

Phd In Trauma Informed Education

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Creating Trauma-Informed Higher Education Classrooms: Exploring Undergraduate and Graduate Student Perceptions
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Abstract. Colleges and universities may desire to become more trauma-informed in light of our growing understanding of the impact that trauma can have on student outcomes. However, there has been little research on what strategies and practices colleges and universities should implement to become more trauma-informed. One approach to this work could be to start in the college classroom to determine which trauma-informed strategies and practices are most beneficial to students with an understanding that undergraduate and graduate students may have different needs. In this study, I surveyed 60 School of Education students, including both undergraduate and graduate students, to evaluate their perceptions of the importance of specific trauma-informed strategies and practices in the classroom, as well as their perceptions of how trauma-informed the host university is overall. Both undergraduate and graduate students believed the host university is moderately trauma-informed. However, there was a perceived significant difference between undergraduate and graduate students as to how important specific trauma-informed classroom strategies and practices were. I discuss the importance of faculty reflecting on various trauma-informed strategies and practices they could implement in the classroom.

Keywords: trauma-informed practices; classroom environment; student perspectives

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to develop trauma-informed environments and offer specific trauma-informed services in higher education (Carello & Thompson, 2021). Exploring the need for trauma-informed colleges and universities is important, as research indicates that between 66% to 85% of children and adolescents have been exposed to a traumatic event before they reach college age (Frazier et al., 2009; Read et al., 2011; Smyth et al., 2008), and students who have been impacted by trauma are more likely to have difficulty adjusting to college (Banyard & Cantor, 2004). Trauma and other adversities also increase the risk that college students may develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, substance use disorders, among others (Anders et al., 2012; Copeland et al., 2007; Read et al., 2011; Turner & Butler, 2003). Moreover, as much as 50% of students are exposed to a traumatic event in their first year of college (Galatzer-Levy et al., 2012). Trauma exposure can impact students in different areas of their college experience, including retention and academic performance, which is related to their experiences in the college classroom.

College students exposed to trauma face a higher likelihood of experiencing academic failure, which can impact retention (Boyraz et al., 2013; Duncan, 2000; Harrison et al., 2020). A correlation between college persistence and PTSD symptomatology has been demonstrated (Boyraz et al., 2013). For example, Boyraz et al. (2013) studied first semester African American students who were

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PHD IN TRAUMA INFORMED EDUCATION IS AN EMERGING ACADEMIC PURSUIT THAT SEEKS TO EQUIP EDUCATORS AND ADMINISTRATORS WITH THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS NECESSARY TO CREATE SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR STUDENTS AFFECTED BY TRAUMA. THIS DEGREE IS ROOTED IN THE UNDERSTANDING THAT MANY STUDENTS EXPERIENCE VARIOUS FORMS OF TRAUMA, WHICH CAN SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACT THEIR EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES. AS AWARENESS OF THE EFFECTS OF TRAUMA ON LEARNING CONTINUES TO GROW, THE DEMAND FOR PROFESSIONALS TRAINED IN TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES IS ON THE RISE. THIS ARTICLE EXPLORES THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A PHD IN TRAUMA INFORMED EDUCATION, ITS CURRICULUM, CAREER OPPORTUNITIES, AND THE BROADER IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION SYSTEMS.

UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA INFORMED EDUCATION

TRAUMA INFORMED EDUCATION IS AN APPROACH THAT RECOGNIZES THE PREVALENCE OF TRAUMA AND ITS PROFOUND EFFECTS ON STUDENTS' ABILITY TO LEARN AND ENGAGE IN THE CLASSROOM. THIS EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK SHIFTS THE FOCUS FROM "WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?" TO "WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?" IT EMPHASIZES THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS' BACKGROUNDS AND CHALLENGES TO FOSTER A SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.

THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON LEARNING

STUDENTS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED TRAUMA MAY EXHIBIT A RANGE OF BEHAVIORS AND CHALLENGES, INCLUDING:

1. **DIFFICULTY CONCENTRATING:** TRAUMA CAN LEAD TO HYPERVIGILANCE OR DISENGAGEMENT, MAKING IT HARD FOR STUDENTS TO FOCUS ON THEIR STUDIES.
2. **EMOTIONAL DYSREGULATION:** TRAUMATIZED STUDENTS MAY STRUGGLE TO MANAGE THEIR EMOTIONS, LEADING TO OUTBURSTS OR WITHDRAWAL.
3. **SOCIAL CHALLENGES:** MANY STUDENTS WITH TRAUMA HISTORIES MAY HAVE DIFFICULTY FORMING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEERS AND TEACHERS.
4. **ACADEMIC STRUGGLES:** TRAUMA CAN SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACT COGNITIVE FUNCTIONS, RESULTING IN LOWER ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND ATTENDANCE ISSUES.
5. **BEHAVIORAL ISSUES:** STUDENTS MAY EXHIBIT DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS AS A RESPONSE TO THEIR TRAUMA, WHICH CAN FURTHER ALIENATE THEM FROM THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT.

THE NEED FOR TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES IN EDUCATION

GIVEN THE CRITICAL NATURE OF THESE CHALLENGES, TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES ARE ESSENTIAL IN EDUCATION. IMPLEMENTING THESE PRACTICES CAN HELP CREATE A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT. KEY PRINCIPLES INCLUDE:

- **SAFETY:** ENSURING PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL SAFETY FOR ALL STUDENTS.
- **TRUSTWORTHINESS:** BUILDING TRUST THROUGH CONSISTENT AND TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION.
- **PEER SUPPORT:** ENCOURAGING SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG STUDENTS AND BETWEEN STUDENTS AND STAFF.
- **COLLABORATION:** INVOLVING STUDENTS IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES THAT AFFECT THEIR EDUCATION.
- **EMPOWERMENT:** FOSTERING A SENSE OF AUTONOMY AND EMPOWERMENT IN STUDENTS.

CURRICULUM OF A PHD IN TRAUMA INFORMED EDUCATION

A PHD IN TRAUMA INFORMED EDUCATION TYPICALLY INCLUDES A BLEND OF THEORETICAL COURSEWORK, RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, AND PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES. THE CURRICULUM IS DESIGNED TO PROVIDE EDUCATORS WITH A DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF TRAUMA AND ITS EFFECTS ON LEARNING.

CORE COURSES

WHILE SPECIFIC PROGRAMS MAY VARY, CORE COURSES OFTEN INCLUDE:

1. **FOUNDATIONS OF TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE:** EXPLORES THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND PRINCIPLES OF TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACHES.
2. **CHILD AND ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT:** EXAMINES HOW TRAUMA AFFECTS DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES AND LEARNING PROCESSES.
3. **PSYCHOLOGY OF TRAUMA:** OFFERS INSIGHTS INTO THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON INDIVIDUALS.
4. **CULTURAL COMPETENCY AND EQUITY:** FOCUSES ON UNDERSTANDING THE DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS OF STUDENTS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATION.
5. **RESEARCH METHODS IN EDUCATION:** PROVIDES TRAINING IN QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS RELEVANT TO EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS.

SPECIALIZATIONS AND ELECTIVES

PHD CANDIDATES MAY ALSO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPECIALIZE IN AREAS SUCH AS:

- SPECIAL EDUCATION: UNDERSTANDING THE INTERSECTION OF TRAUMA AND SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS.
- COUNSELING AND MENTAL HEALTH: INTEGRATING COUNSELING TECHNIQUES INTO EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS.
- POLICY AND ADVOCACY: EXAMINING HOW POLICIES CAN SUPPORT TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS.
- CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT: CREATING TRAUMA-INFORMED CURRICULA THAT ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF AFFECTED STUDENTS.

RESEARCH AND DISSERTATION

A SIGNIFICANT COMPONENT OF A PhD PROGRAM IS THE RESEARCH AND DISSERTATION PHASE. CANDIDATES ARE EXPECTED TO CONDUCT ORIGINAL RESEARCH THAT CONTRIBUTES TO THE FIELD OF TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION. THIS PROCESS TYPICALLY INCLUDES:

1. IDENTIFYING A RESEARCH TOPIC: CANDIDATES CHOOSE A TOPIC THAT ADDRESSES A GAP IN THE EXISTING LITERATURE ON TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF RELEVANT STUDIES TO CONTEXTUALIZE THE RESEARCH QUESTION WITHIN THE EXISTING BODY OF KNOWLEDGE.
3. METHODOLOGY: DEVELOPING A ROBUST RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY THAT ALIGNS WITH THE RESEARCH QUESTION.
4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS: COLLECTING AND ANALYZING DATA, OFTEN INVOLVING QUALITATIVE METHODS SUCH AS INTERVIEWS, FOCUS GROUPS, OR CASE STUDIES.
5. DISSERTATION DEFENSE: PRESENTING AND DEFENDING THE RESEARCH FINDINGS BEFORE A COMMITTEE OF FACULTY MEMBERS.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES FOR PhD GRADUATES

GRADUATES OF A PhD IN TRAUMA INFORMED EDUCATION ARE WELL-EQUIPPED FOR VARIOUS ROLES WITHIN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS AND BEYOND. POTENTIAL CAREER PATHS INCLUDE:

1. EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATOR: LEADING INITIATIVES TO IMPLEMENT TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES AT THE SCHOOL OR DISTRICT LEVEL.
2. SCHOOL COUNSELOR: PROVIDING DIRECT SUPPORT TO STUDENTS AND FAMILIES AFFECTED BY TRAUMA.
3. TEACHER EDUCATOR: TRAINING FUTURE TEACHERS IN TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACHES THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS.
4. POLICY ANALYST: ADVOCATING FOR POLICIES THAT SUPPORT TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES.
5. RESEARCHER: CONDUCTING STUDIES THAT FURTHER EXPLORE THE IMPACTS OF TRAUMA ON EDUCATION AND EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS.

IMPACT ON EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

THE INTEGRATION OF TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES CAN HAVE A PROFOUND IMPACT ON EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS. RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT SCHOOLS IMPLEMENTING THESE PRACTICES EXPERIENCE:

- IMPROVED STUDENT ENGAGEMENT: STUDENTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO PARTICIPATE AND FEEL CONNECTED TO THEIR SCHOOL COMMUNITY.
- INCREASED ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT CAN LEAD TO BETTER ACADEMIC OUTCOMES FOR TRAUMATIZED STUDENTS.
- REDUCED BEHAVIORAL ISSUES: UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS' TRAUMA CAN LEAD TO MORE EFFECTIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS.
- ENHANCED TEACHER SATISFACTION: EDUCATORS TRAINED IN TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES OFTEN REPORT HIGHER JOB SATISFACTION AND LOWER BURNOUT RATES.

THE FUTURE OF TRAUMA INFORMED EDUCATION

AS SOCIETY CONTINUES TO RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING, THE FIELD OF TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION IS LIKELY TO EXPAND. MORE SCHOOLS AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ARE ADOPTING TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACHES, AND THE DEMAND FOR TRAINED PROFESSIONALS IN THIS AREA IS EXPECTED TO GROW.

CONCLUSION

A PhD IN TRAUMA INFORMED EDUCATION REPRESENTS A CRITICAL STEP TOWARD TRANSFORMING EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS TO BETTER SUPPORT STUDENTS AFFECTED BY TRAUMA. BY EQUIPPING EDUCATORS WITH THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS NEEDED TO IMPLEMENT TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES, WE CAN CREATE A MORE INCLUSIVE, SUPPORTIVE, AND EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE. AS THE UNDERSTANDING OF TRAUMA'S IMPACT ON LEARNING CONTINUES TO EVOLVE, SO TOO WILL THE STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY EDUCATORS, ULTIMATELY LEADING TO IMPROVED OUTCOMES FOR ALL STUDENTS.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS A PhD IN TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION?

A PhD IN TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION FOCUSES ON UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON LEARNING AND TEACHING. IT EQUIPS EDUCATORS WITH RESEARCH SKILLS TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES THAT CREATE SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR STUDENTS AFFECTED BY TRAUMA.

WHY IS TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION IMPORTANT?

TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT RECOGNIZES THAT MANY STUDENTS COME FROM BACKGROUNDS OF ADVERSITY. UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA HELPS EDUCATORS CREATE SAFE, SUPPORTIVE, AND RESPONSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS THAT CAN ENHANCE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS.

WHAT ARE THE CORE PRINCIPLES OF TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION?

THE CORE PRINCIPLES OF TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION INCLUDE SAFETY, TRUSTWORTHINESS, PEER SUPPORT, COLLABORATION, EMPOWERMENT, AND CULTURAL, HISTORICAL, AND GENDER ISSUES. THESE PRINCIPLES GUIDE THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES THAT RESPECT AND RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF TRAUMATIZED STUDENTS.

WHAT CAREER OPPORTUNITIES ARE AVAILABLE WITH A PhD IN TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION?

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES INCLUDE ROLES AS EDUCATION POLICY ANALYSTS, UNIVERSITY FACULTY, SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS, TRAUMA SPECIALISTS, OR CONSULTANTS FOR EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS. GRADUATES CAN ALSO CONTRIBUTE TO RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT OF TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS.

HOW DOES TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION DIFFER FROM TRADITIONAL EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES?

TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION DIFFERS FROM TRADITIONAL APPROACHES BY PRIORITIZING THE EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS. IT FOCUSES ON UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA'S EFFECTS RATHER THAN SOLELY CONCENTRATING ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, THEREBY FOSTERING A MORE HOLISTIC APPROACH TO EDUCATION.

WHAT TYPES OF RESEARCH MIGHT BE CONDUCTED IN A PhD PROGRAM FOCUSED ON

TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION?

RESEARCH MAY INCLUDE STUDIES ON THE EFFECTS OF TRAUMA ON LEARNING OUTCOMES, THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TRAUMA-INFORMED INTERVENTIONS, TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLICIES THAT SUPPORT TRAUMA-SENSITIVE SCHOOLS.

WHAT SKILLS WILL I GAIN FROM PURSUING A PhD IN TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION?

YOU WILL GAIN SKILLS IN QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS, DATA ANALYSIS, PROGRAM EVALUATION, POLICY DEVELOPMENT, AND THE ABILITY TO CREATE TRAUMA-SENSITIVE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS. ADDITIONALLY, YOU WILL ENHANCE YOUR LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY SKILLS.

HOW CAN TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION BENEFIT ALL STUDENTS, NOT JUST THOSE AFFECTED BY TRAUMA?

TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION BENEFITS ALL STUDENTS BY CREATING INCLUSIVE AND SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS. STRATEGIES DEVELOPED TO SUPPORT TRAUMATIZED STUDENTS OFTEN IMPROVE OVERALL CLASSROOM CLIMATE, ENHANCE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT, AND PROMOTE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING FOR EVERYONE.

WHAT ARE SOME COMMON CHALLENGES FACED BY EDUCATORS IMPLEMENTING TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES?

COMMON CHALLENGES INCLUDE LACK OF TRAINING AND RESOURCES, RESISTANCE FROM COLLEAGUES OR ADMINISTRATION, DIFFICULTIES IN CHANGING SCHOOL CULTURE, AND THE NEED FOR ONGOING SUPPORT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO SUSTAIN TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES.

HOW CAN I FIND PROGRAMS OFFERING A PhD IN TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION?

YOU CAN FIND PROGRAMS BY RESEARCHING UNIVERSITIES THAT OFFER GRADUATE DEGREES IN EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY, OR SOCIAL WORK. LOOK FOR PROGRAMS SPECIFICALLY HIGHLIGHTING TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION OR RELATED FIELDS, AND CHECK THEIR COURSE OFFERINGS AND FACULTY EXPERTISE.

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Explore the benefits of a PhD in Trauma Informed Education. Discover how this advanced degree can transform teaching practices and support student well-being. Learn more!

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