaching] in any of my education classes before that and it’s such an important thing . . . and it makes me so hopeful for the future, because we’re all gonna (sic) be great trauma-informed teachers.

While we are cautiously optimistic that the shifts in their thinking will continue to take place, we continue to reflect, rethink, and revise how we can support candidates to create learning communities that truly transform.

Limitations

Limitations to this study include the small sample size, as well as the use of self-reported data. It is also important to highlight we did not have the capacity to conduct classroom observations of teaching during the student teaching semester. Therefore, data do not speak to the quality of the relationships developed between candidates and students nor to teaching practices. Understanding this limitation, we focused on how candidates develop and construct perceptions about trauma-informed teaching. We also recognize that attrition complicates the analysis as perhaps those who chose to continue in the study were more likely to “buy-in” to our central purpose. Furthermore, aspects of the course itself created an additional limitation—while field placements during the semester were developmentally appropriate, candidates had limited interactions with students in the classroom.

Discussion and Implications

This project was conceptualized as an intentional, long-term approach to teacher education around community building from a trauma-informed perspective. candidates revisited topics as they co-constructed what they learned in a first semester course throughout the second and third semesters of their programs. the through use of action research within practitioner inquiry explicated these processes. the documentation and evidence from this study, as analyzed and described by the transdisciplinary team, contributes to continuing course revisions. this study, along with other investigations of preservice education coursework, raises questions about how candidates’ come to understand classroom communities that are trauma-informed. additionally, we wonder how those understandings are shaped by the additional emphasis on trauma-informed practices.

Findings show teacher candidates felt more knowledgeable about childhood trauma as well as how to incorporate this knowledge into their teaching philosophy and practices. Importantly, candidates also framed trauma-informed practices from a non-deficit perspective (in some cases) by connecting these to other topics from the class, such as exclusionary discipline practices, discipline disparities, and the school to prison pipeline.

Further, with additional field experiences and new knowledge from other coursework, they benefited from revisiting the purposes and content of trauma-informed teaching after the class, through intentional structures such as PLCs. In

essence, learning to be a trauma-informed teacher, like learning to teach, entails a long-term process that integrates information, analysis, practice, and reflection. Learning to be a trauma-informed teacher also requires a commitment to considerations of the larger implications of teacher actions.

Research has illustrated the need for exposing teaching professionals to this content earlier in their careers and even at the pre-service level, (Ko et al., 2008; Thomas et al., 2018). We found the content appropriate to introduce when candidates are first developing ideas about community building. By adopting a framework from social work (SAMHSA, 2014), we provided teacher candidates content to support shifts in their thinking.

Through our ongoing analysis and reflection on the data, we returned to the body of research about the power of the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975/2002) and the challenges teacher educators experience when they urge candidates to teach differently from how they themselves were taught. We recognized, unlike their counterparts in social work education, teacher candidates likely do not have prior knowledge about trauma or of trauma-informed practices. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely such practices were part of their prior experiences in schools. During their “apprenticeships” as P-12 students, candidates recognized “problems” in classrooms and with students’ behavior. However, they do not enter teacher preparation with a framework that is trauma-informed that might support alternative explanations for their observations.

After reflection on our instruction and the data, we recognized acknowledgement of trauma is significant for candidates. Furthermore, it is not only foundational, but also frequently “triggering.” Some have personal experience with trauma and traumatic events. Many candidates shared they had not been exposed to the research around the prevalence of trauma, similar to other studies of TIP in teacher preparation (Davies & Berger, 2019; McClain, 2021). The introduction of that information forces them to focus and, perhaps, linger on the nature of the trauma. We wonder if they then over-attribute trauma to classroom scenarios.

Not every student in schools has experienced significant trauma, and we remain concerned about candidates’ assumptions around trauma. That said, we continue to hold that it is vital that through teacher education, candidates establish a pattern of thinking and a philosophical stance—rather than a set of tips—on trauma-informed teaching practices to frame classrooms as communities from a trauma-informed perspective. It is also imperative that instructors aid candidates toward shifts that include understanding the complexity of trauma, and an awareness of their own assumptions about students. These shifts should include consideration of other aspects of learning to teach to transform candidates’ perspectives of community in support of each learner. This study provides context for the ways in which discussion and reflection of learning communities that are trauma-informed can occur. We posit that endeavors to move teacher candidates toward such reflection and change requires intentional approaches and further research and encourages teacher educators and researchers to be innovative in these efforts.

In the time following the initial revisions to the course and the analysis of the action research data described here, we have engaged in continuous reflection and modifications to the course through routinely scheduled discussions among the instructors and partners. At the beginning of the project, we introduced candidates to a broad overview of the prevalence and effects of trauma on students and their learning; now we include focused attention to the implications for teaching practices. Through our data analysis we determined specific gaps in the instruction and located needs within candidates’ preparation. Specifically, while we found that our core modification, comprised of the introduction to trauma awareness as a foundation to building community, began to shift candidates’ thinking, we needed additional modifications along with more deliberately designed tasks to engage candidates in processing what they learned, and better preparing them to take the theoretical elements of trauma-informed approaches to their practice as teachers.

We became strategic about our pace of instruction; we devoted more time to targeted reflection, giving candidates space to digest what they were learning about trauma from a teaching and from a personal perspective. We also recognized that the introduction of content on trauma was triggering for some candidates. Additionally, we identified the need to create a more race-conscious approach to trauma that included structural considerations of the circumstances in which trauma occurs and how racism shapes the conditions in which students experience trauma (Alvarez, 2020).

As mentioned previously, we now designate more in-class time for candidates to reflect and process, and we provide tools to support them. Those reflections followed deeper dives on the impact of trauma, and the implications of that impact for classroom learning and behavior, along with more substantive resources and introspection into the connections with the teachers' biases around race and ethnicity, and the role of teacher biases in the school to prison pipeline.

We also modified the critical incident description, originally used to capture candidates' reflection on their actions during student teaching, for use in the course as means to engage them through the processes of building learning communities with a trauma-informed approach earlier in their programs. We also added a module on self-care, adapted from social work education (Wolpow et al., 2016), because we recognized many candidates had also experienced trauma and were themselves struggling with mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression which would potentially affect their capacities to support students once they became teachers (Chambers Mack et al., 2019). Though we know we must continue to recognize, problematize, analyze, and revise, we do believe candidates emerge from the course more informed and better prepared to transform their learning communities to support students who have experienced trauma.

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A District-Wide Implementation of Social Emotional Learning During a Pandemic

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Professional Development

Trauma-informed

Social Emotional Learning

CASEL Framework



Social emotional learning (SEL) has shown significant positive effect on self-management and self-awareness; however, teachers have been skeptical of implementation due to the amount of extra time and resources. This article presents a case study of how a school district implemented SEL using the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework through a trauma-informed lens during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

Social emotional learning (SEL) is gaining momentum across the nation as compelling evidence suggests that academic, social, and emotional skills are related and connected (Durlak, 2016) with the most significant positive effect on self-management and self-awareness (Van de Sande et al., 2019). Yet, over the last two decades, teachers have been skeptical of implementation due to the amount of extra time and resources (Buchanan et al., 2009) and their comfort level of being coached (Quraishi, 2019).

Evidence shows that SEL positively influences student academic growth and achievement (Chernyshenko et al., 2018). Current SEL implementation efforts focus on developing social emotional domains and measurable competencies that integrate developmental psychology, educational theory, and cultural relevance (Ross & Tolan, 2018).

While there are implementation recipes provided by Think Tanks, such as RULER, an acronym for Recognize, Understand, Label, Express, and Regulate Emotions (Durlak et al., 2015), and state and local policymakers have significant documentation for successful implementation, it is not as simple as having the printed formula on a recipe card. Nor does the implementation process guarantee that the outcome will occur as desired (Durlak, 2016).

This article focuses on a case study of how a school district implemented SEL using the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework through a trauma-informed lens during the COVID-19 pandemic. We

start the article with the barriers to SEL implementation and the need for trauma-informed instruction. We then present a district-wide implementation of SEL through an exploratory single case study by sharing the methodology and the strategies used by the district for implementing SEL. We conclude with effective trauma-informed teaching practices and lessons learned.

Supporting Literature

Barriers to SEL Implementation

Studies show barriers and resistance to district-wide SEL implementation (Oberle et al., 2016). Two known barriers to implementation are resources (such as professional development), support, and time. Buchanan et al. (2009) examined teachers' perceptions and practices of SEL and revealed that while teachers feel that SEL is necessary, the resources required for implementation are lacking. Teachers report that they do not have the time for SEL implementation, with many expressing that it is "not feasible" to spend 30 minutes of prep time to prepare SEL teaching materials and that spending 15 minutes is only "somewhat feasible." Essentially, the "not feasible" position ranks higher than the "very feasible" position (Buchanan et al., 2009). A report from the Foundation for Young Adult Success questions the practicality of giving "another thing" for teachers to design and disseminate when they are often already overloaded (Blyth et al., 2019).

Another implementation barrier at the district level is a lack of SEL skills in the instructional staff, specifically in the competency of self-awareness. Wood (2018) states that SEL can promote the marginalization of some students' experiences if teachers lack self-awareness of their own bias or lack cultural literacy. Panayiotou et al. (2019) contends that a lack of teacher self-awareness is the highest limiting factor to SEL implementation. This might suggest that educators ought to frame their SEL experiences in a pluralistic context, thereby allowing students to apply multiple values to their experiences rather than assign meaning to the experience by the power structure operating in the district.

One common thread of inadequate implementation is the belief that SEL is just another fad in instruction, and the result is inconsistent implementation towards an embedded approach (Panayiotou et al., 2019). There are most likely several reasons why successful and sustained SEL implementation is challenging for schools and districts.

In addition to the known barriers to implementation, the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the mental health of students. It created an adverse community environment. Within this environment, students experienced stressors that are known to increase the risk of toxic stress, defined by adverse experiences that lead to strong, frequent, and prolonged activation of the body's stress response system. For many students, the pandemic created feelings of isolation, uncertainty, and profound loss. For families already facing daily stressors such as poverty, illness, community violence, racism, discrimination, intergenerational trauma, or family dysfunction, the challenges brought forth by the pandemic only increased the risk of psychological trauma (Imad, 2021).

The Need for Trauma-Informed Instruction

Starting around the 1980s, the field of psychology began to formally recognize psychological trauma as a medical diagnosis by naming "posttraumatic stress disorder" (PTSD) as a clinical diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5-TR) (Thomas et al., 2019). Since then, there has been an explosion of research on psychological trauma as well as enhanced definitions to inform the myriad of ways psychological trauma can impact both individuals and communities.

In any given classroom across the U.S., it is estimated that two-thirds of all students will have experienced at least one traumatic event by age 16 (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016). Aside from acute and single-incident experiences of trauma, the definition has broadened to address multiple and prolonged traumatic experiences in childhood that often disrupt primary attachment bonds. This is referred to as complex or developmental trauma. Research has also expanded to bring awareness to historical trauma, which is the cumulative effects of group or community trauma across generations, such as war, poverty, oppression, slavery, genocide, racism, and discrimination (Mohatt et al., 2014).

Research has also documented that microaggressions negatively affect the biological, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral well-being of marginalized populations (Sue, 2010). What might appear to some as trivial or unintentional slights are often experienced as major stressors for persons of color, individuals from marginalized ethnic or religious backgrounds, and individuals in the LGBTQ+ community (Sue, 2010). There are other psychological challenges such as the digital age, where students face obstacles in terms of navigating their social worlds and their evolving ego identities among the constant stream of information and social influencing thrust upon them within their social media platforms. These experiences can lead to psychological trauma for students in significant numbers.

Research has demonstrated that psychological trauma impedes school performance, given its direct impact on social, emotional, and cognitive development (Perfect et al., 2016). With the primary goal of educational institutions to prepare children for their future, it is no wonder why the importance of trauma-informed practices in the classroom and school community has become a national movement.

District-Wide Implementation of SEL: An Exploratory Single Case Study

Teachers are the engine that drive SEL implementation (Ross & Tolan, 2018). Much is written in terms of implementation methodology. Almost every state has specific SEL implementation standards, and these SEL standards align with the Every School Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA). However, the literature regarding how SEL is implemented in a district is sparse. Previous studies focus on the validity and benefits of SEL on students' social and emotional growth and academic achievement (Chernyshenko et al., 2018). The absence of comprehensive district-wide implementation in the literature suggests a need to understand how all the pieces of implementing SEL fit together. Therefore, an exploratory single case study looked at how a school district implemented an SEL framework.

The study focused on relationships that were interdependent in the phenomenon of SEL implementation (Yin, 2018). The intent was to investigate and capture complex action, perception, and interpretation of that implementation as applied to the synthesis of Greenberg's model of implementation (Greenberg et al., 2017) and how inner and outer contexts and factors affect that implementation (Moullin et al., 2019).

The case study focused on a medium-sized school district in the Midwest with a student population of 3,000–5,000 students. The data collection focused on the experience of administrators and teachers regarding the implementation of SEL using the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) framework. While the district did receive a small implementation grant from the state, the district administrators have stated that money is not a limiting factor. The greatest limiting factors are personnel models with school counselors, counselors as SEL coaches, using a k-12 district language related to SEL competencies, professional development of staff for SEL instruction, and personal self-awareness and self-management.

Data Collection

The discovery of participants' constructivist understanding occurred through semi-structured open-ended interview questions, which allowed participants to share their views and researchers to understand the construction of their meaning of SEL implementation (see Appendix A: Interview Protocol Guide). This research afforded the opportunity to focus on the participant experience, including the historical and cultural context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The degree of interconnectedness of resources and processes was unique to the district and across the levels of leadership and teachers, which allowed for the discovery of those resources and processes that occurred at the varying levels of leadership. Data collection consisted of 15 semi-structured interviews for a duration of 40-60 minutes each. Participants included district and school-level administration, including members of student services, SEL coaches, and teachers. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and recorded with the permission of the participant during the pandemic. Table 1 shows details about the study participants: the first five are district-level administrators, the second

five are school-level administrators, including the SEL coaches, and the last five are teachers. Students were not interviewed in this case study.

Table 1

Study Participants

Admin/Teacher Level	Gender	Experience	Years of Experience
High-Level Administrator	M	Elem teacher, administration	21
Director of Student Services	F	Teacher, SWD, CESA, more than two districts admin	28
Program Director	F	Elem teacher, college & career readiness org, administration	20
Multilevel System Support Specialist	F	Licensed psychologist, school psych	10
Program Coordinator	M	Business teacher, admin	21
Elementary School Principal	F	Science teacher, admin	21
Middle School Principal	F	Teacher, admin	21
SEL Coach Elementary School	F	Social worker, MSW, counselor	15+
SEL Coach Middle School	F	Rehabilitation specialist, SWD, university professor, international experience	15+
School Psychologist	F	School psychologist	7
Teacher Elementary 1	F	Elem teacher	27
Teacher Elementary 2	F	Elem teacher	4
Teacher Middle School 1	F	Middle-level teacher, several states	31
Teacher Middle School 2	M	Middle school teacher	30
Teacher Middle School 3	F	Middle school teacher	5

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the Elemental methodology, using descriptive and process coding, and the Affective methodology, using evaluative and values coding (Miles et al., 2014). Elemental methods are a type of first cycle coding that provides both the description and detail of the process (descriptive and process coding) (Miles et al., 2014). Effective methods allow for the coding of the participants' subjective experiences. This includes the values, attitudes, and beliefs associated with implementation (values coding) and the judgment and value that the participants have for the process, policies, and organizational structures associated with implementation (evaluation coding) (Miles et al., 2014). Subcodes of first cycle codes were developed after interviews were transcribed and provided more specific qualitative analysis of the data. Analysis of the subcodes led to the development of patterns, second cycle coding, that emerged from cross-referencing values and evaluative codes with descriptive and process codes. As an example, data that were coded as chronological dynamics, or a process that was needed at a specific place and time, were also coded with a values code. This allowed for the identification of how teachers and administrators felt or valued certain processes or the value of certain resources. An example of coded data can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Examples of Coded Data

Code	Examples of Coded Data with Subcode Distinction
Descriptive	District Level Administrator: "To develop our SEL framework, there are components of AVID and ACP. [They] both mesh with social, emotional learning of CASEL. Those are skills that students need to be college and career ready." Coded as Informational Resource (R.I.)
Process	School-level Administrator: We looked at restructuring our staffing. At that time, we had school counselors, social workers, and school psychologists. The idea was to combine the role of the school counselor and the social worker and create a new role, which was a social emotional coach. Coded as an Implementation Process statement (I.P.)
Evaluation	Administrator: "SEL is becoming more important in this district, with the state moving in the direction of, and providing support for, a comprehensive school counseling model." Coded as an Evaluative statement (E)
Value	SEL Coach: "My first impression [of the implementation plan] was thank goodness! We are finally going over the concepts and really able to teach those concepts to all, to all students!" Coded as a Values statement (V)
Pattern	Allowed for Values coding to be applied to Process and Descriptive coding. The theme of high value being placed on SEL coaching emerged from the data

Data Triangulation

The study used three forms of data triangulation to increase the accuracy of the findings: 1.) interview data with different district and school leadership and teachers (themes were built on converging data and perspectives given by participants. The coding of the interview transcripts validated the reviewer's lens), 2.) colleague coding of transcripts to check for consistency, and 3.) study participant feedback (three participants responded to the coded data with a sense of affirmation. There was no disagreement from participants with the coded data) (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Strategies for Implementing SEL in a School District

The case study sheds light on important strategies for implementing SEL in a school district. The first step in implementing SEL was to select a framework. The school district had four existing programs at various grade levels for improving behavior and preparing students for their futures (Zones of Regulation, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports [PBIS], Advancement via Individual Determination [AVID], and Academic and Career Planning [ACP]). The district in the case study chose the CASEL framework for two reasons: 1.) the district's existing programs were flexible enough to be integrated into the SEL framework, and 2.) the SEL framework was adopted by the state and aligned well with existing programs. The school district used human resource strategies to implement the SEL framework in the classroom. While the teachers were not involved in the framework decision-making process, teachers were highly engaged in the SEL implementation process with SEL coaches by participating in professional development and professional learning communities.

Following the selection of the framework was how the district's organizational structure managed resources for implementation. Three human resource strategies with curricular and instructional integration were used for the successful implementation of SEL: 1.) creation of dedicated SEL coaches, 2.) professional development for instructional staff, and 3.) support for professional learning communities.

Dedicated SEL Coaches

The first key resource management decision to implement SEL in the classroom was to create new positions, dedicated SEL coaches. SEL coaches in this case study had backgrounds in psychology and counseling. The SEL coaching position was a realignment of the school counselor role and integrated with student services. One innovative component of the role was to work with both students and teachers. The traditional school counselor role would be limited to only working with students. The SEL coach position was an innovative move in human resources allocation for the district. One administrator described the position: "It was important that we develop these positions as social emotional coaches. Those individuals can support individual student needs as they're determined, and they would help develop and grow the skillset of teachers, that can help our students grow their social emotional competence."

Professional Development for Instructional Staff

Professional development was a large component of the SEL coaching position and included providing professional development for both instructional practice and teachers' self-management and self-awareness. Coaches were asked to analyze local survey data, specifically for school perceptions, and were also asked to co-teach with teachers in the classroom.

Professional development started with the coaches' training. Following their own training, the coaches provided professional development for the teaching staff. This process allowed teachers to integrate the SEL framework into the classroom, collaborate with other peers, and develop their own SEL self-awareness and self-management.

One district administrator described the SEL coach development: "We have relied on our SEL coaches for professional development who then would turn around and be the facilitators for their staff at their school building." She continued with details of efficiency, "They provide lesson facilitation at minimal costs compared to professional development from CASEL, who would put the curriculum together in a sequenced manner. That makes sense to the SEL coaches." This process provided personalization with coaching teachers.

SEL coaches co-taught with content teachers in the classroom. This practice solidified previous professional development of scope and sequence integration, common language use among teachers and students, and teachers developing their own self-awareness and self-management. Coaches as co-teachers helped the classroom teachers perfect their craft of SEL integration into classroom instruction and ultimately implement SEL in the district. One principal described how co-teaching enhanced her professional development:

Having [a coach] come in the class allowed the teacher to work through [SEL] with the students. I think SEL implementation [requires the teacher to] build a lot of empathy for the child. [Co-teaching] builds that relationship between the teacher and the child and the teacher and the coach as well.

The co-teaching model included working with students in large group instruction, problem-solving with students in the classroom, and working and planning with staff. One SEL coach said, "co-teachers have a more proactive role with students and in SEL implementation in the classroom." One school-level administrator spoke to the development of co-teaching for SEL implementation, saying, "I think our universal system wasn't totally yet designed for [SEL coaches as co-teachers]. Classroom teachers really valued it. They made it happen and continue to make it happen. But it's been a long road for sure."

Professional Learning Communities

Part of the district's organizational structure for managing resources for implementation was the development of a Professional Learning Community (PLC). The PLC had a focus on data assessment and support for implementation improvement.

Teachers and administrators referred to data assessment as a core function in their PLC. They spoke about their experience with an SEL-centered data assessment team, which included their SEL coach. Those teams and PLC meetings helped increase the productivity of SEL implementation of teachers by developing learner profiles from the data analysis of grade-level data and culture and climate surveys.

Some study participants mentioned that the pandemic had increased their level of awareness of the importance of SEL. Another teacher spoke candidly of his increased productivity while working with a data team. Learner profiles were a product of the data assessment teams. Students had a learner profile that was composed by the team from academic and SEL data. The profile had an action plan for the student. Learner profiles travel with the student, and as the student moves onto the next grade level, the new grade-level teacher receives the learner profile. This process increases the productivity of implementing SEL.

The culture and climate surveys provided data for the PLC data teams. These data sets are used to assess the growth of the program at grade levels. These data allow PLCs to determine the growth areas and areas of success that can be

used across the district. Learner profiles and survey data added to the culture of continuous improvement.

The staff that stays in the district develops self-awareness and self-management that promotes continuous improvement. That process focuses on the data, the assessment of the data, and the quality of instruction. That focus allows for the successful management of resources required for SEL implementation. Implementation is viewed through the lens of inner and outer contexts of conditions, resources (Greenberg et al., 2017), and limitations. From this perspective, bridging factors (Moullin et al., 2019) could be analyzed and become key components of implementation. One key factor was COVID-19, which became a catalyst for implementation, meaning the pandemic highlighted the need for SEL support for students.

This study was limited to a medium-sized school district and participant selection in the Midwest. A further limitation was that the participants were selected from schools in a district that had been identified as having implemented SEL. A further limitation was that the selected district might not include a diverse group of communities with diverse student populations or diverse staff members.

Effective Trauma-Informed Teaching Practices

Two types of intervention that have been identified as effective means for teachers to utilize in their classrooms to meet the needs of students impacted by trauma are 1.) teacher assistance of student self-regulation followed by 2.) teacher engagement in a positive connection. Both interventions were supported in the case study through professional learning for staff, addressing and increasing their own self-awareness and self-management skills, as well as professional development for student development of self-awareness and self-management. SEL coaches were instrumental in this professional learning and development.

It has been established in trauma-informed literature that when students increase self-regulation and develop teacher and peer relationships based on positive regard, new learning is enhanced (Brunzell et al., 2016). These two interventions have been found crucial to meet the challenges of classroom learning (Herndon & Bembenuddy, 2017).

Brunzell et al. (2016) explored how teachers implemented a practice pedagogy model referred to as Trauma-Informed Positive Education (TIPE) (Brunzell et al., 2016). TIPE was outlined as an evidence-informed model synthesizing current research derived from trauma-informed education models (Wolpov et al., 2009) and positive education models (Waters et al., 2017). TIPE presents a tri-consecutive method of teacher practice to engage their trauma-impacted students in the classroom. The first two phases of this intervention, outlined above, increased student self-regulation through teacher assistance and teacher engagement in positive connection. The third phase involves increasing student agency in accessing psychological resources. This final step is a part of wellbeing-informed education models (Waters et al., 2017).

The literature provides evidence of the success of increasing student access to psychological resources with the integration of well-being interventions in the classroom (Waters et al., 2017). The ability to be open to new learning and new skills is inherent in the strategies required for students to increase psychological resources. This third phase in the TIPE model supports both student well-being and academic growth (Brunzell et al., 2016). This model was designed to help teachers understand the academic and social emotional challenges of their students and to help teachers create goals for student learning based on this understanding. The case study outlined in this article demonstrated the success of using SEL coaches to assist teachers throughout the school year by incorporating a TIPE model way of engaging students, encapsulating the struggles of trauma-impacted students, as well as the student body as a whole.

Lessons Learned: Bridging Factors

SEL implementation hinges on SEL coaches. Without the coaches, the professional development of teachers and the development of learning communities would not occur. Durlak et al. (2015) explain the need for SEL coaches to have a

background in the mental health field. Coaches became a bridging factor (Moullin et al., 2019) for the learning community and the informational resources in the school district.

Gorski and Dalton (2020) and Wiglesworth et al. (2016) agree that one limiting factor for SEL implementation is the limited self-awareness and self-management of teachers. The root problem lies in the teachers' inability to address ways to develop the self-awareness of students if teachers do not have their own self-awareness (Gorski & Dalton, 2020). This case study offers options for professional development for teachers by working with the SEL coaches who have backgrounds in clinical psychology. This shows that SEL coaches with a background in psychology are more successful (Durlak et al., 2015).

While professional development is often difficult for teachers (Durlak, 2016), the SEL coaches in the school district provided professional development to the teachers in a non-threatening and personalized manner. Though the process was stressful for some teachers, there was no evidence of long-term stress on teachers. The experience of the pandemic increased the openness and receptivity of professional development for teachers. One teacher stated, "I feel like COVID might have helped us with respect to understanding that kids' needs are beyond the four walls. I feel like educators might be able to ask now, what are our social and emotional learning responses to kids? This pandemic provided a catalyst for professional development." This statement highlights the increased understanding that teachers developed as the pandemic affected students.

Co-teaching coaches allowed for real-time coaching in the classroom and provided teachers the opportunity to use the language and integrate the scope and sequence with grade-level specifics. The co-teaching model included working with students in large group instruction, problem-solving with students in the classroom, and working and planning with staff. This practice gave teachers confidence. Developing a co-teaching structure increases caring student-teacher relationships and provides a foundation for increased self-management (Rabin, 2020). Professional development of scope and sequence integration and common language development happened in real-time as SEL coaches co-taught with content teachers. An added benefit was discovered that teachers developed their own self-awareness and self-management. One principal described how co-teaching enhanced her professional development, "Having [a coach] come in the class allowed the teacher to work through [SEL] with the students. I think SEL implementation [requires the teacher to] build a lot of empathy for the child. [Co-teaching] builds that relationship between the teacher and the child and the teacher and the coach as well. Coaches as co-teachers helped the classroom teachers perfect their craft of SEL integration into classroom instruction and, ultimately, implement SEL in the district.

Professional learning communities (PLC) have been in the literature for decades, and many of the PLCs focus on social awareness (Durlak et al., 2015). Social awareness and responsible decision-making competencies of CASEL aligned well as the district worked through the challenges presented by the pandemic. PLC in the district addressed student needs associated with social awareness by developing empathy for students in their socially restricted lives. Coaching occurred in the PLC as teachers recognized the increasing needs of students. COVID-19 quarantines and isolations heightened the need for developing social awareness among students. This case study shows the organic development of the PLC with an SEL focus, and at the center of that development is the SEL coach. The SEL coach position provides the bridging factor between the professional development of teachers and the teaching and learning of informational resources.

Conclusion

The effect of COVID-19 led to an increased awareness of the need for SEL implementation. This case study revealed that the level of awareness increased for teachers and school- and district-level administrators. The pandemic was a catalyst for teachers to develop self-awareness and self-management. Both coaches and teachers spoke to the pandemic as a factor that allowed the acceptance of professional development. The adjustment from face-to-face instruction to virtual learning increased the potential for social isolation. Increased isolation during the pandemic promoted the manifestation of stress and anxiety (Kamei & Harriott, 2021). SEL needs will increase even with schools returning to normal, which suggests that the educational system has experienced considerable stress and anxiety, and

K-12 education will experience long-term negative effects (Rosanbalm, 2021). Teachers in this case study reported that student isolation was common, which highlighted the need for SEL integration into daily instruction. SEL instruction and coaching is the most likely process that could equalize the setbacks to students due to COVID-19 (Summers, 2020). In this case study, teachers became more focused on the necessity of implementation as the need became more evident.

Meaningful progress in district initiatives requires commitment and effort from many moving parts. Coordinated programs in the context of the systemic district and school-wide programming can provide the most significant benefit for students (Alexander & Vermette, 2019). Administrative and policy support is necessary for teachers to effectively provide SEL programming (Weissberg et al., 2015). Without coordination between teachers, administrators, policymakers, district leaders, and support staff, a district may not realize the benefits promised by SEL implementation.

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Appendix A – Interview Protocol Guide

For District Level Administration

Introduction and Demographics

1. How long have you been in Education?
2. What positions have you had over that time?
3. How long have you been in your current position?

Deciding on a Framework

1. What was your first impression of SEL, and how important is it for student development?
2. Can you tell me about the process of how you decided to implement SEL in the district?
3. What were your initial thoughts regarding barriers to implementation?
4. Who was involved in the process of choosing a framework?
5. If a district decided to implement SEL, who should be at the table for framework selection?

Allocating Resources

1. What resources did you allocate for embedded SEL implementation?
2. Looking back, what turned out to be the most critical resources?
3. How much time does it take to implement SEL?
4. What would you have done differently, or did it go as planned?
5. I'm assuming there are implementation costs. Could you elaborate on the district cost?
6. Some research suggests that there is an 11:1 return on every dollar invested. What are your thoughts on that?
7. What are some examples of professional development for the staff?
8. Do you feel that the professional development was sufficient? Implementation:
9. If a visitor walked into the school, what would SEL look like to them?
10. Were there times you feel like you were stuck as a district?
11. Did you ever wonder if it was too difficult to implement?
12. Who are the key stakeholders that make-or-break implementation?
13. How important is the expertise afforded by guidance counselors or other professional groups?
14. Can you share a story of the positive impact that SEL has had?
15. How did you know when you implemented SEL or when you achieved the goal? Wrap up and concluding thoughts:
16. Thank you very much for your time, is there anything else you would like to share that we have not covered?

For School Level Administration

Introduction and demographics

1. How long have you been in Education?
2. What positions have you had over that time?

Deciding on an SEL Framework

1. Tell me about the first time you heard about SEL, and what were your impressions of the idea?
2. What would a staff discussion look like when discussing frameworks or competencies?
3. Were there any outside influences or factors which affected the decision to go with a particular framework?
4. Did you have initial concerns about implementing Social emotional learning?
5. What advice would you give a school leader regarding the implementation process? Implementation process:
6. What resources would you say are required for implementation?
7. Was there a perception of "building the plan while you were flying?"
8. What did the professional development look like for the staff?
9. Was the staff compensated?
10. Some research suggests that one limiting factor with implementation is the self- management and self-awareness of the staff. What are your thoughts on this?
11. Was there professional development to assist teachers with their SEL development?
12. All SEL frameworks have competencies. Can you tell me how you track student advancement?
13. What are your thoughts on students assessing and tracking their progress? Interacting human resources:
14. Did you ever think that SEL implementation was too difficult? If yes, what kept you moving? If no, would your staff agree?
15. Can you tell me if one particular thing led you to believe that you arrived at implementation?
16. Who were the key stakeholders that make-or-break implementation?
17. Can you tell me if teachers had concerns about additional work and responsibility, and if so, how was that addressed?
18. Many teachers talk about adding things to their plate, yet the research suggests that teachers find greater satisfaction in their job after implementing SEL. What would you say about that?

Instructional Staff

Leadoff and demographics

1. How long have you been in Education?
2. What positions have you had over that time?

Deciding on an SEL Framework

1. Tell me about the first time you heard about SEL, and what were your impressions of the idea?
2. What was the discussion like among staff regarding the framework options?
3. Can you tell me about the process of selecting a framework?
4. To what degree were teachers involved in the planning and framework selection?
5. If another district were to start the SEL implementation process, what should they know about framework selection?
6. Who are the key stakeholders when selecting a framework? Allocating resources:
7. Did the teaching staff have all the resources initially, or was it a “build the plane while you are flying” situation?
8. What were the key resources that allowed the teachers to implement SEL? Can you tell me how SEL planning is different from content area planning?
9. How much time were staff allowed for development? Was the staff compensated for their implementation work?
10. Can you tell me about the technology resources such as the learning management system software (LMS) specific for SEL?
11. Would you suggest something specific for tracking and reporting competency progress?
12. Some research suggests that one limiting factor with implementation is the teachers’ self- management and self-awareness. What are your thoughts on that?
13. Was there any professional development to assist teachers with their SEL development? Implementation:
14. If a visitor, or an outside teacher, walked into your Classroom, what would they see?
15. Were there times when you thought there was too much on your plate? If so, what helped you make it through those times?
16. How did you know when you had implemented SEL in the Classroom?
17. If you were to advise a teacher just starting out with SEL, what would you tell them?
18. How important is the support of other leadership or counselors in the implementation process?
19. Can you share a story about the positive impact of SEL on students?





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Steve Plum, PhD, has been a science teacher and administrator for 30 years. He currently serves as Superintendent of the Kettle Moraine School District in Wisconsin. He holds Bachelors degrees in philosophy and biology, Masters degrees in biology and administrative leadership, and a PhD in Education.



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Amy Plum, MS, LPC, has been working as a mental health therapist since 1996. Amy specializes in working primarily with children using sand tray therapy and Internal Family Systems to help clients work through attachment wounds, trauma events, school and family conflict, and challenges related to high sensitivity and neurodiversity.



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Using Shared Google Docs to Co-Create Life-Affirming Learning

A Case of Trauma-Informed Instructional Design at the Tertiary Level

Alison Cook-Sather & Van Nguyen

DOI:10.59668/567.11201

Engagement

Trauma-informed

Google Docs

Co-creation

Affective Experiences



In Spring 2022, we (faculty member and undergraduate student) co-facilitated an undergraduate education course. To support and affirm all participants as whole beings who were both navigating trauma and developing as learners and people, we co-created between us and with enrolled students numerous shared Google Docs. We used these Docs to: (1) ground ourselves and map our intentions and plans as co-facilitators; (2) create structures for student engagement and organization; and (3) ensure that affective experiences were integral to course content and processes. We describe these uses and offer recommendations for educators interested in adapting this design strategy.

Introduction

As the COVID-19 pandemic extended into its third year, the trauma students in colleges and universities experienced intensified rather than abated. All students in these institutions were strained by the uncertainty, exhaustion, fear, and loss caused by the pandemic itself (Ezarik, 2022). In addition, some students experienced the pandemic's intersection with other sources of trauma, such as systemic racism, which added to and exacerbated existing injustices (Clayton, 2021; Imad, 2021). These wider realities, as well as careful attention to the particular group of enrolled students, shaped a trauma-informed instructional design practice that we, a faculty member (Alison) and student co-facilitator (Van), developed in an undergraduate education course at one tertiary-level institution. This practice included the co-creation and three related uses of numerous shared Google Docs:

1. To ground ourselves and map our intentions and plans as co-facilitators of the course;
2. To create structures for enrolled student engagement and organization; and
3. To ensure that affective experiences were integral to course content and processes.

This practice was not only responsive to enrolled students' particular needs and contextualized within the wider realities of the recent pandemic and ongoing systemic inequities. It was also situated in expanding understandings of trauma. While research on trauma has traditionally focused on the experiences of war veterans and survivors of childhood trauma, notions of "trauma-informed care" have expanded to recognize the impact of a wide range of traumatic experiences on individuals across contexts, including schools (Thomas et al., 2019). In contrast to early conceptions of trauma, which labeled victims as morally weak, trauma-informed practice in educational contexts avoids approaching students from a deficit perspective and emphasizes empathy (Thomas et al., 2019). Brunzell and colleagues (2019) offer a "practice pedagogy" that includes attention to "aspects of healing (i.e. trauma-informed practice) and growth (i.e. wellbeing-informed practice) in the classroom" (p. 601). The trauma-informed instructional design approach we discuss here is an example of empathetic, healing-attentive, and growth-centered practice, and it was designed to be responsive to the particular trauma students enrolled in our course were experiencing.

To make the use of co-created, shared Google Docs healing and affirming, rather than harmful, we were intentional about creating "a safe, supportive, and trauma-sensitive classroom environment" (Hanover Research, 2019, p. 1). We created this environment by inviting every student to complete a Course Commitment Form to be shared with us as co-facilitators, revised as needed, and used to self-evaluate. This approach reflects three of the six key principles of a trauma-informed approach identified by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2014): 1.) trustworthiness and transparency; 2.) collaboration and mutuality; and 3.) empowerment, voice, and choice. We also asked students to submit an Access Needs Form to inform us of learning differences they might have, supports they needed, and ways in which differences could be resources to themselves and one another (Cook-Sather, 2019, 2022). This approach embraces empathy rather than deficit thinking (Thomas et al., 2019) and reflects additional SAMHSA (2014) principles: safety; moving past historical biases and stereotypes; and recognizing and addressing historical trauma. Finally, course assignments included weekly entries in personal journals to which Alison offered weekly, written responses, contributions to a collective annotated bibliography, fieldwork projects, research studies, and portfolios. All assignments endeavored to support life-affirming learning opportunities designed to ensure that social and emotional content were integrated with subject-specific content of the course—goals Van often pursued through out-of-class dialogue with and support of students.

After we provide a brief history of the course and introduce ourselves, we describe three related uses of the numerous shared Google Docs we co-created, and we offer recommendations for educators across institutional contexts and courses who might be interested in adapting this design strategy. As part of our ongoing process of trauma-informed, self-care practice, our writing process has also been on a co-created, shared Google Doc on which we drafted and revised as well as invited enrolled students to comment.

History of Focal Course and Our Identities as Co-Facilitators

The course we co-facilitated in the Spring-2022 semester was called "Exploring and Enacting Transformation of Higher Education." This undergraduate education course (previously called "Advocating for Diversity in Higher Education") was co-created in 2015 by Alison and then-undergraduate Crystal Des-Ogugua (Cook-Sather et al., 2018). It employs anti-racist pedagogy (Wilson & Cook-Sather, 2022), is always co-facilitated by a faculty member and an undergraduate student of color, and is co-created with all enrolled students each time it is offered (Cook-Sather, 2022). From the outset, the goal of this course was to make space for students to put their lived experiences into dialogue with published work and with other students' lived experiences in order to explore, advocate for, and enact diversity, equity, and inclusion in the course, and in higher education more broadly. The course typically enrolls approximately 20 students.

Who we are also informed how we co-created a trauma-informed learning space and practice in this course. Alison, a tenured faculty member who identifies as a middle-aged, white, cis-gendered female, has taught this course numerous times since co-creating it with Crystal and sees it as a manifestation of the pedagogical partnership work that constitutes her primary area of research and practice (<https://www.alisoncooksather.com/>). This work is premised on collaboration, mutuality, empowerment, voice, and choice, and it specifically strives to redress the epistemic, affective, and ontological harms many equity-denied students experience in higher education (de Bie et al., 2021). Van, a third-year student (at the time we co-facilitated the course) who identifies as a non-binary, first-generation, Vietnamese American, completed the course in Spring of 2021 and co-facilitated it in Spring of 2022 while conducting an independent study on embodiment pedagogy. Doing trauma-informed work with and for one another as facilitators was essential for us to be able to create a space for students to do analogous work of self-care and life-affirming learning (Imad, 2021).

Discussion of Design Choice to Use Multiple, Shared, Co-created Google Docs

During the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic years, a great deal of teaching and learning unfolded via virtual platforms such as Zoom. It was a matter of necessity to find ways for faculty and students to engage with subject matter and its application. Our use of multiple, co-created, shared Google Docs was not necessarily required for those purposes. We felt, however, that using Google Docs was critical to creating a trauma-informed planning process and a trauma-informed learning environment for several significant reasons:

- For ourselves as co-facilitators, specifically to a.) ground ourselves emotionally and b.) to develop our intentions and plans;
- To create structures for student engagement and organization through a.) making outlines of all class sessions for students, b.) mapping responses to subject-matter-focused resources, and c.) brainstorming strategies, approaches, reactions, and recommendations; and
- To ensure that affective experiences were integral to course content and processes through a.) pooling hopes and aspirations for the course, b.) recording student responses to “checking-in” prompts, and c.) capturing insights and inspirations.

Using a Shared, Co-created Google Doc for Ourselves as Co-facilitators

Imad (2021) contends that it is critical for those facilitating learning to engage in self-care if they are going to be able to facilitate students’ self-care. In her discussion of what teachers need to manage their own trauma while supporting students, she writes:

A calm nervous system can help calm other people’s nervous systems. And when our nervous system is calm, we are able to engage socially, be productive, and process new information in order to continue to learn and grow—and to feel we are living meaningful and fulfilled lives. (p. 2)

To calm our nervous systems and to plan class sessions for each week of the course, we met on each Sunday afternoon during the semester we co-facilitated “Exploring.” Our collaboration began via Zoom, and as we talked, we used a single, co-created, shared Google Doc to record our hopes for the course overall and also to draft plans for specific components of each class session. This Doc, shared only between the two of us, captured emotional as well as practical aspects of our experiences. Bringing the social as well as intellectual into a single conversation space built trust, connection, and care that was palpable to both of us: we felt safe with and supported by one another.

Because our goal for this course was to foster this kind of community for students, to construct such a space intentionally for ourselves allowed us to experience expressions of who we are and what we brought to our co-facilitation, and to affirm those out loud and in the Doc. The process of engaging in this way contributed to our continued growth and capacity to be flexible and responsive in relation to our collaboration with one another and in

relation to students. We used this space to acknowledge our positionalities and how they informed our perceptions. These perceptions, in turn, informed our choices to push forward or step back on certain topics, and to engage in particular ways with individual students or groups. This use of a shared, co-created Google Doc allowed us to develop a “practice pedagogy” that consistently attended to the aspects of healing and growth that Brunzell and colleagues (2019) call for.

The following two aspects of our use of this co-created, shared Google Doc were always mutually informing, not linear, but we distinguish them to clarify for readers the ways they informed one another.

Grounding Ourselves as Co-facilitators

Our primary goal as co-facilitators was to address the needs and concerns of students. However, to do that well, we needed to attend carefully to the extent of our own capabilities. Using our meetings and co-creation of the Google Doc as a way to check in with one another both provided us with support and generated more ways in which we could enact trauma-informed care and facilitation for students. This kind of collaborative work is trauma informed and healing centered, and it allowed us to facilitate in ways that were also trauma informed and healing centric. Enacting this form of care is engaging in healing.

Discussing, as Co-Facilitators, Our Intentions and Plans

Building on the grounding of ourselves as co-facilitators we describe above, we used the co-created, shared Google Docs to map out daily plans, which included: consistent components of each class session (e.g., check-in times); estimated times after each segment of a class session; which one of us would be responsible for facilitating any given segment; and reflective questions and substantive points we wanted to be sure to raise under each segment. This use of co-created, shared Google Docs not only allowed us to generate the detailed plans we wanted to have so that we could focus our energy on engaging with students, they also provided detailed documents to return to and build on for subsequent class sessions to ensure continuity.

In these two ways, the co-created, shared Google Docs kept us connected and attentive to ourselves and to one another, as well as consciously aware of and attentive in our planning for an organization of students’ learning experiences.

Using Shared, Co-created Google Docs to Create Structures for Student Engagement and Organization

Our second use of co-created, shared Google Docs reflects how we endeavored to respond to students’ need for structure and organization because of the effects of trauma they were experiencing without imposing prescription and rigidity. As noted in Hanover Research’s (2019) “Best Practices for Trauma-informed Instruction,” supporting students experiencing trauma “requires creating a safe, supportive, and trauma-sensitive classroom environment” (p. 1). The physical and psychological environment should be a “welcoming and organized space” (p. 1) that includes “similar daily structures, reliable warmth, clear and consistent expectations, and predictability” (p. 4).

In addition to our awareness that students needed structure for engagement and organization, we had learned during our initial Zoom meetings with the class that enrolled students had different modes of and needs in learning, such as the use of the captioning while on Zoom. This specific understanding of the students enrolled, along with the general knowledge of students’ need for supportive structure, informed our decision to develop a set of co-created, shared Google Docs in the form of:

- Outlines of class sessions
- Maps of responses to subject-matter-focused resources
- Collections of strategies, approaches, reactions, and recommendations in relation to course assignments.

In using these co-created, shared Google Docs to create a safe, supportive, welcoming space, we insisted that everyone’s perspective and input counts and matters. We were affirming what students brought to the course, which helped students affirm themselves and experience empowerment, voice, and choice (SAMHSA, 2014). The structures

we created, designed to include everyone, both sent a message that people matter and demonstrated it in what students offered and what they gained through contributing. While we consistently provided these structures in class sessions, not everyone always participated; there was always choice.

Making Outlines of All Class Sessions for Students

After we planned our own weekly outline of class sessions, we created versions of these in Google Docs for enrolled students that included time to be spent on each segment of the session. These versions also included links to resources to be drawn on before, during, and after each class, but they did not include some other information (e.g., substantive points we wanted to be sure to make). Having a clear agenda for the day “increases predictability and decreases student stress” (Hanover Research, 2019, p. 4). While we did not always stick to times allocated for each segment of the class session, the time windows were intended to provide structure. Our outlines also responded to student interests and created a sense of stability, follow through, and reliability. Many, but not all, students followed along on the Google Doc outline during class, used it to access resources, and consulted it after class to follow up on ideas or resources shared (or to catch up if they had missed class).

Mapping Responses to Subject-matter-focused Resources

Another set of shared Google Docs we co-created for structure and organization was generated in response to subject-matter-focused resources that all students read, watched, or listened to in preparation for class sessions. As a way of reviewing content and making connections to course themes and students’ individual work, we created Google Docs for each class session with sections, prompts, or questions to which all students responded in real time during class (or to which we added students’ responses if they wanted to focus only on speaking). The experience of watching everyone type collectively contributed to the community building—sitting in a circle, feeling everyone’s energy focused on adding their responses and insights, and seeing everyone’s words weave together on the Docs. Enacting another form of trauma-informed practice, this use of co-created, shared Google Docs contributed to “community-building curricula” (Hanover Research, 2019, p. 3), valued students’ experiences and perspectives, and conveyed that those experiences and perspectives can contribute to everyone’s learning.

Brainstorming Strategies, Approaches, Reactions, and Recommendations

A final set of shared Google Docs that we co-created for structure and organization collected strategies, reactions, and recommendations regarding students’ individual work on major assignments for the course, such as fieldwork and research projects. We created shared Google Docs on which all enrolled students could pool their thoughts and affirm one another’s efforts at different moments. These moments included while students were preparing to undertake fieldwork and research projects, as they were in the midst of working on each, and once the work on each was completed. This set of Docs became a collection of both practical advice and affective support for student engagement in, and work for, the course. Enrolled students embraced and enacted a generative combination of introspection and sharing, which was nurtured as much by the comfortable silence in which we wrote together as by what we ended up sharing out loud.

Using Shared, Co-created Google Docs to Ensure that Affective Experiences Are Integral to Course Content and Processes

Our third use of co-created, shared Google Docs addressed specifically our recognition that students needed us and one another to pay attention to the social and emotional aspects of their learning. As Imad (2021) notes, “in our society in general, and in higher education in particular, we often view emotions as the antithesis of reason. Yet the role of emotions in the human experience, including learning and healing, is indispensable (Damasio, 2000, p. 13).”

Centering well-being and care can help facilitators of student learning stay healthier themselves, and it can also support student well-being (Imad, 2021). Trauma-informed teaching includes creating “meaningful, positive teacher-student relationships, which helps students feel safe and supported to learn” (Hanover Research, 2019, p. 1). Our emphasis on the affective is supported by recent research on the potential of co-creation, or pedagogical partnership, to redress the

harms inflicted on students from equity-seeking groups who experience a range of violences in higher education (de Bie et al., 2021).

The use of shared, co-created Google Docs designed to ensure that affective experiences were integral to course content and processes included: a.) pooling hopes and aspirations for the course; b.) recording student responses to “checking-in” prompts, and c.) capturing insights and inspirations. All of these were about making space for students and facilitators to share feelings, lived experiences, struggles, and successes. These methods recognize the importance of attending to needs on the human level and prioritizing how responding to those needs can inform learning in the class. They conveyed care for students’ well-being, and made students feel that they belonged in the course and mattered to others.

Pooling Hopes and Aspirations for the Course

During the first several sessions of the course, we used a co-created, shared Google Doc to record hopes and aspirations for the semester. These processes of pooling hopes and co-creating classroom community guidelines paralleled the co-creation of intentions that we engaged in as co-facilitators. They unfolded at the intersection of two trauma-informed practices: co-creating “a safe, supportive, and trauma-sensitive classroom environment” and co-creating “community-building curricula” (Hanover Research, 2019, p. 1, p. 3). Having a Google Doc as a physical manifestation of the work of co-creation offered further affirmation of the time we spent enjoying and celebrating—ways of being not traditionally embraced in higher education, but that promote a sense of accomplishment and value.

Recording Student Responses to “Checking-in” Prompts

We opened nearly every class session with a check-in prompt—a practice that is as important for facilitators as for students (Imad, 2021). The table below presents several examples of the kinds of prompts we offered and the questions themselves (see Table 1).

Table 1

Kinds and Examples of Checking-in Prompts

Kinds of Questions	Examples of questions
Open ended and interpretive	“If you had to choose a color to capture how you are feeling today, what color would it be and why?” “If you were to describe yourself as a form of weather, what weather would you be right now?”
Self-awareness and self-care	“Today I feel stressed by _____ and energized by _____” “Something that is sustaining me right now is _____.”
Linked to students’ lived, affective, and epistemic experiences	“For what are you grateful or what you have been gifted in higher education/college?” “How do you keep grounded in the final weeks of a semester?”

This use of check-in prompts and our collection of responses into shared Google Docs is another way of giving space for students to be heard, to feel important, and to attend to “aspects of healing and growth (Brunzell et al., 2019).

Capturing Insights and Inspirations

The final use of shared, co-created Google Docs we share here focused on ensuring both that affective experiences were integral to course content and that processes we employed afforded students an opportunity to step back, reflect on, and capture what they were taking away (from a particular activity, class session, or the course as a whole). For example, we used snowball activities to ensure that students had embodied, community-building, affirming, and encouraging learning experiences and that insights from these experiences were captured in multiple shared Google Docs. Snowball activities were first enacted in person where each person in the room wrote on a piece of paper a response to a prompt (e.g., “What are you appreciating and what are you carrying forward from this course?”), crumpled it up, and threw it into the middle of the room. Then, everyone picked up a piece of paper and uncrumpled it. Next, we went around in a circle reading aloud what was written with no framing or comments. Following that sharing, we

discussed what we heard. Finally, one of us transcribed the student responses onto a shared Google Doc. Approaches such as this were very well received by the enrolled students and contributed to both classroom camaraderie and “community-building curricula” (Hanover Research, 2019, p. 3).

Implications and Recommendations

The uncertainty, exhaustion, fear, and loss caused by the pandemic (Ezarik, 2022), and the intersections some students experience in higher education with other sources of trauma that add to and exacerbate injustices (Clayton, 2021; Imad, 2021), require a rethinking of how we structure and support student engagement in our courses (both virtually and in-person). The use of multiple co-created, shared Google Docs as a form of trauma-informed instructional design emphasizes empathy (Thomas et al., 2019) by integrating affective experiences into subject-matter explorations. As we have noted throughout our discussion, this method includes attention to both healing and growth (Brunzell et al., 2019).

As we have described in the sections above, this design approach supports facilitators and enrolled students in co-creating life-affirming learning by making social and emotional as well as subject-matter content accessible to everyone, before, during, and after class sessions. The approach also contributes to notions of what it means to be present (virtually and in-person). There was a high level of trust because of our classroom dynamic and previous relationships. Because students came in with a certain level of trust, and because we were intentional about co-creating a safe and supportive learning environment, it was easier for students to “buy into” the work. Such buy-in is not always as achievable for those who have experienced trauma. We urge others to consider the importance of trust and trust building, as well as the implications of anonymous contributions and feedback.

We also encourage others to consider the ways in which we used co-created, shared Google Docs to provide structures to ensure participants constantly saw what they and everyone contributed. We were careful to balance choice, autonomy, initiative, accountability, structure, and guidance—practices consistent with SAMHSA’s (2014) concept of trauma and guidance for a trauma-informed approach. Working as co-facilitators, and even designating ourselves facilitators rather than teachers, contributed to the dynamic. Both structures and choices extended beyond the classroom through the use of the co-created, shared Google Docs. When there was silence, or struggle, there were other spaces—outside of the actual classroom. The Google Docs could be a space students entered when they needed to in these moments or later. Furthermore, the Docs offered possible next steps in the particular set of experiences we had planned but also made it possible to sit in silence and uncertainty—just to be—in another dimension of time/space/presence. Often times, those affected by trauma are on an alert response (Imad, 2021), and sitting in silence can be a form of healing. This practice once again links trauma-informed care and healing-centered engagement.

The trauma that students experienced has intensified rather than subsided as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to drag on. As more traumatizing events unfold in the world, we need even more attention to students’—and facilitators’—experiences. We used this design strategy in the context of a small, selective, liberal arts college and a small, co-created, undergraduate course. However, the use of co-created, shared Google Docs could work in a course in any institutional context with any number of enrolled students if facilitators are intentional about creating a safe and trusting learning environment, and take into consideration the recommendations and cautions we have offered. We therefore issue this call to action: Make space for and affirm being as a way to acknowledge trauma and extend grace and love, and consider design strategies such as the development of shared Google Docs to co-create life-affirming learning.

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Special Issue Interview Feature

Translating Trauma-Responsive Schooling to Instructional Design Practice

Treavor Bogard & Alison Carr-Chellman

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Instructional Design

Trauma

Instructional Design Practice

Interviewing



*In extending the conversation around trauma-informed instructional design, one of the key assets we utilized for this special issue of JAID was the text, *Trauma-responsive schooling: Centering student voice and healing* by Lyn Brown, Catharine Biddle & Mark Tappan (2022). As editors, we felt that our readers would benefit from learning a little more about this resource as well as some scaffolded linkages between the trauma-informed literature and the traditional approaches to instructional design. We were fortunate to have the opportunity to interview two of the authors to help make this linkage more clear in this special issue.*

As the authors point out in their last chapter, there are some specific key takeaways from the text that we'd like to start with here:

1. The way that trauma and inequity connect and affect one another is complicated. It is not necessarily the case that attending to one or the other in isolation will address the other, rather we must respond to each in order to facilitate healing.
2. Teachers must reexamine their assumptions about childhood and children in order to focus on equity and trauma-responsiveness.
3. Student voice is an essential component of education, in order to educate the whole child, teachers *must* commit to enabling student voice.
4. The process of truly listening to children, to the student voice and what they have to say about safety and healing in schools is likely to cause teachers to re-think their current practices. This level of re-examination and self-reflection require humility and courage.
5. Because relationship between teachers and children are primary, teachers have to be open and willing to change their daily practice, to embrace improvisation and collaboration.
6. In order to see significant and equitable change, particularly across whole school cultures, there must be supportive agents across the school, district and community.
7. Rural schools, which are the focus of this particular book's examples, do have important implications and lessons for urban and suburban schools in terms of appropriate trauma-responses and equitable change.

As editors, we felt that our readers would benefit from learning a little more about this resource as well as some scaffolded linkages between the trauma-informed literature and the traditional approaches to instructional design. We were fortunate to have the opportunity to interview two of the authors to help make this linkage more clear in this special issue. Below is an edited and focused interview between the guest editors of this special issue (JAID) and the authors of the text (AU):

JAID: Trauma informed Pedagogy may be considered a lens or a practice with strategies. And so there's just a lot of terms orbiting around this conversation. Can you tell us what you have learned from this project, and particularly from an instructional perspective?

AU: I think one of the big things that we learned through this project was just, and I don't know if this is a learning, so much is just a reinforcement of the importance of relationships between instructors and their students. I think one of the things that this project really foregrounded was that relationships aren't just about, you know, learning the things that motivate students to coerce them into better engagement in the classroom. But that it's really about *understanding* at a fundamental level their emotional lives and making space for those emotional lives in the classroom in agentic ways. So giving them choice over how they want to manage their emotions over how they relate to other people, the kinds of activities that they engage in, and that through making that space you are, in fact, creating a healing trauma-informed environment. I mean the opportunities we created, and by extension sort of the lesson [of the book], is any opportunities that teachers and administrators and folks have in schools to give students a sense that their voice matters. Students need to feel that they're being listened to, that they're being taken seriously, that their needs matter. We saw lots of evidence that this listening is the key to building the relationships that are essential to healing. So if teachers take student voice seriously, then students get a sense that they are being listened to. We have lots of examples of that happening, and we wrote about a lot of them in the book. I mean, that was the point, really, to tell those stories. We also have lots of evidence that this also improves instruction and learning.

JAID: With the idea of listening as a radical act in regard to what you just said about developing those relationships, it seems to me that it starts with the listening piece, and one of the quotes that really, you know, we thought was just so resonant is when you wrote, "If trauma is the result of dehumanizing experiences, healing begins with voice being heard, and with a claim to humanity. So you describe the importance of listening to our students and we believe that means incorporating their voices into the instructional design process. How does this happen? And how do we go about doing this in the real world?

AU: That's a good, really good question, and I think we were able in our project to have coaches in each school who were former teachers who were really steeped in the trauma responsive work, so they were able to support that, and encourage and scaffold teachers in their listening. It's not rocket science, you know the teachers can do it. I mean, one

quick example is our “Some days” initiative. This is where each kid is asked what do they want to do in school “some day” and then try to make that come true. And one of the stories in the book is about a little boy who wants to play Beyblades with his teacher someday. They didn’t have a great relationship, but she reluctantly agrees, and she sits down, and he teaches her how to do the battling tops, and it radically transforms their relationship. It radically transforms his experience in school. So she was just open to being kind of open and creative about that opportunity to listen. So that’s one example.

The other thing is making the decisions in this moment about this, and making sure our learners voice is represented. There’s so much in education that’s top down just to start with. Right? The structures just drive that, and a lot of that comes from the idea that the teacher is the God of the world. What happens when we invite students to have the agency to do design with us? What are the structures that get us there? And I think that’s the challenge right? Because that structure is so counter-normative to the way that we do education now that even just building it is the starting point. So yes, this is radical, counter normative. And maybe you all in your world have lots of examples of students as instructional designers, but it just doesn’t happen. It’s still pretty rare. If you let students have that agency, a voice in the design, that’s healing for the kids who’ve experienced trauma, it’s really beneficial for all kids.

JAID: We’re curious about the power of stories because you give a lot of emphasis to that. So the listening and then the storytelling, I mean, they all go hand in hand, and the relational building, and also that co-constructive process of designing together. Where I want to go next is sort of this idea of stories, because you talk about the importance of authorship and storytelling. Can you unpack that a little bit more for readers of this issue about how these stories work?

AU: Yes, we were very inspired by Elizabeth Dutro’s work, and the work that she did around critical witnessing as just a sort of foundational element of how we thought about the teacher-student relationship with regards to trauma. There are a lot of opportunities, particularly with older kids, to get them to articulate their emotions, their experience of the world in different ways, right? And they have the kind of cognitive wherewithal to do that. When we were working with much younger kids we struggled with this question of how do we create space for that? And stories are such a generative way to understand the world. But they also bring in this incredible opportunity to connect to kids’ home lives in different ways, you know, by allowing in culturally responsive stories, for example, and holding that space for students. Stories are also a great way to bring in other people from kids’ lives. So, for example, we had parents who maybe wouldn’t have connected strongly with the school coming in to help read or facilitate moving stories. So I think we come together around stories in different ways. And so that natural tendency to gather around narrative is something we can leverage, and in learning spaces we can use narratives to help humanize people and connect people with one another.

Carol Duffy developed this process out of her own individual therapeutic work, her clinical practice with kids. It started out as play therapy in the clinical setting, and then she expanded it to a group setting. And then she said she’d help us try it out in our setting and train folks. It provides a kind of physical model so that the stories are chosen carefully—really powerful children’s literature—across a variety of contexts. Then they’re literally acted out and then they are asked to respond and to tell their own story. Sometimes they have their own sanctuary. Sometimes they draw as a way into telling their own stories. And there’s somebody who’s listening, either another kid or a grown up in the room. And so there’s an audience. It has to be the right setting and not every kid’s comfortable with that. But it seems to me it’s a structure that really helped—this holding space.

JAID: What Does that mean to you? Because I’m trying to see it, this structure?

AU: I think one of the things that is amazing about some of these strategies is that they’re very complex, but they’re also very simple. Right? So telling a story, on its face, does not seem like a very complex thing to do. But you know if we have the student use a sand tray to tell the story, particularly with younger children, the sand itself has a calming quality. The agency around selecting the figures and placing them in the sand is an opportunity for young people to express themselves. It seems so small, Right? But it’s not small, and you can see how powerful it is. You get this incredible insight into the dynamics of a classroom, just watching the kids interact with the sand tray as a group, you know. And so, as a teacher being able to sit back and look at this and understand it from a social perspective. What is happening

here emotionally, you know is just through this very simple structure. You get some really powerful information from that. I think there's a kind of messiness in this. When you hold that space, you don't know what's going to emerge out into it, and that's the whole point. But that is so counterintuitive to the way that we do teaching and learning right now where we have standards and expected outcomes, and a set of activities to get us from Point A to Point B. And that space kind of becomes foreclosed by that structure. And so you're pushing back against that to hold it.

JAID: So thank you for these strategies that you've been talking about. One of the things that we've wondered is, Does this have implications for our thinking about pedagogy, instructional design and teacher preparation? And if so, what are your reflections on that?

AU: I work in an educational leadership program so think about how to coach faculty towards these practices. Teacher preparation programs should be moving away from behaviorist ideas about student behavior management. Not that those can't be tools in the toolbox. But I think that those types of approaches get in the way of the types of relationships that we're trying to build with students to do this in an authentic way. One thing that I don't see enough of is authenticity—authentic approaches to listening to students. I really think it just starts there, which from an instructional design perspective, prompts several questions: What are the structures that you build in your classroom to listen to students? What are the ways in which they can determine their own learning? Do they have authentic opportunities for agency that aren't teacher driven, that aren't one of two teacher predetermined choices, but real choices. I think there is an aspect of this that gets to deconstructing some of the things we take for granted, deconstructing that traditional teacher-student relationship. And I feel like that's really at the heart of this.

JAID: So there's a huge emphasis right now, especially post pandemic on whole child education. We've been so much behind our zoom screens, and locked down for so long that we have lost connection with our moving, sensing body as part of the learning process. So I'm thinking about this notion of embodied education as part of a whole child approach. So can you talk about how you think about foregrounding embodied learning from a trauma-responsive lens?

AU: Perhaps the best example we discuss in the book is the use of micro-adventures as a way to structure outdoor education within the school day. e, Mico-adventures are intended to align with the curriculum and to be genuine learning opportunities within the context of a set of curriculum targets in science and math. We also partnered with an outdoor education organization called the Main Outdoor School. They trained outdoor educators who worked with kids to take them out and do all kinds of experiential learnings around nature and habitats, and constructing shelters. The simple part of it is you getting kids out of the classroom, moving around in the natural world, engaged with each other, not having to sit in rows and raise their hand. It can be chaotic at times, but we have lots of examples, formal and informally, where the kids learned a lot and also benefited socially and emotionally from those opportunities.

I think the story of how that came together is demonstrative of how the principles of the project drove what actually happened. So the kids said they wanted more recess, but then they asked the kids, "Why do you want more recess?" And it was like, "Well, we want to spend more time outside. We want to spend more time moving our bodies." And so then it was like, "Well, how can we do that and leverage the natural assets of these rural schools?"

JAID: I know that the book was published in two thousand and twenty-two, and that Covid, you know, had an impact on the project. I'm wondering if you would share your thoughts on the impact of Covid on childhood trauma. As we are learning more and more about learning losses. What do you think we're looking at going forward?

AU: I think the place to start is just the number of kids that have lost a caregiver. One of the things that we forget is that a huge number of people have died in this pandemic, and that's affected kids profoundly. Then there is the issue of schools having been locked down for such a long time. If school is a place that supports the healthy development of kids, then their relationship to that supportive environment is disrupted. This has had profound implications for kids, regardless of the other environments that they spend their time in.

PK-12 instructional designers and curriculum administrators should be mindful of the fact that young people have felt incredibly isolated, have felt isolated from their friends, from the adults that support them, from other environments, like after school programs and other positive adult mentors in their lives. I think we're grappling with a crisis of isolation, and

the mental health effects even more than the disruption of learning itself. It's so easy to get completely obsessed with learning loss and worrying about lower academic achievement, but to address that we must also acknowledge the causes, one being that so many young people are trauma-exposed and isolated.

JAID: To that point, can you help us to link between trauma informed instruction and SEL (Social Emotional Learning) conceptually?

AU: It's honestly a question that we've thought a lot about. We're pretty critical of the automatic assumption that all SEL approaches or SEL curriculum are trauma-informed. So I think it has to be done really carefully and thoughtfully. Helping kids build and develop their social and emotional capacities and skills, they can't be passive participants in that process. They have to be active. They have to be empowered, they have to be given the opportunity to make choices. We were inspired deeply by the work of Judith Herman and others in the trauma world, who talk about the importance of voice and reclaiming story and agency and control for adult trauma survivors.

I'd say one of the reasons that SEL and Trauma-informed pedagogy get confused is that they're both universal approaches. Trauma informed pedagogy is really about two things. It's about centering the healing of the person who's experienced trauma and preventing retraumatization. There's nothing about social emotional learning necessarily within that. There might be some that happens for any individual survivor, but it's really about providing opportunities for people to chart paths to their own healing and giving them enough space to do that, while also creating an environment that's calm enough, or that removes learning barriers, whereas SEL is a cognitive approach to emotional learning. So SEL may offer children some words and vocabulary and tools to enhance emotional awareness, but it doesn't have a healing objective.

JAID: I just want to close with a kudos. Not just for advancing an understanding of what it means for schools to be trauma responsive, but focusing on rural school settings while still drawing implications for suburban and urban schools. So thank you both so much.

AU: It's been a delight. So thank you for inviting us to thank you for helping us to go deeper into this topic.

Conclusion

This opportunity to interview the authors of *Trauma-responsive schooling: Centering student voice and healing* (Lyn Brown, Catharine Biddle & Mark Tappan, 2022) was a real honor. As is obvious from the edited transcript, the conversation was both spirited and engaging for all. As we talked about the work, and understood it within the lens of the other contributions for this special issue as well as within the context of instructional design, we believe we've learned several specific takeaways from this conversation:

- The primacy of relationship in trauma and healing
- The absolute importance of student voice and agency
- The necessity of giving learners authentic choices
- Listening as a radical act
- The important role and specific characteristics of coaches
- The power of stories and storytelling in healing
- Consider the whole child including embodiment and nature
- Teacher education should move away from behaviorist models toward student agency
- Social Emotional Learning is not automatically Trauma-informed pedagogy
- COVID has caused a great deal of trauma beyond learning loss and we must begin to prepare for trauma-informed classrooms to respond to their needs
- Rural settings have a lot to tell us about trauma-informed learning models and these learnings can be translated to urban and suburban settings

As we move closer to a model of instructional design with positions itself to be responsive to learner trauma and needs, we see the alignment of the ideals of many needs based models of design including traditional ID, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Universal Design (UDL) and Trauma-informed pedagogy. As Carr-Chellman (2022) points out, we must find ways to integrate this into our daily practice as the pandemic will likely point all of us toward more need for trauma-informed instructional design models. From this interview we can hear the importance of suspending our traditional top down model where the teacher and the designer make all the decisions. Rather the need for student voice, agency, storytelling, and decision-making control are essential to the critical relationship building that is needed for post-traumatic healing and growth. This represents a significant and well-documented departure from traditional ID models with supportive evidence from the book's case study in Maine. We are grateful to the book authors for their time and patience in guiding us through these initial steps.

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About the Interviewed Authors

Lyn Mikel Brown is a professor of Education at Colby College in Waterville, Maine. She uses qualitative, voice-centered methods to explore the intersections of culture, context, and development, with a particular focus on youth voice and engagement in schools and communities. She is a founder of three youth-driven organizations and the author of six books, including her first, *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development* (with Carol Gilligan), and her latest, *Powered by Girl: A Field Guide for Supporting Youth Activists*. Past research projects include a five-year longitudinal study of girls' psychological and social development, an analysis of social class differences in girls' experiences of schooling, and an exploration of the ways adults can effectively scaffold youth-driven social change work.

Catharine Biddle is an associate professor of Educational Leadership at the University of Maine. Her research focuses on ways in which rural schools and communities respond to social and economic change in the twenty-first century. She's particularly interested in how schools can partner with community organizations or groups to address issues of social inequality and how nontraditional leaders—such as youth, parents, and other community members—may lead or serve as partners in these efforts. Prior to joining the faculty at UMaine, she spent five years as a research affiliate with the Center on Rural Education and Communities at Pennsylvania State University. Catharine also served as the executive director of the Nanubhai Education Foundation, an international education nonprofit working in rural India, and as an out-of-school-time educator for the national nonprofit organization Citizen Schools.

Mark Tappan is a professor of Education at Colby College in Waterville, Maine. He is a developmental and educational psychologist whose early work focused on narrative and sociocultural approaches to identity development, moral development, and moral education. Currently, his research interests include equity and social justice in elementary, secondary, and higher education; the development of healthy forms of masculinity among children, adolescents, and young adults; and trauma-responsive education in rural schools and communities.



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Conclusion: A Trauma-Informed Instructional Design

Treavor Bogard & Alison Carr-Chellman

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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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