

Trauma-informed strategies for pre-service teachers: Preparing graduate teachers for our new normal in order to promote student engagement, healing and learning

Michael Witter¹

Tom Brunzell²

¹ Australian Catholic University

² Berry Street

As schools are still contending with the adverse implications of COVID-19 disruptions to student learning, trauma-informed teacher strategies to increase student engagement and learning maintain priority focus in our research and practice. Trauma-informed practices (Brunzell, 2019; Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2016) assist teachers to understand the primary and vicarious stress-impacts on students and their teachers; and provide viable strategies to bolster on-task learning for students vulnerable to the impacts of adverse childhood experiences. Initial teacher education offers the most scalable platform for embedding trauma-informed practices throughout the classrooms of early-career teachers, and has the power to ensure that teachers entering classrooms populated with students experiencing the residual effects of the pandemic can be supported with responsive strategies to promote pathways towards healing and growth appropriate within classrooms.

Our evidence shows that trauma-informed praxis has not been robustly integrated into teacher education at a national scale, and thus, this paper will introduce a framework focused on embedding trauma-informed practices within initial teacher education, and introduces our methodology to examine the longitudinal impact of this initiative on pre-service teacher knowledge, beliefs, and capabilities to support students who have experienced childhood trauma. The rationale for our multi-year pre-service teacher project acknowledges that for well over a year since COVID-19, researchers are beginning to qualify and quantify the toll that the pandemic has taken on educational outcomes, including those related to wellbeing. The impact of school-led remote learning created numerous new challenges for learners, including reduced one-to-one engagement with teachers, greater limitations in determining and responding to students' academic progress, expanded requirements to learn via technology, increased social isolation, and an increased level of oversight and support required from parents and carers. Drane, Vernon & O'Shea (2020) suggested that vulnerable students were particularly at-risk, due in part to the challenges of coping emotionally with remote learning, both capacity and capability constraints in engaging with necessary technologies, and the potential challenges facing parents and carers required to step into the educator role whilst simultaneously managing their own additional constraints and anxieties during this time. The psychological toll of the pandemic has also extended well-beyond vulnerable students, including teachers (Flack, Walker, Bickerstaff, Earle & Margetts, 2020) and the majority of the population, including students, with most Australians experiencing at least mild anxiety and depression, and as much as 30% experiencing moderate to high levels of anxiety and depression (Berger & Reupert, 2020.)

Our paper will note the emerging evidence showing how learning how learning trauma-informed practices bolsters new teachers as they prepare for and ultimately enter their

profession, illustrate how these practices can be effectively integrated into wider ITE curriculum, and will introduce a mixed-method approach to explore and appraise a comprehensive model of trauma-informed education practices for pre-service teachers that pairs with praxis-focused teacher education paradigms of Powerful Teacher Education (Darling Hammond, 2012) and Realistic Teacher Education (Korthagen & Kessels, 2009). Our paper concludes with practical implications and future directions for pre-service teacher education.