

A CASE STUDY ON TRAUMA-INFORMED CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING: CORE CONCEPTS FOR SCHOOL PROFESSIONALS

Karen M. VanDeusen, Dee A. Sherwood, Linda Reeser, & Marian Tripplett

School of Social Work, Western Michigan University (USA)

Abstract

Purpose: This workshop addresses the critical need for educators and helping professionals to develop competencies in supporting students affected by adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), intergenerational trauma, and socio-political adversities. Participants will acquire practical skills in implementing trauma-informed and culturally responsive (TICR) approaches within educational settings. **Background:** The workshop integrates the National Child Traumatic Stress Network's 12 Core Concepts for Understanding Traumatic Stress Responses (12 CCs) with SAMHSA's trauma-informed principles. Through problem-based learning (PBL), participants explore ecological factors influencing trauma response and recovery while developing strategies to mitigate secondary traumatic stress among educators and helping professionals. **Key Points:** Participants will: (1) apply the TICR framework to diverse educational contexts; (2) analyze multisystemic trauma impacts on student response and recovery; (3) consider risk and protective factors across ecological systems; and (4) identify TICR strategies to support educators, helping professionals, and students. **Methodology:** The 45-minute workshop employs a structured PBL approach comprising three phases: (1) didactic presentation introducing TICR framework and 12 CCs; (2) small-group case analyses using one case vignette and applying select CCs as analytical lenses for critical reasoning and case conceptualization; (3) small-group synthesis of insights and opportunities for participants to apply TICR framework to their own settings. **Participants:** Educational professionals including teachers, counselors, social workers, psychologists, and administrators. Maximum of 40 participants, ideally seated in groups to maintain optimal small-group dynamics.

Keywords: *Trauma-informed, culturally responsive, problem-based learning, secondary trauma.*

1. Introduction

It is reported that about 70% of people are exposed to potentially traumatic events (PTEs) in their lifetime (Kessler et al., 2017, as cited by the World Health Organization, 2024). Children, families, and communities respond differently to PTEs. Some forms of trauma are associated with more negative impacts, such as war, violence, sexual trauma, and complex trauma, i.e., multiple trauma exposures. Other factors associated with negative outcomes include insecurity related to basic needs and lack of adequate mental health and health care services. Social-ecological factors found to promote resilience include social support, food and housing security, and access to mental health services and affirming care (Satapathy et al., 2022).

Given the ubiquitous nature of exposure to PTEs, educators are likely to have students in their classrooms who have experienced trauma. These students may experience various trauma responses that impact their behavior in the classroom including hyperarousal (e.g., agitation, startle responses), hypo-arousal (e.g., avoidance, emotional numbing, tuning out), re-experiencing symptoms (e.g., poor sleep quality, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, flashbacks), and avoidance of sensory input (e.g., physical sensations, sights, sounds, smells, tastes), thoughts and feelings that may act as trauma reminders. When responding to a trauma trigger in the classroom, a child or adolescent may move rapidly from a regulated state to a dysregulated state (Saxe et al., 2016).

Educators may also have experienced their own history of trauma, including ACEs, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, sexual trauma, racial trauma; and/ or shared trauma such as community violence (including school violence), disasters, and war. When educators learn about students' exposure to trauma, they may be reminded of their own trauma histories and/ or experience symptoms of secondary traumatic stress (NCTSN, 2012).

2. Purpose

The purpose of this workshop is to address the critical need for educators and helping professionals to develop competencies in supporting students who have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (Anda et al., 2006) such as abuse, neglect, witnessing domestic violence, food or housing insecurity, and other exposures outside of the family (e.g., community violence, bullying, disasters, refugee trauma, deportations).

This workshop integrates the National Child Traumatic Stress Network's 12 Core Concepts for Understanding Traumatic Stress Responses in Children and Families (12 CCs) (NCTSN, 2012) with an adaptation of the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA, 2014) guidance for trauma-informed care. The NCTSN's 12 CCs describe the complex impacts of trauma that children, adolescents, and their families commonly experience and were developed as part of a larger curriculum to train graduate students, helping professionals, and educators in childhood trauma (Dublin et al., 2025).

While the CCs aim to increase understanding about childhood trauma and its impact, SAMHSA (2014) delineates principles essential to trauma-informed care, including "safety, trustworthiness and transparency, peer support, collaboration and mutuality, and [acknowledgement of] cultural, historical and gender issues" (p. 10). We have adapted the latter principle (cultural, historical, gender) to include cultural and gender responsiveness and move beyond awareness of "issues" or a problem-centered approach to a trauma-informed and culturally responsive (TICR) approach.

3. Workshop aims

This workshop aims to increase participants' understanding of the impact of individual, historical, and/or shared trauma on students while focusing on strategies that support emotional regulation, build upon student strengths and resilience, and co-create a safe and culturally responsive environment in the classroom (Sherwood et al., 2021).

This workshop applies the 12 CCs (NCTSN, 2012) as an important tool for educators to increase their understanding of the ways in which children, families, and communities are impacted by trauma, integrated with a TICR approach to build on student strengths and resilience leading to more effective outcomes in the classroom. Participants will acquire practical skills in implementing trauma-informed and culturally responsive (TICR) approaches within educational settings. Through problem-based learning (PBL), participants explore ecological factors influencing trauma response and recovery while developing strategies to mitigate secondary traumatic stress among educators and helping professionals.

3.1. Workshop structure and plan

The workshop will include up to 40 participants who will be assigned to work in small groups of five members. Handouts will be provided to include the 12 CCs, case vignette, and resources. The following outlines the workshop plan:

1. The workshop will begin with a brief overview, introduction to the TICR framework, the NCTSN 12 CCs and SAMHSA's principles for trauma-informed care (10 minutes).
2. A PBL case-based, practice-oriented approach will be introduced with a brief case vignette (5 minutes)
3. Small group activity (1): Groups will identify how one preselected CC applies to the facts of the case, with 2 groups sharing 1 CC so that overall, 8 groups will cover 4 CCs (10 min). This assignment may vary depending on the total number of participants.
4. Small group activity (2): Group members will apply the TICR approach and SAMHSA principles to their own educational/ practice settings (10 minutes).
5. Learning assessment/ large group shout outs: Participants will be invited to share take aways from their learning with the large group (10 minutes).
6. A resource handout will be provided that participants may bring back to their organizations for further discussion and implementation.

3.2. Learning outcomes

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

1. Identify and describe key elements of the TICR approach, the NCTSN 12 CCs, and SAMHSA's principles for trauma-informed care, as demonstrated through active participation in small group activities.
2. Apply at least one NCTSN CC to a case and analyze how the CC applies to the facts.

4. Evaluation

A brief evaluation using three Likert-scale questions will be provided at the end of the workshop. The evaluation will assess participant perceptions of the relevance of content, quality of presentation, and likelihood to apply information in the presentation about trauma-informed and culturally responsive education in a professional setting. QR code will be projected on the screen which will link to a digital version of the evaluation, which participants may access with their phones. Print copies will also be placed on the tables.

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