

Informed by Care: The Design of Trauma-informed Online and Face-to-Face Teaching and Learning

by

Suzanne Reinhardt

M.A., Michigan State University, 2015

M.A., Oakland University, 2009

B.A., Hiram College, 1998

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in the
Educational Technology and Learning Design Program
Faculty of Education

© Suzanne Reinhardt 2022
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Summer 2022

Copyright in this work is held by the author. Please ensure that any reproduction
or re-use is done in accordance with the relevant national copyright legislation.

Declaration of Committee

Name: **Suzanne Reinhardt**

Degree: **Doctor of Philosophy**

Title: **Informed by Care: The Design of Trauma-informed Online and Face-to-Face Teaching and Learning**

Committee:

Chair: **Michael Ling**
Senior Lecturer, Education

Kevin O'Neill
Supervisor
Associate Professor, Education

Sheri Fabian
Committee Member
University Lecturer, Criminology

Suzanne Smythe
Examiner
Associate Professor, Education

Janice Carello
External Examiner
Assistant Professor, Social Work Department
Edinboro University

Ethics Statement

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this work, has obtained, for the research described in this work, either:

- a. human research ethics approval from the Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics

or

- b. advance approval of the animal care protocol from the University Animal Care Committee of Simon Fraser University

or has conducted the research

- c. as a co-investigator, collaborator, or research assistant in a research project approved in advance.

A copy of the approval letter has been filed with the Theses Office of the University Library at the time of submission of this thesis or project.

The original application for approval and letter of approval are filed with the relevant offices. Inquiries may be directed to those authorities.

Simon Fraser University Library
Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada

Update Spring 2016

Abstract

Schools and educational systems have as their express purpose to provide support for students throughout their learning, but they also have the power to harm. It goes without saying that no student should be hurt in the pursuit of their education. A growing body of research has begun to examine how trauma and retraumatization affect learning in face-to-face classes in tertiary education. Fewer studies have explored trauma and its effects in an online platform. The present study utilized a constructivist grounded theory approach to examine how college instructors think about and design trauma-informed practices in both their online and face-to-face classes. An analysis of the data gathered through interviews with 13 college instructors revealed a great deal of concern about the emotional welfare of their students. Using dimensional analysis, the core dimension that emerged from the data was Creating a Learning Environment of Care. The primary dimensions of Describing the Lived Experience of an Instructor, Being Present, Building Positive Student-Instructor Relationships, and Making Thoughtful Instructional Choices all supported the core dimension. A model for the process of Creating a Learning Environment of Care for is provided, along with a model for Creating a Learning Environment of Care Online. Theoretical propositions and practical applications are provided based on the data from the interviews. This study provides a foundation for future research on trauma-informed teaching and learning in tertiary educational settings.

Keywords: online teaching and learning; trauma-informed practice; online; trauma-informed; care-centered pedagogy; post-secondary education

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my dad who believed in higher education so strongly that he stipulated in his will that I could only use my inheritance for college tuition and books.

Thanks to him, that fund paid for my undergraduate degree. I also want to acknowledge that some of my interest in this subject matter can be attributed to his struggle with trauma. I wish he had been able to find the support that he needed and deserved.

Also, in memory of my loving and generous grandparents Betty and Howard Fites.

An additional dedication goes to my beloved cat James (formerly James Franco) who was totally and entirely devoted to me. He is dearly missed.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my dear friend Sharon for her endless supply of compassion, empathy, and supportive cheerleading. My Aunt Carole for her ability to make me feel special as a young person when I had few sources of that kind of support. My cousin Howard who helped keep me entertained and from being totally isolated during the pandemic. My friend Mark for all his help with my writing and reference letters and generally kind nature. And my friend Traci, who drove with me and three cats to Vancouver from Iowa.

Laura, Cindy, Krista, Barb, and Gretchen have also been especially supportive during this stressful time. They were a source of emotional support that, if I had not had them, I would have come out of this experience a very different person, and not in a good way.

One of my greatest supports over recent years has been my Twitter community. They have expressed kindness when I needed it, outrage when I was bent out of shape about some particular dysfunction in academia, and answers and resources when I was confused and needed practical help. This especially includes (but is not limited to): @StonnySays, @kathleengorma13, @zerdeve, @john_t_ormerod, @crys_tom, @RaisingFloors, @geology_johnson, @jeffrubin2, @CarlLPalmer. Thank you so much. Social media can truly be healing.

My online ERN family has been a blessing. They have listened and comforted me over all the ups and downs in my life and especially during my doctoral program. I feel grateful to have them in my life. The whole community has been supportive, but I specifically want to thank @Jenny_Johannesson, @555, @LinCaro, @Trice901, @Yogi_bear, @BatmanHasACat, and @Dr_Brewer.

My other online community at PhD Thrive has been a great support as well. They have helped to keep me focused and to stay accountable. It's truly a kind and supportive group of people, and I appreciate everyone there but especially Katy.

Many thanks go to my supervisor Dr. Kevin O'Neill and committee member Dr. Sheri Fabian. Their patience and compassion have been seemingly endless. I honestly could not have done this without their kind support.

A special thanks goes to Sifu Christoper Scafone who ran the first, and only, trauma-informed school I ever attended – without even trying – simply through teaching with kindness and care.

My cats Ryan Gosling, Daring Greatly, and Dino Layton have been a great source of strength and comfort to me.

Table of Contents

Declaration of Committee	ii
Ethics Statement	iii
Abstract	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Table of Contents	viii
List of Tables	x
List of Figures	xi
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
1.1. Trauma	1
1.2. Trauma and Marginalization	3
1.2.1. Refugees	3
1.2.2. Veterans	4
1.2.3. Women	5
1.2.4. Indigenous People	5
1.3. Educational Trauma	6
1.4. Trauma and Learning	7
1.5. Statement of Purpose	9
1.6. Overview of Dissertation	10
Chapter 2. Literature Review	12
2.1. Trauma-informed face-to-face practices	13
2.2. Trauma-Informed Online Teaching and Learning	16
2.3. Summary	21
Chapter 3. Methodology	22
3.1. Symbolic Interactionism	23
3.2. The Use of Grounded Theory for This Research	25
3.3. Challenges within Grounded Theory	28
3.4. Reflexivity	30
3.5. Study Design	30
3.5.1. Ethical Concerns	31
3.5.2. Research Question	32
3.5.3. Sampling	32
3.5.4. Data Collection	34
3.5.5. Coding	34
3.5.6. Memoing	37
3.6. Summary	37
Chapter 4. Results	38
4.1. Dimensional Analysis	38
4.2. Core and Primary Dimensions	40

4.2.1.	Core Dimension: Creating a Learning Environment of Care	40
	Conditions.....	41
	Processes.....	41
	Consequences.....	42
4.2.2.	Primary Dimension: Describing the Lived Experience as an Instructor ...	43
	Conditions.....	45
	Processes.....	48
	Consequences.....	49
4.2.3.	Primary Dimension: Being Present for Students.....	50
	Conditions.....	51
	Processes.....	53
	Consequences.....	54
4.2.4.	Primary Dimension: Building Positive Student-Instructor Relationships..	55
	Conditions.....	56
	Processes.....	59
	Consequences.....	61
4.2.5.	Primary Dimension: Making Thoughtful Instructional Choices	62
	Conditions.....	64
	Processes.....	67
	Consequences.....	75
4.3.	Summary	76
Chapter 5.	Discussion.....	77
5.1.	Creating a Learning Environment of Care	77
5.1.1.	Describing the Lived Experience of an Instructor.....	81
5.1.2.	Being Present for Students	83
5.1.3.	Building Positive Student-Instructor Relationships.....	84
5.1.4.	Making Thoughtful Instructional Choices	87
5.2.	A Model of Creating a Learning Environment of Care	90
5.2.1.	A Model of Creating a Learning Environment of Care Online	92
5.3.	Theoretical Propositions	95
5.3.1.	Proposition 1: Use of trauma-informed practices is driven by the understanding that trauma affects learning and that trauma interventions support student learning.....	95
5.3.2.	Proposition 2: Trauma-informed approaches begin with a belief in caring for the whole student which drives teaching practices.	96
5.3.3.	Proposition 3: Use of trauma-informed practices online is driven by the level of experience an instructor has with online teaching and learning. .	97
5.4.	Implications for Practice.....	97
5.5.	Conclusion.....	99
References.....		102

List of Tables

Table 3.1.	Participants, their disciples and institution types.....	33
Table 4.1.	Creating a Learning Environment of Care	41
Table 4.2.	Describing the Lived Experience as an Instructor.....	43
Table 4.3	Being Present for Students	50
Table 4.4	Building Positive Student-Instructor Relationships.....	55
Table 4.5	Making Thoughtful Instructional Choices.....	63

List of Figures

Figure 5.1	The Process of Creating a Learning Environment of Care.....	78
Figure 5.2	The Process of Creating a Learning Environment of Care.....	91
Figure 5.3	The Process of Applying Trauma-Informed Practices Online.....	93

Chapter 1. Introduction

There's no such thing as neutral education. Education either functions as an instrument to bring about conformity or freedom.

~Paulo Freire

Within the literature on trauma-informed work, the phrase *first do no harm* is repeated more than once. This underlying principle of the medical sciences should not be the exclusive onus of those disciplines. Any profession that places people in unequal positions of power — the usual suspects including doctors, police officers, and teachers — should hold itself to the same ethical standard. Carello and Butler (2014) reiterate this idea: “Individual safety must be ensured through efforts to minimize the possibilities for inadvertent retraumatization, secondary traumatization, or wholly new traumatizations in the delivery of services” (p. 156).

Working within a trauma-informed framework is one approach that focuses on harm prevention for the racialized and marginalized. Carello and Butler (2014) describe the meaning of this phrase:

To be trauma informed, in any context, is to understand how violence, victimization, and other traumatic experiences may have figured in the lives of the individuals involved and to apply that understanding to the provision of services and the design of systems so that they accommodate the needs and vulnerabilities of trauma survivors. (p. 156)

In a safe educational environment, the goal is for students to be free from a burden of stress that interferes with learning and supported in as much of an ideal emotional space as is possible (Finn, 2010; Perry, 2006). As the enrollment in online classes grows, trauma-informed online learning has not, as of yet, caught the attention of the research community concerned with trauma-informed educational practice.

1.1. Trauma

As Perry (2006) succinctly states, “Trauma changes the brain” (p. 21). Ideally the body wants to stay in a state of physiological equilibrium. However, both stress and trauma disrupt this equilibrium. Although trauma, and stress especially, are commonly

used terms, they are not interchangeable. Stress, which evolved to be a protective reaction to a physical or psychological threat, triggers the fight, flight or freeze response (Perry, 2006). Trauma, however, has other consequences. Although the shift from stress to trauma is complex and includes personal and situational predispositions (van der Kolk, McFarlane, & Weisaeth, 2012), extended disequilibrium facilitates trauma.

Perry (2006) describes trauma along a spectrum. On the one end is a state of calm homeostasis. On the other end are the sequalae of trauma. However, most people who experience trauma will not develop Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (van der Kolk et al., 2012). The immediate effects of trauma do not often develop into prolonged symptomology. As van der Kolk et al. say, "PTSD tends to be the exception rather than the rule" (p. 158). Outside of this homeostasis, on the further end of the spectrum that Perry (2006) describes, traumatization is an experience that is disconnected from any present stress. Its power lies in reactivating the original trauma with an intensity, noted by van der Kolk et al. (2003, p. 188), that causes retraumatization.

Van der Kolk et al. (2012) give a rather fatalistic and deficit-focused view of the consequences of leaving trauma unaddressed in their book *Traumatic Stress*:

Society can only make a commitment to victims if it accepts these two ideas: (1) that victims are not responsible for the fact that they were traumatized; and (2) that if victims are not helped to deal with the memories of their trauma, they will become violent and anxious people, unreliable and easily distracted workers, inattentive parents, and/or people who use drugs and alcohol to help them cope with unbearable feelings. (p. 35)

This grim statement by a well-respected trauma researcher contributes to the problematizing of the consequences of trauma (Carter, 2015). However, the point van der Kolk et al. (2012) make about traumatized people not being the cause of their own trauma deserves acknowledgement. The onus of recovery is currently on the person experiencing trauma to fix themselves with socially acceptable interventions rather than putting the focus on the systems that create and perpetuate trauma (Carter, 2015).

Carter (2015) adds to our understanding of trauma by focusing specifically on trauma as a disability and states that "we live in an ableist and trauma centered society" (2015, para. 10). The essence of this statement being simply that our media profits off an inundation in our culture of trauma and its effects, and therefore trauma has lost the potency of its meaning. In addition, trauma stories parallel those of the disabled

inasmuch as the disabled are found deficient, and their only hope for redemption is in a hard-fought recovery. Carter continues by stating that the responsibility to manage the sequela of trauma is placed on the traumatized rather than the society that problematizes these effects.

1.2. Trauma and Marginalization

The body of trauma-informed work has been approached from several important angles. Reassuringly, there is significant work around trauma-informed teaching and learning with children and adolescents (Gray, 2019). There has also been important work done with people who have historically been affected by trauma (Ahern et al., 2015; Carter, 2015; Ketcham, 2018), and increasingly more research is being done in the face-to-face college classroom (Boyraz et al., 2016; Carello & Butler, 2015; Davidson, 2017). One important gap in the research is the work around trauma-informed online teaching and learning.

Both Ketcham (2018) and Kerka (2002) advise that we should use a “deficit mindset” with great restraint (Ketcham, 2018, p. 26). Kerka claims that this perspective of lack is misdirected toward the student rather than the educational system that neglects issues of safety and trauma in the classroom – an argument supported by Horsman (2004). Overall, Kerka calls attention to the current structure of education that needs to consider the complexity of being able to learn freely, without emotional distress created by institutional obstacles.

With these caveats foremost in mind, having a foundational understanding of some of the people historically most often affected by trauma can inform interventions that mitigate its effects. The relationships among refugees, veterans, women, and trauma are discussed briefly below.

1.2.1. Refugees

People living or having lived in refugee situations are gaining more attention from the research community (Walker & Zuberi, 2019). Experiences such as living through war, forced migration and violence encourage susceptibility to trauma (Marshall, Butler, Roche, Cumming, & Taknint, 2016). However, the data indicating the specific number of

people in refugee situations who experience PTSD are wildly inconsistent. In an article published in *The Lancet*, Fazel et al. (2005) cite a range of 3% to 86% of refugees affected by PTSD. They go on to explore interview-based research to extract their own estimate and reveal a 9% incidence of PTSD among post-migration refugees. A more edited collection by van der Kolk (2012), cites a rate of 50% from twelve studies that looked at PTSD and other psychological disorders, such as anxiety and stress among refugees. Regardless of the exact number, any number is too high for people to continue to suffer the effects of a traumatic situation months and years afterwards.

Due to previous trauma experiences, refugees are particularly susceptible to retraumatization within educational systems (Carello & Butler, 2014). UNESCO (2013) maintains that education is a basic human right but that does not mean education comes without risks such as retraumatization. As a consequence, the advantages of education for refugees creates an environment that demands educators become trauma-informed.

1.2.2. Veterans

Within an educational setting, PTSD and depression are the most common types of disability reported by veterans (Ahern, Foster, & Head, 2015). These residual effects of active duty make academic success more challenging. Veterans consist of nearly 26% of undergraduates and 17% of graduate students in the 2015 – 2016 school year in the U.S. and represent a group of students who deserve special attention to the unique considerations of their learning (“Digest of Education Statistics, 2017,” n.d.). Ahern et al. make a valid argument for improving the services for veterans on college campuses in their 2015 article. However, their list of suggested supports omits training for instructors to better support veterans. While additional veterans’ services can be beneficial, the overarching purpose of higher education is the education itself, and people who facilitate that education are an integral piece in the puzzle of support. Ahern et al. state that, “student veterans have reported that they believe faculty do not understand what they are experiencing as student veterans because large numbers of administrators and faculty have little firsthand knowledge of the military and military culture” (p. 79). While an informed instructional practice about the military setting would benefit these students, a trauma-informed practice would specifically benefit the subset of veterans who experience trauma and PTSD.

1.2.3. Women

Women are another marginalized group in society who are more vulnerable to PTSD than the population as a whole (Read, Ouimette, White, Colder, & Farrow, 2011). In light of the #metoo movement, it has become harder to ignore the prevalence of sexual assault and violence that pervades society, including on college campuses. The result is that the sequelae of trauma are evidenced in women in the classroom (Kostouros, 2010) and interfere with learning (Wagner & Lynn Magnusson, 2005).

Horsman (2004) argues that for women to thrive in the classroom, it is essential that educators recognize the pervasive violence experienced by women. The author continues by saying that schools can become a contributor to that violence if women's experiences are not acknowledged. Horsman says they may "experience the educational setting as a silencing place, or another site of violence, where they are controlled, diminished, and shamed by institutional structures or classroom interactions" (p. 134). It supports the learning capacity of students, who identify as women, if instructors are knowledgeable about how gender marginalization and violence affects their students.

1.2.4. Indigenous People

This research was conducted within the context of a Canadian university. Taking into consideration the trauma thrust upon Indigenous people through the experience of colonization and residential schools, I would be remiss if I didn't bring Indigenous voices into this work. Renee Linklater relates how, in a health care setting, Indigenous trauma is seen through the eyes of: "Western oriented clinicians as evidence of psychopathology" (2014, p. 20). She goes on to say, "Western frameworks of psychiatry and psychology have medicalized the experiences of Indigenous peoples, applying diagnoses such as post-traumatic stress disorder, further pathologizing their trauma." She uses the term trauma to describe the "reaction or response to injury" and explains how the use of the term trauma has been manipulated to dismiss and avoid responsibility on the part of Western society and government. She says, "Using trauma terminology implies that the individual is responsible for the response, rather than the broader systemic force caused by the state's abuse of power" (p. 22).

Decolonizing Indigenous trauma holds two complementary parts in a health care setting according to Linkletter (2014). First, is finding “relevance in Indigenous worldviews, knowledge and strategies that Indigenous health care practitioners find useful.” And second, “Indigenous people who share in the experience of multigenerational effects of historical trauma must be at the forefront of developing Indigenous trauma practice and theory” (p. 27). These decolonizing trauma principles depend on valuing and including Indigenous voices and worldviews, which the boarding and residential schools were “profoundly effective in destroying” (p. 28). These principles can – and should – be transferred to an educational setting with the intention of decolonizing educational trauma.

1.3. Educational Trauma

As previously mentioned, there are many marginalized people who are deeply affected by trauma. Those affected include people who may not necessarily experience a primary trauma, but experience historical trauma – a history of, “holding embodied knowledge of the way their community has been historically persecuted, displaced, and attacked, such as with Indigenous people or individuals whose ancestors experienced the Holocaust or slavery” (Conley, Ferguson, & Kumbier, 2019, p. 530). Every marginalized and racialized person deserves a supportive environment in which to learn through their unique lens of experience. Awareness of the effects of trauma by the people who hold themselves in positions of authority in the classroom is required to provide the positive, safer learning environment that everyone deserves. Sitler Collins (2009) goes further, to argue that beyond safety, students deserve a deeper commitment on the part of instructors to provide an emotionally nurturing environment to students.

In the introduction to *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks (1994) beautifully describes her history of educational trauma as a racialized minority and woman. She found her grade school education demoralizing after the racist education she was required to participate in as part of desegregation. Her graduate experience was less than functional in other ways. She relates this experience:

In graduate school the classroom became a place I hated, yet a place where I struggled to claim and maintain the right to be an independent thinker. The university and the classroom began to feel more like a prison,

a place of punishment and confinement rather than a place of promise and possibility. (p. 4)

Equating a learning environment with punishment is a just description of a system that creates and depends on the effects of trauma to prevent people who are traumatized from being more engaged in their emancipation. Freire (2000) describes this system in a banking metaphor, where educators hold the power of knowledge and gift it to students. This paradigm allows those in power to maintain that power.

Educational trauma, a term and paradigm coined by Lee-Ann Gray (2019), and defined as “the cyclical and systemic harm inadvertently perpetrated and perpetuated in educational settings” (p. 13) relies heavily on the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (2000). Learners are part of larger systems that affect how they view and experience the world – the racist educational system, in bell hooks’ case, for example. While the present research is interpretive in nature, its motivation lies in a critical research approach. The ultimate goal of this research is to provide foundational work for a paradigm shift in how we think about and approach education from the ground up. It is hoped that other researchers in the area of educational trauma can use this thesis to inform critical research that affects change in how our educational systems work.

Power relations are of central importance in critical studies, and that follows in addressing trauma as well. Outside of situational events like natural disasters and motor vehicle accidents, trauma is a consequence of a person or group having power over another (Carter, 2015). Herman (2015) uses the word “political” to describe the underlying social structures inherent in the causes of trauma because using “political” reveals how people are systemically oppressed. The areas of critical research and trauma both focus on oppression. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that, “the assumption is that power in combination with hegemonic social structures results in the marginalization and oppression of people without power” (p. 61). This holds true for educational trauma.

1.4. Trauma and Learning

Alzaroo and Hunt (2003) inquired about the educational experiences of Palestinian refugees, and the voices of the students speak for themselves. “Q: What is the most important thing you think about? A: School, finishing my education and

graduation. (3rd generation girl from Al Fawar)" (p. 171). Students have identified the need and have pursued education to have agency in their own lives and futures.

However, for students to access and fully utilize educational opportunities, there has to be a foundation of mental health that creates an environment that nurtures learning.

Contrary to popular understanding, mental health is not a lack of psychopathology. Rather, mental health allows people to actively pursue their life goals, make contributions to society, and interact with others freely without being hindered by unreasonable mental distress (Hilario et al., 2018). As previously noted, refugees have often experienced multiple types of trauma (Marshall et al., 2016), which can make PTSD more likely, and as a consequence, can make learning more of a challenge (Ketcham, 2018). While living through a traumatic situation does not necessarily result in PTSD, according to Read et al. (2011), 9% of incoming college students actually suffer from PTSD. Boyraz et al. (2016) estimate the proportion at 12.4%. With such a meaningful portion of students affected by trauma and PTSD, the implications for student academic performance should be of concern to those in positions of power and responsibility in educational systems.

Students affected by PTSD have higher incidence of drop-out, as well as lower GPAs in their first year of college (Boyraz et al., 2016), and increased substance abuse (Calmes et al., 2013). Boyraz et al. attribute the academic difficulties to challenges students face with effort regulation – the ability to persevere regardless of the challenges of academic work. They make the argument that PTSD contributes to the inability to manage the skills needed to thrive under the high pressure of an academic environment. Perry (2006) acknowledges that, "Some of the most persistent changes in the brain involve the capacity to acquire new cognitive information and retrieve stored information—both essential for effective functioning within our current educational system" (p. 21).

Since a substantial portion of the student body is affected by trauma, postsecondary educators need to teach in a way that includes trauma-responsiveness (Carello & Butler, 2015; Horsman, 2004). This responsiveness should be the case for all course modalities: in-person and online. In the fall of 2017, 34% of U.S. students were taking at least one distance course ("Digest of Education Statistics, 2017," n.d.). Yet, as of this writing, little empirical research explores how trauma is addressed in an online

learning environment. If a third of students were taking distance classes previous to 2020 and the shift to remote learning due to COVID-19, this area clearly needs the attention of the educational research community. The pandemic changed the landscape of online learning in ways that could not have been anticipated and has created even greater urgency with respect to trauma-informed practices.

Even while a search of the literature revealed little current research in the area of trauma-informed online education, it is not a far stretch to make an initial conjecture that similar numbers of trauma-affected students take online classes as there are in face-to-face classes. Much of the current research focusing on how trauma affects college students is explored within the context of social work programs, and the students within these programs (Agliias, 2012; Berger & Quiros, 2014; Black, 2006, 2008; Butler et al., 2017; Cunningham, 2004; Dane, 2002; Didham et al., 2011; Knight, 2019; Litvack et al., 2010; Marlowe, 2010; M. Miller, 2001; O'Halloran & O'Halloran, 2001; Walker Baron et al., 2019). This area has the attention of the community that educates counselors because of the potentially distressing content addressed in the disciplines of counseling and social work. However, addressing trauma in a clinical setting – for future counselors who confront the emotionally charged topics that clients bring into therapy – is vastly different from how it should be addressed in the general student population.

1.5. Statement of Purpose

Perry (2006) tells us that put very simply, trauma interrupts the cycle of learning and discovery. The cycle of curiosity begins with curiosity and ends with mastery. If the cycle is allowed to follow its natural evolution, then academic successes build on themselves and the cycle supports itself. However, if the process is interrupted by trauma, fear or stress, then learning is disrupted. The focus of the learner becomes regulating the distress rather than facilitating learning.

Many of the principles of trauma-informed face-to-face classes could potentially be applied to online classes. The crux of the challenge, however, is not deciding what approach to apply; it is finding what tools, techniques, and design principles to use in a meaningfully different format. Educators are still working with students who commonly experience some state of distress (Perry, 2006). We are still trying to design classes with a trauma-informed lens (Carello & Butler, 2014). And we are still trying to create a place

of safety (Carello & Butler, 2014; Carter, 2015; Horsman, 2004; Perry, 2006). What we do not yet know is how to translate the already not well-understood or regularly used trauma-informed tools to an online platform.

The purpose of this study is to understand how postsecondary instructors take a trauma-informed approach to support their students' learning in the online environment, so that the pressure of managing distress is relieved, and students can focus more easily on their academic studies. To explore this topic, instructors who have taught both online and face-to-face classes were interviewed to elicit their experiences and thoughts about trauma, how trauma affects their students, and how they design or plan instruction that supports students through content or personal histories that may elicit trauma reactions. A grounded theory of the thoughts and processes involved in designing online learning experiences with trauma-informed teaching and learning principles was created. The study aims to provide the groundwork for further exploration of trauma-informed teaching and learning.

1.6. Overview of Dissertation

Chapter 2 looks at the literature that informed this study. The first section discusses difficulty in understanding the conflicts between the traditional inductive nature of grounded theory with the use of deductive practices. Then a brief description of trauma-informed practices is introduced, followed by a literature review of the research on trauma-informed online practices in tertiary education.

Chapter 3 begins with a general overview of grounded theory. Constructivist grounded theory is then explored in detail, along with a discussion of symbolic interactionism. The challenges of using constructivist grounded theory as a new researcher are discussed. Further discussion balances this perspective with the benefits of using grounded theory. The processes that were used to recruit participants, the process of data coding, ethical concerns, and the methods of analysis are also discussed.

In Chapter 4 the results of the interviews are analyzed. Dimensional analysis is used to sort and make sense of the data. The core dimension of Creating a Learning environment of Care is identified and examined. This is followed by a discussion of the

primary dimensions: The Describing the Lived Experience of an Instructor, Being Present, Building Positive Student-Instructor Relationships, and Making Thoughtful Instructional Choices. The practices used in the two modalities (online and face-to-face) are described separately within each dimension.

Findings are addressed in Chapter 5. Models of trauma-informed practices, including both online and more general approaches to trauma-informed teaching and learning, are provided and discussed. Theoretical propositions are also described. Implications for practice are discussed and include a brief review of some trauma-informed practices that had not been explained in previous chapters.

Chapter 6 ends this thesis with implications for practice. Trauma-informed practices that stood out within the analysis as particularly strong, but did not find a place elsewhere, are discussed as a way to give instructors options of practical tools that they may consider using in their instruction. The Chapter ends with a conclusion.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

In many cases, the students you work with have had to subvert a system that sought to oppress them in order to make it to your classroom.

~Sean Michael Morris

One of the guiding principles of conducting grounded theory research is the inductive approach to the research that is reflected in the literature review. Traditionally, the literature review is done after the data have been collected and analyzed, with the intention of preventing the literature from influencing the analysis. More recent versions of grounded theory have a more flexible manner of working with previous research. Other researchers believe that conducting a literature review previous to the data collection and analysis provides foundational information for the study by fleshing out the research question and thus how the researcher proceeds with the research (Merriman & Tisdell, 2016; Timonen et al., 2018).

Timmermens and Tavory (2012) go so far as to argue that the inductive nature of earlier grounded theory approaches hindered the emergence of new theories – the antithesis of the meaning of grounded theory. Instead of an inductive lens, they suggest an abductive method of working with previous research, which is the approach that I have chosen to use here. Kathy Charmaz defines the term abductive: “We adopt abductive logic when we engage in imaginative thinking about intriguing findings and then return to the field to check our conjectures” (2016, pp. 137–138). The authors claim that the abductive method is essential to theory generation. They explain their belief about the abductive process this way: Discovering new theories depends on the inability to frame findings in existing theoretical frameworks, as well as on the ability to modify and extend existing theories in novel ways (p. 173).

Timonen et al. (2018) also describe the practically of, and thus encourage, conducting a literature review before data collection. The underlying purpose of delaying the literature review is to remain open without superimposing preconceived ideas or hypotheses on the data. Timonen et al. believe it is possible to retain this openness while also having an understanding of the current literature in the field.

The following is a review of the current research on trauma-informed online teaching and learning beginning with an exploration of trauma-informed face-to-face practices then shifting to trauma-informed online practices. The initial literature review was conducted by tracing citations from papers written by established researchers in the area of trauma-informed learning. Those articles then supplied further citations used to support a fuller picture of the research in the area. A Google Scholar alert was used with the search term “trauma learning” for current updates in the literature. Further citation tracing was used on the relevant articles from the Google Scholar alert.

2.1. Trauma-informed face-to-face practices

Because of the breadth and width of frameworks that guide trauma-informed principles, it is challenging to create a best practices approach. A good argument could even be made that a situationally and/or individually based approach would best serve students, and that a one-size-fits-all framework would be inappropriate. We are at the discovery and exploration stage of addressing the perpetuation of the sequelae of trauma in the college classroom. However, within the context of face-to-face classes, the literature provides us with some themes and common approaches to managing trauma. Before we examine trauma-informed practices and interventions, let us start with an examination of the nature and role of instructors.

Part of being trauma-informed is for educators to understand their role and not assume the position of therapist (Carello & Butler, 2014). Instructors are not counselors and do not have the skills of trained and certified counselors. In the hands of the untrained, attempts to use counseling tools can do more harm than good. Carello and Butler implore us as educators to make learning the priority, not other forms of healing interventions. Instructors using counseling techniques without counseling backgrounds and training is exactly the potentially damaging intervention that Carello and Butler warn us about (2014, 2015). They describe an incident from their personal experience in which a student disclosed sexual abuse in a writing assignment, which exemplifies the conflict between teaching and counseling. They state that, “My goal was not to learn how to provide therapy to students but, instead, to ensure their—and my own—emotional safety” (p. 268). It is clear that it is within a teacher’s responsibility to be aware of the resources at a student’s disposal and reference those resources if that seems appropriate (Carello & Butler, 2015).

However, Venet (2019) also describes instructors as facilitators of connections. This idea not only means a connection between instructor and student but also connections among the students. Facilitation of connections aligns well with the influence of social constructivist paradigms currently prominent in education today. The social constructivist claims learning is social, and thus we need each other to construct meaning (Sommers-Flanagan, 2015). Again, this idea complements Perry's (2006) argument that positive relationships are crucial to stability, and thus a safer environment for learners.

Additionally, a thoughtful argument is given by Horsman (2004) who points out that there is no clear delineation between the different environments that support healing. She cautions that the effects of past trauma cannot be isolated to the counseling relationship; trauma affects learning as well. She acknowledges the importance of counseling but notes that trauma can additionally be addressed in the classroom. Providing a safer, predictable environment is a trauma intervention, and instructors would be benefitting students to be aware of this and apply trauma-informed practices. Safety begins in the classroom. A safer environment is built through structure and predictability (Perry, 2006), and prevention is far and away a more constructive method to support students than trying to undo retraumatization or even unnecessary stress.

If we move from the environment and our roles as instructors to the broader picture, the literature suggests several approaches to consider when designing a curriculum that is trauma-informed. As we look more closely at how to address specific effects of trauma and to support both instructors and students, one place to start, for example, is with the common symptom of disassociation – the act of feeling disassociated from one's body as a response to trauma. Horsman (2004) challenges us not to turn disassociation into a negative but to use it as a learning experience, encouraging a curiosity between the periods of lack of presence, and exploring what encourages presence. In the language learning classroom, Finn (2010) also suggests focusing on the present to avoid temptations to revisit past traumas. In this instance, directing learning toward competency-based instruction might allow students to lean away from the past and remain in the here and now. However, using present moment mindfulness as a tool to address trauma could also present a threat; and requiring presence in students may do more harm than good. Again, we revisit the advice Carello

and Butler (2014, 2015) give us not to misconstrue our roles to be those of counseling professionals.

In addition to specific interventions, it is also important to keep an eye on the content of the class which might be triggering to sensitive students with trauma histories (McCammon, 1995; Zosky, 2013). Carello and Butler (2015) suggest awareness of content as a preventative measure to retraumatization. We should also be thoughtful about assignments of a personal nature. Although there is some ambiguity around whether using writing as a tool to explore traumatic events is beneficial or detrimental – it likely depends on the particular type of trauma a student experiences (Carello & Butler, 2014) – Venet (2019) reminds us not to require this of students. Making emotional disclosure a requirement could indeed cause unintended negative consequences for the student.

Lastly, when considering how to provide a learning rich environment for those affected by trauma, it is imperative to understand, as Perry (2006) explains, that: “The key to understanding the long-term impact of trauma on an adult learner is to remember that he or she is often, at baseline, in a state of low level fear” (p. 25). Perry tells us that accessing the parts of the brain that allow learning to happen require a state of “attentive calm,” which is not as easily accessible in those who suffer from PTSD (p. 25). Thus, the overarching goal that educators can use to facilitate learning is to create a safer classroom for learners (Carello & Butler, 2014a, 2015; Horsman, 2004; Kerka, 2002; Perry, 2006; Quiros et al., 2012; Venet, 2019) which students themselves indicate encourages a more sound environment for learning (Holley & Steiner, 2005).

The glaring weakness in the manner that Perry (2006) addresses trauma is the tendency to come from a deficit mindset. It benefits both the instructors and the students to take into consideration the skills and tools students bring with them as learners rather than focusing on the view that something is missing. Ginwright (2018) asks us instead to focus on strengths and healing of the community at large in his approach called Healing Centered Care. Agency is the driving force in Healing Centered Care. If power imbalances cause much of the trauma that people are subjected to, encouraging agency redistributes power into the proper hands.

2.2. Trauma-Informed Online Teaching and Learning

The challenge that makes simply transferring trauma-informed techniques from a face-to-face classroom to an online platform difficult is that these are distinct modalities each with their own affordances and strengths. In the preface to her book *Minds Online*, Michelle Miller (2014) highlights the advantages of online teaching and learning, which include:

frequent, low-stakes testing ... better spacing of study over the time ... presentation of material in ways that take advantage of learners' existing knowledge ... presentation of material via multiple sensory modalities ... new methods for capturing and holding students' attention ... frequent, varied practice that is a necessary, precursor to the development of expertise ... new avenues to connect students socially [and] emotionally ... [can] borrow from the techniques of gaming to promote practice, engagement, and motivation. (p. xii)

On the other hand, connections and presence may not be as readily available online, more emphasis on timely feedback is needed to support good outcomes in online classes, and methods of communication need to be even more explicit in an online environment. These differences require unique methods of teaching and learning, including different approaches and practices to support trauma-informed online teaching and learning. Face-to-face trauma-informed practices cannot simply be overlayed on online instruction and vice versa.

My review of the following articles begins with those furthest away from trauma-informed teaching and learning, specifically an article on the design of an online framework to support students with psychiatric disabilities. Then I examine literature on disabilities in online learning. Next is the first research on trauma-informed online practices conducted with social work students. Last is a discussion of an article addressing trauma-informed online teaching and learning practices with student teachers.

As noted in an email conversation with Janice Carello (personal communication, May 27, 2022) little research into online trauma-informed practices was conducted prior to 2019; however, one of the earliest articles that comes close to addressing trauma and how it affects learning in an online context is by Scott Grabinger (2010). This earliest attempt to understand and support students in an online platform addresses the

generalized category of students with psychiatric disabilities. There is no specific focus here on trauma affected students, rather the stated goal of this article is to use action research to identify and explain the problems students with psychiatric disabilities have and to introduce the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a guide for designing classes for these students.

In this particular work, Grabinger (2010) is dedicated to an immediate, practical focus on helping the student rather than concentrating on systems that disregard the historically problematic nature of disability supports. Grabinger dismisses the dualistic idea that students either need help or don't, and instead visualizes a spectrum on which some students need more support and some less. Grabinger used the Center for Applied Special Technology's (CAST) research, which identifies the brain processes of recognition, strategic, and affective as areas of instructional processes and aligns them with symptoms of students with cognitive weakness that can then be integrated into the UDL framework. His design also focuses on students accessing support at the instructional level in the online learning environment rather than in the disability office. Therefore, all students can be helped to some degree by a more inclusive, just-in-time instructional design, not solely students who have been through the often rigorous university process of requesting accommodations. From my perspective, the weakness of Grabinger's reframing of disability for the online context is that it does not explicitly address trauma; however, his framework provides a rich foundation to build more specific areas of research related to trauma-informed practices and is a necessary step on the path to trauma-informed online teaching and learning.

Kent (2015) conducted a study in a general educational environment. This study included 352 participants from Open Universities Australia – a program that consists exclusively of online classes created through a consortium of Australian universities. The participants were selected from among respondents to a survey who had identified themselves as having a disability and as receiving disability support. The students were asked to complete a survey of 12 questions, which included demographics, questions about their disability, and their present educational experiences. The purpose of the article was to identify the strengths and challenges to online learning that students with mental health histories experienced in online classes.

Kent (2015) reported that 63.4 % of respondents overall, and 71.1% of respondents who identified themselves as having a mental health disability, volunteered to engage in further participation through semi-structured interviews. Eleven online interviews were conducted in total. The reported impairments¹ included: depression, anxiety, PTSD, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Four participants stated that they experienced more than one impairment such as suicidal ideation.

One advantage to combining research on disability-focused online learning with mental health, and PTSD in particular, is that it casts a wide net and reaches students who may not otherwise have their experiences represented. The disadvantage is that this dilutes the group of participants and implications for support may be too generalized and might not address the specific needs of each individual population. Most important, Kent reports that accommodations for some groups can add barriers for others. The example the author gives is of curb-cuts in sidewalks which can provide accessibility to wheelchair users but impedes the blind from being able to feel the edge of the curb (Kent, 2015).

Another meaningful contribution of his study is arguably the inclusion of the voices of students in expressing their needs and experiences. In an area in which voices are often silenced, these experiences hold the utmost value and are centered through this study. Several students described the shame and stress involved in accessing disability services at their school. One student described the effects of an interaction with their disability office: “The first dealing with [University] Disabilities Services sent me into a depression spin that put me out of commission for a week. Their style of questioning was intrusive and insensitive.”

Students found both affordances and weaknesses in the online learning platforms. One such affordance was the ease of use that one student describes, “The oua website has been very helpful. When the website was upgraded I struggled to understand how to navigate it, however has pretty much figured it out again.” Another student described how the design of classes could be improved, “I know it is not easy with online study, but my strongest recommendation is to enable a variety of assessment

¹ Impairment is the term that Kent uses in this article. There are a wide variety of terms that are much preferable to use that are less deficit-focused, which I would have used had it been my own research.

methods – I would like to see more exams (for the reason outlined above) or other assessment methods.” Yet, there were troublesome areas too, “Group projects (ARGH) … too much unknown, and reliance on other people. Own self-imposed high standards do not always translate across a shared assessment platform” (Kent, 2015).

The theme of barriers flows throughout this study. Kent (2015) states that for eLearning, it is the inaccessible technological, pedagogical and institutional design of the learning environment (rather than any problem resulting from a particular student’s impairment) that activates disability (para 39). This statement is informed by the social model of disability that places the locus of problems on the systems that interfere with accessibility, in contrast to the medical model which problematizes the bodies of the disabled. Kent’s assertion suggests that further research needs to be conducted on the specific application of trauma-informed practices with the intention of preventing additional barriers for students with disabilities, as well as for students who are specifically affected by trauma (Kent, 2015).

Walker Baron et al. (2019) were the first authors to specifically capture and explore trauma-informed practices in an online platform. The authors applied trauma-informed practices, based on the principles of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration – part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – to an online social work program. Their intention was to support students through the emotionally charged content of social work classes with a sense of safety and security. To do this, the authors explain and apply each of the SAMHSA’s six Trauma-Informed Care Guiding Principles (SAMHSA, 2014) to a teaching scenario, then provide a trauma-informed technique that could be used in each situation. The 2014 version of the principles, as cited by Walker Baron et al., are: safety; trustworthiness and transparency; peer support and mutual self-help; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice, and choice; and cultural and historical and gender issues.

While Walker Baron et al. (2019) address social work students, the vignettes and accompanying teaching principles they discuss are not exclusive to students studying in that discipline. All the authors’ suggestions could easily translate to a general population classroom. One of the last sections of their article diverges from the SAMHSA framework and discusses the significance and application of mindfulness-based practices in a virtual classroom. Walker Baron et al. cite the strength of the evidence-

based practices of mindfulness as a way to support students in engaging in challenging material. Not only can tools like meditation help students to self-regulate, but mindfulness can also provide students a way of using self-awareness to mitigate the tension of the emotional reactions of other students in a classroom.

Again, the practices recommended by Walker Baron et al. could support students in any discipline, although it appears these practices would hold greater value in subjects which address intense emotional content. The article's strength lies in the generalizability of SAMHSA's Trauma-Informed Care Guiding Principles (SAMHSA, 2014) that could apply to all disciplines, as well as supporting either a face-to-face or online modality. An educator from any field can be thoughtful about creating a safer, supportive environment for learning. This brings into question, however, if any faculty would be skillful enough to apply these principles, especially the mindfulness tools, or if that would require social work specific proficiencies. This article was not written with the general faculty population in mind; therefore, we are directed to seek further guidance that can apply to all faculty, whether they are social workers or not (Walker Baron et al., 2019).

An especially intriguing study by Roman (2020) used action research to apply trauma-informed practices to support preservice teachers' mental health during the sudden shift to emergency remote teaching in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Roman used the theories of Carello and Butler (2015) that suggest supporting students through difficult emotions by acknowledging them. Roman applied check-ins through the online tool Spiral to monitor how students thought they were doing through casual interactions and gently probing questions. The 12 students who were actively engaged in the class responded to short questions about how they were dealing with stress, as well as rating their stress from 1 to 10. The instructor followed-up through email or GroupMe with students on the higher end of the distress scale, and students indicated that they appreciated that support.

While this study is an important step in the pragmatic approach of supporting students under traumatic circumstances, much can be done to provide more rigorous investigations. In general, the nature of action research focuses on improving a situation so there was a lack of transparency about how the data were collected and analyzed in the study. More transparency in future studies and a larger group of participants would

support empirical evidence as well as the addition of qualitative research methods. However, this research reminds us of the importance of the pragmatic applications of our research (Roman, 2020).

2.3. Summary

It is somewhat challenging to critique the available articles related to trauma-informed online teaching and learning. There are so few articles that are directly relevant to trauma that this gap provides an enticing argument for the need for further work. While clinical counseling has provided foundational research to move forward, more work needs to be done within the discipline of education. The articles that are less directly related strengthen the argument for concentrated focus in trauma-informed online pedagogy for the general student population.

Poor management of trauma in the classroom, through traumatization or retraumatization, can result in higher dropout rates and lower grades, not to mention general emotional distress among students (Boyraz, Granda, Baker, Tidwell, & Waits, 2016; Carello & Butler, 2014). While we as educators have little control over the original trauma, within the learning environment we can have a positive impact by either avoiding retraumatization or preventing avenues for new educational trauma. Preventing the creation of new trauma ought to be of the utmost concern to educators. In her book *Educational Trauma*, Gray (2019) uses a somewhat alarming chapter heading in what can serve as a warning to educators: Higher Education Fuels Educational Trauma (p. 197). However, interventions can be applied in the classroom relieving students of some portion of the burden of managing trauma and thus moving that onus from the student to the system that drives the trauma.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Meaning is tied to practice.

~ *Kathy Charmaz*

Grounded theory is not for the faint of heart, and this is doubly true of the constructivist version of this methodology. Wacquant (2002) describes grounded theory as an "epistemological fairytale" because of its inductive nature that often fails to lead to theory generation. Others describe the difficulty in following esoteric procedures (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Nagel et al., 2015). These are just some of the arguments *against* the use of grounded theory but there is a compelling argument to be made *for* grounded theory and its use in this research in particular.

Grounded theory was created by Glaser and Strauss (Charmaz, 2014) through the attempt to address some of what was missing from quantitative research – the prevailing methodology in sociology in the mid-1960s. During this time, the research community was shifting from the positivist influences of objectivity and narrow structure that limited areas of research, to something that could be more inclusive of a broader range of subject matter and approaches. This change also addressed human concerns that were unapproachable from a positivist perspective. Glaser and Strauss additionally wanted to move the focus of research to something more pragmatic, focusing on how theory could be used in practical applications (Timonen et al., 2018).

Qualitative research in sociology shifted from static data gathering methods like case studies to observational methods in the 1940s, although at the time as that shift, it was not yet an explicitly detailed procedure. In 1967, Glaser and Strauss published *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, which was based on their construction of the qualitative methods they developed as they studied death and dying. Their collaboration produced a system of strategies of analysis that were based on what emerged from their data. This is where the theory originated that ideas could emerge from the data rather than the dominant quantitative approach of testing hypotheses (Charmaz, 2014).

Although later iterations and approaches to grounded theory broke with Glaser and Strauss' original premises, these initial principles provided a platform and guided grounded theory research: concurrent (rather than sequential) data collection and analysis, memo-writing to support the development of categories, analytical codes and categories originating from the data rather than from an *a priori* hypothesis, constant comparative methods employed through each stage of analysis, theoretical sampling, moving toward theory development through data collection and analysis, and constructing the literature review after analysis (Charmaz, 2014). The 1967 book made a compelling argument for the strengths of qualitative research, and challenged quantitatively-based assumptions head-on, defining qualitative research as a method in its own right.

Glaser and Strauss later developed differing views of theory development. Glaser retained his view of theory as being solely emergent, but Strauss teamed with Corbin to use additional methods of categorization and analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Contrary to the supposition that developing additional methods of analysis creates more structure, the later constructivist grounded theory retains more flexibility that is more aligned with Glaser and Strauss' original intent of emergent data.

3.1. Symbolic Interactionism

In the year 2000, Kathy Charmaz gave a plenary talk which detailed a new approach she applied to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). She used the term "constructivist" to describe a type of grounded theory that takes the presence of the researcher into consideration. Instead of an expectation that the meaning of the data would reveal itself solely through analysis, the data analysis gains strength from the influence of the perspective of the researcher. Charmaz explains her approach in detail by saying, "We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices" (p. 17). This statement expresses the influence that symbolic interactionism had over this particular iteration of grounded theory and guides the current trajectory of grounded theory.

Charmaz describes constructivist grounded theory as a craft that requires practice (Charmaz, 2014). One of the principles that she ascribes to this craft includes

paying attention to ideas whenever they come in the process and following them. She also discusses the need to gather rich data and conduct intensive interviews that move the theory forward. The coding process involves both line-by-line coding and focused coding. Memos and theoretical saturation – the concept of fully explored categories that have no new emergent qualities – drive the theory construction. The process ends with the generation of theory.

Strauss embraced and made his own the idea of symbolic interactionism, the epistemological foundation of grounded theory that is most associated with Herbert Blumer (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz describes symbolic interactionism as a theoretical perspective that assumes society, reality, and self are constructed through interaction, and thus rely on language (p. 9). Symbolic interactionism integrates people and the complexity of how humans think and behave into research theory. It takes into consideration the importance and influence of meaning in our lives. It assumes that we behave less like Pavlov's dog – simply reacting to stimulus – and more like the philosophers that many of us are.

While there are several more grounded theory approaches, a major influence on the present study worth mentioning is critical inquiry. Charmaz (2017) encourages us to probe the depths of knowledge – knowledge of both ourselves and the world – further than qualitative methodology, grounded theory or constructivist grounded theory already do. Critical inquiry explores areas of social justice, focuses on supporting marginalized voices and reveals areas of injustice and inequality. Charmaz specifically says that critical qualitative inquiry, "has focused on the plight of disadvantaged peoples and the effects of structural inequities on them" (p. 35). She describes how the epistemological and methodological changes that advance constructivist grounded theory from previous grounded theory sets the stage for critical inquiry to further develop constructivist grounded theory. The pragmatist influence gives us ways to think about critical qualitative inquiry, and constructivist grounded theory tells us how to do it – at least superficially.

Methodological self-consciousness, which is an essential aspect of critical grounded theory, facilitates getting to the core of a researcher's beliefs and value systems regarding the area of research. It requires a keen level of self-awareness. It

requires the researcher to examine the power structures they are a part of, both as a researcher and as an individual (Charmaz, 2017).

3.2. The Use of Grounded Theory for This Research

As mentioned previously, the area of trauma-informed online learning appears to have been largely neglected to date, with few existing studies to inform research. Maiden (2019) wrote about secondary trauma in a social work setting, but that is the only study I was able to identify that covers online learning. Many other researchers have addressed trauma-informed learning in face-to-face classes, adult education or university libraries (Carello & Butler, 2014, 2015; Conley et al., 2019; Horsman, 2004; Kerka, 2002; Ketcham, 2018) but the same number of research studies is not mirrored in the online learning environment. Prior to the outbreak of Covid-19 and the shift to remote learning, more and more students were already enrolling in online classes (*Digest of Education Statistics*, 2018, n.d.). If we are to be truly trauma-informed, virtual spaces need further exploration and the use of grounded theory methodology would be appropriate to build an informative body of work.

A grounded theory approach is used for this research because it supports a way to build a base of research when little exists. Generally speaking, because of its inductive nature, qualitative research is appropriate for areas of research that have not been effectively addressed previously (Merriman & Tisdell, 2016).

The subject matter of how particular college instructors think about and address trauma in their online classes aligns with what Corbin and Strauss call “substantive” (2015, as noted in Merriman & Tisdell, 2016). The purpose is to explore an area of research that has pragmatic applications, rather than what Corbin and Strauss call “grand” theory. Constructivist grounded theory is practical at its core. They also note that grounded theory looks at targeted issues, especially issues of practice, which is exactly what this research investigates. Neil Selwyn (2010) – an education researcher who notably looks critically at the use of technology in education – would likely agree with this line of thinking because this area of research addresses how technology is used in a very practical way in a learning environment.

The premise of this research is the supposition that the process involved in applying trauma-informed pedagogy is different in an online platform than in a face-to-face environment. Grounded theory is appropriate to examine trauma-informed online learning because it looks at social processes (Charmaz, 2014) -- what Merriman and Tisdell describe as something that "changes over time" (2016, p. 32). Charmaz notes that Glaser and Straus (1968) describe this particular type of grounded theory that studies process is specifically social. In this research, I look at the role instructors play in the emotional lives of college students and the actions they take to be supportive to students emotionally. These are the social processes of teaching and learning. Grounded theory looks at people, how they interact and how they interpret those interactions – all parts of constructivist grounded theory.

As mentioned above, grounded theory is considered an inductive approach to research. Instead of proposing a hypothesis and constructing an experimental design intended to determine the truth of that hypothesis, grounded theory looks at the data in real time and goes where the data lead (Charmaz, 2014). Generally with grounded theory, literature reviews were left to the end of the research, which allows the researcher to be fully open to what the data show (Timonen et al., 2018). However, Timonen et al. argue otherwise. They claim that an exploration of the literature, as long as it does not interfere with a researcher remaining open to the data, can advance a grounded theory study. They claim it is a myth that undertaking a literature review negates the emergent nature of grounded theory. Instead, they say a literature review is necessary to identify gaps in prior research.

Because trauma-informed practices in higher education are just beginning to gain interest in the research community and because online classes are on the edge of that exploration, research requires clear definitions of what is missing in existing research to clear a path for further research. At this point because so little is currently known about trauma awareness in the online learning environment, it has been a challenge even to construct a well-defined research question. The lack of previous work in this area leaves nothing to follow that might lead to an adjacent area of research developed from previous work.

However, grounded theory allows for this seeming lack of clarity. Its foundational quality is that it is emergent. Gathering data allows us to find our way. The research

question can be more refined as more data are gathered. Charmaz (2014) specifies that the importance of being able to modify research questions allows researchers to go where the important ideas lead. I found this to be the case in my own research; even through one initial interview, clarity was forming about how to further direct the construction of a research question.

On a practical level, grounded theory is a methodology that appears to be supportive of beginning researchers. Grounded theory gives a specific, yet not inflexible, approach to conducting research (Charmaz, 2014). This is ideal for a researcher new to understanding and applying qualitative research methods. There is guidance but enough leeway to follow the data, as is the emergent nature of grounded theory.

In addition to looking at the process aspect of grounded theory for this research, the foundational aspect of symbolic interactionism of grounded theory is key to this study. This research depends on the idea that postsecondary instructors are thoughtful and reflective about trauma, in at least three aspects: 1) how they present potentially disturbing material, 2) how they interact with students who are historically affected by trauma, and 3) that trauma is a part of the human experience and is therefore likely present in some proportion of the student population. Symbolic interactionism is infused in the design of this study, which couldn't be done as thoroughly or effectively without this consideration. The symbolic interactionist premise is that people interpret their world then apply practical solutions to navigate this world, as I am attempting to reflect in this research.

The interpretive lens of symbolic interactionism is another consideration for the use of constructivist grounded theory for this research. Charmaz believes that the data in a grounded theory study are shaped by the construction of our realities. In her description, constructivist grounded theory is research that is constructed, "through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices" (2014, p. 17). I think this idea is especially relevant to my study, as I bring my personal history of trauma into the analysis of the data. I examined the data as someone who has a trauma history, and how that history manifested for me in the classroom. In this way, my personal history of trauma reflects the symbolic interactionist perspective.

The lens of critical grounded theory is also tied to the research area of trauma and learning in educational environments. Trauma and stress affect marginalized people at a higher rate than they do others (Matheson et al., 2019; Reinhardt, unpublished). Gender, sexuality, physical and mental disability, poverty, military service, are all experiences and identities that tend to bear a heavier burden of trauma. I can speak for traumatized people in the broadest way simply because of my particular trauma history. This personalized choice of research topic allows me to bring the self-awareness of critical inquiry into this project. It is important for me to be personally and emotionally invested in the research process, and I value the emphasis on critical inquiry that grounded theory methodology embraces.

3.3. Challenges within Grounded Theory

Early on in my writing of this methodology section, before I had gathered data and was able to speculate more generally about the supportive nature of grounded theory for newer researchers, I thought the grounded theory framework and procedures were going to smoothly lay themselves out before me. I assumed that I could focus on the data rather than getting too far into the weeds on the specifics of procedure. Yet while the principles of grounded theory align with the intent and propose of this study, the difficulty of employing grounded theory has not been addressed widely enough in my view.

Bryant and Charmaz state that grounded theory "...provides a set of steps and procedures any researcher can follow in the construction of an interpretation fitted to a particular problem" (2019, p. 3) The claim that "any researcher" can use grounded theory provided me with the support I needed to feel I was capable of engaging in this methodology, yet Charmaz' (2017) frequent use of the word "flexible" to describe grounded theory also created conflicting information about its ease of use. This leaves newer researchers to resolve the paradox of flexibility and structure their own.

As a novice, I found the descriptions of the procedures of grounded theory so vague that I had to repeatedly ask myself if I had followed them properly. Not only are practical steps of a grounded theory approach somewhat challenging to pin down and apply, theory generation in grounded theory has also been critiqued, and has come up short. Timmomens and Tavory (2012) explain the lack of theoretical breakthroughs in

grounded theory research with the “...lackadaisical, incomplete, or inaccurate application of grounded theory principles” (p. 168).

Anticipating the stress brought on by using grounded theory methods, several PhD students sought to support others by laying out the obstacles to the grounded theory researcher, and their suggested solutions (Nagel et al., 2015). The areas of weakness that Nagel et al. identify paralleled the challenges that I experienced. Lack of concrete procedures, lack of consistency in approaches, inability to find practical resources for constructivist grounded theory, and some lack of familiarity with the differences of among grounded theory types on the part of my committee members all made an already difficult endeavor more challenging. These difficulties were exquisitely illustrated through the use of a piece of Escher artwork for the cover of a book that I used as a reference called *Developing Grounded Theory: The Second Generation* edited by Janice M. Morse (2009). I distinctly felt the mutability of my situation.

An unanticipated consequence of using constructivist grounded theory was the anxiety level required to write a PhD thesis with a methodology defined as “flexible” (Charmaz, 2014). Like the faceless people in Escher’s world, I marched purposely up the stairs whether the staircase ended in a blank wall or not. In retrospect, a more structured framework would have prevented a lot of stress and headaches for a novice researcher. However, in some ways this disequilibrium helped free me from the preconceived ideas that Charmaz repeatedly cautions us about. It’s impossible to bring assumptions about what the data will show when the focus of the researcher is consumed with correctly interpreting and acting on constructivist grounded theory methods. The method indeed insisted on emergence.

In addition to the elusiveness of the constructivist grounded theory procedures, there are research processes that appear to completely contradict each other. Grounded theory is based on the idea of action and process as an area of study and analysis, but from the symbolic interactionist perspective, general environment and attitudes are also taken into consideration (Charmaz, 2014). If coding is based on action words, how would a researcher go about coding an attitude with a gerund? This was more of a minor irritant, but consistent with similar difficulties that I struggled with. The following section on study design details the process I used in data collection and analysis, and how I addressed these challenges.

3.4. Reflexivity

When I saw the phrase “forced resilience” (2021) used by disability activist Karli Drew on social media to describe the form of resilience imposed on disabled people, it immediately resonated with me. What choice do people have if they are disabled or experience trauma? Healing is not required to work a job, go to school, or pay bills. It is not required, and it makes functioning in the world exceedingly difficult, but regardless, some form of functioning is required.

This is how I see most of my life. I wouldn’t call myself resilient, but I have been forced to be functional. I have struggled to find healing – using my research as a means to learn about new and emergent forms of healing treatment-resistant complex post-traumatic stress disorder. What has led me and kept me surviving through decades of mostly useless interventions is a stubborn persistence and unyielding curiosity.

I did come to this research with a wealth of knowledge about trauma-informed practices from my personal experiences in a clinical counseling setting and popular literature about addressing trauma. It benefitted me, however, that there is not a wealth of knowledge of trauma-informed practices in tertiary education. The dearth of literature allowed me to stay more open during the coding. As an educator, and not a counselor, I had very little experience of addressing trauma pragmatically in the classroom.

While I worked through the coding, I was led by my natural sense of curiosity, which has been such a powerful force in my personal life. I was driven by a need to learn from what I extracted from the interviews. Meaning was not placed on the codes as much as patterns emerged from the data. I am a researcher because of a disposition that leaves me wanting to understand more (about myself), and this curious nature imposed itself on how I conducted my research and analyzed my data.

3.5. Study Design

This section breaks down the specific parts of the design of this research and the steps that I took in collecting and analyzing the data.

3.5.1. Ethical Concerns

Per standard ethical research practices, my study design, consent form, interview protocol, and recruitment materials were reviewed, deemed minimal risk, and approved by the Office of Research Ethics at Simon Fraser University.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted over Zoom and audio recorded. Permission was given by the participants via a signed consent form. I expected the interviews to take about 45 minutes each, and most stayed within that timeframe. Transcription was done through Otter.ai – online transcription software – and transcripts were then uploaded to NVivo. Once the data were analyzed, the original recordings were transferred to SFU Vault, and deleted from both my phone and computer.

To protect instructor privacy, they were allowed to choose their own pseudonym. If the instructors had no preference, I chose one for them. Throughout the transcription process I assigned each interview a number based on the order in which the interviews took place. Pseudonyms were given once the writing process began.

My interviews were not expected to cause a great deal of distress, although some instructors might have found the discussion of student distress upsetting. The self-selecting process of participant recruitment supported my supposition that instructors would have some level of comfort discussing trauma in educational settings. I also communicated at the beginning of interviews that participants were in no way required to answer any questions. If they found a question uncomfortable, we would move on to the next question. To provide support for instructors who wished to have it, I provided links to the faculty counseling resources for instructors at Simon Fraser University in my consent form. For instructors who were not part of SFU, I provided links to the US National Institute of Mental Health resource page.

I did not anticipate meaningful benefits for the instructors participating, however, this was not the case. One instructor mentioned that they enjoyed our conversation and was looking forward to reading the results. Another instructor thanked me for doing this important work. All the instructors understood the importance of this research and wanted to contribute to furthering trauma-informed practices in higher ed.

3.5.2. Research Question

My initial interest focused on how college instructors, who were concerned about trauma among their students, approached designing differently for the use of sensitive material between their online and face-to-face classes. I attempted to align my process with the emergent quality of grounded theory, and my research question was no exception. As I moved through the process of additional interviews and revised my interview questions, my research transformed into a broader inquiry concerning trauma in the classroom not solely in the online environment. Ultimately, I formulated my research question as: How do instructors think about and address student trauma in both their online and face-to-face courses?

3.5.3. Sampling

Initial sampling included college and university instructors who identified as being interested in how trauma affects their students², applied some form of trauma-interventions in their teaching, and had taught both online and in-person classes. With the assistance of my senior supervisor, an initial participant was obtained through his collegial connections. With ethics approval through my advanced qualitative methods course, I conducted a single interview that was covered under the parameters of the ethics review for that class. Nearly a year later, the recruitment of additional participants continued with an ethics review that was specific to this thesis work. My supervisor recommended several more colleagues with relevant experience, and with consent I completed four more interviews.

My initial sampling included more participants in the discipline of education simply because these were people that my supervisor reached out to in his interactions with his fellow colleagues in the education program. However, I was pleased by the inclusion of a few other disciplines outside of the social sciences. This second round – and all of the interviews from that point on – happened to take place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Naturally, the participants had concerns about how the pandemic was affecting their students, but these concerns were not the overall focus of this research

² Not all of the participants in this study had formal training in trauma-informed practices, but the phrase trauma-informed will be used throughout to maintain consistency with the standard terminology in trauma studies.

and the interview protocol did not specifically focus on them. In fact, the questions specifically encouraged interviewees to reflect on their overall experiences regarding trauma-informed teaching.

Table 3.1. Participants, their disciplines and institution types

Name	Discipline	Type of Institution
Emily	Criminology	University
James	Education	University
Rachel	Education	University
Paul	Education	University
Vernon	Education	Liberal Arts College
Hannah	Psychology	University, Private Colleges
Amanda	Education	University, Liberal Arts College
Carrie	Education	University
Lisa	Psychological Sciences	University
Sarah	Health Sciences	Private College
Oola	Biology	University
Grady	English	Community College
Siobhan	Writing	University

After I completed those additional four interviews, I requested suggestions for other appropriate participants from the first group using a snowball sampling method. The concept behind snowball sampling is to ask participants to recommend others with experience relevant to the study (Noy, 2008). However, this approach produced few additional participants. After several attempts to find more participants through snowball sampling, I turned to social media to flesh out my participant list. With approval from the Office of Research Ethics, I sent out a request on Twitter for college instructors who had

taught both online and face-to-face, who were interested in how trauma affects their students, and who apply trauma-informed practices to their teaching. This strategy was wildly successful. I quickly had 13 interviews scheduled, and more on hold while I waited to analyze my data.

3.5.4. Data Collection

When I conducted my initial interview, my interest at that point was in determining whether instructors were approaching online learning with a trauma-informed lens at all. As suggested by grounded theory, my initial interview could lead me to reconsider my research question (Charmaz, 2014). It was possible, and perhaps likely, that even educators who are concerned about the effects of trauma do not apply trauma-informed principles in an online platform. This issue resolved itself through subsequent interviews. Because I recruited participants who self-selected as thoughtful about how trauma affects student learning, they were all using some manner of trauma-informed practices online.

At that point, it was clear that my interview questions needed revision. The data I was gathering weren't congruent with my early understanding of grounded theory. I originally thought that I needed to focus exclusively on the process these instructors used to design trauma-informed classes. I wanted to have a better understanding of that process, but I was equally interested in the instructors' emotional commitment to their students. I became curious about what these instructors thought their responsibility was to see their students as whole people whose learning is impacted by their emotional states and histories. As a consequence of this additional line of inquiry, I added several new questions to my interview guide that reflected this interest.

3.5.5. Coding

As the mother of constructivist grounded theory, I relied heavily on Charmaz' 2014 text *Constructing Grounded Theory*, especially for the coding portion of the analysis. While I wanted to remain faithful to this complex research method, attempting to follow so closely to this text may have been to my detriment. Charmaz explicitly says that, "Constructivist grounded theory highlights the flexibility of the method and resists mechanical applications of it" (p. 13). This was the crux of the problem. I needed specific

direction in how to use constructivist grounded theory, by but definition it defies detailed guidelines. Nevertheless, I persisted.

Initial coding was far and away the most challenging aspect of an already challenging methodological framework. I initially dove in without a clear understanding of constructivist grounded theory, and for my first interview I sorted the codes by theme. I was initially looking at general patterns that developed rather than looking for process and staying close to the data by coding with action words as Charmaz suggests (2014). I later scrapped these codes once I had a better understanding of the initial, focused and theoretical coding processes based on categories and not themes. With a vague understanding of how to proceed, I began line-by-line initial coding.

The next obstacle in the process was gaining enough understanding of line-by-line coding to begin using the method of analysis faithfully. Charmaz (2014) describes this as, “naming each line of your written data” (p. 124). She tells us that this method “seems arbitrary” but is an effective tool for developing a deep understanding of the text. I wanted my work to reflect the process as described in the literature and was cautious of what I considered a line because as Charmaz (2014) tells us, “The size of the unit of data to code matters” (p. 124).

When I referenced the examples given by Charmaz (2014) in her text (e.g. pgs. 119 & 123), I noticed that not every line is coded, and she often takes bits from the previous line or the following line to include in a code. I found myself following the same procedure. Too often I was unable to code a line because words from the previous line completed the idea. I remained as close as I could to line-by-line coding, but I felt it wasn’t possible to stay totally within those parameters. I often had to go over more than just a line of text to stay close to the data. I moved forward with the coding following this method.

Focusing on action, as Charmaz (2014) guides us to do, I used action words to create the codes. However, it was often quite challenging to identify the process that a participant was using. Their processes could be described with a dozen different words - all potentially fitting. I found this especially obstructive when I was coding beliefs and values. I ended up using the word “Identifying” and “Describing” quite a bit in these

situations, such as “Identifying anxiety as a sign of trauma” and “Describing how trauma affects learning.”

Constant comparison was somewhat expedited using NVivo. While I coded the interviews and typed the code into the coding field, the system would bring up previous codes with the same keywords highlighted in bold. This automated tool smoothed out the process considerably. As my intention was to stay close to the data, I did not find a lot of overlapping codes, as each code had its own unique expression during initial coding.

After I had initially coded several interviews, I noticed patterns that could be turned into focused codes. I simultaneously continued with initial coding of interviews while I sorted and categorized focused codes. I initially thought this process resulted in a smooth transition of categories that could be turned into theoretical codes and used for sampling. However, more exploration of the focused codes was necessary. I memoed ideas as they came to me while I coded. Some of the codes didn’t fit the categories that I created, but I continued to code and memo. The categories that developed during initial and focused coding went through several iterations, yet eventually firmed up and were ready for theoretical sampling.

I was fortunate to work with a group of participants who had self-identified as instructors concerned with how trauma affects their students. Working with this group of participants required fewer follow-up interviews during the theoretical sampling stage. Categories had been sorted, and I nearly considered them finalized, with the exception of one area that needed further explanation.

I found a conflict in the responses to the questions “What responsibility do you feel toward supporting students emotionally in your courses?” and “Have you discussed with students what would support them with sensitive materials in your courses?”. The answers to the former question enthusiastically embraced the idea of emotionally supporting students. In response to the latter question, instructors were more reticent and often rejected the idea that they should ask students straightforwardly what they need. I completed three additional interviews to gain more clarity around these contradictory reactions: one from a participant from an arts and humanities discipline,

one from sciences, and one from education. This theoretical sampling fulfilled my intention of fleshing out the categories, as Charmaz (2014) proscribes.

3.5.6. Memoing

Per grounded theory methodology, I used memos to record my research process (Charmaz, 2017). The memoing was fairly straightforward. Throughout the process, I noted ideas, complexities and challenges that I faced, starting with my first interview. Initially, this process mostly consisted of noting my challenges with coding and navigating my initial interviews. I wrote memos about specific lines of text that stood out to me, and words or ideas whose meaning I wondered about. Further along in the analysis, memoing consisted of the formation of categories and questions that emerged from the data. Later, I wrote about my thoughts on the categories I was developing.

3.6. Summary

Grounded theory is a complex, ambiguously defined and confusingly prescribed research methodology. This chapter details many of these challenges. As I navigated the stairs of constructivist grounded theory that both go up while upside down but also that end in a wall, I found supports in the form of other dissertation writers such as Oram (2016) and Cloninger (2017), the social researchers Bowers and Schatzman (2009) and doctoral students Nagel, Burns, Tilley and Aubin (2015).

Chapter 4. Results

We have to articulate a vision of the world we want, don't we?

~ *Sasha Costanza-Chock*

4.1. Dimensional Analysis

As my analytical work progressed beyond my fully fleshed out categories, dimensional analysis fulfilled the need to have my work guided by some analytic structure. This was the specific intention of the creator of dimensional analysis, Leonard Schatzman (Kools et al., 1996). Kools et al. describe Schatzman's belief that previously, "the operations involved in discovering theory remained largely mysterious and undisclosed" (p. 313). Schatzman saw dimensional analysis as aligned with grounded theory, yet more explicit in its own instruction and procedures to support the analysis.

Rooted in natural analysis – the process Schatzman used to describe our socialized ability to navigate day-to-day problems – dimensional analysis encourages a similar process of investigation. Part of the socialized skill of this type of analysis is the ability to "address the complexity of a phenomenon by noting its attributes, context, process, and meaning" (Kools et al., 1996, p. 316).³ This leads right into the underlying meaning of dimensional analysis, which looks more holistically at all the elements that make up the experience being studied. It stands in contrast to earlier iterations of grounded theory that consist of gaining an understanding of the basic social processes of a situation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Kools et al. describe dimensional analysis as a methodological strategy that "serves to illuminate the plethora of dimensions and corresponding sets of properties unique to any phenomenon" (1996, p. 317).

Schatzman believed that earlier forms of grounded theory neglected to include essential and specific processes of categorizing that focused on identifying value in

³ Most of the literature on dimensional analysis has not been written by Leonard Schatzman. The method began as a way for Schatzman to support his students in the analysis phase of their grounded theory research and continued for some time through oral tradition. His students then began to publish their own articles on dimensional analysis which remains the bulk of the literature in this area – although in 1991 Schatzman published his own description of this method.

dimensions. This lack of description of the sorting hierarchy made learning about grounded theory, as noted, challenging and “was at least a partial explanation for the mysterious nature of analysis” (Bowers & Schatzman, 2009, p. 92). This assertion was the beginning of Schatzman’s formation of dimensional analysis. As did Schatzman’s students, I did not find that comparative analysis fully supported my analytic work (Bowers & Schatzman, 2009). As mentioned in earlier chapters, I found constructivist grounded theory challenging, and I have chosen to use dimensional analysis to facilitate theory generation.

As described in dimensional analysis, early on in my data gathering, characteristics began to emerge from the data and easily form into dimensions. There were several iterations of dimension forming, and they remained fluid through the analysis, but ultimately the data formed around certain ideas. I used dimensional analysis as a tool later in the process to analyze categories that I fleshed out into their dimensional components. There was no clear path to evaluating the categories and being guided by the direction as delineated by Schatzman provided much-needed support (Bowers & Schatzman, 2009).

Analyzing data in terms of dimensions involves a process called designation, which is simply categorizing the dimensions and properties. The goal is theory generation; thus, the purpose of designation is to move closer to theory by way of greater abstraction. In dimensional analysis, the perspective – described here as the core dimension – is the overarching theme that runs through all of the dimensions. The core dimension guides the description of the phenomena under study.

While the data are analyzed and reach a saturation of the dimensions, the next stage is organization into an explanatory matrix. Here is where the data are described and the explanatory matrix provides “the researcher with both a structure and context for explanation” (Kools et al., 1996, p. 317). Each dimension then breaks down via the explanatory matrix. The components that make up the explanatory matrix include *Context, Conditions, Processes, and Consequences*. *Context* represents the environment in which the studied social process happens. The *Condition* is what affects and influences the process. *Processes* are the actions that are part of the larger social process. And *Consequences* are the results of the processes (Kools et al., 1996).

The *Context* for this research includes both Online and Face-to-Face learning environments and remains consistent throughout the analysis. Online includes fully designed pre-COVID online classes as well as emergency remote classes. Face-to-Face denotes a classroom where students and instructors gather together in a physical environment or classroom of some sort. The following section includes a discussion of the core dimension and the four primary dimensions.

Outside of the core dimension, which holds the most abstract and general orientation toward trauma-informed learning environments, every dimension and dimensional component has a corresponding online lens. That lens will be addressed next, within each of the dimensions and dimensional components.

4.2. Core and Primary Dimensions

Among the dimensions, one rises to the top as holding the meaning that binds all the dimensions together. Kools et al. (1996) describe this core dimension as holding the most explanatory power (p. 318).

4.2.1. Core Dimension: Creating a Learning Environment of Care

The idea that emerged from the data collected from college instructors who carried some level of trauma sensitivity regarding students was the idea of *Creating a Learning Environment of Care*. This dimension encapsulated the intention that all instructors were working toward. Regardless of the *Context*, the purpose remained the same. Whether instructors were teaching an online or a face-to-face class, they were creating with care in mind.

Table 4.1. Creating a Learning Environment of Care

CONTEXT	CONDITIONS	PROCESSES	CONSEQUENCES
Online, Face-to-Face	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seeing students as whole persons	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creating a safer space• Supporting learning• Making a welcome space• Building support• Showing care• Foregrounding addressing trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students feeling safer• Students can take risks• Benefits everyone• An ethical relationship• A safer environment for learning

Conditions

The condition surrounding the creation of this environment was *Seeing Students as Whole Persons*. Instructors did not separate students into distinct emotional and learning components. They were highly aware that emotional state affects learning, and the two cannot be separated. Grady describes the impossibility of this construction:

The idea that we're gonna somehow chop up learning and say like, this is your academic learning, and this is your social-emotional learning is, that's poorly constructed; it doesn't happen that way.

Emily made the caveat that although they work toward creating safer spaces for students, the reality is that a trauma-informed classroom is only an ideal. Emily described it in this way, “Safety in the classroom is a misnomer, in the sense that there's no such thing as a truly safe classroom.”

Processes

Several components made up the processes involved in *Creating a Learning Environment of Care*. Instructors were focused on *Creating a Safer Space* for students to learn. Grady said, “Fundamentally, I'm working to create a space where people feel seen, heard and respected, where people experience relational safety.” To build this safer environment they planned for *Supporting Learning*. They were very intentional about planning that was focused on helping students learn. Sara said this: “It's about

what's gonna make the environment the most successful for the students to learn in a variety of ways." Instructors were also *Making a Welcome Space*. They had an understanding that environment matters, and they could support students by being purposeful about creating a learning space that is warm and welcoming. This was a priority for Siobhan who said, "...one of the first things...is to think about how to make your class a welcoming space."

Additionally, *Building Support* was another aspect of creating this environment that Emily described: "We're going to do what we can to build a classroom environment where you can learn from each other." It was also important to instructors to express concern for students by *Showing Care*. They wanted students to feel cared for and to know that someone was concerned about their wellbeing. Siobhan again tells us what this means to her as an instructor: "I think I do a good job of coming off as someone who clearly cares about them as whole people." Foregrounding *Addressing Trauma* was the last component that emerged from the *Processes*. Instructors knew that applying practices that mitigated and prevented trauma created a foundation for learning and focused on these practices. James explained how his thinking has changed in relation to this foregrounding: "It's certainly...made itself more evident now that I think I have to and want to foreground it more."

Consequences

Several consequences resulted from the previously described processes, including *Students Feeling Safer*. Amanda shares the result of her process to generate that safety:

So when I'm face to face, I spend a lot of time building communities, because we know that one of the things that helps trauma affected people the most is feeling connected, having relationships, feeling safe in the classroom.

Having an environment where *Students Can Take Risks* was an important focus for instructors. Vernon says that risks do require discomfort but emphasizes the concern surrounding it: "...it's a discomfort that's always surrounded with care." These trauma-informed practices benefit everyone, as Siobhan tells us:

I think that's trauma informed teaching, but it benefits everybody even, even benefits the person who just wants to go party on Thursday.... They know they can they have a little bit of extra time, but it also

benefits people who may really be struggling because of trauma or anything else.

Instructors also made statements to the effect that they felt this approach was the only ethical way to teach. For example, Grady shared these thoughts, “I found that using a trauma-informed approach, all the time, is the only responsible way for me to enter into that educator-student relationship ethically” (Grady). Amanda expressed what all the instructors were ultimately aiming for. She wanted students, “Feeling safe in the classroom.”

4.2.2. Primary Dimension: Describing the Lived Experience as an Instructor

This dimension encompasses what it means to be a caring teacher, as described by the instructors themselves. It includes attitudes about teaching, the student-teacher relationship, the teaching environment, the educational system, and instructors articulating their role and responsibilities.

Table 4.2. Describing the Lived Experience as an Instructor

CONTEXT	CONDITIONS	PROCESSES	CONSEQUENCES
Online, Face-to-Face	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Awareness of their limitations• Being conscious of power dynamics• Feeling concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attempting to understand student needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning and growing

Instructors felt significant responsibility toward supporting students emotionally. Grady stated, “I mean, what responsibility do you have to support people emotionally that are around you all the time doing other things? It's key, it's key.” In response to the question of how much emotional responsibility they felt toward their students, Siobhan simply said, “Enormously.” Amanda also described the responsibility of creating safety in the classroom, “I think part of the responsibility is to create, create that emotional safety and sort of attend to learners feeling safe enough to take those risks in their thinking.”

There were a variety of ways that my participants described their supportive role as instructors. Some of the responses included: guide rather than sage, facilitator, creator of structure, creator of context for learning, provider of guidance during challenge, and creator of a space for learning, reflection, and community.

Instructors described a broad range of expertise in trauma-informed practices as listed here. When asked what they knew about trauma-informed practices Sara joked that she knew “Everything,” yet Oola said, “Very little.” Sara mentioned learning about trauma-informed practices and what had changed for her, “It changed everything. It changed everything I teach, and the lens I teach through. It changes how I lead my teams and how I interact with people.” James describes the process of learning about trauma-informed practices:

It's been kind of incidental increment for me, and it's been situational, right? I haven't, I haven't consciously said, oh I'm going to be more trauma-informed. Um, it's happened, because of say, learning more about what triggers people.

Although there was a range of experience described by the instructors, Sara explains becoming trauma-informed as a journey. And Hannah expressed the idea that education itself traumatizes: “Every aspect of learning is different with me because I say right up front, education traumatizes all the participants. So how are we going to learn together in a way that doesn't traumatize us?” To prevent further harm, Hannah explicitly tells her students her orientation toward people who are vulnerable to trauma:

I'm referring in this moment to the mildest example of spectral educational trauma, not wanting to traumatize and re-traumatize in any learning environment in that way, but there are so many other examples. So when we were talking about safety, I'm in that moment. I'm attempting not to traumatize and retraumatize or marginalize students, so I let them know that I'm an ally.

Online – Describing the Lived Experience as an Instructor

Vernon mentioned a preference for face-to-face teaching. But Emily goes further to question her resistance: “Why am I so reluctant to do this in an online [environment]?” Other instructors had very optimistic views about the online landscape. Hannah said, “I think that it's been a democratizing thing overall.” Lisa also expressed enthusiasm about teaching online: “I really loved teaching online. I like the flexibility that it allows, and also, just the challenge to design a course experience that's meaningful for students.”

Siobhan, Amanda, Emily, and Paul described the difficulty of teaching in a trauma-informed way online. Rachel related her experience of trying to support students emotionally online: “I think we believe it's important. But I don't think we have a lot of tools or strategy.”

Conditions

Awareness of their Limitations

The first condition, *Awareness of their Limitations*, showed the reflective nature of these instructors, and their awareness of areas in which they needed further development. The data included several comments about their lack of knowledge about trauma-informed practices. Vernon explains it this way: “If you were to ask me about, like specific trauma-informed practices, I can tell you what my gut says, and what I've experienced works, but I could not tell you what the research says.” Lisa mentioned that she wanted to know more about how to support students in this way, but suggested it was an institutional responsibility to provide that support: “I don't know, I think we should receive better training.” She was unclear about where to even find assistance – “I literally can't figure out who actually knows about trauma-informed teaching or where I might learn about it.”

Online - Awareness of their Limitations

Several instructors also mentioned the need for more training and support in online teaching and learning. They were aware of their lack of expertise and wished to develop those skills. Siobhan stated it clearly: “There is...a lot of us who...need more training than just face-to-face.” They also expressed concern about addressing sensitive material online. Oola admitted, “I don't even know if I did it well enough.” Rachel went on to explain how she felt a lack of support: “We need way more information on how to support students and also how to support instructors and teaching faculty with trauma when you are online.”

Awareness of the Power Dynamics

The next condition, *Awareness of the Power Dynamics*, made it clear that the instructors as a group are thoughtful about their power as instructors and how they could unintentionally mishandle that power and create harm. Vernon explains it this way: “I

have enormous power to, with a casual or throwaway phrase, to gut somebody, right? Just to gut somebody." Grady purposely uses his instructional role to break up these dynamics:

So [I want] to be a guide, a mentor, to be a person with expertise, but to honor the self determination of the individuals in my classes because that's an empowering intervention that dismantles the more traditional power structures that exist in a teacher-student relationship. Because I find those are oppressive and disempowering, and don't ultimately lead to the kind of self-sustaining growth that we should aim, that I believe we should aim for.

Siobhan is aware of how students may have been harmed previously by instructors who abused their power. She used this assumption to inform the way she interacts with students: "So I guess I think about this a lot in terms of response[s] to students that I think, I always assume that there are people who have been treated poorly by teachers who didn't take them seriously or didn't really take their work seriously."

Relatedly, it was common for instructors to share thoughts about the prevalence of racism and equity in relation to this condition. Carrie said, "And the idea is that, like racism is embedded in so much of the way that we conceptualize and think about [my discipline] and, and teach it and assess it." Grady explained the how racism adds more obstacles to learning. He sees how racial trauma makes it difficult for BIPOC to participate fully and speak up in class: "And that's, you know, inextricably tied into white supremacy."

Online – Awareness of the Power Dynamics

In relation to power dynamics, several instructors found the online platform democratizing. Amanda said:

I think, maybe most present for me when I'm teaching in-service teachers is just like, the flexibility and ability to gather people from different areas, or people who wouldn't have been able to take time off to go to a class, but they can do one online.

Amanda found flexibility supportive for students in a democratizing way: "...the flexibility and ability to gather people from different areas, or people who wouldn't have been able to take time off to go to a class but they can do one online." Siobhan found that having conversations around equity were more accessible online: "And I have found that that

conversation actually seems to work better online when people can just think about that question and posts themselves.”

Feeling Concern

The last condition in this dimension is *Feeling Concern*. All of the instructors who participated felt great concern for the emotional well-being of their students. Paul expresses his investment this way: “I really want to know how they’re doing emotionally and physically.” Vernon describes it as an obligation to express care: “We absolutely have an obligation to be careful with our students, right?” Instructors went to great lengths to be supportive for students emotionally. Emily shared this: “I do everything I can to find a way to make [the classroom] safer for students.” James related a similar sense of care for a student who was struggling with a death in the family by saying he was willing to “do anything I can.” He even went so far as to say that helping students was an “obligation.” Vernon also used the word “obligation” to define his responsibility to care for students. James described not providing any support as “negligent.” Lisa found herself affected by the attitude of her colleagues who did not learn over their experience as educators to be more compassionate and flexible. She explained it this way: “I’m even more horrified when I still see colleagues and other people I know, who are still just teaching [rigidly without care for students] because they can’t be bothered.” Concern also expressed itself as worry, as Oola said when she touched on emotionally intense material: “I definitely was worried about my students.”

Online – Feeling Concern

The running theme in instructors’ *Feeling Concern* for students online was the worry that they aren’t supporting students well enough. There was a spectrum of distress over their perceived lack of supporting students well enough online. Rachel describes her particular experience on one end of the spectrum: “Online I don’t know how to do that really.... It is very challenging, and it’s tricky, and I’m really not sure I’m doing a good job at all. Like, it is upsetting for me.” Rachel, however, was able to provide a caring presence with more effort. She explains it this way: “I feel like that just comes off naturally in person in ways that it won’t online unless I really do something about it.”

Processes

Attempting to Understand Student Needs

Attempting to Understand Student Needs stood out as the process component within *Describing the Lived Experience as an Instructor*. The instructors felt that before they implemented any interventions in their instruction, they needed to first understand what students actually needed. They aimed to set aside assumptions and made a genuine attempt to identify student needs. Then they went on to take those needs into consideration in the design of their classes. Grady did this through attempting to understand who his students are as people: “For me, as the instructor to understand who this person is and how they're doing, because who they are, and how they're doing has a big impact on how I might seek to instruct them.”

There were some conflicting ideas about how instructors went about identifying student needs. Without exception, instructors chose not to ask the class directly what would support them. Rather, they tended to ask students in individual situations, as Sara did: “And so I wouldn't say it's a class discussion. I would say it's more of a like a one on one. How, what do you need?” In another example, Carrie sent a survey before the start of class, “And I asked lots of questions about that, like, what do you need to feel supported? Are there any, is there anything I need to be aware of?” However, some instructors were hesitant to ask students specifically what they felt they needed. Rachel identified the importance of supporting students emotionally, but expressed caution:

I think we believe it's important. But I don't think we have a lot of tools or strateg[ies].... So there's a, there might be a discrepancy, like, or gap between what we believe is important and what we actually doing, like in terms of action, and in terms of pedagogical approaches, and also strategies.

Rachel also wondered if students would have answers if asked directly. “I think that challenge sometimes is, students don't know [what they need].”

Online - Attempting to Understand Student Needs

Rachel's biggest concern in an online format was the instructor's lack of ability to identify what students needed after engaging with emotionally charged material, and if a student is in distress, how they might go about getting support. She expressed it this way, “We spend less time with them [in an online class]. I don't think that's healthy, and

it, it is a concern. Because then they just “end meeting” [on the video call], right? Just leave. And then they’re by themselves at home. They may have family members. We don’t know, right?”

Consequences

Growing and Learning

The consequences of the conditions and processes resulted in instructors *Growing and Learning*. The learning that instructors experienced moved them from a lesser understanding of students’ needs into a greater understanding. When asked what they do to support students, Sara responded by saying this:

I've grown, because I would say in the beginning, if you would have asked me that question, it would have been about what am I teaching and how do I feel comfortable? Teaching in front of a class? What makes me the most comfortable teaching? And it's [now] about what's gonna make the environment the most successful for the students to learn in a variety of ways.

Rachel also discussed learning in relation to the tension of not having expertise in addressing trauma: “I’m not sure if I’m doing the correct things, or not, right? So it’s kind of a learning experience.” Instructors also talked about specific instances of new understanding, such as this from Sara:

I had one student, [in] my human sexuality class who came to my office after I talked about ACEs [Adverse Childhood Experiences] and was bawling because both of her parents had multiple trauma events growing up, were they going to die early? And so we, we talked about that. [It was a] really good reflection for me to know how I talk about the impact [of those experiences] on disability and death, early death and resilience and healing.”

The experience of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic also initiated its own insights, as Siobhan said: “I think my, my progress through the pandemic has only made me feel, like, compassionate. Inclusive teaching is simply more meant for more people more of the time.” Instructors often felt such a need for information on trauma-informed practices during this crisis that they initiated their own exploration and learning in a variety of ways. Most notable was the dynamic of instructors who were involved in learning as part of the process. James describes this as “Learning right along with them.” Oola likewise said “I’m also learning in the classroom from my students.”

Online - Growing and Learning

Carrie expressed a concern about how to address trauma online and was unclear about how to do that. She said, "Maybe that's my own, like, you know, spot where I'm unaware of it, and I need to be thinking about it more." Even if instructors weren't well versed in this particular area of teaching, they were reflective and aware, and expressed a desire to learn more.

4.2.3. Primary Dimension: Being Present for Students

From *Describing the Lived Experience as an Instructor*, the category *Being Present for Students* moves further away from principles and ideas about teaching into slightly more practical applications.

Table 4.3 Being Present for Students

CONTEXT	CONDITIONS	PROCESSES	CONSEQUENCES
Online, Face-to-Face	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Noticing distress	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Validating experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Creating space

Presence was mentioned by the instructors as a commonly used practice, especially with emotionally charged content or with distressed students. However, presence does not have to be a complex practice; it can simply mean being thoughtfully in the moment. Grady describes this: "I try to remind myself to do less. And to just be present." Hannah emphasizes the importance of being mindful and present for students to address trauma: "Mindfulness [is] the foundational tool for trauma." Paul uses presence to encourage students to use their own strengths, "There are ways of gathering, reclaiming our attention and our own presence and our center." Hannah also uses presence to focus on student strengths:

When you increase mindfulness, you increase your ability to be open to the present moment, with balanced awareness. And in so doing, it would leave each person open to capturing the resources that are most relevant to them. So it's more about enabling and empowering students with the skills to identify their own trauma and finding ways to be supported and treated around it.

However, Hannah asks us to be cautious when using mindfulness: “I caution practitioners, because it has its risks, and its benefits and then it’s important to be aware of them.” While Hannah didn’t elaborate, being checked out can be an effective coping technique for managing trauma. Forcing or even encouraging mindfulness might be detrimental for students with heavy burdens of trauma and should be done cautiously and with great skill.

Online - Being Present for Students

Instructors tried to bring mindfulness and presence to the online platform despite sensing obstacles. Grady used his presence to show up for students online, “I try to be as present as I can, in our online discussion forums.” And Amanda created a specific time for mindfulness, “I did a mindful moment every week.” Carrie found it a challenge to be present for students online because as she said, “That’s tricky with online, though, because I wasn’t in all of their breakout sessions.”

Conditions

Being Present for Students Involved Noticing Distress

All of the instructors had some understanding of what trauma looked like in their students, and the condition surrounding *Being Present for Students* involved *Noticing Distress*. Even instructors who did not have structured training in trauma-informed practices had an intuitive understanding of how trauma affects students. Rachel said this, “I don’t want to say interesting, but it is interesting for me to, kind of verify, that kind of my gut instinct that I have about this particular student.” They were often able to pinpoint challenges that students were having with executive functioning. In his interview, Grady produced a list: “planning and prioritizing, accessing their frontal lobe for like organizational skills, frustration tolerance.” Planning and problems with deadlines came up several times in the interviews.

Interviewees also recognized depression and shutdown as indications of trauma. Siobhan described what shutdown looked like to her:

Some students can take [a position of] “Well, I’m going to come to class, but you can’t make me talk. I’m going to come to class and I’m just going to do what you explicitly told me to do. But I’m not putting a lot

in. And, and then, you know, maybe I'm just gonna stop coming and I'm not gonna, I'm not gonna do any work."

Instructors also saw students' difficulty with ambiguity as a sign of trauma affecting their learning. Amanda mentioned, "Challenges seeing like, gray areas between black and white perspectives." Trauma could also be visible in its effects on wellness: Amanda mentioned disrupted sleep or eating. There was also a recognition that trauma affects safety and trust, as Amanda says, "And so, you know, and also trauma impacts trust and can impact, you know, the willingness to take those risks I was talking about, or willingness to engage with peers." Trauma can additionally affect how a person thinks about themselves. Siobhan explains it this way: "...trauma can also give people really terrible stories to tell about themselves."

While there was a large amount of data that described what instructors saw as trauma in their students, there was clarity that trauma doesn't necessarily have hard and fast rules. There was some difficulty around identifying more internal signs of trauma, since some of its symptoms, such as poor self-concept or a tendency to see things in black-and-white terms, would not be something an instructor could necessarily identify from interaction in a classroom setting. Lisa said, "I mean, I assume most of the consequences that students have from experiencing trauma are not obvious in class."

Online - Being Present for Students Involved Noticing Distress

Only Vernon, Rachel and Grady had thoughts on how they noticed distress online. Rachel explained how students felt discomfort with crying on camera: "And people are very uncomfortable [with that], right? Like people just feeling like turning off their camera." It seems apparent that fewer responses from the participants about how they notice distress online is evidence for how difficult is it to identify when students are struggling.

Vernon also talked about the difficulty in differentiating distress online from hyper controlling behaviors. "It's hard to tell on Zoom, you know, if that's happening or not. But the hyper control, [is] one I've seen happening [in] classrooms, synchronous, asynchronous." Vernon gives more explanation about the meaning of controlling behaviors:

I've seen the hyper perfectionism is probably the one [sign of trauma] that I've seen more often. You know, where, where control, controlling, controlling, controlling, and I have to get an A. I have to get an A, and it has to be a perfect A. And, oh, there's ambiguity in this situation.... Ambiguity is not, not going to work or tell me exactly what I need to do. And the inability, the inability to let processes play out. You know, wanting, wanting answers right now...that's probably the most common one. I think it is that, that because there's an element of my life that is or was out of control, that has hurt me. I will control everything else, everything else that [I] can.

Processes

Validating Experiences

The process around *Being Present for Students* involved *Validating Experiences*. Vernon revealed the different aspects of validating student experiences:

There's a posture of humility that an instructor can take, that is going to involve listening to students...that allows for the students to know things through lived experience that the instructor does not know. And when those things come up, to acknowledge them, and say, yeah, no, that's a great point.

Lisa said something similar in regard to the layered nature of trauma and what she terms a “racial pandemic”:

And so we should be aware of these, like multiple experiences that people are having.... I would say I'm trying more to, like, acknowledge that [racial trauma] are potential experiences...and that they are...certainly valid ones to be having.

Instructors paid particular attention to acknowledging and accepting students' struggles. Paul said, "...given all this, all the demands that [my] student teachers are facing, it is only natural that they'll feel stressed and anxious and really struggling." He goes on to say, "That struggle, challenge and dis-ease as just a characteristic of life, is just a feature of what we go through." Normalizing struggle was a theme that came up as well. Rachel explained how she approaches this:

I try to normalize having problems in that I tend to talk very publicly about the support services that are available on campus. I talk a lot about, I made sure everybody in class knows what should you do if you think you can't get an assignment in on time, so that people will [understand] that having problems isn't some private thing that people are sitting wondering what should they do.

Relatedly, Vernon spoke about communicating the real expectation of distress with students: "We're gonna talk about hard things, and we're gonna have hard conversations, and you're gonna be uncomfortable."

Online - Validating Experiences

One approach to addressing trauma online was described as similar to those used in face-to-face classes. *Validating experiences* and struggle remained the same regardless of the platform. Even though she chose to address stress and not trauma directly, Amanda describes her experience: "I touched on like, stress a lot [in my online class] and, and try to sort of narrate and talk about how they might be feeling stress, different strategies to manage stress."

Consequences

Creating Space

Creating Space was the consequence of the other three components. There was understanding of the emotional nature of learning that informed their desire to allow time for emotions to be expressed rather than focusing solely on content and instruction. Noticing student distress and validating these experiences led to creating space for emotions.

Instructors tried to be there for students and recognize their distress without attempting to change it. Paul describes it this way: "I try to hold the space, space open for that emotion to be there, and for people to bring whatever state that they're in." Sara creates an open class where students can come and go as needed to allow space: "I've a very open classroom, like, take a breather, don't come back if you don't need to, come late, leave early." Paul also emphasized the need to acknowledge emotions before it was possible to create space for them, "And then it's only through talking about, talking through whatever it is that they're feeling, then we can, we can see how we can make some room." James felt somewhat at a loss for how to deal with student distress but chose space as a way to support them. He said, "All I could really do was try to hold the space for everyone and give space for silence."

Online - Creating Space

The most common way instructors held space online was through suggesting and encouraging students to take breaks. Rachel simply asked students to take a break, “And sometimes I will ask them. Ok, let’s get a ten-minute break. You guys go get, you know, tea or coffee or walk outside, and then just come back.”

4.2.4. Primary Dimension: Building Positive Student-Instructor Relationships

Among the dimensions, the one that moved furthest along the spectrum from abstract to more concrete, was *Building Positive Student-Instructor Relationships*.

Table 4.4 Building Positive Student-Instructor Relationships

CONTEXT	CONDITIONS	PROCESSES	CONSEQUENCES
Online, Face-to-Face	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not focusing on deficit• Respecting Boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communicating	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Building Trust

Instructors spent a considerable amount of time developing relationships with their students. James describes his intention in working individually with students: “[In] doing the one-on-one meetings, it is, my intention is, to sort of in just a friendly way, find out a little more about them.” The instructors found power in relationships with their students. As Sara said, “I would say that, that educators ...that want to, like, change their culture of where they work, they’re there because they believe in the healing power of the connection.” Amanda talks about her willingness to be a support for students: “Often as an instructor, you can be in a position to sort of like the, you know, just part of the web of support...and just be like, one more person in their life that is kind of looking out for them.” One of the consequences of developing relationships is not just that students feel a safer relational environment, but the instructors themselves developed feelings of affection for students. Vernon expressed his special regard for his students, “And I always finish the semester just kind of in love with my students.... I’m in awe of what some of my students, what they carry, and what they’re able to do, in the midst of all they’re carrying.”

Even though instructors felt responsible to help students emotionally, they felt constrained by their lack of expertise. As Lisa expressed, "I would feel wholly ill equipped to help somebody who is like, you know, living, let's say, with an abusive partner, and needed help to, like, get out of that living situation. I wouldn't know what to do with that person. I have no clinical or...counseling training." They seemed very clear about the limits of what they can do for students. As Siobhan told me, "I'm not a counselor, it's not my job to be responsible for my students' wellness in that sense."

Online - Building Positive Student-Instructor Relationships

Building Student-Instructor Relationships online held its own challenges. Carrie emphasizes putting more effort into developing relationships in the online modality. "I can tell you without shadow of a doubt, I did that a lot, especially online and in a global pandemic." She also discussed the relational dynamic of having many students not use their cameras online. "And yet I like loved them and came to really know them. And somehow I never saw their faces." But Siobhan worried that her caring nature didn't come through online. "In online classes, I have to think harder about how to communicate to them that I am a caring person." Oola was especially cautious about not assuming the race of her students who were not using cameras, especially within the context of the intensity of racial tensions in the U.S. (where she teaches):

...a lot of students typically at our university that take the summer courses are non-Caucasian. But I it was like going to online [for remote teaching during the pandemic], and I have, like, I don't want to make assumptions, reading people's names, because I don't know for sure. And not being able to see any of the students, I [have] never been more nervous about trying to make, like, an equity and inclusivity statement.

Grady explained that he negotiated the relationship divide by spending more time in developing those relationships with students by spending more time on it: "I have also... done longer-form individual conferencing, with students."

Conditions

Not Focusing on Deficit

The first condition of *Building Positive Student-Instructor Relationships* was *Not Focusing on Deficit*. The overwhelming theme of this condition was agency and empowerment. Instructors wanted to give students power over how they interacted in the

class and with the content and additionally to build students up emotionally. Although Carrie acknowledged the ease of applying a negative lens to trauma: "I think it's really easy to place a deficit lens [on students]." Instructors had different approaches that they used to focus on uplifting students. Sara focuses not just on students but "How we can all thrive." Paul looks at how he can, "Not necessarily...abolish the stress, or to be in a totally different mental state [but find] a way so that they can still remain buoyant, and upright in the midst of all that stress." Siobhan tries to communicate that instructors are there to support students: "College is really complicated, and I think the teachers try to make it easy for students to succeed, not by reducing standards or anything, but just by making it really clear that it is possible to be successful in college." Sara emphasizes that the negative side of trauma isn't fate: "It's not that destiny that some people say or that we hear about.... we [as a society] focus on the doom and gloom instead of the thriving and the healing that can come from it." James specifically aims for encouraging agency with students: "[I try to] help them find some aspect of agency." Several instructors talked about respect and admiration for students, for how they handle stress and life's challenges. Vernon expresses it this way:

My students who, who I know have been traumatized [I'm just] in awe of them. Just in awe of, like I said, I couldn't get out of bed if I, if I were carrying some of the stuff that my students would carry. And they are. They're pretty awesome people.

Assuming the best of students was another repeated theme. Vernon exemplifies this:

I assume the best of my students.... We're going to start with that assumption.... Sometimes I discover otherwise, but I start there. So, I encourage us all, let's start there with each other. Let's all assume the best until we know otherwise.

Grady prevents engaging in a deficient mindset by focusing on the wealth of knowledge that students bring into the class: "Understanding that every single person, when they walk into a classroom, already has a whole fund of incredibly useful skills." He goes on to address this in the power dynamics of a classroom: "...to honor the self determination of the individuals in my classes, [is] an empowering intervention that dismantles the more traditional power structures that exist in a teacher-student relationship."

Online - Not Focusing on Deficit

This was the only online component that did not have comments that were differentiated from face-to-face classes. In one way this is not surprising. This is a relational practice that may not have specific applications that are differentiated between teaching platforms. However, this practice might need more reflection in the future from instructors about how refrain from focusing on deficit in an online modality.

Respecting Boundaries

The second condition of *Building Positive Student-Instructor Relationships* was *Respecting Boundaries*. Instructors knew when not to push students beyond what they were able to do. Rachel explained her thoughtful approach: "I'm not a trained psychologist. I'm not trained in trauma...you have to be careful." Instructors did not require their students to disclose reasons why they need extensions for their work or why they needed to leave class. Carrie described it this way: "You know, like, it wasn't that it was that power dynamic of like, you have to share [your personal reasons] because your assignment's late." Sara related that through the process of respecting boundaries, "What ends up happening is most of them end up disclosing, because the, it just enriches the experience, I think. But by no means do they have to, ever." Several instructors supported students in defining their own boundaries, especially around class structure and expectations. Emily said in regard, "We co-create the guidelines." Instructors also used anonymity to support students expressing their boundaries, as Carrie explains:

And so the anonymity aspect of it, it takes away the chance that I as their like, quote unquote, instructor or professor, could know who it is, and then follow up [and press for more information]. And so sometimes, especially with trauma, it's just easier to do it in a way that you know that it's not going to be pinned on you. And so...almost all of my feedback forms are anonymous, because at the end of the day, it's not about who the person is, and who the answer is [from]. It's more about the information I'm getting from them.

Online - Respecting Boundaries

In an online format, instructors repeatedly mentioned not requiring students to turn on their cameras. Amanda pointed to the controversy over the use of cameras online, "One thing that's been a hot topic lately is about cameras. The cameras on video

chats.... I am a big proponent of cameras always being optional." She explained how she is cognizant of why students may not want to turn on their cameras: "From a trauma informed perspective, recognizing that people may have a whole huge variety of reasons why they don't want to be seen" is important. Sara and Carrie also shared the same sentiment. Vernon shared his experience:

I didn't have a problem with people not turning their cameras on...I suppose if people aren't putting cameras on, you could have just a series of sort of disembodied, like you're teaching to the void. But that that is not my experience. I have not had an issue with people not turning cameras on.

Processes

Communicating

The process involved in *Building Positive Student-Instructor Relationships* was *Communicating*. There were a variety of paths that instructors took to develop good communication with students. Oola, Amanda, and Lisa all used surveys to get feedback from students. Others used the syllabus as a way to address sensitive material by discussing the challenges of working with potentially triggering content or noting in the class calendar when it could be expected to be part of the content, including Emily, Carrie, Sara, Oola, and Siobhan. Check-ins were a common form of communicating with students. Several instructors found the immediacy of being able to check in with students in face-to-face classes made it easier to keep tabs on how well students were doing. Sara expressed it this way: "I think when I am face to face, I can read nonverbal communication. And I am able to check in with students just by saying something at the end as they're walking out." Oola also talked about being able to "read the room" in face-to-face classes, so she could adapt her response to sensitive material. James also used check-ins as a way to monitor the emotional temperature of the students he supervises:

So every time I visit the students, I tried to have a check in. I tried to ask them, how are you doing? And when I asked them that, I make sure that they know it's not a formality, just a convention. And for like, how are you, but I really want to know, how they're doing emotionally and physically. And it's an invitation for them to share openly about how they're doing in terms of their own physical and emotional health.

James emphasized to students that they were not alone in their struggles during COVID, "I just said, um, you know, we're in this together." Paul found it important to create a

dialog around difficult topics: “I tried to basically accompany them in [their experience of ecological grief], and hopefully, in doing so, engaging in dialogue, hopefully help them find some aspect of agency.” Several instructors, including James, Rachel, Lisa, and Grady, would use one-on-one time with students to ask them directly how they could help. Oola describes asking a student pointedly what they needed: “When it comes to students one on one...there is more of that discussion where the student is talking together [with you] about what do you need? And how can we get you there? What, what other resources might you need?”

Online - Communicating

Check-ins were used in person, remote, and online. However, Sara related that she found this more difficult online. In this way, instructors noted that it was more challenging to monitor students’ emotional states. But instructors did get creative and used polls, reaction keys and chat to monitor student reactions. Lack of small talk was another concern. Rachel described this: “I think what’s more, more difficult online is the lack of informal, uh, small talk that is so important when we teach...students.”

Similar to face-to-face classes, Rachel would use check-ins to decompress with the class after difficult content: “It sometimes, it’s been a heavy topic and then together we say how are you guys feeling emotionally?” When working with challenging content online, even very experienced instructors found it difficult to monitor the emotional temperature of the class. Sara stated this simply: “It’s really hard to do...online.” Grady gave the reasoning for this: “So one of the biggest differences [online] is that there are just fewer inputs, in terms of body language, tone of voice, things like that.” Ultimately, even when they attempted to monitor where students were emotionally, instructors still worried about whether students were getting enough support as they shifted from class to their home lives, as Rachel says:

So I’ve noticed also less [emotional states] online because we spend less time with them. So, and I don’t think that’s healthy, and it, it is a concern. Because then they just end [the] meeting, right? Just leave. And then they’re by themselves at home. They may have family members. We don’t know, right?

Consequences

Building Trust

Lisa explains that her intention for developing a good relationship with students is to build trust. "At its core, my goal with building rapport is to have, is to build trust between myself and my students." All the different forms of communication that instructors used with their students were intended as ways to build trust, even if it wasn't stated explicitly in the interviews. Transparency in many forms, from being precise about sensitive class content to checking in with students, all expressed care and concern for students and supported trust building.

The result of *Building Positive Student-instructor* relationships is *Building Trust*. Grady described how genuine communication with students creates trust:

They can really expect me to be who I say I'm going to be. That ability to rely on me being exactly who they think I am is a really valuable part of developing the trust in me that they need to take risks to grow. And it helps me to then repair mistakes that I make with them in a way that they can trust is earnest.

Grady also builds trust by communicating his relationship to them. He makes it clear that he is not their therapist: "Another thing that I do is I am really clear about who I am in their lives, or I try to be." Grady also describes that clearly communicating his intentions builds trust:

I find that that level of transparency supports their engagement, [with] the ideas. It's a learning opportunity. It is psychoeducation for themselves and their classmates. It generates compassion and support, [and] supports trust in me.

Online - Building Trust

Vernon describes how he builds trust similarly between a face-to-face class and an online class:

I will, if you get up and walk out of class, I will assume the best of you. That you are getting up and walking out because you need to use the restroom or because what's happening at the moment is too much.... What does that look like on Zoom? You know, they turn their camera off, you know, whatever. Um, uh, other ways I've worked on so, one, is the atmosphere of trust.

Vernon also uses respect to build trust in similar ways online as he does in face-to-face classes:

Just making sure I can pronounce my students' names and use the pronouns that they want me to use. And, and that their, their personhood is, is welcomed and, and honored in our classroom. And that's virtual, or that doesn't matter if it's online or, or on ground, that, that's the same.

Lisa shared the similar idea that in her face-to-face classes she uses rapport to build trust. "At its core, my goal with building rapport is to have, is to build trust between myself and my students. So, like, that general principle is the same between the two modalities."

Overall, I gathered that there was a lack of clear understanding about how to build trust online. Applying trauma-informed practices in face-to-face classes was less problematic than creating a well-designed online environment and then applying an overlay of a trauma-informed framework. Amanda explains how her students seem more hesitant to embrace trust online – perhaps because there were few trauma-informed practices applied:

I think with my, with adult learners, especially online, where that trust building is, can be slower. I think that it can be challenging, you know, for folks who feel really guarded, because of past trauma or ongoing trauma, to sort of be willing to get vulnerable, the way that you might, if you sort of were sitting in a room and you sort of could pick up those cues and [that] body language to assess whether you were safe or not in that moment. I think that's one of the best ways I see it come up online, it's just like that, that trust building and sort of like, am I safe enough here to, to do this?

4.2.5. Primary Dimension: Making Thoughtful Instructional Choices

The last dimension that emerged was *Making Thoughtful Instructional Choices*. Instructors wanted to make pedagogical choices that supported student learning by creating an environment that supported emotional safety.

Table 4.5 Making Thoughtful Instructional Choices

CONTEXT	CONDITIONS	PROCESSES	CONSEQUENCES
Online, Face-to-Face	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Addressing sensitive subjects and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Building community• Encouraging flexibility and choice• Providing resources• Identifying areas of concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Designing an environment that supports learning

Instructors approached creating a safer learning environment from a variety of perspectives. Amanda chooses to construct a safer environment for all students with the assumption that it helps everyone:

One thing I know from studying trauma is that you just never know who has, or is, or was experiencing trauma. So, I tend to operate from the perspective of almost like, assume everyone is traumatized. Because that allows me to just plan with those needs in mind, even if not everyone needs it, everyone can benefit.

Only Hannah mentioned not intentionally designing for trauma-informed practices, because her prior training made it unnecessary: "And it's probably my comfort...with almost any situation as a psychologist that makes me prepared without needing to prepare." In general, while they may not have had Hannah's background, instructors were able to pull from different frameworks to support trauma-informed practices. For example, Grady mentioned culturally sustaining pedagogies, while Amanda used an equity-centered trauma informed education framework.

Online - Making Thoughtful Instructional Choices

Several instructors were cognizant of the time and effort it takes to design online classes, as Sara expresses here:

There's people that say, 'I hate online learning; it's not for me. I can't make relationship[s]. It's so impersonal. There's still students that don't ever show up, or don't...' Well, that's like that in my regular classes too. Like, you have to put in the effort into seeing what's out there, and how

we can be better at online teaching just like we've been trying to do in face to face for so long.

Carrie was somewhat surprised by the work involved in creating online classes. "I think you can do a lot of the same online. I just think the structure, you have to get a little more creative. And honestly, I had to do a lot more work, like on the back end of building the course and thinking really thoughtfully." However, instructors with more online experience were aware of the extra effort involved in creating online classes as opposed to face-to-face classes. Vernon described the necessity of being deliberate in designing online classes, "There are things that happen incidentally in a classroom, that you have to build, and design, if they're going to happen online."

Most instructors – specifically those with more online experience like Grady, Vernon, Sara, and Siobhan – expressed the opinion that there were clear differences between online and face-to-face classes. Grady identified one important difference: "If you believe, as I do, that all growth happens in relationship, obviously, there are ways in which being [in] an online, or a synchronous remote format has limitations when compared to the in-person work." These highly skilled online instructors knew enough about teaching online that they could parse the differences between the two modalities. Grady articulated how both platforms have benefits and detriments: "That's not to say that one is better than the other, right? Each has its own advantages and disadvantages."

There is a vigorous debate on social media and in education circles around ungrading that reflects one side of the argument described here. It is beyond the scope of this research to address in depth but strong arguments for limiting grading have been made elsewhere outside of trauma-informed frameworks (Kirschenbaum et al., 2021). The hashtag #ungrading links to much of the conversation and @jessifer discusses this in-depth.

Conditions

Addressing Sensitive Subjects and Safety

The condition that emerged within *Making Thoughtful Instructional Choices* was *Addressing Sensitive Subjects and Safety*. When working with sensitive content, nearly all the instructors mentioned simply giving students warnings about upcoming content.

As Grady mentions, “I always give them a heads up” on content that may be challenging. They didn’t want students to be surprised by potentially upsetting content, so that as Emily mentioned, “they’re not blindsided.” Vernon uses the related strategy of moving into sensitive topics slowly: “I don’t come out swinging. I guess as I’m planning, I, I plan sort of, ‘let’s dip our toes in the water.’” He also tries to use more neutral examples in his discussion of sensitive topics. “One of the ways when I’m planning for that, I think, [is to use] other, other non-threatening examples.” And James spoke about expanding the conversation around sensitive content: “I’ve done more lately, I’ve started dragging, not dragging, but making it a more protracted, um, exploration.” Rather than exposing students to intense bursts of emotionally charged content, James expands the conversation and allows space and time for emotions to be explored and processed.

Some instructors spoke about the sensitive nature of feedback and assessment as well. Rachel explicitly does not use grades in her course as a way to reduce anxiety. “...our course is all on reflection and sharing, and [evaluation is through a] personalized portfolio, and there’s no grades attached to it. It’s pass or fail.” Grady is also cautious about how he provides feedback, informing students that “I’m going to provide you with the feedback about your piece from a caring, empathetic academic perspective.”

Contrary to most instructors, Hannah mentioned not actively planning when addressing emotionally sensitive topics: “To be honest, I’ve presented this stuff without any forethought, planning or preparation.” Relatedly, Emily wasn’t sure how to design around specific content online and felt conflict about showing difficult content. Yet, she mentioned that providing exposure to certain emotionally charged content was important too: “I think it’s important to show those sorts of things.”

Online - Addressing Sensitive Subjects and Safety

In the online environment, there was incredible diversity in how instructors approached sensitive topics. Some instructors tended to see the two modalities, and thus their approach to trauma-informed practices, as the same. Emily said, “I don’t have too much different in how I address [trauma].” Hannah said something similar: “My practices online and in person are identical.”

But James recognized a difference in designing for these two modalities. “I’m almost inclined to say, I feel like it has to be more intentional in the online modality.” And

Emily mentioned the challenges of how to address these topics: "It's harder in the online class." Oola focused on the difficulty of addressing the topic of racism in her online class:

I think for me, like with my, the transition to my online or remote course, when that happened, it was also right at the beginning. Like, the, I think it was the Friday, the weekend before my first class was the events that, like...sparked the Black Lives Matter movement.... And I have to say it was something that I was like, "well, I want to address this, like, because this is a huge, like, while all this is important and [a] huge movement right now." And, and I have to say, like, figuring out how to address it, I don't even know if I did it well enough.

However, others expressed more ease using an online platform in a trauma-sensitive way. Lisa mentioned that how she designed her class affected the ease of addressing sensitive topics:

Yeah, I think in a way, it's maybe an easier adaptation to make an online class. Because in at least in the way I designed my online courses in like modules... so it would be easier to embed in there, sort of that disclosure, or that warning, that sensitive information was upcoming.

Instructors were able to identify other approaches to addressing trauma online. Emily considered using video: "I wonder if one of the ways would be to introduce the unit or the content with the video." Her hesitation reflects less experience with online learning in more advanced classes with more challenging content, yet she remains insightful and thoughtful. Vernon mentioned that he avoided the use of discussion forums for addressing emotionally charged topics: "Those are really not the greatest forums." Grady deliberately used less troubling content online: "I have pulled back on the stuff that I think may be more triggering for some students in the online space. I'm just not offering as much of that content as I would, in the in-person space." Emily mentioned needing to have some face-to-face interaction, "So maybe one of the ways to address it online is to try and have a face-to-face [i.e. in-person] or virtual face to face opportunity. That's great. But my class is going to be 120 people in fall. I probably can't do that with 120 people."

Processes

Building Community

Building Community was a significant part of addressing trauma for both face-to-face and online instruction. Vernon talked about how he values and creates community in his class:

And so sometimes I'll start off class with like, 10 minutes of, you know, I'm just going to put you in random, you know, groups of three or four, right, and you're going to turn [to each other and] tell each other something you're grateful for this week or tell each other something that you need help with this week. I kind of pick that. But we usually start with something like community building.

Paul talks about how he specifically creates a supportive environment in his class to address sensitive subjects or material:

The way I prepare for it is to have built a community, a dialogic community that's safe and supportive. And where the classmates have each other's sort of, they care about each other so that they, they know that they're working toward a shared understanding and shared learning together. And so when the container itself is supportive, people can have a more, better place, a better set of conditions through which to grapple with some of those ideas and then also should share some of their own personal struggles.

Sara also told me how important she saw community building – which she considered even more important than teaching content. As she said, "I believe spending that time, even though it may take time away from content, is more impactful for the long-term learning." Instructors had a wide variety of tools and design approaches that they used to build and encourage community. Several instructors co-created guidelines for the class as community, as Sara mentioned: "The other thing I work really hard to do is to develop classroom expectations or guidelines. But I don't dictate those. We co-create them." Grady very insightfully said something similar with regard to his intention of not dictating his own expectations but creating those with students as equals:

I basically don't have any policies. There is no late turn-in policy. There's no class attendance policy. There's no, you know, respectful communication, expectations or policy, none of that exists anymore. Because, A, it's doing to and for [students]. It's disempowering. B, if I were to create all that stuff, given my perspective and identity in the world, it would inevitably center [my perspective]...in ways that are going to both explicitly and implicitly devalue, other identities and ways

to be. And it's a huge missed opportunity for community building, and academic assessment, and student engagement. So rather than have all these policies [formulated ahead of time], I spend time, I invest instructional minutes at the beginning of the course, in generating agreements with the group around all these things. And I obviously have some expertise and experience and some things [to add because] I am a member of that group. I'm, I want to make sure I get included in these agreements. But we use a process that I lead to create agreements about all of those things.

Other instructors focused on small-group activities, like James did: "I guess the key thing we did was to make sure we did plenty of things in small groups so that they were able to connect with each other." Vernon attempts to make checking in emotionally a standard practice in his class, "That's normalized, right? That, that process of checking in and then vocalizing, 'Hey, what's coming up [for you]?'"

Online - Building Community

One concern that came up around an online environment was whether it was even possible to create close connections among students online. In relation to this question, Rachel described her feelings about emergency remote learning: "It is remote. It is remote learning, right? [It's] so artificial." Amanda described her challenges with building community online as she would face-to-face: "And I have found like, you really just can't do that in the same way online, or I can't." However, the majority of instructors found that connections could be made, and some were even surprised by the strength of those connections. Paul described what he heard from his students:

I think that my students have also mentioned that there is another kind of intimacy that's associated with remote or online learning that is not available otherwise. Um, and I was quite surprised by this. [With video calls] you can see into people's homes, and right away there's a sort of getting to know the personal side of that person.

One of the themes that came up was developing small permanent groups for students to gather around. Vernon described how his school's cohort model worked for students:

One of the things that has always been a hallmark of our, of our, our [program] is this cohort model, right? And they developed a close relationships and friendships [within their cohorts]. And I was shocked that at the level of the level of camaraderie and, and, and relationship that was built in our online course.

Amanda also used something she called “home groups,” as she explains: “You can set up small groups of people [within the learning management system], and their weekly, like discussion posts or other activities will just be with that small group.” All of these examples are illustrative of what Grady described as the need for more intentionality in creating community online:

I've brought it into my practice in the online and synchronous remote space, much more intentionally, in order to make up for the lack of sort of less intentional community building that would typically occur in an in-person class.

Another experience that came up repeatedly was the lack of casual conversation online. Rachel was one of the instructors who noted this:

So you know, because you don't have that ability to show up to class a few minutes early and check in with people about what their dorm life is like, or whatever.... And in an online class it's just our class all the time. There's none of that hallway chit chat or little questions here and there during class.

Carrie addressed this specifically by “Opening the class early and keeping the Zoom room open later.” But she also created other specific times for casual conversation. As she mentions, “I wanted to do coffee chats, when I taught in person. I would do coffee chats, like, in the student center. And I still did those virtually [during COVID], we just did them via Zoom, or we did them on the phone.”

Amanda related the discussion that has shown itself in the higher educational community around building community without cameras: “I know that that is a contested opinion because some people feel really strongly that to, you know, build relationships we have to be able to see each other and all that kind of stuff.” Ultimately though, they were trying to keep students from feeling alone, like Rachel said: “It's not just them isolated in their little camera window.” And Amanda mentioned that, “There are different ways to connect people.” The ideas mentioned previously, such as home groups, check-ins, and coming early to class are all included as other ways to build community outside of needing to see each other on camera. Amanda also recognized the effort involved in creating those connections: “I think, you know, when you're face to face, there are some shortcuts to building relationships that come with just physically spending time with people. And I think that, or I wouldn't say shortcuts, but like the length of time I think is different.”

Despite the challenges, Vernon described the strength that online relationships can have:

But the relational aspect of it was really there. It was present, it was strong, it was good. I, it was different, but it wasn't lacking, right? And I think in the past, I might have said, 'oh yeah, you just can't build relationships online as well.' I don't think that's true anymore.

Encouraging Flexibility and Choice

Within the *Process of Encouraging Flexibility and Choice*, instructors' statements regarding fostering agency among students often described *why* instructors wanted to engage in flexibility and choice. Many of the instructors did not *require* students to engage with emotionally charged content. Emily describes it this way: "It's agency, or giving you back agency [as a student] rather than dictating what's going to happen." She also noticed that students often choose to engage in the emotionally charged material anyway, when given the choice not to. "I always give them that option. And, it's interesting, because once you give the option, it's very rare that students don't participate." Similarly, Lisa does not require her students to remain in class when there is sensitive material being presented: "If you would prefer not to, you know, you can leave."

An important part of encouraging flexibility with the content is not giving penalties, as Amanda says: "there is no penalty or anything like that...if they chose to skip a chapter or skim a chapter." Sara talked about how allowing choice benefits students' well-being: "Personalizing...sometimes gives you a little bit more ownership over your adversity, because you then, I feel like the students feel a little bit more empowered." Emily, Amanda, Grady, Carrie, Rachael, Vernon, Sara, and Lisa all found it important to allow students to choose topics that were meaningful to them as students, as Sara mentions: "They get to choose the topic that they [feel] connected to." Lisa also mentions that encouraging choice allows students to be more attuned to their own needs, "[And I] hope that students are able to sort of judge for themselves whether something is going to be feasible for them or not."

Flexibility with deadlines was another tool that instructors emphasized. Grady mentioned the importance of students engaging with the material on their own timeline. He said if given the choice, "They're able to engage topics on their own terms in ways

that sometimes can create emotional experience, you know, can really be supportive, rather than, rather than compromising to their mental health." Vernon expressed his desire to support learning in the same way: "Again, I want them to learn, and their learning is more important than their adherence to my arbitrary deadlines." Vernon also mentioned the need for flexibility when planning meets reality: "I made [my plans] in a vacuum without real people in front of me in [a] real context. So of course, when [my plans] meet reality, and real people in real situations, they're going to have to bend a bit."

Lisa was similarly critical of the idea of firm deadlines. "It was drilled into me as a student, like, oh you know, don't miss a deadline! Deadlines are how the real-world works. ...And I just can't think of something that's like further from the truth about how the real-world works. Like, I don't know where that notion came from. But I've wholly abandoned it." Instructors found that removing strict deadlines benefited students significantly. Grady explained, "...I found that [having flexible deadlines] also has been a way for students to take the care they need around content that might be difficult for them by removing what's usually the biggest pressure point, which is time." He goes on to say, "And if having regular weekly deadlines for things is something that's going to be supportive of you or you know what [that's fine], but I'm going to grade your work, not your ability to complete tasks."

Instructors were not without their own concerns about flexibility. However, most of these concerns were the result of program or institutional expectations. Sara mentions this: "The timelines have to be stepped out because of accreditation barriers." And Siobhan mentioned that how a definitive end of the semester requires some type of deadline: "[Colleagues on] Twitter suggested having actually no deadlines, although I think that way lies madness because the semester has a deadline at the end of it." Ultimately instructors were concerned about learning, and Sara even offered the option of an "incomplete" grade when students needed more time to learn:

So I emailed, I think there was four or five [students who were late]. I emailed them, I said, "Hey, there's no timeline here. We can do an incomplete at the end of the semester. You can finish the last few projects, three, four weeks out. I don't have to turn in the final grade till the next semester." Like, let's just slow down, you know, and giving them the opportunity to actually focus on the learning, because they were learning about themselves.

Online – Encouraging Flexibility and Choice

Many of the decisions that instructors made about flexibility were easily translatable to online classes. Lisa found common practices between the two modalities:

In my online course, obviously, it's asynchronous, so there's no class to attend. But then in my face to face courses, there's also no attendance requirement. So I guess, or like, in both in both my face to face classes, and my online classes, there's, you know, the flexibility with assignment submissions, so you can have more time or whatever, if you need it.

Instructors also found that in online classes students have the freedom to not reveal their preferences around sensitive topics. As Lisa mentioned, "In an online class, I guess I would just embed that as sort of like a default alternative assignment, so that students didn't have to ask me, you know, for an alternative." Giving students a choice about whether they need to use their cameras in a remote class was also discussed by Amanda: "[I] just like the very, just like having choice, and being able to consent and, and having that [anonymity] as an option."

Providing Resources

Providing Resources is the next element within the component of *Processes*. Most of the instructors' examples of *Providing Resources* came in the form of linking students to resources on campus, as Siobhan describes:

I would say I, I spend time telling them about things that are available to support them on campus, whether it's like the full range of things from the counseling center. We have a wellness (like, in normal [non-COVID] times), we have a wellness center in our student center that does meditation and mindfulness and whatnot, you know. Then they'll bring therapy dogs into the library during finals week, you know, so I tend to talk about those kinds of things.

However, several instructors had additional resources that they thought might be supportive for students. Paul found the natural environment a good source of support for students, as he mentions:

I tried to say that there are ways of gathering, reclaiming our attention and our own presence and our center. And that has to do with the natural world itself, going out into the natural world, listening to water, smelling the air, touching the plants, or the soil, these really physical forms of contact, which basically gather the attention and bring them to a very concrete place.

Other instructors created their own resources. Hannah explained to her students that she, "wrote a trauma treatment training protocol for introducing you to self-compassion." Oola gives her students materials to help them stay organized, "I...give them a document about how to manage their own well-being and time." Emily, James, and Rachel provided themselves as sources of support. As Emily relates, "I am prepared to debrief with you after the [sensitive] film, in, you know, as, as you see fit, I will be here as long as I need to." Sara mentioned providing resources in the form of accommodations without requiring students to go through the campus disability accommodations process. "I know there's going to be students that are going to need extra accommodations, that I don't need to [provide] through our accommodations office. I'm just going to accommodate because we have a conversation about it." Relatedly, Siobhan talked about normalizing conversations about needing support:

I try to give them some kinds of supports in advance or make, make the news of support available to everybody. So that it's always out there. You know, so that people aren't hearing about the, so people aren't hearing about, say, our campus counseling center for the first time [when they are] in my office crying. But it's really been in the syllabus, and we've already talked about it a lot in class. I mean, so that it's, it's like, I try to just normalize that kind of conversation.

Online - Providing Resources

Mentions of *Providing Resources* in the online modality were mostly the same as in face-to-face classes, with one exception. Grady mentioned that for online classes he relied more on advisors as a means of support than he generally does in in-person classes. He describes having fewer resources online, "But having a decreased set of tools that I can use, effectively, I look for the other tools that exist. I'm more in touch with advisors."

Identifying Areas of Concern

The last process within *Making Thoughtful Instructional Choices* is *Identifying Areas of Concern*. Instructors were on the lookout for topics and content that may cause distress for students. Some instructors were able to identify a significant amount of sensitive material in their discipline, such as Emily: "We talk about horrible things all the time." Yet others found they had few, if any, areas of concern, like Siobhan:

I feel like in my course, you know, like we're reading or just reading some essays. Like, we're reading an essay about Wonder Woman, you know. Like, my courses, I think don't have as, don't have as in an immediate sense of 'this could be hard for you.'"

James articulated his intuitive sense about situations or topics that might cause difficulty for students: "I feel like my antennae are particularly up for it in the undergrad course." Instructors were also sensitive to topics that may affect students with specific experiences or histories. Emily mentioned this:

I also talked a lot about the role of residential schools and how they impact Indigenous peoples and led to their over representation [in the criminal justice system]. So those kinds of, those pieces of information can be really triggering for Indigenous students in particular.

Yet some instructors struggled with trusting their intuitions on what might be triggering. Lisa describes her difficulty in pinpointing specific areas:

And then the, when I was talking about providing like warnings around content, or assignments and things that sort of started earlier when I was teaching [a particular course] because you just touch on so many topics. And I feel like you can't really predict what students are going to have a hard time with.

Content involving racism was mentioned several times by instructors as having the potential to traumatize students, as Carrie said:

And so I think if there were to be retraumatization, it would possibly be through some of those lenses that we [as socially just educators] talk about. Like when we're inviting in, you know, instances of historical racism or, you know, systemic inequities in those ways.

Lisa is also aware of how racism affects her students:

And I tried to point out that, especially you know, a lot of people say, like, "oh, we're only having like, one pandemic in America, but like, arguably, we're also having like a racial pandemic." And [that statement is] really upsetting, you know, that's really difficult for some students to deal with. And because the majority of my students are white, I like to build into those announcements, like a, an acknowledgement that that pandemic is co-occurring, and is also really difficult for students [to accept].

Of special importance in our current political climate is the comment Paul made about the trauma of racism that schools themselves create:

For me as an educator, there's a there's a fine balance that I have difficulty negotiating, which is the fact that I think schools have for many people been traumatic for a lot of students. They have a lot of really painful memories from schools. But when they get to a certain level of higher education, and they are visiting a lot of critical theories which unpack the injustices and the oppressions that are endemic in society, it's very painful, because we're looking at the ways in which prejudice, racism, um, are embedded in the, the functions of society. So that in itself is hard.

Amanda also talked about the trauma that is created in school. "Part of my interest is looking at how do schools create trauma or retraumatize." Nonetheless, there was one instructor that felt it was necessary to make sure students were exposed to specific content regardless of its sensitive nature. Emily explained this for herself: "You can't avoid these topics. They're real, and they're important. So, [the question is] how do we teach about them in a way that doesn't actually create trauma in our students?"

Online - Identifying Areas of Concern

Because *Identifying Areas of Concern* is not modality dependent, there were fewer comments about this component in an online format. However, one instructor did mention how they addressed this issue in the online modality. Grady discussed the use of discussion boards:

I have used my presence in the asynchronous discussion forums, to play this role as well, where I acknowledge that, you know, some of the material that we're covering, may bring up stuff for some people, and sort of asked the question, what do we want to do?

Sara talked about the importance of addressing sensitive topics online:

I mean, I've done it and face to face, but I think it was even more important right now in online. So I would make sure all that's done. And then I would have the foreshadowing for what's to come, and what accommodations they would need.

Consequences

Designing an Environment to Support Learning

The *Consequence* of the other dimensions is *Designing an Environment to Support Learning*. Intentionally supporting students emotionally and designing a class with an eye toward that end, was a constant throughout the responses by the instructors. Lisa describes how she approaches creating a class with a sensitivity to the emotional

lives of students: "It's kind of my job to just to design a course such that whatever struggle a student might be having is navigable alongside my course." Grady stated that designing classes for students who were affected by trauma had a positive effect on all his students: "I found that the feedback that I've gotten, and the skills I've developed, working with the one population has really supported the growth of all of my students."

Online - Designing an Environment to Support Learning

Because the idea of designing classes to support learning in the face of trauma is more abstract than a concrete tool, there were essentially no responses that addressed online learning in particular. However, Siobhan compared Universal Design for Learning with trauma informed-practices: "It's like UDL. I think trauma-informed pedagogy benefits all students, even people who are leading charmed lives."

4.3. Summary

The unifying theme, and core dimension, that emerged in my analysis of the data was *Creating a Learning Environment of Care*. The four additional primary dimensions that belonged under the umbrella of the core dimension were: *Describing the Lived Experience of an Instructor, Being Present for Students, Building Positive Student-Instructor Relationships, and Making Thoughtful Instructional Choices*. All of the dimensions expressed concern for students' emotional well-being.

The data reflected a wide range of abilities among instructors in both online learning and trauma-informed awareness. Some instructors very intentionally integrated trauma-informed practices into their instruction. Others saw themselves essentially as caring resources for students. There was some conflict with regard to how to apply practices that value students' emotional selves in an online platform, but concern and care over the safety of students reigned even if there was less clarity about implementation. Instructors wanted to build caring environments that nurtured learning, and they had considerable emotional investment in that ideal themselves.

Chapter 5. Discussion

To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin.

~ bell hooks

I began this research with the goal of understanding how instructors designed their classes with a trauma-informed lens differently between their face-to-face classes and their online classes. As I read the literature related to trauma-informed practices in higher education, I grew more interested in the emotional commitment educators felt toward their students. I was interested in exploring the emotional commitment we feel toward other people in general. As a college instructor myself, the college classroom was where I wanted to investigate this dynamic. In using dimensional analysis (Kools et al., 1996) in Chapter 4, core and primary themes were identified based on emergent ideas within the interviews with college instructors who were concerned with how trauma affects their students, and who also applied interventions to mitigate the effects of trauma.

Dimensional analysis was created with the explicit purpose of providing researchers a more direct path from analysis to theory than previous grounded theory approaches were able to provide. This explanation of the findings, as Schatzman describes, “tells a story about the relation among things” (1991, p. 303). In dimensional analysis, the core dimension and interdependent primary dimensions narrate a path that will lead to generation of a theory. The components of context, conditions, processes, and consequences provide the people, places, and things that make up the story.

5.1. Creating a Learning Environment of Care

To continue the metaphor used by Schatzman, the story of this thesis examines how college instructors think about and use trauma-informed practices in their online and face-to-face classes. The core dimension of *Creating a Learning Environment of Care* provides the theme that runs throughout the narrative. Figure 5.1 depicts a model of the participants’ process that mirrors this narrative.

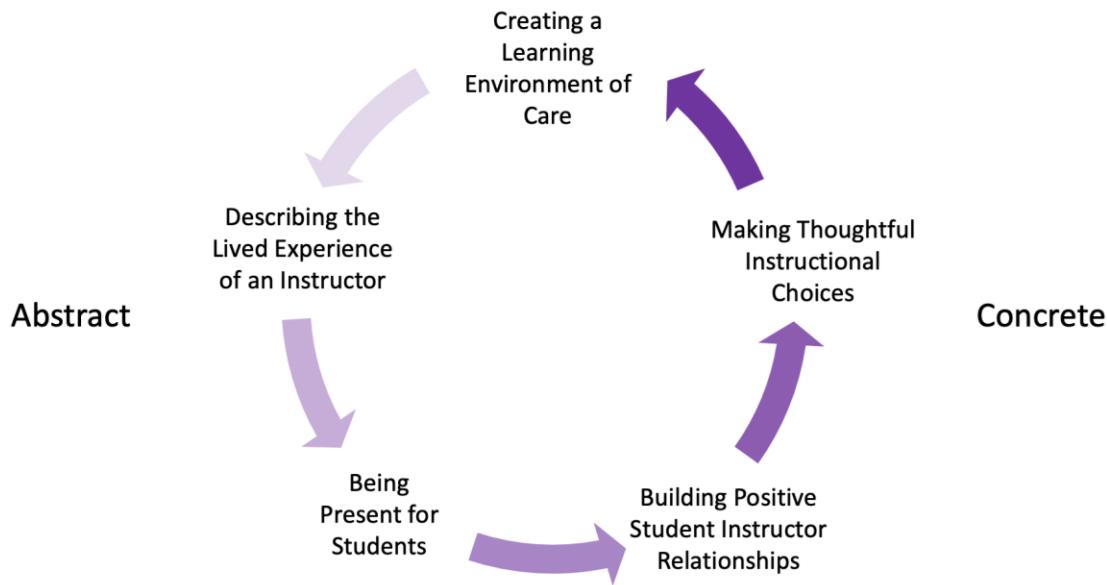


Figure 5.1 The Process of Creating a Learning Environment of Care

The college instructors who volunteered to participate in this research self-identified as being concerned about how trauma affects their students. As described, they were attempting to create a caring environment, one that supported learning, and prevented the interference of trauma in that learning. As Oola said, “They can't really succeed in learning if they're not doing well.”⁴ She also adds how she thinks about the differentiation between supporting students emotionally and supporting them academically. She says, “That would be at least half my task of supporting their learning. The other half, of course, then is supporting their, their actual progress in the, in the course.”⁵

The idea of care is common within the literature on trauma-informed practices. Nell Noddings is one of the principal advocates for care in the classroom, though her work does not intentionally address trauma. It is advantageous to this study that care revealed itself to be the unifying motif rather than – as seen in other trauma-informed spaces – attempting to provide a safe space. Sykes and Gachego (2018) argue that it’s

⁴ I disagree slightly with the extremity of this statement, but I do acknowledge that if students aren’t doing well, they aren’t able to live up to their fullest potential academically.

⁵ Although I did not specifically recruit instructors who had professional expertise in trauma-informed practices, participants included experts in psychology and public health who did have specific training in trauma and its effects. As a consequence, there is a range of understanding of trauma among the participants.

not possible to provide a safe space within our minoritized and racialized society, and that it is privilege that claims a safe space is possible. They state that “safe-ish” is the best we can do and only when approached from a framework of an ethics of care, such as the type of work of Nell Noddings (2013) engages in. Care expresses concern for student well-being but mitigates the privileged perspective that safe spaces are achievable.

Several authors have addressed the need for systemic change to move toward more trauma-informed approaches (Carello & Butler, 2014; Davidson, 2017; Kerka, 2002). Absent from the literature, however, are other foundational ideas about how learning and care are dependent on each other from an institutional perspective. Sara was able to pinpoint that higher educational systems need to progress in their fundamental understanding of education and learning: “...many institutions are still college institutions [that] are using outdated types of learning environments that are not meeting the needs of the current learners that are coming up, because they've held on to outdated ideas of what learning should look like.” This is unfortunate because specifically focusing on helping trauma affected students, in actuality, helps all students. The ideal result of this approach to supporting students would be an environment in which students have an emotional foundation free from intense distress that allows learning without restriction.

In a recent article that was published after my initial literature review, Robinson et al. (2020) use the framework of care specifically in an online environment. The authors used care theory and the ethics of care to examine whether it is possible to provide students an inclusive, caring environment online. They found that through design and instructional practices, care was present in online classes that applied care centered approaches. Again, care facilitated a sense of concern in an online platform.

Robinson et al.’s (2020) research that focused on expressing care for students through care-centered theory mirrors the results of this dissertation. In this research, I found that instructors were focused on the importance of expressing care for students and providing an environment that supported student learning in an online modality through that care. While there were different levels of effective expression of care among instructors who participated in this research, the Robinson et al. article provided additional support that care can be expressed and received in an online platform.

An additional article by Rider (2019) – which, again, was published after my initial literature review – went into greater depth about how care can be applied in a computer-mediated environment. The author identified invitation, intentionality, and inclusiveness as key qualities that students observe in a caring instructor. The author developed these characteristics into concepts that instructors can apply in their interactions with students in a technological platform. Of particular note in this article was the claim that care is contextual depending on individual student needs. Each student has different needs, and a genuinely caring instructor will be attentive to those distinct needs.

What I found to be missing in previous literature is an attentiveness to the fact that the problems that arise for trauma-affected students in face-to-face classes can just as easily happen in online classes. Sara described this in a quote that was shared above, but it is worth repeating because the instructors with less experience in online learning were not able to parse similarities and differences as easily:

I think the arc of learning and what fits best is, is time intensive. And I don't know if people recognize that. And there's people that say, I hate online learning, it's not for me, I can't make relationships, it's so impersonal, there's still students that don't ever show up or don't [participate]. Well, that's like that in my regular classes too. Like, you have to put in the effort into seeing what's out there, and how we can be better at online teaching, just like we've been trying to do in face-to-face for so long.

Also missing in the trauma-informed online teaching and learning literature is the differentiation between the two learning environments. Grady is clear that online and in-person learning are distinctly separate modalities both with unique affordances and constraints:

I feel like one of the things that's really valuable, is being upfront with students about how what they're getting in the online or remote experience is different than what they'd be getting in in-person experience.... Each has its own advantages and disadvantages, right, for somebody that experiences social anxiety, who wants to participate in class discussion, but there are quick thinking loud voiced white males like me in the room. ...There are significant barriers to engagement [in an in-person class that] in the online asynchronous space...are absent.

Prescribing care in the classroom has its constraints and forces us think carefully about whether we are ever truly safe and who has access to feelings of safety. Yet, “safe-ish” is a respectable target. If we apply practices of care, we are helping both students who experience trauma and those who do not. The reasons to support trauma-

informed practices are multi-fold. And if we can get our institutions on board, that support would help instructors to create more care in the classroom.

5.1.1. Describing the Lived Experience of an Instructor

Instructors involved in the study were thoughtful about their roles as educators. They were also clear about the necessity of providing emotional support for students that would open the way for students to access their ability to learn more freely without the constraints imposed by the effects of trauma. The literature consistently addresses safety in the classroom (Carello & Butler, 2015; Kerka, 2002; Perry, 2006; Wilson, 2020) and concern and care were the values that led instructors in their beliefs about how to interact with students. Although there is tension in the literature and from instructors about whether true safety is possible, it seems that safety is the target whether or not it is realistically achieved.

There were a wide variety of practices, mentioned by participants in this study, that were not previously addressed in the literature that showed instructors were concerned about student well-being. Some instructors, for example, were concerned about how testing affected students. Hannah identified testing as a potential form of educational trauma and made a concerted effort to avoid that type of trauma. This care made it clear that small efforts that reflected valuing students were worth acting on.

There was also a heightened awareness among my interviewees of the power dynamics in the classroom. Instructors expressed a desire to mitigate the power disparity between themselves and their students. Carrie also shared her concern about structural racism that is rooted in her discipline: “And the idea is that, like, racism is embedded in so much of the way that we conceptualize and think about psychology and, and teach it and assess it.” Instructors were aware that racism affected their students, even if some felt unsure whether their interventions were effective in mitigating that trauma.

My data reflected a significant effort by instructors to identify the emotional needs of their students. People have a variety of needs that manifest in the classroom (Rider, 2019). Sometimes the need is social and sometimes it is to be well prepared for

emotionally challenging material. Amanda explained her process for identifying student needs:

I think a lot about how trauma impacts learning. And...also trauma impacts trust and can impact, you know, the willingness [of students] to take those risks I was talking about, or willingness to engage with peers. And so, you know, setting up my classroom, I think about all of those needs. And then in my content, I try to be really mindful of potential times when things could be difficult to engage with or, or be retraumatizing and give students options for how to engage with things, give them a heads up, if something is maybe going to be particularly difficult.

Ultimately instructors were looking at areas where they had less skill than they needed to support students, then were intentionally learning how to address their limitations. They also made the connection between learning and needing more information about how to support students. Instructors were able to identify their gaps in knowledge, and they wanted more. This is a meaningful interpretation for this research. Instructors want more information on trauma-informed practices. They also spoke about their growth and how it often took several years to work out the structure of their classes to be more trauma-informed. Lisa summarized it this way: "...I'd really like to learn more about it and be more intentional."

It was telling that instructors who were interviewed for this study expressed fear and hesitancy about online learning. This lack of confidence showed a lack of understanding of the complexities and unique characteristics of online learning. Instructors with less online teaching experience struggled with finding meaning in online interactions. The instructors' struggle included feeling pressure to learn a new mode of teaching in a short amount of time, as was required for the move to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moving from face-to-face classes to emergency remote teaching just exacerbated the anxiety that was already present in teachers with less online experience.

Instructors who were more at ease, had more confidence, and were able to differentiate online pedagogy from in-person pedagogy were instructors with specific – and often extensive – training on online instruction. Contrary to the tension some instructors with lesser experience in online learning felt in designing online classes, some instructors enjoyed designing meaningful online classes. This reinforces the

message that more support is needed for instructors in implementing pedagogically strong online instruction, which should include trauma-informed online practices.

5.1.2. Being Present for Students

Being mindful and present, as discussed by the instructors, is a specific practice related to mindfulness. Instructors reported using presence to support students emotionally and found it a powerful way to support students. Hannah described it this way: "Mindfulness [is] the foundational tool for trauma." Rather than exclusively supporting students in developing their own skills in present moment awareness, as previous research has done (Kerka, 2002), this presence was focused on the instructor's awareness of their students' emotional states, how trauma affects them, and being available for them emotionally. This included an understanding and awareness of how trauma affects students in many different forms of distress, as Davidson (2017) suggested.

Instructors were also present for students through engaging in conversations that validated their distress. Specifically, there are two distinct aspects of validating students' distress that are worth noting. One is being present for student distress, such as being willing to meet with them or to simply be available after a class that includes emotionally charged content. But just as important, there is also normalizing distress, as has been previously addressed in the literature (Zurbriggen, 2011). In other words, there is holding space for students' emotional distress.

Instructor presence has also been addressed in the literature on online teaching and learning (Robinson et al., 2020). However, Robinson et al. use presence to refer to engagement with students and their work, rather than being in the moment with students and their emotional experiences. The practice that the instructors involved in this study used online was making space for distress and emotions. The way that they made this space was to allow breaks. These breaks could either be structured breaks or simply suggesting that students take breaks whenever they needed.

Instructors made a caveat that when using mindfulness, regardless of the modality being used for teaching, it was necessary to use caution. Hannah suggests we be aware of the different aspects of using presence, "I caution practitioners, because it

has its risks, and its benefits and then it's important to be aware of them." Mindfulness needs to be used skillfully by instructors who understand the risks to traumatized students to prevent doing more harm than good.

5.1.3. Building Positive Student-Instructor Relationships

Not only did instructors in this study invest considerable effort in developing trusting, safe relationships with students, they expressed how placing value on trusting relationships shaped their teaching, as is mirrored elsewhere in the literature (Barros-Lane et al., 2021; Wilson, 2020). Hannah explained how important a trusting relationship is to student learning: "I understand that the development of rapport between students and between the student and the teacher are critical elements of the learning process." The instructors found power in relationships with their students. Their connection with students was considered a healing force that could change the dynamics in the structural systems of education.

Monitoring the emotional temperature of students was one of the most prominent tools that instructors used in the dimension of communication to support students. This had been addressed previously with check-ins (Carello & Butler, 2015; Cunningham, 2004; M. Miller, 2001). However, there were other ways instructors supported students through communication, which included adding trauma-informed statements to their syllabi. Instructors also asked students directly, most often on an individual basis, what they might need. This not only expressed the instructor's concern for students but gave students agency in regulating their emotions and reactions. It empowered students.

There were several additional ways in which instructors invested time and effort to build relationships with students. While Carello and Butler (2015) encourage focusing on student strengths, instructors participating in this research took an intentionally different angle by not focusing on deficit. They emphasized focusing on the positive, such as successes as well as being clear about the difficulty of learning. They were able to identify that there can be growth through traumatic experiences, as seen in post-traumatic growth. Tedeschi & Calhoun (2004) relate that after experiencing trauma there is growth that may originate from those experiences. They expressed the sentiment that how we, as a society, typically relate to trauma is to focus on the pain and difficulty that it causes, although these experiences are not that simple. Being aware of the

multidimensional nature of trauma improves our understanding of how trauma affects students, and thus their learning. Instructors in this study also emphasized creating agency for students as a way to empower them. Instructors wished to show students that their experiences didn't define them, but rather what students did with those experiences was a truer reflection of who they are as people.

This dimension moved deeper into pragmatic tools instructors used in their teaching by going beyond holding space for distress and consciously building in breaks. Respecting student boundaries was critical to developing good relationships with students. This included having students be co-creators in making the class safer by creating class guidelines together. Respecting boundaries also entails not requiring students to reveal why they need an extension for an assignment. Forcing students to reveal their medical histories or personal challenges as a condition of support is the antithesis of trauma awareness. There are a variety of ways to avoid this type of disclosure and making it clear in the course syllabus that disclosure is not required is one of them. Perhaps most importantly, trust is reciprocal. Asking students to trust their instructor places considerable emotional vulnerability on the shoulders of students. That same willingness to trust should extend to instructors. Respecting student boundaries builds relationships through mutual expressions of trust.

Developing trust was the result of the dimensional processes that instructors used and has been addressed repeatedly as one of the foundational tools of trauma-informed practices (Barros-Lane et al., 2021; Carello & Butler, 2015; Davidson, 2017; Finn, 2010; Kerka, 2002). Instructors built trust from the beginning of their interactions with students by making sure they knew students' names and were pronouncing them correctly. They considered this a small but powerful practice that expressed the care they feel toward students.

Several instructors also built trust by being explicit about how they were addressing racism in their class and building a conversation around it. Instructors made clear statements about racism, as Carrie did:

I think if there were to be retraumatization, it would possibly be through some of those lenses that we talk about. Like when we're inviting in, you know, instances of historical racism or, you know, systemic inequities in those ways. And I'm just really transparent at the outset of everything I talk about. I just, like fully own my whiteness and say, like,

I am coming to this space, not as a person with any answers. I am not sitting in this space with you, because I know what it feels like [to be a racialized person] but because this is a conversation we can have together.

While some instructors displayed anxiety during the interviews about how well they were addressing racial trauma, most instructors felt stating their positionality was a helpful way to support students who have experienced the trauma of racism. Further research from the perspective of BIPOC students would add to this body of work by providing evidence of whether statements of positionality are in actuality supportive to these students or not.

Robinson et al. (2020) explain the need to understand and pay attention to the distinction between how care is expressed in online and face-to-face settings. The instructors who participated in this research had similar concerns. They knew that communication, and especially communicating care, is more effortful in an online environment, yet they made concerted attempts to express that care through building caring relationships. Yet, in spite of the lack of assuredness some instructors had about how to build caring relationships, most were making an attempt to build strong connections. Even instructors who did not require the use of cameras were able to feel a sense of connection with those faceless students.

Instances where instructors mentioned setting boundaries online were mostly focused on the use of cameras, and none of the instructors I spoke with required them of students to use cameras during synchronous class meetings.

Dialog was the term Robinson et al. (2020) used to describe communication in their study. Robinson specifically mentioned the use of email and discussion boards that showed an expression of care for students. Instructors in this study thought about communication online in very different ways. When developing relationships with students, they used casual interaction to their advantage, and they found those opportunities missing online. Small talk before and after class, and in-between breaks was missing from the online platform, and instructors felt that absence intensely.

Similar to Robinson et al. (2020), instructors in this study asked for feedback from students on the design of their classes. However, the instructors that I interviewed were also soliciting feedback by asking how students were managing emotionally. They

wanted their students to not feel alone in their distress. Instructors explicitly wanted to prevent students from feeling a sense of disconnection during distress if they were physically separated from the rest of their classmates. Rather, the instructors who participated in this study wanted students to know that they were not alone and that upsetting emotions were a common experience during discussions that included emotionally charged material.

Far and away the greatest concern among instructors was their difficulty in being able to identify distress in students as easily online as they are able to do face-to-face. They used body language and physical cues to read the emotional temperature of the room in in-person classes, but they found their inability to do so online profoundly frustrating. They could identify when students were bored or they were not understanding the material in their in-person classes, but this was not represented online. There is an immediacy that instructors felt in their face-to-face classes that simply isn't present online.

5.1.4. Making Thoughtful Instructional Choices

This last dimension provides very pragmatic applications of instructor desire to provide a caring place for students to learn. These intentions begin with concern and care, which lead to using teaching tools and approaches that reflect that care. Because there was a spectrum of trauma-informed expertise among my interviewees, some instructors were attempting to minimize general stress for students, and others were making an effort to prevent retraumatization around potentially triggering topics. Intense distress that may be created by painful content however, aligns with how Perry (2006) describes trauma, as an "extreme form of stress." While some of the tools and practices instructors mentioned may not directly address trauma, they intervene in the stress cycle that also interferes with learning.

Instructors had a wide range of tools and practices that they used to mitigate the effects of trauma and support students in their learning. Some instructors were providing shorter syllabi, several mentioned scaffolding, and others focused on using videos for sensitive topics. They were aware of how the content of their class affected learning, and they took this into consideration when planning classes. There was also evidence for thoughtful design as instructors felt that everything mattered, and that no decision was

inconsequential. As Emily explained, “I do little things in my classes that seem really tiny but are really important.”

When teaching subjects that could potentially create distress for students, instructors were especially thoughtful and cautious about preventing harm. They tried to identify difficult material and apply interventions to mitigate distress as an alternative to consoling a distraught student after the fact. Most instructors included some type of warning to prepare students for the upcoming material, which has been written about extensively as “trigger warnings” in relation to content (Boysen et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2019; Rae, 2016) but less so in connection with trauma-informed practices (Carello & Butler, 2015).

Building community is mentioned widely in the instructor interviews, and is mentioned extensively in recent literature as well (Hess et al., 2021; Hitchcock et al., 2021; Kerka, 2002; Nelson et al., 2022). Instructors identified community-building as a key component of providing a safer place for learning. They saw connections as essential for creating some form of safety; safety wasn’t possible without connections among students. The practices of creating class guidelines, policies, and expectations together were repeated throughout the interviews. Grady emphasized how important this co-creation is:

It's a huge missed opportunity for community building, and academic assessment, and student engagement. So rather than have all these policies [up front], I spend time, I invest instructional minutes at the beginning of the course, in generating agreements with the group.

Another approach that provided support in community building was small group work. Some instructors created “home groups” so that students were able to build stronger relationships by spending more time with a specific small group of their classmates. They intentionally focused student work on connection with others, and that supported learning by creating a more socially cohesive environment.

Providing students with choice to promote a sense of agency has been written about by Davidson (2017). Flexibility around how instructors introduce content and expectations had less attention in the research literature. Instructors mentioned flexibility in several areas that are discussed in recent research (Hitchcock et al., 2021; Nelson et al., 2022): deadlines, the amount of sensitive content to introduce, grades, alternative

assignments, and attendance. Instructors built in flexibility and choice into the design of their classes intentionally. Instructors consistently emphasized that encouraging agency through choice for students and flexibility supported students emotionally and ultimately supported student learning.

Supporting students with resources has been thoroughly addressed by previous researchers (Carello & Butler, 2014; Cunningham, 2004; Doughty, 2020; Kerka, 2002). Instructors in this study focused on normalizing the necessity of supports and providing those supports prior to students finding themselves in a state of distress. They saw this normalization as a way to break the stigma and resistance students might have for getting themselves help. Providing resources from the beginning of class and throughout the semester provided a powerful tool for helping students engage more fully with their learning.

Some instructors were aware that there are pedagogical differences between online and face-to-face learning, as Robinson et al. advise us to be in a care-centered setting (2020). This knowledge led them to adapt the trauma-informed practices they were using in face-to-face classes to their online classes. They were aware of the time-consuming nature of creating online classes and factored that into the design process. Frustration was evident in instructors with less online experience about how to adapt practices, especially in making connections among students. More experienced instructors could more easily identify the similarities of the two modalities, as well as the differences. From there, instructors could apply more informed teaching practices.

Instructors seemed to feel that more work was needed to design for sensitive material online. However, instructors with less online teaching experience said that they weren't addressing trauma differently between the two modalities. This lack of distinction is less about trauma-informed practices than it is about lack of knowledge of online teaching and learning. Again, Robinson et al. (2020) warn against assuming the same practices are necessary without fully understanding the differences in the two modalities.

Instructors were skillful about using casual conversation to their advantage online. They identified this practice as crucial to developing relationships among students and between themselves and students. They built time for this in a number of ways, such as starting a Zoom session early, leaving it on late, and creating casual

online meet-ups with students just to chat. Again, instructors with more online experience were able to see that online relationships required more time and nurturing. They were clear though, that meaningful relationships were possible, as Vernon described: “The relational aspect of it was really there. It was present, it was strong, it was good.”

Instructors were able to identify that addressing sensitive material online needed more planning and thought. On the plus side, instructors working online found it easier to give content warnings and found that the online modality allowed students to pace the flow of content according to their emotional needs. If instructors spent more time building relationships and connections, they felt more comfortable teaching emotionally charged content online. This thoughtful online relationship building came mostly from instructors with more expertise and experience in online learning.

5.2. A Model of Creating a Learning Environment of Care

The core dimension of *Creating a Learning Environment of Care* became the driving force for the other dimensions. All of the primary dimensions fell within the core dimension, and *Creating a Learning Environment of Care* rose to what Kools (1996) terms the perspective. It is the dimension that holds the most meaning for, “Provid[ing] the most fruitful explanation of the phenomenon under consideration” (p. 318). Since all the other dimensions provided ways that instructors expressed the intention of building a place that showed concern and care for students, *Creating a Learning Environment of Care* emerged as the perspective.

This idea is the essence of the answer to my research question: “How do instructors think about and address student trauma in both their fully online and face-to-face courses?” The process begins with a fundamental commitment to the emotional well-being of students on the part of instructors, who intentionally craft a place of safety where students feel cared for. Grady describes some of the tools he implements that he describes as essential to “creating a safe and secure environment where people can take the kinds of vulnerable risks they need to in order to learn and grow.”

Figure 5.1 shows the process involved in creating this caring and safer environment. We begin with the core belief of *Creating a Learning Environment of Care*,

which drives further dimensions. As we move through the process, we also move from more abstract ideas to concrete tools and practices that instructors use to support students.

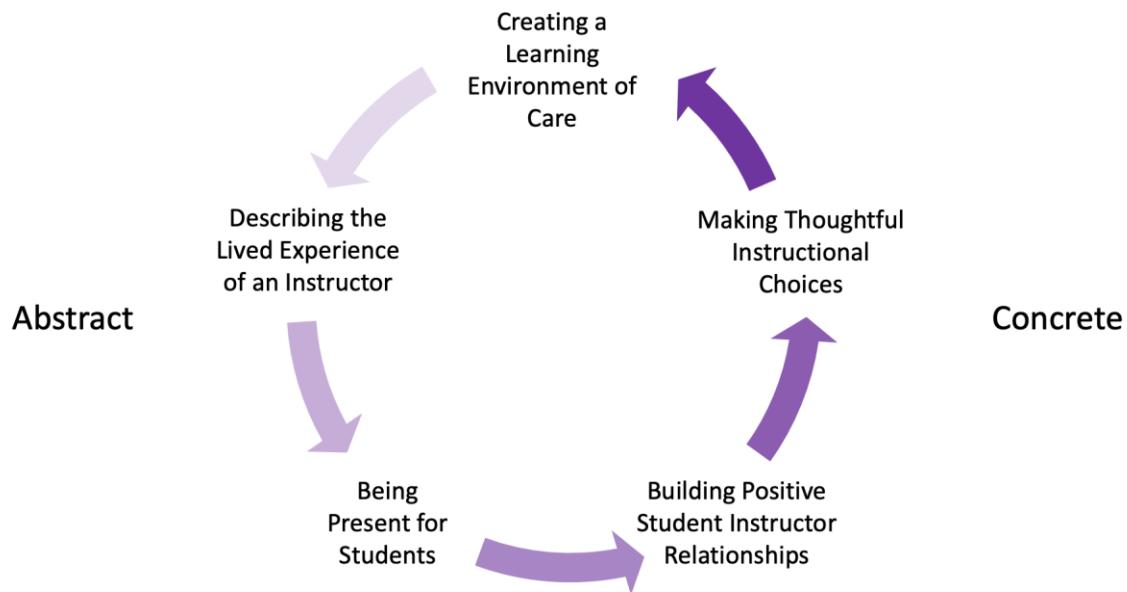


Figure 5.2 The Process of Creating a Learning Environment of Care

From a place of beliefs and values around education and learning, the foundational principle of *Creating a Learning Environment of Care* initiates the momentum to move step by step away from abstract ideas and more toward concrete tools and interventions. Instructors first describe their values, understanding, and experience within the primary dimension of *Describing the Lived Experience of an Instructor*. Hannah shares her understanding of how trauma affects students: “I say right up front, education traumatizes all the participants. So how are we going to learn together in a way that doesn’t traumatize us?” Sara shared similar thoughts about her understanding of trauma: “It changed everything. It changed everything I teach, and the lens I teach through. It changes how I lead my teams and how I interact with people, [even] my own family, right? So [in] pretty much every class...we talk about trauma events, and the impact on the developing brain, body and resilience, and so forth.”

These beliefs about how trauma affects students and their education led into a slightly more tangible primary dimension of *Being Present for Students*. For example, Carrie related how she uses presence in supporting students: “I do think that my role in

supporting their emotions is to be present, and to be there for things that may arise.” Being available to students as a source of supportive presence, in a variety of ways, moves beyond the area of thoughts and beliefs and exists as a way of showing up and interacting with students.

From providing a supportive presence, the next primary dimension, *Building a Positive Student-Instructor Relationship*, moves into the space of specific practices instructors use when designing their classes to support students through relationship. Hannah described the essence of this dimension: “I understand that the development of rapport between students and between the student and the teacher are critical elements of the learning process.” Instructors felt the power that was held in nurturing a healthy, trusting relationship with students of mutual respect.

The last dimension of *Making Thoughtful Instructional Choices* brings the cycle full circle. The specific approaches and tools that instructors use in *Making Thoughtful Instructional Choices* bring the abstract ideas of care for students to life. The cycle began as concepts of how instructors approach teaching and the dynamics they have with their students and ends as the pragmatic practices that support those concepts. Oola addressed the conscious effort involved in creating trauma-informed classes: “I definitely devote some of my headspace and...planning to their overall emotional support in the classroom.” From valuing emotional support of students to designing and implementing for that support, the cycle provides movement from the foundation of Creating a Learning Environment of Care through each dimension and ends with an environment that does indeed support students emotionally. The cycle is, however, not the same for online teaching and learning.

5.2.1. A Model of Creating a Learning Environment of Care Online

The model for the use of trauma-informed practices in an online platform manifested as a very different dynamic than the model in the face-to-face environment. Similar to the face-to-face model, the core dimension *Creating a Learning Environment of Care* was at the heart of how instructors thought about and designed trauma-informed classes. The difference is that *Creating a Learning Environment of Care* does not drive subsequent dimensions. The core dimension supports the primary dimensions but is

less of a foundational force online. The energetic force in an online environment is the first primary dimension, *Describing the Lived Experience of an Instructor*.

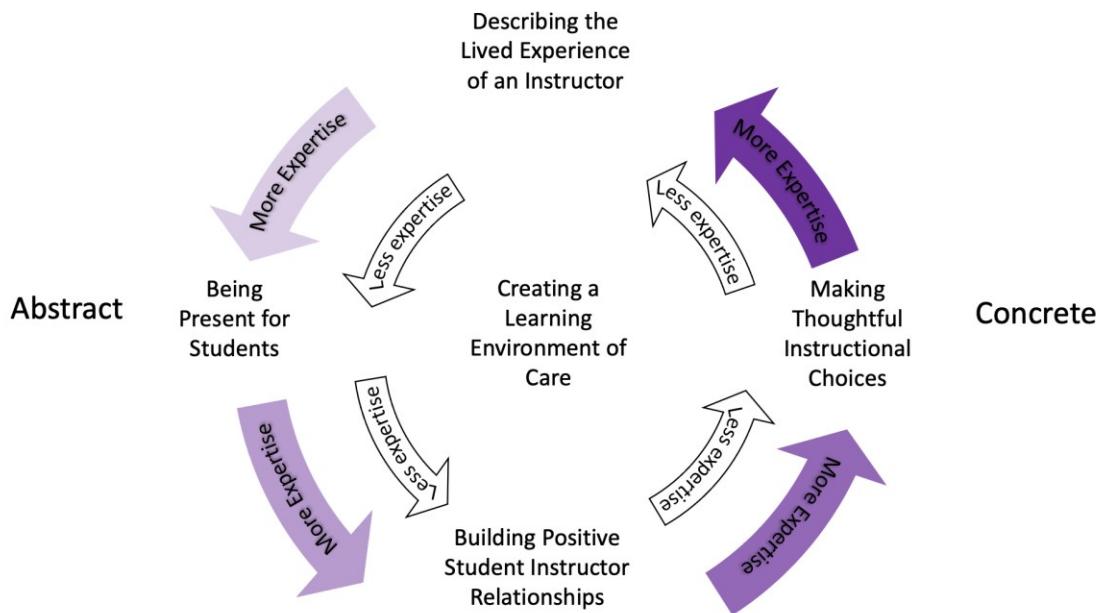


Figure 5.3 The Process of Applying Trauma-Informed Practices Online

Describing the Lived Experience of an Instructor encompasses instructors' thoughts, beliefs, and experience level with trauma-informed and online teaching and learning practices. The differences in how instructors approached online and face-to-face learning differently often fell along the lines of expertise and experience within an online platform. Instructors who had very little experience and support in trauma-informed practices were intuitively led by their care and concern for students to implement tools and strategies to lessen the impact of trauma on their students. However, the same instinct with regard to online teaching and learning was not prevalent with instructors who had less experience with the platform.

As discussed in the literature on online learning, taking maximum advantage of media for remote and online learning dictates some different practices than are used in-person learning (Anderson, 2008). However, instructors with less online teaching experience missed the distinct differences between the two platforms. Hannah stated directly that she had no formal training or experience in online teaching and learning. When I asked her how she designed trauma-informed classes differently between the two modalities, she responded, "The more trauma sensitive a teacher is, the more

similar their online and in person approaches will be, the less trauma sensitive, the more divergent. I'm very trauma sensitive, right? My practices online and in person are identical. For better and for worse, right?" Emily told me something similar about how she addressed trauma-informed practices online, "I don't have too much different in how I address it." It appeared that relatively less online teaching experience led to less robust trauma-informed practices, because these instructors weren't accounting for the different affordances and constraints of the two platforms.

Quite the opposite was happening with instructors who were well acquainted with online teaching and learning. Lisa's training in online teaching and learning even allowed her online instruction to inform her face-to-face instruction: "And I would say afterwards, I actually began to think about how to use sort of best practices with online course delivery in my face-to-face courses." These experiences with online teaching and learning did drive their instructional practices.

Instructors with significant time using and learning about online teaching and learning were aware of the commitment of time and effort needed to provide high quality instruction in this modality. Sara explained:

More than likely there's going to be differentiation between how I create relationship in my online class with my students versus in person. How I create and cultivate examples and connection to the content. And how I even do assessments can be similar but different. But I think the foundation is, it takes work.

Instructors with less experience and education in online learning were more unsure of themselves and the effectiveness of the platform. Emily explained the weight of why she hadn't previously taught an advanced class online: "I haven't before [COVID] because I think there's too much responsibility that comes with it."

Unsurprisingly, instructors who had less experience with online teaching and learning were less sure of themselves and expressed unfettered anxiety about their abilities. Emily was very revealing in her explanation, "One of the things we need to get past, and I'm not exactly sure how to do it yet, is...this fear of [the] online environment." On the opposite end of spectrum, Grady was very confident in his abilities: "I'm an effective teacher online." Grady's confidence mirrored that of other instructors who reported more experience with online teaching and learning.

The cycle of *Creating a Learning Environment of Care* follows a similar pattern in both online and face-to-face environments. Once instructors are reflective about their teaching practices and are attempting to create a caring environment of safety, those beliefs move from the abstract values of caring for students through the primary dimensions moving toward more concrete instructional practices that end up back at a class (whether online or face-to-face) that expresses care for students. The difference between the modalities is the motivating factor. Online instructors expressed more drive to support students through their understanding and experience with online learning. Instructors who have less experience created less robust trauma-informed online teaching and learning practices. More experienced instructors know that they need more time to plan lessons and that they need to create more opportunities for social interaction, among other practices. If they have more experience, they create more expansive practices that take into account the strengths and weaknesses of the online platform.

5.3. Theoretical Propositions

I took my lead from Kathy Charmaz in how I approached the theoretical propositions. They were formed through the coding and analysis of the interviews but needed to remain practical to teachers who are concerned about how emotions and life experiences affect learning in their students. Oram (2016) tells us that, “Constructivist grounded theories have as aims being credible, original, resonant, and useful (Charmaz, 2014); this is a noteworthy charge for practitioner scholars to derive theory that has applicability in real-world settings” (p. 144). The following theoretical propositions aim to provide pragmatic explanations for how instructors think about applying trauma-informed practices to their online and face-to-face classes.

5.3.1. Proposition 1: Use of trauma-informed practices is driven by the understanding that trauma affects learning and that trauma interventions support student learning.

All of the instructors who participated in this study were aware either intuitively, or through knowledge of the research, that emotional states affect learning. They were committed to supporting students through their learning process and considered it their

responsibility to be a supportive part of the emotional side of learning. They took this responsibility quite seriously.

Instructors believed in the importance of providing a safer environment for students to learn, whether that was online or in face-to-face classes. They built trust and a sense of safety through being consistent in who they were and what they said. Instead of focusing on deficit, they celebrated successes and encouraged student agency and empowerment. They listened and respected student boundaries. They developed this sense of trust with students through a variety of communication techniques that expressed to students their concern and care for them. They knew there was a foundational emotional piece that is necessary for students to have access to their full capacity as learners, and instructors made conscious choices in that direction.

5.3.2. Proposition 2: Trauma-informed approaches begin with a belief in caring for the whole student which drives teaching practices.

Instructors were clear that learning and the emotional states of students can't be separated. The two are intricately connected, and it is not possible for one to be unaffected by the other. They were concerned about how content and teaching practices might stress or retraumatize students and implemented interventions that would prevent that distress.

Instructors thought carefully about what might be difficult emotionally for students. Yet, they were not rushing in to save them. They allowed students to have dis-ease around uncomfortable subjects. While they normalized discomfort, they also built a community of support around students. They did this first by maintaining integrity in their teaching practices and how they relate to students, but also by encouraging students to support each other through community. Choice on the part of the students, and flexibility on their part, was how they shifted the focus to student well-being instead of a teacher-focused environment. Providing resources, giving students warnings about potentially triggering content, and focusing on assignments that centered connection are examples of ways that instructors expressed care through their pedagogy about the well-being of their students.

5.3.3. Proposition 3: Use of trauma-informed practices online is driven by the level of experience an instructor has with online teaching and learning.

While all the instructors in this study showed a great deal of affection for and concern about the well-being of their students, not all instructors had the same level of skill in being able to address student well-being in the online environment. Even instructors who had little experience with trauma-informed practices were very skilled and had a strong intuitive sense about what would support students with distressing content in the in-person context. Students were allowed to leave class, and if they needed, to get extensions on assignments, and instructors spent considerable time developing relationships in the class.

These same trauma-informed practices were not always evident in the online environment, however. The mitigating factor was how much expertise instructors had with online learning. There was confusion by instructors with less experience about the differences between online and face-to-face teaching and learning, and for this reason, the affordances and constraints that would impact the use of trauma-informed practices were not addressed. There was often even confusion about whether there were any differences between the two modalities.

On the other hand, instructors who were skilled in online teaching and learning were quite skilled at applying trauma-informed practices to their online instruction – whether or not they had significant experience with trauma-informed practices. They knew it took more time to design online classes well, and they knew building community required considerably more effort. They put more effort into communicating with students and made checking in emotionally a standard part of their teaching practices. They knew how to make connections online and knew how to support students emotionally through their online teaching practices.

5.4. Implications for Practice

Overall, instructors interviewed for this study did well with trauma-informed practices in their face-to-face classes. Just by having concern and expressing care for the emotional lives of their students, they were able to either intuitively cobble together, or thoughtfully design, very strong trauma-informed practices. They used presence,

trust-building tools, and were intentional about how they designed their classes in a trauma-aware manner. The data provided evidence for a different dynamic in online classes, however.

Although this research had the fundamental goal of identifying the ways that college instructors used trauma-informed teaching practices, the data showed that it is necessary to first have a strong understanding of how to create online classes that were differentiated pedagogically from face-to-face classes. This gap in knowledge of online design either made creating online trauma-informed practices considerably weaker, or absent, in this modality. Effective online trauma-informed practices are dependent on understanding online course design and pedagogy.

A key conclusion of this study is that instructors who have a desire to be trauma-informed need more support for both online pedagogy and trauma-informed practices. More support for instructors would help better serve the educational needs of tertiary education students. Considering that the often-suggested professional development is the typical answer to the need for more support, I believe that more time and administrative support is urgently needed, as is noted elsewhere (Davidson, 2017).

There are a variety of relevant resources – not within the purview of this research to survey extensively – such as mentoring, observations of instructors with more trauma-informed experience and online expertise, outside workshops and educational resources, and professional conferences. However, there appears to be less support from an institutional perspective. Administration needs to support instructors in the use of these, and other, resources to expand their knowledge of trauma-informed practices. Support such as this could come in the form of professional development funds, releases from committee work to develop relevant skills, and course releases for more extensive and involved interventions.

Gaining a more informed understanding of how emotional states affect learning will benefit everyone who works as an educator. This knowledge supports more pedagogically sound instruction and supports students as a result. Even before specific practices are applied to instruction, tertiary educators need a foundational understanding as to why these practices are important and valuable to support students.

In regard to specific instructional practices, instructors should be aware that it takes more time, effort, and knowledge to develop trauma-informed practices for the online environment. Some practices used in the in-person environment do not simply transfer over to an online modality. Thoroughly trained instructors spend more time on their online classes even before they apply trauma-informed principles (Cavanaugh, 2015; Tomei, 2006). This is an essential consideration when designing online classes.

Within the field of educational technology, when providing support to instructors who want to use more technology in their teaching, we are cautioned not throw every tool and new technology at them. The same is true for trauma-informed practices. Instructors do not have to reinvent their instruction to express care for students. Small interventions matter. A few new tools each semester add up over time and those small adjustments can have a big impact on how students experience their education.

5.5. Conclusion

Sir Hercules G. R. Robinson was correct when he stated that “great power carries with it great responsibility, and great responsibility entails a large amount of anxiety” (dannysuling, 2019). The college and university instructors who participated in this study felt the intensity of their responsibility to support the emotional wellbeing of their students. As a result of this awareness, they also often felt stress and worry over whether they were serving students as well as they should be. The results of this study indicate that, contrary to their concerns, these instructors were making a concerted effort to support students that was likely felt by the students whom these intentions were directed toward.

There is a growing body of research that examines trauma in different educational contexts. Within the primary and secondary school contexts there is a generous amount of research that explores how to bring trauma-informed frameworks into primary and secondary schools to provide the groundwork for all students to thrive in an educational environment. Tertiary education is borrowing these principles and adapting trauma-informed practices to university classrooms. Less work has been done in the online modality in the university context. Regardless of the stage of a student’s educational life, or the modality in which a student is learning, it is an educator’s

responsibility to provide the best possible environment for learning and much more work needs to be done in an online modality for university students.

To lay the groundwork for further in-depth research, I interviewed instructors who considered themselves concerned about how trauma affected their students, and who also tried to apply interventions to lessen its effects on their students' learning. Through the use of constructivist grounded theory and dimensional analysis, the theme of care emerged and exemplified the thoughts, values, and practices that the participants used to try to support their students emotionally.

These instructors strongly believed in the importance of the connection between learning and emotional affect. They also believed that it was their responsibility to provide support to students by supplying instruction and creating an environment that facilitates a safer environment for learning. Outside of the beliefs and values that instructors held toward their profession, mindful presence became an important practice that they used to support students. In a variety of ways, instructors acknowledged the normality of distressing emotions and the need to express those emotions. They then used trust as a tool to hold those emotions for students. These instructors made a great effort to say what they meant and mean what they say. And lastly, they consciously designed their classes in a way that supported students emotionally.

The instructors who participated in this study felt great responsibility for the wellbeing of their students and expressed that through care and concern in their instructional choices and how they related to their students in a personal manner. They knew that we are responsible for each other, and that includes not just in the moment when there is pronounced distress and the possibility of the creation of a new trauma but also – perhaps especially – after the fact.

The participants of this study were self-selected as being concerned about the emotional welfare of students and trauma affects in particular. In the wider post-secondary environment, we are left to wonder how much of a concern instructors have in general toward the emotional well-being of students, how students are affected by trauma, and which practices instructors use for addressing student needs. Emotional states affect learning, and it would clearly benefit tertiary education to use this

information to support instructors in their understanding of trauma-informed practices, which in turn will support student learning.

References

- Aglias, K. (2012). Keeping safe: Teaching undergraduate social work students about interpersonal violence. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 26(2), 259–274.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2011.610890>
- Ahern, A., Foster, M., & Head, D. (2015). Salt Lake Community College Veterans Services: A Model of Serving Veterans in Higher Education. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2015(172), 77–86. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20165>
- Alzaroo, S., & Hunt, G. L. (2003). Education in the Context of Conflict and Instability: The Palestinian Case. *Social Policy & Administration*, 37(2), 165–180.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9515.00332>
- Anderson, T. (Ed.). (2008). *The theory and practice of online learning* (2nd ed). AU Press.
- Barros-Lane, L., Smith, D. S., McCarty, D., Perez, S., & Sirrianni, L. (2021). Assessing a Trauma-Informed Approach to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Higher Education: A Mixed Methods Study. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 57(sup1), S66–S81.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2021.1939825>
- Berger, R., & Quiros, L. (2014). Supervision for trauma-informed practice. *Traumatology*, 20(4), 296–301. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0099835>
- Black, T. G. (2006). Teaching trauma without traumatizing: Principles of trauma treatment in the training of graduate counselors. *Traumatology*, 12(4), 266–271.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1534765606297816>
- Black, T. G. (2008). Teaching trauma without traumatizing: A pilot study of a graduate counseling psychology cohort. *Traumatology*, 14(3), 40–50.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1534765608320337>
- Bowers, B., & Schatzman, L. (2009). *Developing grounded theory: The second generation* (J. M. Morse, Ed.). Left Coast Press.
- Boyraz, G., Granda, R., Baker, C. N., Tidwell, L. L., & Waits, J. B. (2016). Posttraumatic stress, effort regulation, and academic outcomes among college students: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 63(4), 475–486.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000102>
- Boysen, G. A., Isaacs, R. A., Tretter, L., & Markowski, S. (2019). Trigger warning efficacy: The impact of warnings on affect, attitudes, and learning. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, No Pagination Specified-No Pagination Specified. <https://doi.org/10.1037/stl0000150>
- Bryant, A., & Charmaz, K. (2019). *The SAGE Handbook of Current Developments in Grounded Theory*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526485656>

- Butler, L. D., Carello, J., & Maguin, E. (2017). Trauma, stress, and self-care in clinical training: Predictors of burnout, decline in health status, secondary traumatic stress symptoms, and compassion satisfaction. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 9(4), 416–424.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000187>
- Calmes, S. M., Laux, J. M., Scott, H. L., Reynolds, J. L., Roseman, C. P., & Piazza, N. J. (2013). Childhood Psychological Trauma and First-Year College Students' Substance Dependence. *Journal of Addictions & Offender Counseling*, 34(2), 70–80. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1874.2013.00016.x>
- Carello, J. (2022, May 27). *Suzanne R's literature review revisions* [Personal communication].
- Carello, J., & Butler, L. D. (2014). Potentially Perilous Pedagogies: Teaching Trauma Is Not the Same as Trauma-Informed Teaching. *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 15(2), 153–168. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15299732.2014.867571>
- Carello, J., & Butler, L. D. (2015). Practicing What We Teach: Trauma-Informed Educational Practice. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 35(3), 262–278.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2015.1030059>
- Carter, A. M. (2015). Teaching with Trauma: Disability Pedagogy, Feminism, and the Trigger Warnings Debate. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 35(2).
<https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v35i2.4652>
- Cavanaugh, C. (2015). Barriers to Online Education in a Developing Country: The Case of Nepal. In T. Clark & M. Barbour (Eds.), *Online and Distance Education in Schools: Global Perspectives of Policy and Practice*. Stylus Publishing, LLC.
https://www.academia.edu/32992125/Barriers_to_Online_Education_in_a_Developing_Country_The_Case_of_Nepal._In_Clark_T._and_Barbour_M._Eds._Online_and_Distance_Education_in_Schools_Global_Perspectives_on_Policy_and_Practice._Stylus
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing Grounded Theory*. SAGE.
- Charmaz, K. (2017). The Power of Constructivist Grounded Theory for Critical Inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 23(1), 34–45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800416657105>
- Chun Tie, Y., Birks, M., & Francis, K. (2019). Grounded theory research: A design framework for novice researchers. *SAGE Open Medicine*, 7, 2050312118822927. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050312118822927>
- Cloninger, S. (2017). *EXPLORING THE LIVES OF WOMEN WHO LEAD*. 353.
- Collins Sitler, H. (2009). Teaching with Awareness: The Hidden Effects of Trauma on Learning. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 82(3), 119–124. <https://doi.org/10.3200/TCHS.82.3.119-124>

- Conley, S., Ferguson, A., & Kumbier, A. (2019). Supporting Students with Histories of Trauma in Libraries: A Collaboration of Accessibility and Library Services. *Library Trends*, 67(3), 526–549. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2019.0001>
- Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. L. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory.*
- Cunningham, M. (2004). Teaching Social Workers about Trauma: Reducing the Risks of Vicarious Traumatization in the Classroom. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 40(2), 305–317. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2004.10778495>
- Dane, B. (2002). Duty to Inform: Preparing Social Work Students to Understand Vicarious Traumatization. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 22(3–4), 3–20. https://doi.org/10.1300/J067v22n03_02
- dannysuling. (2019, May 14). *Power and Responsibility: A Quote's Short History by dannysuling on DeviantArt.* <https://www.deviantart.com/dannysuling/art/Power-and-Responsibility-A-Quote-s-Short-History-797647132>
- Davidson, S. (2017). *Trauma-Informed Practices for Postsecondary Education: A Guide* [Text]. <https://educationnorthwest.org/resources/trauma-informed-practices-postsecondary-education-guide>
- Didham, S., Dromgoole, L., Csiernik, R., Karley, M. L., & Hurley, D. (2011). Trauma Exposure and the Social Work Practicum. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 31(5), 523–537. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2011.615261>
- Digest of Education Statistics, 2018.* (n.d.). Retrieved May 17, 2019, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_311.15.asp?current=yes
- Doughty, K. (2020). Increasing Trauma-Informed Awareness and Practices in Higher Education. *Examining Social Change and Social Responsibility in Higher Education*, 17–28. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-2177-9.ch002>
- Education transforms lives.* (2013, April 11). UNESCO. <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education>
- Finn, H. B. (2010). Overcoming Barriers: Adult Refugee Trauma Survivors in a Learning Community. *TESOL Quarterly*, 44(3), 586–596. JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27896747>
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed). Continuum.
- Ginwright, S. (2018, July). The Future of Healing: Shifting from Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement. *Kinship Carers Victoria/Grandparents Victoria*, 25. <http://kinshipcarersvictoria.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/OP-Ginwright-S-2018-Future-of-healing-care.pdf>
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.*

- Glaser, B. G., Strauss, A. L., & Strutz, E. (1968). The Discovery of Grounded Theory; Strategies for Qualitative Research. *Nursing Research*, 17(4), 364. https://journals.lww.com/nursingresearchonline/Citation/1968/07000/The_Discovery_of_Grounded_Theory__Strategies_for.14.aspx
- Grabinger, S. (2010). A Framework for Supporting Postsecondary Learners with Psychiatric Disabilities in Online Environments. *Electronic Journal of E-Learning*, 8(2), 101–109. <http://proxy.lib.sfu.ca/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=50138540&site=ehost-live>
- Gray, L.-A. (2019). Educational Trauma. In L.-A. Gray (Ed.), *Educational Trauma: Examples From Testing to the School-to-Prison Pipeline* (pp. 13–16). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28083-3_2
- Herman, J. L. (2015). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence, from domestic abuse to political terror / Judith Herman, M.D. ; with a new epilogue by the author*. Basic Books.
- Hess, K., McAuliffe, E. L., Gleckman-Krut, M., & Shapiro, S. (2021). Learning from 2020: How the Challenges of Remote Teaching Reinforce the Need for Care-Informed Pedagogy. *Teaching Sociology*, 0092055X211060344. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055X211060344>
- Hilario, C. T., Olliffe, J. L., Wong, J. P., Browne, A. J., & Johnson, J. L. (2018). “Just as Canadian as Anyone Else”? Experiences of Second-Class Citizenship and the Mental Health of Young Immigrant and Refugee Men in Canada. *American Journal of Men’s Health*, 12(2), 210–220. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1557988317743384>
- Hitchcock, L. I., Báez, J. C., Sage, M., Marquart, M., Lewis, K., & Smyth, N. J. (2021). Social Work Educators’ Opportunities During COVID-19: A Roadmap for Trauma-Informed Teaching During Crisis. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 0(0), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2021.1935369>
- Holley, L. C., & Steiner, S. (2005). Safe Space: Student Perspectives on Classroom Environment. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 41(1), 49–64. <https://doi.org/10.5175/JSWE.2005.200300343>
- hooks, bell. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.
- Horsman, J. (2004). “But Is It Education?”: The Challenge of Creating Effective Learning for Survivors of Trauma. *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, 32(1/2), 130–146. JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40004396>
- Jones, P. J., Bellet, B. W., & McNally, R. J. (2019). *Helping or Harming? The Effect of Trigger Warnings on Individuals with Trauma Histories* [Preprint]. Open Science Framework. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/axn6z>

- Karli Drew [g]. (2021, May 27). @EdTech4Funky1s It's absolutely unnecessary and forced resilience [Tweet]. @KarLeia.
<https://twitter.com/KarLeia/status/1398028551366971393>
- Kent. (2015, December 17). Disability, Mental Illness, and eLearning: Invisible Behind the Screen? *The Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy*.
<https://jitp.commons.gc.cuny.edu/disability-mental-illness-and-elearning-invisible-behind-the-screen/>
- Kerka, S. (2002). *Trauma and Adult Learning*. ERIC Digest.
<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED472601>
- Ketcham, C. (2018). Understanding the potential effects of trauma on refugees' language learning processes. *EWU Masters Thesis Collection*.
<https://dc.ewu.edu/theses/508>
- Kirschenbaum, H., Napier, R., & Simon, S. B. (2021). *Wad-Ja-Get? The Grading Game in American Education*. Maize Books. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.11900733>
- Knight, C. (2019). Trauma Informed Practice and Care: Implications for Field Instruction. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 47(1), 79–89. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-018-0661-x>
- Kools, S., McCarthy, M., Durham, R., & Robrecht, L. (1996). Dimensional Analysis: Broadening the Conception of Grounded Theory. *Qualitative Health Research*, 6(3), 312–330. <https://doi.org/10.1177/104973239600600302>
- Kostouros, P. (2010). *The Dance of Trauma in a Post-secondary Education*. 12.
- Linklater, R. (2014). *Decolonizing Trauma Work: Indigenous Stories and Strategies* (p. 176 Pages). Fernwood Publishing.
- Litvack, A., Mishna, F., & Bogo, M. (2010). Emotional Reactions of Students in Field Education: An Exploratory Study. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 46(2), 227–243. <https://doi.org/10.5175/JSWE.2010.200900007>
- Maiden, R. P. (2019). *The Transformation of Social Work Education through Virtual Learning*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Marlowe, J. M. (2010). Beyond the Discourse of Trauma: Shifting the Focus on Sudanese Refugees. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 23(2), 183–198.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feq013>
- Marshall, E. A., Butler, K., Roche, T., Cumming, J., & Taknint, J. T. (2016). Refugee youth: A review of mental health counselling issues and practices. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne*, 57(4), 308–319.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/cap0000068>

- Matheson, K., Foster, M. D., Bombay, A., McQuaid, R. J., & Anisman, H. (2019). Traumatic Experiences, Perceived Discrimination, and Psychological Distress Among Members of Various Socially Marginalized Groups. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 416. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00416>
- McCammon, S. L. (1995). Painful pedagogy: Teaching about trauma in academic and training settings. In *Secondary traumatic stress: Self-care issues for clinicians, researchers, and educators* (pp. 105–120). The Sidran Press.
- Merriman, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation, 4th Edition*. Jossey-Bass. <https://www.wiley.com/en-us/Qualitative+Research%3A+A+Guide+to+Design+and+Implementation%2C+4th+Edition-p-9781119003618>
- Miller, M. (2001). Creating a Safe Frame for Learning. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 21(3–4), 159–176. https://doi.org/10.1300/J067v21n03_12
- Miller, M. D. (2014). Minds Online: Teaching Effectively with Technology. In *Minds Online*. Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674735996>
- Morse, J. M., Stern, P. N., Corbin, J., Bowers, B., Charmaz, K., & Clarke, A. E. (2016). *Developing Grounded Theory: The Second Generation*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315430577>
- Nagel, D. A., F Burns, V., Tilley, C., & Aubin, D. (2015). When Novice Researchers Adopt Constructivist Grounded Theory: Navigating Less Travelled Paradigmatic and Methodological Paths in PhD Dissertation Work. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 10, 365–383. <https://doi.org/10.28945/2300>
- Nelson, K., Peterson, K., McMillian, & Clarke, K. (2022). Imperfect and Flexible: Using Trauma-Informed Practice to Guide Instruction. *Libraries and the Academy*, 22(1).
- Noddings, N. (2013). *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (2nd ed.). <https://www.ucpress.edu/ebook/9780520957343/caring>
- Noy, C. (2008). Sampling Knowledge: The Hermeneutics of Snowball Sampling in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11(4), 327–344. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570701401305>
- O'Halloran, M. S., & O'Halloran, T. (2001). Secondary Traumatic Stress in the Classroom: Ameliorating Stress in Graduate Students. *Teaching of Psychology*, 28(2), 92–97. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15328023TOP2802_03
- Oram, L. (2016). *A Method to My Quietness: A Grounded Theory Study of Living and Leading with Introversion*. 223.
- Perry, B. D. (2006). Fear and learning: Trauma-related factors in the adult education process. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2006(110), 21–27. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.215>

- Quiros, L., Kay, L., & Montijo, A. M. (2012). Creating Emotional Safety in the Classroom and in the Field. *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping*, 18(2), 42–47. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1622293276?parentSessionId=vKd9BvLK3NbHSTIQ9%2ByZiKFUMvYE4ry4MrqGo3apC6g%3D&pq-origsite=primo>
- Rae, L. (2016). Re-focusing the debate on trigger warnings: Privilege, trauma, and disability in the classroom. *First Amendment Studies*, 50(2), 95–102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21689725.2016.1224677>
- Reinhardt, S. (unpublished). *I Was Misinformed: Addressing trauma-informed online learning*.
- Rider, J. (2019). E-Relationships: Using Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis to Build Ethics of Care in Digital Spaces. In L. Kyei-Blankson, J. Blankson, & E. Ntuli (Eds.), *Care and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Online Settings*. IGI Global.
- Robinson, H., Al-Freih, M., & Kilgore, W. (2020). Designing with care: Towards a care-centered model for online learning design. *The International Journal of Information and Learning Technology*, ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print). <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJILT-10-2019-0098>
- Roman, T. (2020). Supporting the Mental Health of Preservice Teachers in COVID-19 through Trauma-Informed Educational Practices and Adaptive Formative Assessment Tools. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 28(2), 473–481. <http://www.learntechlib.org/primary/p/216363/>
- SAMHSA. (2014). *Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services*. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US). <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207201/>
- Schatzman, L. (1991). Dimensional Analysis: Notes on an Alternative Approach to the Grounding of Theory in Qualitative Research. In A. Strauss & D. R. Maines (Eds.), *Social Organization and Social Processes: Essays in Honor of Anselm Strauss*.
- Selwyn, N. (2010). Looking beyond learning: Notes towards the critical study of educational technology: Looking beyond learning. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 26(1), 65–73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2729.2009.00338.x>
- Sommers-Flanagan, J. (2015, December 5). Constructivism vs. Social Constructionism: What's the Difference? *John Sommers-Flanagan*. <https://johnsommersflanagan.com/2015/12/05/constructivism-vs-social-constructionism-whats-the-difference/>
- Sykes, P., & Gachago, A. (2018). Creating ‘safe-ish’ learning spaces—Attempts to practice an ethics of care. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 32(6). <https://doi.org/10.20853/32-6-2654>
- Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G. (2004). TARGET ARTICLE: “Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence.” *Psychological Inquiry*, 15(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli1501_01

- Timmermans, S., & Tavory, I. (2012). Theory Construction in Qualitative Research: From Grounded Theory to Abductive Analysis. *Sociological Theory*, 30(3), 167–186. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275112457914>
- Timonen, V., Foley, G., & Conlon, C. (2018). Challenges When Using Grounded Theory: A Pragmatic Introduction to Doing GT Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1), 1609406918758086. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918758086>
- Tomei, L. A. (2006). The Impact of Online Teaching on Faculty Load: Computing the Ideal Class Size for Online Courses. *Journal of Technology & Teacher Education*, 14(3), 531–541. <http://proxy.lib.sfu.ca/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=507862117&site=ehost-live>
- Venet, A. S. (2019). Role-Clarity and Boundaries for Trauma-Informed Teachers. *Educational Considerations*, 44(2). <https://doi.org/10.4148/0146-9282.2175>
- Wacquant, L. (2002). Scrutinizing the Street: Poverty, Morality, and the Pitfalls of Urban Ethnography. *American Journal of Sociology*, 107(6), 1468–1532. <https://doi.org/10.1086/340461>
- Wagner, A., & Lynn Magnusson, J. (2005). Neglected realities: Exploring the impact of women's experiences of violence on learning in sites of higher education. *Gender and Education*, 17(4), 449–461. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540250500145189>
- Walker Baron, M., Brown, D., Cardinal, L., Hess, S., & Indera Singh, M. (2019). When the Past is Present in the Classroom: Utilizing a Trauma-Informed Approach in the Virtual Setting. In R. P. Maiden (Ed.), *The Transformation of Social Work Education through Virtual Learning*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Wilson, V. (2020). *Trauma-informed teaching of adults*. 43, 7.
- Zosky, D. L. (2013). Wounded Healers: Graduate Students with Histories of Trauma in a Family Violence Course. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 33(3), 239–250. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2013.795923>
- Zurbriggen, E. L. (2011). Preventing secondary traumatization in the undergraduate classroom: Lessons from theory and clinical practice. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 3(3), 223–228. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024913>