

5 Things: Learning About Trauma-Responsive Pedagogy



2021

THE SERIES

The resources recommended in this series are intended to be eclectic and thought-provoking. They may be journal articles, blog posts, podcasts, interviews, reports, or just about anything else that we think is important to read, watch, or hear about this topic. For the general concept, this series is deeply indebted to the EDUCAUSE “7 Things You Should Know About...” reports.

THE TOPIC

The negative impact of trauma on learning and development is well-documented. Grounded in caring awareness of the ways that students may have experienced trauma, trauma-responsive pedagogy seeks to foster learning environments that support students’ needs.

While trauma can affect anybody regardless of life circumstances, the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing struggles for racial justice highlight the ways some individuals and groups are disproportionately affected and how traumas can intersect (Pica-Smith and Scannell 2020). As therapist, educator, and activist Tiombe Wallace notes, “Trauma does not occur in a vacuum—it occurs within the personal, social (and often political) context of the person and their intersecting identities: race, class, ability, gender identity and expression, first language, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status, body size, etc.” (2017, 6). In the face of systemic, intersecting traumas, trauma-responsive pedagogy requires a holistic approach that encompasses both individual educators’ practices and institutional culture, practices, and policies.

In light of this, there has been a paradigm shift in recent years from trauma-informed care (TIC) and trauma-informed practice (TIP) to trauma-responsive work. “Attainment of knowledge is not always enough,” as psychiatrist and educator Sandra Bloom argues, because “in order to truly meet the needs of people who have experienced trauma and adversity, it is necessary ... to achieve a more significant level of responsiveness to those needs that derives from the increased knowledge” (2016, 389).

The resources on this list are only a small sampling of the rich bodies of literature on this topic in library and information sciences, education, psychology, social work, healthcare, and other fields. Those wishing to learn more may consult Rebecca Tolley’s *A Trauma-Informed Approach to Library Services* (ALA Editions, 2020). [Library Juice Academy](#) and [We Here Community School](#) have also offered courses on this topic.

1. Davidson, Shannon. 2017. "Trauma-Informed Practices for Postsecondary Education: A Guide." Education Northwest, August. <https://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/resources/trauma-informed-practices-postsecondary-508.pdf>.

A key premise of this resource from Education Northwest is that "choosing a trauma-informed approach requires an entire campus community to shift its focus to understanding what happened to a student rather than fixating on that student's negative behaviors" (Davidson 2017, 16). To that end, Davidson first defines trauma, establishes its prevalence, outlines its potential effects on student learning, and identifies student groups who are particularly likely to have experienced trauma. The most substantial portion of the resource addresses practices for college- and university-level educators both inside and outside the classroom to address trauma and support traumatized students; these practices include guidance for avoiding vicarious trauma. Davidson concludes with a substantial bibliography for further reading and research. **Approximate reading time: 30 minutes.**

2. Conley, Sasha, Aaron Ferguson, and Alana Kumbier. 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>.

This article outlines the ongoing efforts of library staff at Hampshire College to offer universally designed, trauma-informed academic support. The authors suggest six strategies for building a trauma-aware library: gain awareness of the trauma and marginalization many students experience, disrupt negative self-talk, make self-service resources available, provide identity-specific programming, recruit and hire diversely, and offer informed referrals to appropriate offices on campus. Readers will gain insight into the training library staff receive in order to provide student support through one-on-one consultations and the creation of a Toolbox, or curated collection of resources that address common issues reported by students. A strong emphasis is placed on continued self-reflection and the ongoing practice of cultural humility among library staff. The authors also explore the various ways trauma can impact students and the need for library staff to learn the symptoms of trauma in order to offer support that does not cause more harm or retraumatization. **Approximate reading time: 45 minutes.**

3. Ludvik, Marilee Bresciani. 2020. "Co-Creating the Container for Optimal Learning and Development: Lessons from Trauma-Informed Mindful Compassion Practices." *About Campus* 24 (1): 25-31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086482219899648>.

Incorporating trauma-responsive teaching practices can foster optimal learning that respects students' lived experiences and emotions. Drawing on the zone of proximal development and research on mindful self-compassion, Ludvik outlines "zones of proximity" to optimize student learning. Acknowledging that optimal learning involves a sense of being challenged to grow, the author shares specific practices for students to enter, re-engage, and feel safe in this learning. Of particular note is Ludvik's focus on strategies that incorporate student agency, inclusive options for reflection, and an appreciation for learning preferences. The strategies that Ludvik

shares lend themselves to a variety of instruction formats, and the author includes writing prompts, visual resources (for instance, communication cards with think-pair-share preferences), and tactile grounding exercises that offer both new and experienced instructors opportunities to co-create inclusive classroom experiences. **Approximate reading time: 20-30 minutes.**

4. Hagelin, Karina. 2020. "Moving Towards Healing: A Trauma-Informed Librarianship Primer." *ACRLlog* (blog), June 23. <https://acrlog.org/2020/06/23/moving-towards-healing-a-trauma-informed-librarianship-primer/>.

A great, brief introduction to this concept that points to many more resources you can engage with. Hagelin reminds us that when you work in a library, you are working with trauma survivors whether or not you're aware of it. The reason it's important to be mindful is so you don't re-traumatize someone. You have a choice: you can be a healing influence, or a traumatizing one. Hagelin suggests rejecting the mindset of "difficult" patrons and instead thinking of what that patron might need. What you're seeing might be coping behaviors. Hagelin outlines the four goals of trauma-informed care; it 1) realizes the impact of trauma, 2) recognizes signs and symptoms of trauma, 3) responds by using this knowledge, and 4) resists retraumatization. Hagelin then outlines some actionables in the library, which are worth reading in full but include clear signage, marked exits, community participation in library initiatives, and confidentiality. **Approximate reading time: 10-15 minutes.**

5. Imad, Mays. 2020. "Leveraging the Neuroscience of Now." *Inside Higher Ed*, June 3. <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/06/03/seven-recommendations-helping-students-thrive-times-trauma>.

Imad's seven quick tips provide guidance on teaching students with pandemic-induced trauma. For students who have lost their sense of safety, she writes, learning becomes secondary. Because of this, addressing students' anxiety is paramount. Instructors can do this by facilitating communication: between students and from student to teacher. For example, providing a platform where students can share their stories allows them to identify the emotions they are experiencing and learn that others share those feelings. Imad also stresses the importance of understanding the disparate effects the pandemic has had on different communities and being sensitive to these distinctions. Imad opens and closes her post with this quote from the poet Rumi: "Friends, we are traveling together." These tips demonstrate how to provide students with this sense of mutual support during a difficult time. **Approximate reading time: 10 minutes.**

Works Cited

Bloom, Sandra L. 2016. "Advancing a National Cradle-to-Grave-to-Cradle Public Health Agenda." *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* 17 (4): 383-396. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15299732.2016.1164025>.

Pica-Smith, Cinzia and Christian Scannell. 2020. "Teaching and Learning for this Moment: How a Trauma Informed Lens Can Guide Our Praxis." *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Higher Education* 5 (1): 76-83. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jimphe.v5i1.2627>.

Wallace, Tiombe. 2017. "Impact of Trauma, Violence and Stress on Health." Presentation at a meeting of the Los Angeles County Integration Advisory Board, Los Angeles, CA, September 27. <http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/113136.pdf>.

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If you have comments or questions about the "5 Things" publications, please contact the current IS Research and Scholarship Committee Chair: <http://www.ala.org/acrl/is/acr-insressch>.