From Trauma-Informed to Trauma-Transformative:

Creating Classrooms Where Children Can Heal, Belong and Thrive



1

The ordinary moment

Think of a student who found school difficult.

What ordinary interaction happened repeatedly?

What message might the student have received?



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From informed to transformative

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Trauma-aware

I recognise that trauma may affect children.

Trauma-informed

I understand how trauma may influence development, behaviour, relationships and learning.

Trauma-transformative

I intentionally create experiences that strengthen healing, dignity, connection, agency and hope.

3

Making SPACE for learning

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Safety	Resourcing a felt sense of safety at school
Predictability	Providing predictable, reliable supports
Attuned connections	Nurturing compassionate, dependable relationships
Cultural strength	Practicing with cultural humility and increasing cultural safety
Empowerment	Promoting strengths and participation

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Safety before strategy

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Trauma Transformative Dimensions

- Safety Dedicated
- Relationally Integrative
- Therapeutic Intent

SPACE

- S — Safety
- P — Predictability
- A — Attuned Connections

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Scenario: Alexa's first five minutes

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1. Alexa arrives 15 minutes late.
2. The class is already working.
3. Alexa enters loudly, drops a bag and says:

"What are we even doing?"

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Safety does not remove expectations.

It creates a relational pathway through which expectations become more achievable.



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Pain, grief and shame

Trauma Transformative Dimensions

- Grief Receptive
- Shame Responsive
- Compassion Oriented
- Decolonising Practice

SPACE

- **S** Safety
- **A** Attuned Connections
- **C** Cultural Strength

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Shame changes the story of self

Guilt
"I did something bad."

Shame
"I am bad."



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Where might shame be hiding?

"I don't care."

"This work is stupid."

"It was their fault."

"I wasn't even trying."

"You hate me anyway."

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The boundary stays. The experience changes.

1 Scenario	2 The boundary	3 The question
During group work, a student becomes frustrated, swears at another student and knocks their books onto the floor.	The harmful behaviour must stop.	How can we hold that boundary without adding shame or disconnection?

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Response 1

"That is completely unacceptable. **Pick those books up immediately and apologise.** I have had enough of this behaviour from you."

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Response 2

"I can see you're upset. **Why don't you go outside for a while and calm down?**"

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Response 3

"You have breached the classroom behaviour expectations. **You know what the consequence is. Go to the designated room/space.**"

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Response 4

“Stop. Knocking someone’s things over is not okay.”

“I can see something has happened. Right now, I need to make sure everyone is safe.”

“Take some space. When you’re ready, we’ll work out what happened and what you need.”

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Compassionate boundaries

1 STOP	2 PAUSE	3 CONNECT	4 REPAIR
Protect safety and clearly name the limit.	**Reduce intensity before demanding reflection.**	**Communicate that belonging and relationship remain available.**	**Return to accountability when the student can participate.**
“Stop. Knocking someone’s things over isn’t okay.”	“Let’s take some space for a moment.” **This applies to the adult as much as the student.**	“I can see something happened. I’ll check in with you shortly.”	“Let’s work out what happened, who was affected and what needs to happen now.”

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Behaviour has a story

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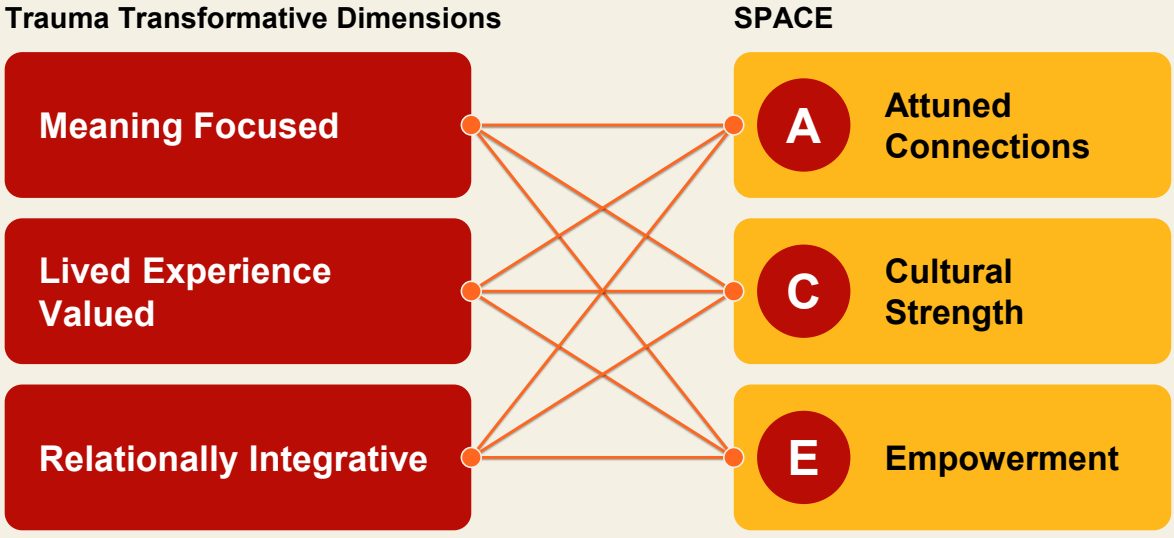

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What is happening here?

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A student pushes away an assessment task and says:

"This is stupid. I'm not doing it."

? **What story might adults tell?**

? **What story might the student be living?**

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Create understanding with the student

Instead of "Why aren't you doing the work?" **ask:**

- "What makes this hardest for you?"
- "What usually helps?"
- "Is there something we are doing that makes it harder?"
- "What could we change together?"

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Who has to change?

From:
"This student needs to learn to fit into the school."

To:
"What does the school need to understand or change so this student experiences cultural safety, dignity and belonging?"

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Who has to change?

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Decolonising and Anti-oppressive Committed

A calm classroom will not feel safe if a student's identity is stereotyped, invisible or subject to racism.

Collaborative and Participatory Driven

Consistency requires collaboration and inclusive approaches that can be trusted.

Lived Experience Valued

Asking students what they think without allowing their contribution to affect anything may deepen cynicism rather than build agency.

Hope Inspiring

Children need evidence that something different is possible. Hope becomes credible when relationships, opportunities and systems actually change.

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One ordinary interaction

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One student

Who might I now see differently?

One interaction

What ordinary moment can I transform?

One SPACE principle

What will I strengthen?

One dimension

What will I carry more deliberately?

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"Relationships that heal are trustworthy and enduring. They offer predictability. They stabilise. They regulate. They help to create new memories of care and trust. Safety is the biologically determined pathway to healing children's trauma."

Tucci et al. (2024)

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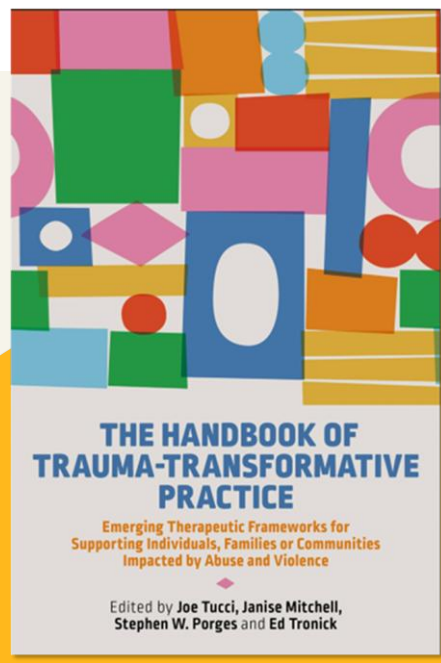

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