

Understanding Trauma Informed Pedagogy in On-Line Education during Turbulent Times: A Mixed Methods Study in a Canadian Social Work Context

Authors : Colleen McMillan, Alice Schmidt-Hanbidge, Beth Archer-Kuhn, Heather Boynton, Judith Hughes

Abstract : It is well known that social work students enter the profession with higher scores of adverse childhood experiences (ACE). Add to that the fact that COVID-19 has forced higher education institutions to shift to online teaching and learning, where students, faculty and field educators in social work education have reported increased stressors as well as posing challenges in developing relationships with students and being able to identify mental health challenges including those related to trauma. This multi-institutional project included three Canadian post-secondary institutions at five sites (the University of Waterloo, the University of Calgary and the University of Manitoba) and partners; Desire To Learn (D2L), The Centre for Teaching Excellence at the University of Waterloo and the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning. A sequential mixed method research design was used. Survey data was collected from students, faculty and field education staff from the 3 universities using the Qualtrics Insight Platform, followed by virtual focus group data with students to provide greater clarity to the quantitative data. Survey data was analyzed using SPSS software, while focus group data was transcribed verbatim and organized with N-Vivo 12. Thematic analysis used line-by-line coding and constant comparative methods within and across focus groups. The following three objectives of the study were achieved: 1) Establish a Canadian baseline on trauma informed pedagogy and student experiences of trauma informed teaching in the online higher education environment during a pandemic; 2) Identify and document educator and student experiences of online learning regarding the ability to process trauma experiences; and, 3) Transfer the findings into a trauma informed pedagogical model for Social Work as a first step toward developing a universal trauma informed teaching model. The trauma informed pedagogy model would be presented in relation to the study findings.

Keywords : trauma informed pedagogy, higher education, social work, mental health

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