Trauma-informed education: A Gazan Perspective

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1

Acknowledgement of Country

The University of Notre Dame Australia is proud to acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of this land upon which our University sits.

The University acknowledges that:

- The Fremantle Campus is located on Wadjuk Country;
- The Broome Campus on Yawuru Country;
- The Sydney Campus on Gadigal Country.

Artwork: Mia Kaart by Neta Knapp

2

- INTRODUCTIONS
- TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION
- A GAZAN PERSPECTIVE
- Q & A

3

4

5

Resources for Self-Care

6

Helplines

National

Medicare Mental Health Support (1800 595 212)
Lifeline Australia (13 11 14)
Beyond Blue (1300 22 4636)
MensLine Australia (1300 789 978)
13 Yarn – for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (13 11 14)
Kids Help (1800 55 1800)
Suicide Call Back (1300 659 467)
EAP counselling (1800 959 956)

Regional

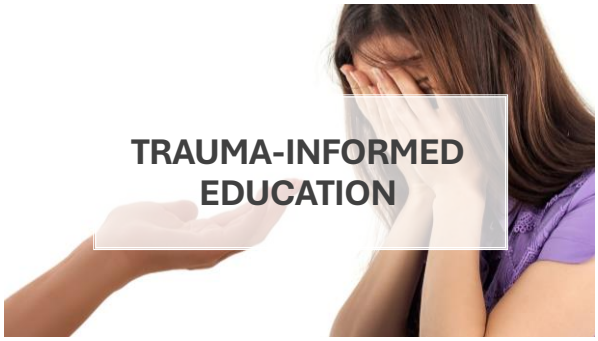
ACT 1800 629 354
NSW 1800 011 511
NT 1800 682 288
QLD 1300 642 255
SA 13 14 65
TAS 1800 332 388
VIC1300 60 60 24
WA 1300 555 788 (Perth) 1800 676 822 (Peel) 1800 552 002 (Rural) 1800 720 101 (Type & Listen)

7

Websites

Healthline
Mind Spot
RUOK?
Black Dog
Headspace (Young People)
Helping Minds (WA)

8



9

What is trauma?

The effects of exposure to the threat or occurrence of death, injury, sexual violence or more broadly other stressful psychosocial events or situations, including indirect or intergenerational exposure to any of the above (Stromberg, 2023a; Venet, 2021; Blakemore, 2021; McNeill, 2016).

Trauma is made up of the 3 E's: Event, Experience, Effect (SAMHSA, 2014).

Characteristics of trauma include: "abuse of power, betrayal of trust, helplessness, pain and/or loss" (Valdez, 2023, p. 14) leading to disempowerment and disconnection (Herman, 1998).

Students may have experienced traumatic events early in life (ACEs: Adverse Childhood Experiences), in the recent past, or during their time at university (Schroeder et al., 2024).

Because of its enduring effects, "trauma is not in the past; it is in the present" (Carello & Thompson, 2022, p. 1).

10

How prevalent is trauma in our setting?

A hidden epidemic (Van der Kolk, 2014).

Nearly a third of children have experienced trauma (Ayre et al., 2022); in Australia, on average, one child in every classroom is the focus of a child protection investigation or order (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2025).

A quarter of Australian women have experienced gender-based violence from an intimate partner (Australian Government, 2024).

About one in four university students in Australia has experienced a recent bereavement (Breen et al., 2025).

A national survey of Australian nursing students found that more than half had experienced workplace violence during placements (Johnston et al., 2024).

Disruptive events increase anxiety and stress, particularly for already disadvantaged students (Berger et al., 2018).

11

What is the relationship between trauma and learning?

TRAUMA → **LEARNING**

Trauma impacts cognition, self-esteem, self-regulation, trust, and behaviour (Arens et al., 2012; Dvir et al., 2014; McKinsey & Desmarais, 2023; Kim & Choi, 2020; Valdez, 2023).

LEARNING → **TRAUMA**

Trauma, retraumatisation, or vicarious traumatisation can be engendered by any aspect of university learning (including the setting, course policies, topics, and teacher behaviours) (Carello & Butler, 2015).

12

A class in which students heard first-hand testimony from one of the Stolen Generation impacted students cognitively and affectively (Harrison et al., 2020).

Feeling overwhelmed by the effects of an experience is a defining feature of trauma (Rice & Groves, 2005).

13

What is trauma-informed education (TIE)?

TIE takes into account the existing and potential impact of trauma on students and staff while designing and delivering learning experiences (Carello & Butler, 2015).

TIE is not aimed at curing, but in the first place at avoiding or mitigating the risk of harm arising from the experience of tertiary study itself, while helping to inform the students about trauma and the resources, internal and external, which they can draw upon in their personal healing journey (Le Pichon & Lundy, 2023).

Aims to **R**ealize the impact, **R**ecognize the signs, **R**espond positively, and **R**esist retraumatization: the four R's (SAMHSA, 2014).

TIE promotes resilience and conveys hope (Craig, 2017; Carello & Thompson, 2022), even if grounded in the reality of the systemic injustices that individuals may still face (Pacely et al., 2022).

14

What are the principles of trauma-informed education (TIE)?

Safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, empowerment (Fallot & Harris, 2009).

Safety is core principle in order to avoid the risk of retraumatisation (Carello & Butler, 2014, 2015).

Within an indigenous context, TIE incorporates not only the individual, but their family and community and draws on the strengths of each (Waterfall & Button, 2022).

However, "there is no right way to be trauma-informed" (Carello & Thompson, 2022, p. 4).

15

A GAZAN PERSPECTIVE

16

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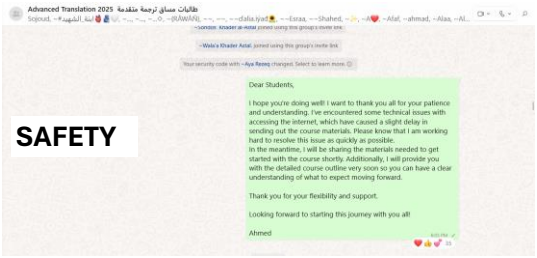

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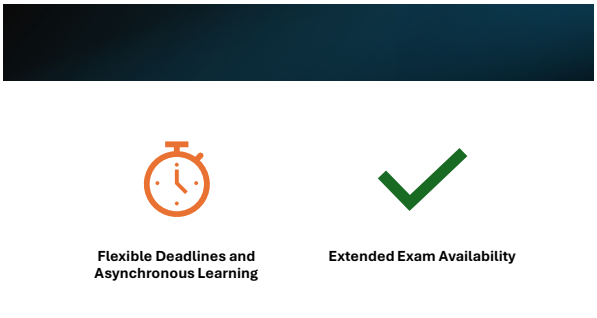

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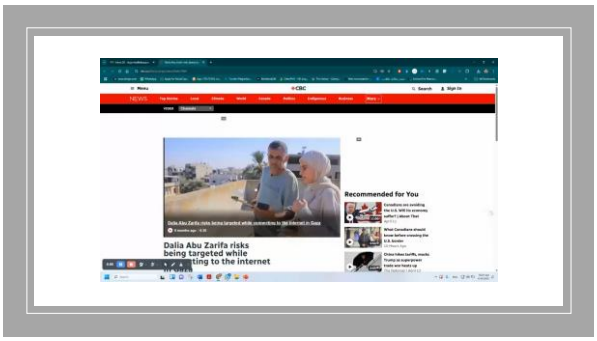

21

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OPTIONAL PARTICIPATION MODES

FLEXIBLE ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION

CUSTOMIZABLE LEARNING OPTIONS

25

COLLABORATION

26

Student-Informed Teaching Adjustments

Community Resilience and Resource Sharing

Family Support

27

EMPOWERMENT

28

Intrinsic Motivation

Education as Resistance

Storytelling as a Healing Strategy

29

RECONNECT

BECAUSE EDUCATION CANNOT WAIT

30

31

Q & A

32

ADDITIONAL NOTES & REFERENCES

33

What practices are consistent with TIE?

- **General considerations**

Becoming a trauma-informed institution and practitioner is a developmental process. The Missouri Model has four stages: trauma-aware, trauma-sensitive, trauma-responsive, trauma-informed (Carter & Blanch, 2019).

"Traumatic experience needs to be viewed and responded to as a uniquely individual experience, not as a generic problem to be solved" (Southall, 2025, p. 2).

Adopting an ethics of care approach: attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness, solidarity (Baker & Naidoo, 2024; Tronto, 1993).

POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS TO ALL (Academic Language and Learning)

- Working in harmony with pastoral care services.
- Seeking opportunities to contribute to university policy (e.g., Academic Integrity, Retention).

34

- **Safety**

Ask yourself what makes you feel safe (Imad, 2022) and draw on this in creating a psychologically safe environment (Wilson et al., 2022), ideally at a whole-of-institution level (Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016); incorporating both physical and interpersonal space (Valdez, 2023). Online learning can allow students to find (relatively) safe spaces for learning, especially in conflict zones (Tykha, 2025).

Integrate implicit wellbeing content with disciplinary topics (Upsher, 2022). Model and provide space and time for stress management practices: breathing exercises, time out, positive imagery (Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016) and mindfulness (Dvorakova et al., 2019; Stromberg, 2023b; McKinsey & Desmarais, 2023).

Convey your own calmness and self-regulation (Imad, 2022). Maintain routines (Carello & Butler, 2015; Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016), including check questions like "How are you travelling?" (Blakemore, 2021); support students when they experience trauma as it emerges during their learning experiences (Waterfall & Button, 2022).

Allow space for student voices; consider opportunities for unlearning, especially in the context of working with marginalised or indigenous communities; for instance, acknowledge that these students may be dealing with the legacy of being punished for speaking (Waterfall & Button, 2022).

POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS TO ALL

- Reflecting on our spaces, words, and behaviours.
- Checking in on students' wellbeing
- Communicating explicitly the confidentiality of our service.

35

- **Trustworthiness**

Model and provide support for self-care practices (Carello & Butler, 2015).

Be transparent and consistent in messaging to students to avoid them perceiving a betrayal of trust (Valdez, 2023).

Reduce uncertainty by regular, clear communication and transparency regarding assessment (Imad, 2022).

POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS TO ALL

- Presenting ourselves as lifelong learners.
- Following up on consultations and workshops.

36

- **Choice**

Provide flexibility around course content and assessment, as students may experience triggers and stressors they were not anticipating as a result of past trauma. Inform students about content or assessments (particularly those which involve self-disclosure) that could be traumatising and provide alternative activities (Carello & Butler, 2015; Pennebaker & Evans, 2014).

Give students opportunities to reflect on why they are studying and what they hope to achieve (Imad, 2022).

POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS TO ALL

- Providing flexible options for synchronous and asynchronous learning support.
- Avoiding 'autopilot' instruction on writing, referencing etc.

37

- **Collaboration**

Support peer student networking (Upsher, 2022) and promote self-help groups (such as 'Active Minds') which have been shown to result in help university students maintain good mental health (Valdez, 2023).

Ensure that students negotiate and adhere to guidelines for group interactions, particularly peer review, in order to reduce the risk of microaggressions; model how to provide constructive feedback (Fitzsimmons, 2023).

Trauma-aware or informed staff may receive more student disclosures, so need to be aware of boundaries and be able to refer students to relevant colleagues and services (Schroeder et al., 2024).

POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS TO ALL

- Providing support for groupwork.
- Modelling collaboration in our practice (e.g., with colleagues).

38

- **Empowerment**

Avoid a deficit approach to students with trauma (Valdez, 2023; Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2024) and focus on supporting students to draw on their own sources of resilience and strengths (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Brunzell et al., 2015).

Nurture student's sense of agency by allowing for and acting on students' input. Collect students' feedback and show how you are incorporating it in class (Imad, 2022). Consider giving students opportunities for expressive communication to help them develop their emotional regulation and resilience (Tykha, 2025).

Include students as partners in learning activities, resources, and assessment (Valdez, 2023).

"Seize teachable moments that affirm Indigenous knowledge and understandings" (Waterfall & Button, 2022, p. 155) and refer to indigenous sources of knowledge and strength (Tujague & Ryan, 2023).

POTENTIAL APPLICATIONS TO ALL

- Modelling and encouraging positive self-talk.
- Working alongside student peer learning facilitators.

Please email me your ideas for further ways to incorporate trauma-informed education in our ALL practice. I will compile and share these at AALL.org. And if you have any resources that you think would be useful for Ahmed and his students, email them to me and I'll compile and forward them to him.

39

With constant air raid sirens
I learned not to put things off for later
I value the time spent with family and friends much more
I appreciate every moment of life.

- Solia, a Ukrainian student (as cited in Tykha, 2025, p. 13).

40

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42

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44

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45