



But I Live Educational Resources

Trauma-Informed Pedagogy: Five Principles

While there is a wealth of literature detailing various approaches to trauma-informed pedagogy, for the purposes of this unit, there are five key principles that must be adhered to. The overall goal of this unit is to help students build an understanding of trauma, through the use of visual narratives, without any secondary traumatization. To that end, the unit has been structured to adhere to the following five principles:

Safety

Students cannot learn when they feel unsafe. This unit has been structured with predictable and transparent routines and protocols to create a sense of safety in the classroom.

Through the use of regular emotional monitoring, content warnings, and discussion-scaffolding strategies, we aim to never put students in an unsafe situation. Discussions are a key mode of engagement, yet they can challenge students. Many recommendations have been included for ways to structure discussion for student safety, while maintaining engagement. The instructor should prioritize student safety above all else.

Choice

Students are given choices at various junctures in the unit, particularly in guiding their own personal responses and reflections. However, when adapting this unit, the instructor should be mindful that they do not overburden students with choice. Too much choice can feel unsafe. The process of group formation, for example, may isolate individuals, leaving left-out students feeling vulnerable. Or students may feel overwhelmed if given too many prompts to respond to, worrying that they have made the wrong choice. Choice should always be offered in a structured and guided way.

Collaboration

While students will complete a sizable section of the unit individually, collaboration is very important. Collaboration can be emotionally vulnerable, so the unit includes classroom protocols that foster transparency and predictability.

The instructor's role is to be always on the student's side. The collaborative process includes the teacher too: how the instructor involves themselves is equally important. Classroom management, for example, may look different with a trauma-informed practice. If students violate classroom protocols, the instructor's role is to ensure the safety of all students. When the instructor addresses inappropriate behaviour, they should do so constructively rather than punitively. A trauma-informed instructor should always try to understand the root causes of behaviours, and should offer constructive solutions rather than punishments. For example, rather than telling a student to leave, you can ask if they'd like to take a walk.

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Trustworthiness

In order to be trustworthy, we must be open and transparent. This unit is designed to allow students to understand the rationale behind each activity and assessment. Whenever we ask students to do something, we should be clear about why we are doing it, and what our objectives are.

Empowerment

Students should be set up to succeed, and assessment should be strengths-based. The instructor should be gentle with critique—instead focusing on areas where students demonstrate growth and strength. To this end, the teacher may want to develop a three-point rubric for the final reflection.