The Trauma Informed Teacher

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PART ONE: (WHAT AND WHY)
- HOW TRAUMA AFFECTS THE BRAIN
- IMPACT ON BEHAVIOR & LEARNING

PART TWO: (HOW)
- TEACHING TIPS, FOCUSED ON
  o Syllabi policies
  o Graded work
  o General strategies

"LET EVERYTHING HAPPEN TO YOU. BEAUTY AND TERROR. JUST KEEP GOING. NO FEELING IS FINAL." RAINER MARIA RILKE

Session guidelines

▶ Please hold questions until the end

▶ Feel free to follow-up for additional information after the session is complete

Part 1 & Part 2 overview

Part 1 will cover
- The definition & prevalence of trauma
- Trauma's impact on biology
  - Brain morphology & connectivity
  - Epigenetics
- Impact of biological differences on behavior
  - Most common & visible behaviors
  - Less commonly recognized behaviors

Part 2 will cover
- CDC TI principles, with focus on practices that maximize transparency, safety, and trust
- Teaching practices that increase probability of achieving TI principles, with focus on
 - Syllabi
  - Graded work
  - General strategies

Part I

- **Definition: Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible situation (APA, 2020)**
  - Adverse Childhood Experience study (ACE; 1995 to 1997)
  - 2/3 of participants had at least one and 1/5 had three or more ACE
- **Prevalence: 25 to 50% of college students have experienced one or more (significant) traumatic events**
- **Dose-response relationship:**
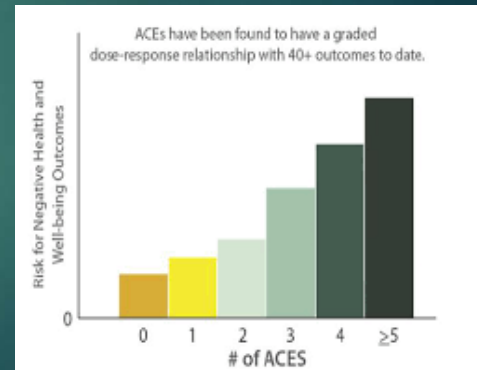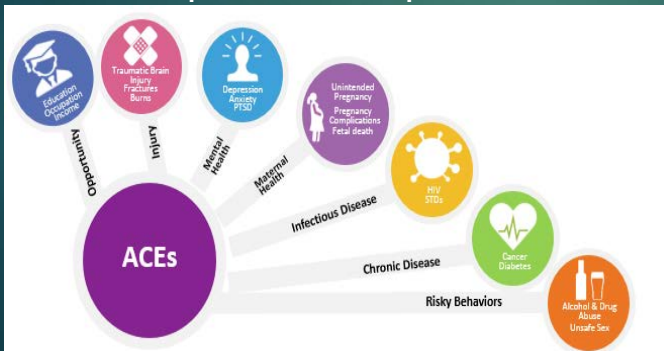
Trauma's biological impact

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9AfBsTAQ8zs

Epigenetic processes (prenatally and throughout life) impacts brain morphology/connectivity as well as health and well-being
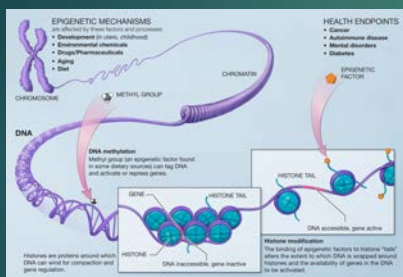
✓ **Trauma:**
- **Timing**
- **Severity & chronicity**
  - o **Has epigenetic effects with varied outcomes**

Brain impacts

✓ **Trifecta disruption: Threat perception, filtering (attention), and self-sensing brain systems are disrupted (Bessel van der Kolk, 2015)**
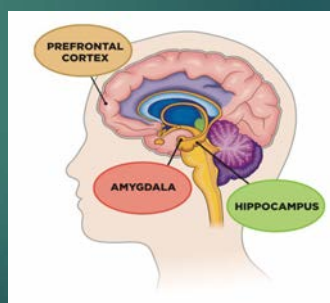
Behavioral impacts: most visible

▶ **Results of trifecta disruption:**

(2) Bessel van der Kolk on three Ways Trauma Can Change the Brain – YouTube
(2) Science Bulletins: Brains Change with Trauma - YouTube

✓ **Most visible impact of trauma: Chronic difficulty with emotional/behavioral regulation**

▶ **Neuro-developmental disorders and some types of mental illnesses manifest similar difficulties (final common pathway model)**

✓ **PTSD**

✓ **Mood disorders**

✓ **Personality disorders (Cluster B)**

- all share -

- **Mood lability, hostility/irritability, & reactivity**

- **Bodily symptoms (headaches/gastrointestinal/pain)**

- **Increased risk of "comorbid" substance abuse**

4/14/22

## Behavioral impacts: less visible

Less obvious:

► **Incorrect processing (reading) of social cues: tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures**
► **Gets upset, has trouble de-escalating**
► **Misperceive people, situations, or things as threatening or hostile**
► **Evoke reactions in others that reinforce beliefs**
  ✓ **Paranoia is evocative**
► **Do not match (attune to) others emotional states or synchronize/harmonize (respond in sort)**
► **Anxiety may be expressed as oppositional-defiance**
► **Problematic attachment styles**
  ✓ **Intrusive, avoidant, disconnected or mixed**

FUN FACT: I Don't Care

Part 2: TI teaching principles[(2) Understanding Trauma: Learning Brain vs Survival Brain – YouTube](#)

► **Set of 6 purpose-driven principles that maximizes learning for all students**
(https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/infographics/6_principles_trauma _info.htmCDC 2020)

  ❑ **Focus on central principle of safety, trustworthiness, & transparency (CDC, 2020)**
    ✓ **Reduces Anxiety & ambiguity**

► **How to achieve TI principle(s)**

  ❑ **By trauma informed teaching practices that cross disciplines & teaching modalities**

THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Work Begins — F**k Off — Panic — All The Work While Crying — Deadline
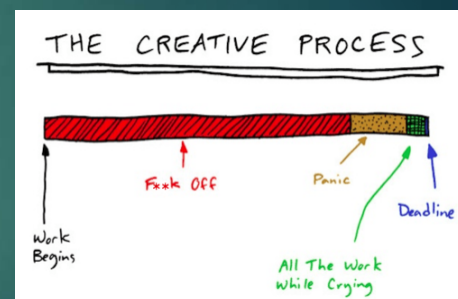
Part 2- Next, is a sampling of teaching strategies focused on common elements across disciplines & modalities

How Time is Spent in Class

🟩 Waiting for the teacher to be done lecturing
🟥 Writing stuff
🟦 Doing work
🟧 Stifling laughter because the teacher said something dirty

imgflip.com

Strategies:

#1 Syllabus practices

#2 Assignment practices

#3 Exam & grading practices

#4 General practices (teaching tips)

✓ Techniques to maximize transparency, safety,& trustworthiness for our students.

Syllabi practices

10. Rachel has 16 chocolate bars. Tracey takes 4 from her and asks for the remaining quarter. What would she end up with?

A slap
X

Not the answer I was looking for

mrmemei.com

► Consider a "basic needs statement": Sara Goldrick-Rab
► Purpose-driven structure & policies:
  1) Weekly schedule of topics/chapters/graded work
  2) Set reasonable, but explicit policies
     ✓ Late work policy
        ❑ Setting due dates (or clear expectations) is necessary – to establish boundaries, provide structure, & support instructor
        ❑ Allow sensible opportunities for missed work
           ○ Avoid "zero tolerance" For example, use "grace periods," allow a limited number of late submissions or reduce points for late work
              ○ Scaffolding
     ✓ Attendance policy
        ► Ideally, is incentive-based
     ✓ Clarify of final grade determination

Assignment practices

❑ **Preface Blackboard course content with a learning plan**

  ✓ **Consider laying out the course learning plan. It gives students a map of how you will teach across the semester**

 ✓ **Sample (PSY 110 "Course Overview and How to Navigate")**

❑ **Preface assignments/graded work with a virtual or written guided tour of the course set up**

  ✓ **For example, the "Start here" button – contains course syllabus & key policies**

    *Consider posting your teaching philosophy

Assignment practices

Book argues that mentoring programs should try to unveil colleges' "hidden curriculum" (insidehighered.com))
Microsoft Word - JEP-Vol.6 No.33 2015.docx (ed.gov)

▶ **Conduct task analysis for each assignment to**

  ✓ **avoids "the hidden curriculum"**

      &

  ✓ **promotes agency**
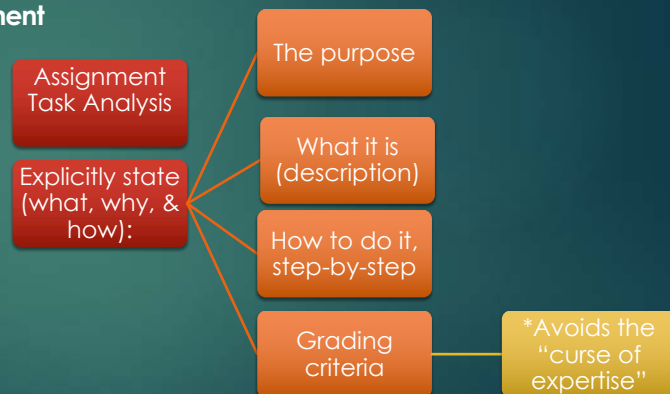
▶ **All assignments should address:**

  ❑ **Purpose (what is it and why?)**

  ❑ **How to do it**

  ❑ **How it is assessed**

Assignment Task Analysis

Explicitly state (what, why, & how):

The purpose

What it is (description)

How to do it, step-by-step

Grading criteria

*Avoids the "curse of expertise"

Assignment practices

I CARE ABOUT THIS ALOT

▶ **Practice course "alignment"**
  ❑ **Reading and assignments align to exam questions**

▶ **Practice content-based grading with sensible exceptions**

  ❑ **Grade for conceptual/skill understanding**
    ✓ **Avoiding taking off points for grammatical mistakes that don't interfere with content**
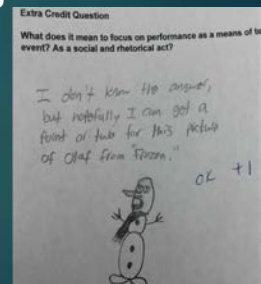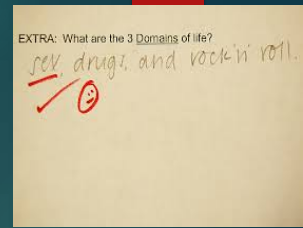   ***Unless, of course, grammar is of focus!**

Assignment practices

▶ **Play promotes learning across the lifespan. Consider:**
  ✓ **Although research doesn't support validity of "learning styles", learning is enhanced by multi-sensory engagement**

  ✓ **(optimal) arousal and interest enhances learning**
    ❑ **Ideas to promote engagement**

We got Super Smash Bros 5 down here, wana play?

Assignment practices

▶ **So what about "extra credit"? Consider:**

　▶ **Allowing 3 to 5% of the total course points accounted for by enrichment learning** (above limit)

　▶ **Enrichment assignments should align with course learning objectives**

　　✓ **Set a deadline for submission at least 2 to 4 weeks before semester's end. Or use paced due dates.**

　　✓ **Enrichment assignments can push boundaries (encourage "stretch skills") & introduce students to more advanced material**

　　✓ **Skillfully practiced enrichment increases student engagement & confidence**

EXTRA: What are the 3 Domains of life?
sex, drugs, and rock'n' roll.

Extra Credit Question
What does it mean to focus on performance as a means of to event? As a social and rhetorical act?

I don't know the answer, but hopefully I can get a point of two for this picture of Olaf from Frozen." ok +1

The difference between passing and failing is the willingness to try anything

Exam & grading practices

▶ **Use practice exams**

▶ **Offer drop by prep. sessions**

　✓ **Consider formal coaching/tutoring**

▶ **Model perspective taking**

　✓ **It's not all or nothing**

　✓ **"Pie technique"** ➡

▶ **Use "error of the estimate" for final grades**

▶ **Ideally, final grade is balanced among multiple assessment modalities**

▶ **Keep grades updated in point/percentage column**

#1643247
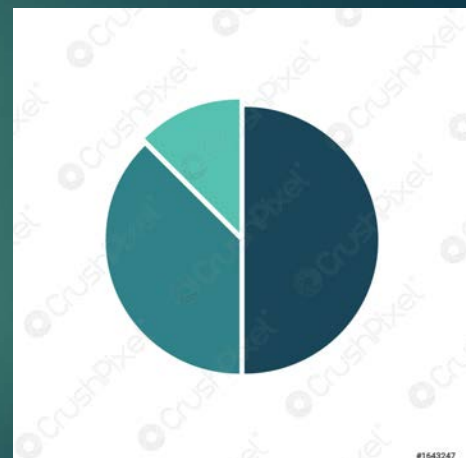
General strategies

- **Use every student interaction to build engagement and rapport**
  - ✓ It may be in the syllabus. But repeat it as often as asked.

- **Repeat, repeat, repeat!**
  - ✓ Conceptual learning requires repetition
  - ✓ For example, provide a course schedule, but each week review what is happening and what is due in an announcement. Also, repeat this information in each Blackboard unit (. . .a good approach is to have a folder for each week of work)

- **Raise awareness of on and off-campus resources**
  - ✓ Consider posting a document with clickable links

General strategies

- **Give excellent feedback. One method:**
  - ✓ Give individualized feedback via written comments, a recording, or a live session.
  - ✓ At the same time, give group feedback addressing commonalities across the assignment or exam

- **Humor, play, and creativity helps shift perspective and reduce anxiety**
  - ✓ Small moments of humanity increase student liking

- **Be flexible with engagement & communication options**
  - ✓ Avoid the dreaded "participation grade" (unless assignment/activity specific)
    - ❑ Instead, facilitate participation through tone, classroom environment, and opportunity
  - ✓ Do group assignments with extreme caution

General strategies

▶ **Sensible "trigger warnings" are good, working to avoid making students "uncomfortable" is not**

▶ **Avoid over-correction spin outs**
  ❑ **Healthy boundaries means sometimes saying NO**
  ❑ **Being TI informed does not mean avoiding conflict or controversial topics**

▶ **Know when to get help, and err on over doing it**
  ❑ **Use campus resources**

Resources

Course policies & statements (Carnegie Mellon Eberly Center)
https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/syllabus/newcourse/coursepoliciesandstatements.html

Basic needs clause (Goldrick-Rab, 2020):
https://medium.com/temple-sociology-of-education/temple-sociology-of-education-syllabus-8ad1f430e7c9

Brain facts.org BrainFacts