

Summary report of the Trauma Informed Practice conference in Brisbane on the 20th and 21st of June 2019

Geoff Bridgman

Key take-aways from the conference

1 Trauma aware language is not a major part of the education conversation in New Zealand but it probably should be as many of the trainers in this area in Australia have been to New Zealand and some are saying that there is significant interest in New Zealand. It is probably important that Jade Speaks Up incorporates elements of trauma aware language in the description of the programme

2, The focus of trauma informed practice is to address the needs of children with complex trauma. This is a different goal from that of Jade Speaks Up which is to address the general relational and safety needs of all children including those with trauma. As such the trauma informed practice described by service is working primarily with children with high and complex trauma may not be all that relevant to general classroom teaching.

3. Many of the practices of trauma informed teaching can be and already are part of Jade Speaks Up programme. The *meet the brain* programme, the use of brain breaks, the Berry Street way of doing mindfulness, time off cards, visual timetables, greetings, appreciation, careful attention to the beginning of each new session, better teacher understanding of their own processes of self-regulation and the impacts of mirror neurons all could have a place within Jade Speaks Up (some already do).

4. Much of the justification for the use of trauma informed practice comes from qualitative research, teacher feedback around the reduction in behaviour challenges of the children . The best quantitative research involves improvement in academic abilities (the three r's). but none that I could see use well-being measures. Two of the major programmes , *Reboot* and *ReLATE*, did not have any research evidence about the effectiveness of their programme. Both are quite new programmes and *ReLATE* had a PhD student who was interested in making an evaluation of *ReLATE* the subject of her PhD.

5. Judging by the number of people at the conference (there were about 1000 with the vast majority being teachers) becoming trauma informed is a powerful social and political movement within teaching in Australia, particularly in Victoria and Queensland but also in South Australia. State governments have so far resisted incorporating trauma informed practice into their policies but they are coming under significant pressure to do so . One of the problems for trauma aware practice is that the definition of who might be eligible is extremely broad. As in New Zealand, trauma aware practice does not appear to be part of the general curriculum of teacher education and although training programmes like *Reboot* do refer to the fact that their programme is compliant with the state or national curriculum, that curriculum will not specifically identify trauma aware practice or theory.

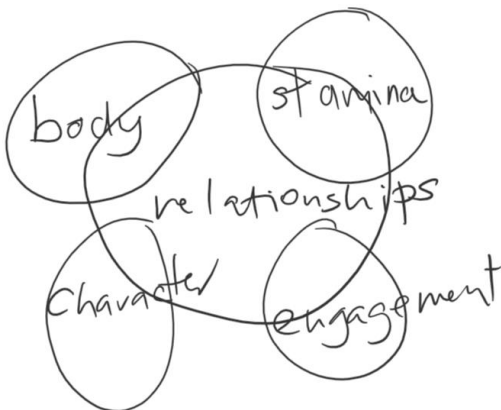
6. Most of the organisations providing trauma informed training were private businesses with exceptions being the MacKillop Family and the Australian Children's Foundation. Much of the training that was done, was persuading individual teachers to come to workshops. The programs for workshops were advertised well in advance and not necessarily negotiated with schools. Nobody seemed to be negotiating directly with their Ministry of Education to directly fund the training, although in Queensland the *Reboot* programme is on a list of preferred providers from the Ministry. Over the years the Berry Street school has received substantial government grants and also has major charitable supporters.

A lot of the training is done on line and these are just as expensive per teacher as the face to face courses. the costs per course seem to be a bit dearer than we are proposing. The programmes come with manuals and other resources, some of them fairly behavioural in nature (*Reboot*). The MacKillop Family programme (ReLATE) is the only one that seemed to concentrate on supervision, reflective practice and the application of self-regulation to teachers as well as children.

Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative. An expanded definition of trust includes unconditional positive regard, trust in the child's and trust in the child's ability to survive, trust that those who support them will listen and trust that the child has something to teach me. This is from the safe and supportive schools framework which comes from Massachusetts <https://traumasensitiveschools.org/get-involved/safe-and-supportive-schools/> There are some great resources at this website.

The Berry Street school approach (a trauma informed model) emphasizes the importance of micro moments of teaching. It began as a positive psychology programme with a well-being focus. However, they realised that you can't talk kids into being more resilient and that trauma aware practice and a whole of school approach is needed. Finding the right language to explain how things work and the right stories was important. Positive psychology on its own just could not cut it

In the context of trauma informed, trauma means struggling with complex needs. Some key points are that trauma is a physical and emotional phenomenon stored in the body, which means that good non verbal acuity on the part of teachers is important . There will also be spiritual needs that have to be addressed (not clear on this). Teachers need to have unconditional positive regard and need to be amateur behavioral analysts. Children will have reduced cognitive capacity, sleep disturbance, poor concentration and difficulties with memory.



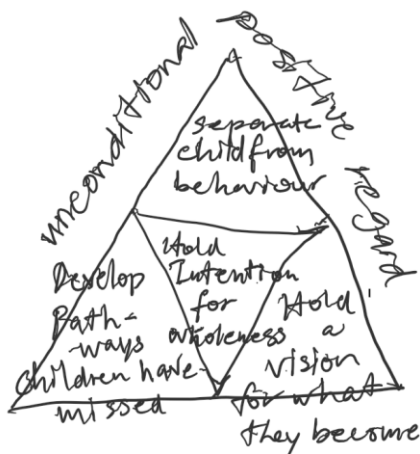
Their programme is centred around *relationships* and that's one of their modules with the others being *body*, *stamina*, *engagement* and *character*. Part of what they call a "non-negotiable list" includes routines, greetings, assertion of positive values, expectations, the skill of listening which they call tracking the speaker, announcements which make clear the programme for the day and finally what they called *www* which is "what's working well".

A list of key elements includes 1. teaching children about how the brain works including dramatic activity such as *I'm the amygdala*. 2. Having routines - today is just like yesterday and unpredictability = risk. 3. Using brain breaks- here's another one sing row row row your boat. 4. Working from character strengths - two master strengths are self regulation and the capacity for love / attachment. The big question is can regulated become self regulated. 6. They also use a *ready to learn scale* which looks something like the picture on the left and represents, I think, the space available for new learning as understood by the child. 7. They're also reinforcing that we have mirror neuron systems which mirror behaviour patterns both ways. This emphasizes that not only do teachers have to be careful about what they present to children, but they also had to be careful what they pick up from children. 8. The healthy child requires a safe haven - something that children can run to to be received with delight, but as they grow they also require a secure base which means that teenagers need to understand what the limits are that they need to follow. 9. Unconditional positive regard covers everything that teachers do and includes the need to a) separate the kid from behaviour, b) doing one's best to hold an

intention for wholeness, c) develop those pathways that the child has missed, and d) hold the vision for what they will become.

They have a strong commitment to healthy touch and feel that the policies around not touching have been quite damaging. There's a lot of emphasis placed upon values and character strengths. Their values statement is not treated like a school motto, it's serious and talked to every day. There are four values I can only remember two, courage and respect, and there was some discussion about how useful respect is as a value because children are told to

respect their parents, respect their teachers, respect their peer group and respect authority outside the school and home and in each situation these mean different things and what children learn is "code switching".



They have a safety plan but they call it a "focus plan" or a "ready to work" plan because it's more than just safety, so it'll include things such as "my calming strategies " and this will identify the micro moments that can trigger behaviour such as "starting to swear ". The focus plan will also include strategies such as "finding a quiet space ". The programme relies on the rules for self regulation that come from Perry (2006). This is a top-down cortical modulation approach. They also use the concept of "adaptive dissociation" in contrast to "non-adaptive dissociation". In other words it's good for the children to be able to cut out from things that are stressful. This goes along with the concept of bottom-up self-soothing rhythmic somatosensory activities . This is where occupational therapy skills are highly valued. They

believe that rocking is a key activity. We love rocking chairs, treadmills, rhythmic games, swings, trampoline. and so on. Colouring in even is seen as a very useful self-soothing activity.

Schools need to "re organise", build "action stations" to build self regulation. Physical movement is important such things as racing up and down the school hallway. Mindfulness is part of this and what's been important is that teachers have to be made more comfortable with it. Mindfulness has to be made easy.

A typical classroom plan will start with

1. Respect the class. Basically, I think, this is about children trying to meet the intentions of the class and the class respecting the capabilities and wishes of the children. This process will include a 1 minute mindfulness exercise.

We were asked what would be the best mindfulness exercise a) meditating on a smiling mind , b) meditating while listening to a teacher read mindfulness script, c) silence and d) listening to a tape of rainforest noises. It turns out that kids don't like to be told how to feel, so the smiling mind doesn't work . Teachers don't like reading out mindfulness script and kids don't like listening to them. Silence is altogether too frightening. So the answer is rainforest noises or other natural noises that roll out at 60 beats per minute, even including some forms of jazz. Children actually are asked to choose their own mindfulness music and bring it into class

2. Brainstorm agreements - this includes respecting the process of making agreements.

3. Create OK alternatives for what are called “brain breaks” , for example, taking a 1 minute nap..

Finally the lesson plan will have this sort of structure

A five minute transition period where children deescalate from the previous activity and mindfulness will be used

A 5 minute *tuning in* period which helps prepare the focus for the lesson that's coming up .

there are youtube clips on tuning in (e.g. <http://www.tuningintokids.org.au/> or

<https://medium.com/get->

[started?redirectUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fmedium.com%2F%40ben.reeves_62533%2F5-great-inquiry-tuning-in-strategies-for-students-of-all-ages-3044ac1cd2d9%3Fsource%3D-----](https://medium.com/get-started?redirectUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fmedium.com%2F%40ben.reeves_62533%2F5-great-inquiry-tuning-in-strategies-for-students-of-all-ages-3044ac1cd2d9%3Fsource%3D-----)

[post free-](#)

A 7 minute mini lesson

A 4 minute brain break

A 15 minute stamina building lesson

4 minute brain break another

A 7 minute www reflection. This a “what is working well” reflection and is the final part of the basic teaching strategy called “genuine appreciation”

The issue of secondary traumatic stress or teacher burnout was also raised. Teachers are looking for meaning and purpose and *trauma-informed positive education* gives good strategies for children, but only if those same strategies are applied to the teacher first. Teachers who say I'm a teacher at work, but I'm not going to apply this to myself outside work are at greater risk of burnout. It's a dual process and transformed understandings and meaning are at work.

The Berry Street school training programme has been used by thousands of teachers in Victoria and probably large numbers outside Victoria as well. However, the Berry Street model is used by very few schools with most not having a social emotional learning programme and possibly half the children in Victoria don't have access to trauma informed support of this kind . The programme has four school sites and is part of a very well funded private organisation and accounts for about one-tenth of its total budget. In the evaluation of the programme the focus has been on educational achievement and not on well-being which they admit has been suffering an omission . However the work on educational achievement is substantial with students showing an ability to catch up on learning time lost and to make progress and about the same pace as students in ordinary schools . Given that Berry Street is a last resort school then that's reasonably impressive,

The Berry Street training costs about \$1,000 a day per teacher and can run for as many as 4 days, but where they get whole schools involved (and that's what they try to do) and have as many as forty people in the training, their costs will drop to about half

Strategies for Managing Abuse Related Trauma (SMART) Program

THE AUSTRALIAN CHILDHOOD FOUNDATION, AUSTRALIA

A free eLearning program, but registration is required at commencement

<https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/strategies-managing-abuse-related-trauma-smart-program/>

Modules in this program:

- 'Module 1: Introduction to SMART'
- 'Module 2: Understanding the developing brain'
- 'Module 3: Trauma and its impact on the developing brain and body'
- 'Module 4: Trauma and memory'
- 'Module 5: Trauma and emotion'

- 'Module 6: Trauma and connection'
- 'Module 7: Trauma and representation'
- 'Module 8: Transforming trauma through SMART practice'
- 'Module 9: Integrating SMART at school'
- 'Module 10: The adolescent brain'
- 'Module 11: Summary and conclusion'

The SMART project and later on the SMARTER project comes out of South Australia and focused initially on an investigation into educational failure in going for something like 15 years and there are three levels of the programme with one or two days of workshops and additional professional development resources. The initial research on the programme shows that there was no impact when looking at whole school sites and they ended up not being sure about the impact on individual teachers who had done the training.

The strategy then shifted to an approach that involved whole schools in 2014. The initial training was quite limited - 2 hours in schools but followed up with case study discussions and (I'm not sure about this) one day of face-to-face review. In 2018 core practitioner qualifications were introduced, but the outcomes were not spectacular as there is still problems in terms of getting the programme into a sufficient number of schools. slow to get whole of site processes occurring.

Rebooting Education! Whole Brain Learning. one of the more interesting and relatively new programmes (I think it's been going for about 5 years) and hasn't yet have any formal academic evaluation is this programme <https://rebootingeducation.com/>, This programme is hugely focused on children understanding how the brain works and what their brain is doing when it's working well and when it's not working so well or rather when it's directing children into problematic behaviours. It has a strong appeal because children can view their physical brain as something that is separate from their identity . When challenging problems emerge children are not being asked to change their identity (be a better person), but rather to work out why their brain responded to provoking stimuli the way that it did and what they might be able to do in the future to allow their brain to remain in a more reflective space.

One of the exercises introduced was “meet your brain” which began by asking “what would you like to ask your brain”. Teachers were interested in what children would imagine that their brain would say, all the children would draw a picture of what their brain was doing. This exercise was repeated at the end of seven 30 minute sessions of training and children's understanding of how their brain works had clearly grown with some of the pictures accurately reflecting the triune brain and the role of the amygdala with some notation about problematic things that the amygdala can get up to. As an aside Torn Brunzell from Berry Street described a class play where one child dressed up as a very naughty amygdala with other children dashing about her dressed up as neurons.

The “meet the brain” course is an excellent example of externalising (to use a narrative term) and fits well with what one of the keynote speakers talked about in terms of the importance of narratives and particularly those of the children. *Let's meet the brain* training creates a significant change in how children viewed learning - students noticed when they became dysregulated then went to deep breathing or other similar activity. Having the language to speak about what was happening inside is crucial to this approach as are *brain breaks* in creating calm and connected classrooms. It also helped teachers regulate their own behaviour which is a baseline for helping children regulate and connect

As with Berry Street physical activities are really important. A body percussion group activity was demonstrated starting with rubbing hands, clicking thumbs and fingers, increasing the

speed (to heavy rain) clapping, banging on the thighs and stamping the feet as if it was a massive thunderstorm and then reversing that process right down to rubbing hands which is a gentle breeze

Reboot seems to be providing pedagogical resources that might be more specifically aimed at what we would call special needs students while still engaged with a whole school approach

- Reboot Audit
- Reboot engagement pyramid
- Student intake forms
- Lesson Plans
- Case Management plans

Reboot runs a one day workshop for teachers covering the following (day 1)

<https://rebootingeducation.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2-day-Workshop-Flyer-Caboolture-May-2019-A-public.pdf>:

Discover the Quadrants of Engagement and 3 key ways to improve student engagement

- Address the 6 key effects of complex childhood trauma with effective strategies
- Boost self-regulation in your students and improve student belongingness at school
- Explore whole-brain teaching and learning with the Reboot 7-Step Framework
- Enhance student willingness and capacity to engage
- Explore the Reboot 7-Step Framework to gain insight, language and strategies to improve life and learning engagement

And on day 2: Foster intrinsic motivation and positive, achievable goal setting and develop an action plan to apply Reboot tools.

- Improve emotional self-regulation
- Effectively de-escalate situations and avoid crisis
- Build self-responsibility and an internal locus of control
- Learn strategies to create brain friendly classrooms

Reboot also runs “collective packages” which try to engage a community of schools (up to 10 schools) and 3 separate days of workshops and “twilight pd” for the whole school. Reboot also runs Train the Trainer programmes in 9 online modules and including two twilight PDs and parent workshops, Their modules include create.calm, self-regulate, meaning and purpose and the rebooted school. These Train the Trainer programmes would go alongside their collective packages for school clusters.

The Lookout programme focuses on family violence and putting trauma informed care into practice and tries to establish partnering agreements around training and implementation with schools. So in a school there might be a designated teacher for trauma aware work. This teacher will have been specially trained and they will have network meetings with other designated trauma aware teachers. Also in schools there will be learning mentors for young people providing a trauma informed student voice,

The Beresford Street school. As well as the Berry Street school there are a number of other schools which play a leading role in promoting trauma informed practice. The Beresford Street school is one such school and draws from Bruce Perry's child trauma academy and the training modules of that academy

<https://www.neurosequential.com/product-page/introduction-to-the-nme-training-series>

This school is a state school and so takes all children from it's area, but as well is a school of last resort and doesn't turn down anyone. About a quarter of its last resort students are aboriginal which is 13 times their representation in Victoria. One of the major issues for

these children is hygiene and it is argued that the only thing that they are familiar with is their own odour and therefore it's not something they want to get rid of. The alternative explanation, as a protection from abuse, is that they want to smell so bad that people will stay at from stay away from them.

Many of the activities of the school have already been described in other programmes and includes the following. 1) brain mapping for children. 2) a constant process of observe, review and refine. 3) the use of visual timetables - picture based timetables with four things for the day so children are very clear about what's going to happen for them. 4) breakfast and making sure that children are prepared for the day. 5) great use of art, drawing, painting, sculpting to build relationships. 6) the use of a kitchen garden for the same purpose, 7) focused lessons based on brain mapping and physical activities such as jumping on a trampoline, skipping, basketball and sensory activities involving music that has a heavy rhythmic beat

Every classroom has a visual timetable, sensory boxes , fidget toys and squeeze toys, stretch bands, sensory cushions, flexible seating, chill-out areas, and time off cards and processes. Everyday classroom practices include individual greetings for every new entry to the classroom for teaching space and a conversation around “are you ready to learn”.

MacKillop Family Services <https://www.mackillop.org.au/our-services/education> MacKillop family services is a large Catholic organisation and part of its services are educational. One of their programmes *the ReLATE programme* calls itself a *whole of school cultural change model*. ReLATE creates a whole school culture of safety and wellbeing, supported by practical strategies through four key components:

- A universal theoretical basis in trauma and educational theory that provides a lens for understanding culture, diversity and trauma-based behaviour
- A values base for creating, maintaining and restoring safe school relationships and environments
- The trauma-informed framework represented by the acronym S.E.L.F. (Safety, Emotions, Loss, and Future) which attends to common barriers to change and positive relationships
- A set of practical strategies for creating and maintaining a culture of safety and wellbeing in schools and classrooms.

What was interesting about this model which has been developed in two of MacKillop schools is the emphasis on reflective practice. This, in practice, means that they require all their teaching staff right through to the principals to have regular supervision. They do not believe that you can implement trauma informed practice without it. While it is possible that supervision could be done by an outside professional virtually all the supervision is done within the school except for the principal who is supervised by his line manager - not ideal.

Their programme deals with children from a wide variety of risk factors (16) and vicarious trauma (24). They put a lot of emphasis on self-care plans and safety plans. Everyone has to have a safety plan and strategies of keeping calm such as breathe or get a drink of water.

The second day keynotes. The first of these was from Judith Atkinson a retired professor and a powerful advocate for aboriginal people. Her very angry speech about the crimes that had been perpetrated on the indigenous people of Australia was in contrast to the complete lack of any aboriginal representation at the conference. While some speakers did acknowledge the aboriginal presence in Australia and pay their respects to elders, none that I heard acknowledged the local Jagera and Turrbal tribes,

The second keynote speaker on the Friday was Judith Howard one of the organizers of the conference. She talked about the thirst for neuroscience and gave a powerhouse speech on all the initiatives that were happening at the Queensland University of Technology around creating training resources for teachers in this area. First she talked about the free MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) complex trauma which Elaine and Andrea have already done and a range of fee based online courses coming out of QUT, the most advanced of which is at a postgraduate level. <https://www.qut.edu.au/study/professional-and-executive-education/courses/teaching-students-who-have-suffered-complex-trauma>

Along with the Australian Childhood Foundation, Judith Howard has produced draught national guidelines for trauma aware schooling. This is an attempt to get government recognition and funding for trauma informed services. I have a copy of these guidelines but they don't appear to be online yet, although a detailed paper by Judith Howard covers the same territory. <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/120276/1/Howard%2C%20State-Wide%20Framework%20Trauma-Aware%20Schooling%2C%20Research%20Report%202018.pdf>

Our presentation. The slot there we were given for the presentation was at the death at 5 15 and just prior to the cocktail hour. There was a total of 30 people at the presentation which was somewhat less than 150 people that other presentations in the same room had received. The presentation went well. It was the most comprehensive presentation of data around programme success and people were quite awed by that. However, because our programme does not present itself as a trauma informed programme and doesn't really use much of the language of trauma informed teaching, it didn't really resonate with the powerful intentions of the conference and its organizers to make trauma informed schooling a core part of educational policy across Australia.