

# Is Your Syllabus Trauma Informed? An Application of Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education in Teacher Education

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## ABSTRACT

Recognizing the limitations of existing trauma-informed education approaches, this research emphasized the need to address systemic issues and societal inequalities. The study documents a transformative process undertaken by the author in the Spring semester of 2023, involving a meticulous reevaluation and rewriting of course policies using Shevrin Venet's (2021) four proactive priority questions. The article explores student perceptions of the equity-centered trauma-informed education through surveys conducted at the beginning and end of the semester, revealing positive shifts in student attitudes towards the implementation of the four priorities. The findings suggest that a thoughtfully crafted and trauma-informed syllabus can contribute to a positive learning environment, emphasizing predictability, flexibility, empowerment, and connection. Through this inquiry, the article contributes to the ongoing discourse on bridging the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical application in trauma-informed pedagogy within teacher education.

**Keywords:**

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In teacher education, the imperative to adopt trauma-informed pedagogy has gained prominence (Harrison et al., 2023; Henshaw, 2022; Hunter, 2022). Numerous studies (Ferrara et al., 2023) use the definition of trauma developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (2012) that focuses on the result of events that impact an “individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening” (p. 2). This definition is widely applied to research about trauma informed education, including the way the National Education Association (2024) frames trauma informed schools through using the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE’s) study to identify students who experience trauma and then working to “fosters a school climate where students feel safe and confident in their ability to learn, can differentiate between

trauma induced behavior and appropriate behavior, and connect with adults and peers in a positive manner” (para 7). While these definitions are widely applied to work in trauma informed education, Shevrin Venet (2021) led the way in pointing out that these definitions and many others neglect the systemic issues that may be involved in creating and perpetuating trauma in schools. Gorski (2020) agreed with this way of thinking when he posed the question “how trauma informed are we really” and called on educators to enact three transformative commitments that would change entire systems rather than over-focusing on individuals who experience trauma. Shevrin-Venet (2021) argues against a narrow view of trauma and actively resists using trauma as a label within classrooms. Cognizant of these complexities in defining trauma and that not acknowledging the systemic issues that prevent true trauma informed action, this paper focused on Shevrin Venet’s (2021) definition to define trauma-informed pedagogy as:

Trauma-informed educational practices respond to the impacts of trauma on the entire school community and prevent future trauma from occurring. Equity and social justice are key concerns of trauma-informed educators as we make changes in our individual practice, in classrooms, in schools, and in district-wide and state-wide systems. (p.10)

As teacher educators, it is our responsibility to prepare our students for the schools and communities they will enter at the end of our program. This charge requires understanding the students we are equipping students to work with. Due to the collective trauma of Covid-19 (Watson et al., 2020) and the increase of experiences of trauma in children (Woods, 2018), it is imperative that we equip our preservice teachers to apply trauma-informed pedagogy in their schools. The university where this study took place is the largest provider of teachers in the state it is located. Therefore teacher educators at this university potentially have the greatest influence as a university on how teachers are prepared to navigate working with children who have experienced trauma. Boylan et al. (2023) explained that trauma-informed teacher education “is a form of transformative professional learning that can lead to critical reflection on educational practices and values” (p. 2). One way we apply trauma-informed pedagogy to our context of teacher education is through embedding equity-centered trauma-informed education (ECTIE) practices into our courses and providing a model for what ECTIE looks like in an educational setting.

Recognizing the pivotal role of course syllabi as the first point of contact between students and instructors, this paper recounts the transformative journey undertaken in Amber’s courses during the Spring semester of 2023. Throughout this paper it makes sense to use first person language. When first person is used, it is Amber sharing her experience applying ECTIE in her teacher education courses. Stacie supported the write up of this research and has since added elements of ECTIE to her own courses as a result of the findings of the current study. To focus on reshaping the teacher education courses used in this work, I systematically reevaluated and restructured course policies using Venet’s four proactive priority questions. As the course

progressed, student perceptions of how I implemented equity-centered trauma-informed education were gauged through surveys. The ensuing discussion not only presents the findings but also engages with the broader discourse on the essential intersection of trauma-informed pedagogy, equity, and syllabus design. This article seeks to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on translating theoretical frameworks into tangible practices within the dynamic landscape of teacher education.

## **POSITIONALITY**

Drawing from theorists such as Paulo Freire (1968) and bell hooks (1994), I take a critical approach to pedagogy. This approach “encourages students and educators alike to recognize their social positionings and reflect on how the institutionalization of their social identities not only inform the lenses through which they view the classroom, but also influence how they participate in the classroom” (Acevedo et al., 2015, p. 28). My social positioning with this research is as a white, cisgender, female, Assistant Professor of elementary education at a predominantly white institution in the Midwest. This identity places me in the majority race in higher education with 73% of faculty in America identifying as white but the minority by gender with 44% of tenure track professors identifying as female (NCES, 2023a). I recognize my privileged majority identity mirrors the field of public education that I am preparing my students to enter with 77% of public school educators identifying as female and 80% identifying as white (NCES, 2023b). These public school demographics were also reflected at the institution where I work where 78% of instructional faculty are white and 84% of the elementary education faculty are female.

I acknowledge my experiences shape how I view my work and role as a teacher educator. My own experiences teaching in the K12 setting for 12 years prior to entering higher education have influenced my research path to focus on trauma from a variety of perspectives. Ultimately, I chose to leave the K12 setting as a result of the impacts of secondary trauma which is defined as the “the natural, consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other” (Figley, 1995, p. 2). The emotional toll of taking home the traumatic stories my students shared with me led me to use my experiences with secondary trauma to help better prepare future educators for entering a profession fraught with challenges. My hope is to equip preservice teachers with skills and mindsets that I was not provided in my teacher education to prevent the burnout and compassion fatigue I experienced. This positionality and my own experiences contributed to the development of this research and my own identity as a scholar practitioner.

Another aspect of my positionality is my research paradigm. I identify as a pragmatic-transformative researcher which is often conveyed in the style of my writing. This paradigm in action means I am interested in investigating my own practices to improve them in an effort to create transformational learning experiences. I take a narrative inquiry approach to research, particularly when that research describes my own experiences. Narrative inquiry is a way to explore “both phenomena under study and a method of study” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 4). Clandinin and Connelly explained that “narrative is the closest we can come to

experience... and the guiding principle... is to focus on the experience and to follow where it leads” (p. 188). Narrative inquiry typically utilizes a less scholarly tone than other research methods as the intention with this method is to capture the experience of the researcher and participants in a conversational form (Bruner, 1991). You may notice this more narrative tone in this chapter and as we share some lessons learned from our project.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

While there are numerous approaches to trauma informed education and frameworks to support the implementation of trauma informed pedagogy (Duane, 2023), this research focuses on implementing Shevin Venet’s (2021) equity-centered trauma-informed (ECTIE) framework. Shevin Venet recognized shortcomings of other frameworks that fail to focus on the systemic issues and inequalities of society when she developed her six part framework.

The first component of ECTIE is that education must be anti-racist and anti-oppression. Anti-racism in trauma informed practice has been researched by others including Palma and colleagues (2023) who investigated how schools who promote trauma informed practices may be unintentionally simultaneously reanimating cultural deficit theories from the 1960’s. Waite and Ihedruru-Anderson (2022) spoke to the need for trauma informed approaches to be race conscious in their research that focused on the connection between racism and trauma. Their work echoes Shevin Venet’s (2021) intention with including antiracism and anti-oppression as a component of ECTIE as it pointed out the roots of trauma for people of color lies in the historical colonization and the psychological impacts of anti-Blackness in America. Antiracism and anti-oppression are components of Shevin Venet’s (2021) framework that sets it apart as it highlights the root cause of trauma. To truly be trauma informed, oppression in all forms must be resisted as we examine the true roots of the trauma that is perpetuated and experienced in our society.

The second component of ECTIE is that education must be asset-based. Too often well-meaning teachers view students who are experiencing trauma with pity rather than empathy which is rooted in a deficit perspective on students’ identity (Howard et al., 2020). The harmful impacts of deficit perspectives in education were recorded in Palmer & Witanapatirana’s (2020) study which found deficit mindsets in schools perpetuated a blame the victim mentality, were embedded at both the macro and micro level of school policies, contributed to a cultural deficit narrative in schools, and framed students as uneducable. This “corrosive power of deficit perspectives” (Dutro, 2019, p. 22) can be seen in the sheer volume of studies that frame learning through deficit perspectives. Gray et al.’s (2022) meta-analysis showed that 87 out of the 93 studies they analyzed coded cognitive skills in schools through a deficit lens. ECTIE pushes against that mentality and requires teachers to see the assets and strengths of their students.

Another aspect of ECTIE that sets it apart from other approaches is that it views trauma informed education as systems-oriented. Gorski (2020) pointed out that many schools are adopting trauma-informed practices as the next “shiny new thing” instead of carefully considering how implementing such approaches should examine the

schoolwide culture and systems. He advocated for approaching trauma-informed education through this systems-oriented lens by first examining the institutional culture of schools attempting to implement trauma-informed education. The reality of trauma as Shevrin Venet (2021) pointed out is that oftentimes trauma is caused or perpetuated by the schools that are attempting to be trauma informed.

The fourth component of ECTIE is that education must be human-centered. The roots of trauma-informed mindsets are in clinical settings of psychology and healthcare (Harris & Fallo, 2001). As a result of these clinical approaches to trauma, trauma informed education can unintentionally remove the human from the equation. This can look like pathologizing and trying to “fix” the student or their circumstances. Hsieh (2023) pointed out how this dehumanization of students has crossed over into the dehumanization of teachers and this must be corrected in order to alleviate the teacher shortage crisis.

The fifth component of this framework is equity-centered trauma-informed education must be proactive and universal. A common practice in schools is to use the adverse childhood experiences (ACE) study published in 1998 (Felitti et al.) in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine to identify what students are or have experienced trauma. Once students are identified as “trauma students,” interventions and supports are then put into place to help them. Shevrin Venet (2021) helped educators rethink this harmful practice because it 1) dehumanizes students by turning them into a number, 2) is not research based in the education field because it applies a medical study to the classroom, and 3) leads to some students receiving support when in reality could benefit all students. This harmful use of the ACE study has been debunked broadly (Compton et al., 2023; Winninghoff, 2020), but is still a common starting point with trauma informed education.

The final component of ECTIE is it must be social justice focused. This again sets Shevrin Venet’s (2021) framework apart from others. Boylan (2021) explored the connection between trauma informed education and social justice education and constructed a framework to connect the two. Boylan summarized this connection, “a commitment to reduce the prevalence of trauma in society, rather than focusing mainly on addressing or mitigating the effects, requires a commitment to significant social, economic and cultural transformation” (p. 20).

While this six part theoretical framework to trauma informed education which centers equity is helpful, I echo DeVlieger (2023) who wrote, “the implementation of trauma-focused pedagogy is essential for narrowing the research to practice gap and supporting systematic efforts to scale up effective programs” (p. 86). To address the gap between theory and practice, Shevrin Venet (2021) offered a framework of four questions to guide educators’ evaluation of their teaching practices and policies to determine whether they were equity-centered and trauma-informed. These “four proactive priorities” (p. 67) were used to reshape my own courses to model ECTIE with preservice educators.

## **CURRENT PROJECT**

Anderson et al. (2023) identified a need in higher education to re-center students’ experiences and voices to move higher education to a more trauma-informed field.

That is precisely what this project in my teacher education courses attempted to do. In the Spring semester of 2023, I reexamined how I approached the course policies that appeared in my syllabus to ensure I was enacting what I taught my preservice teachers they needed to do to provide equity-centered trauma-informed (Shevrin Venet, 2021) education. In most of my courses I was using the syllabus I had inherited from previous instructors of the course, with all of the policies of past instructors. These syllabi were based on the university's sample syllabus and were not unique to the specific teacher education courses I taught. Instead, it was a blanket syllabus with policies and statements that gave very little consideration to pedagogical design in general, let alone trauma informed practices. While the university had made efforts to enact more learner-centered syllabi (Richmond, 2016), I had not spent much time contemplating how the syllabi for my courses reflected what I hoped students would feel and learn in my courses.

After learning about equity-centered trauma informed education (ECTIE) from Shevrin Venet (2021), I knew my syllabus was a starting point to transforming my teacher education courses. The course syllabus is the first impression students had of the course, of me, and of the overall feel for their experiences in my course. Even with this being the first impression, many students choose to not thoroughly read this document because they are too long and "clogged with opaque, administration-mandated fine print" (Weaver, 2022, para 4).

To begin reimagining my syllabus and apply the framework of ECTIE to my courses, I placed all my course policies from my original syllabus into a table. Then I interrogated each policy with Shevrin Venet's (2021) four proactive priority questions. These questions asked the following of each policy:

- Is this policy/practice predictable?
- Is this policy/practice flexible?
- Does this policy/practices foster student empowerment?
- Does this policy/practice foster connection?

Interrogating the policies laid out in my syllabus led to a complete rewrite of most of my original course policies so each one was flexible, predictable, fostered empowerment, and created connection with students. You can see the transformation of these policies in Table

**Table 1: Original Course Policies Transformed to ECTIE Course Policies**

<b>Course Policy</b>	<b>Former Course Policy</b> (where applicable) <b>How policy was changed to implement the 4 Proactive Priorities</b> (Shevrin Venet, 2021)			
<b>Attendance Expectations</b>	<p>Former Attendance &amp; Participation Policy: Learning is an active process. As a learner, you are expected to make every effort to engage in the learning experiences during class and apply them to your life experiences. It is impossible to contribute when you are unprepared or are not present. In-class information and assignments will be given during class sessions. Therefore, attendance and active “critical” engagement with the content is expected at all class meetings. Please be prompt! Absences, late arrivals, and early departures will negatively affect your grade. Credit for in-class assignments and activities cannot be made up.</p> <p>Every student will receive 80 professionalism points and be allowed one absence without a loss of any of these points. The following two absences will result in a 10 point deduction of professionalism points per absence. Absences in excess of three will result in a loss of all 80 professionalism points. Tardiness or early departure will result in a 5 point loss per incident and will also result in a complete loss of the 80 points after 4 occurrences.</p>			
	<p><b>Predictability</b></p> <p>You will need to show your understanding of the content from every class session. I work hard to ensure each class session is engaging and relevant</p>	<p><b>Flexibility</b></p> <p>If you cannot be IN class, we can arrange alternative work for you to show your understanding <i>for up to two class</i></p>	<p><b>Empowerment</b></p> <p>I trust you and believe you know what’s best for your mental and physical wellness. You have choices in how you show your understanding both in class and if you use an alternative way to showcase understanding.</p>	<p><b>Fosters Connection</b></p> <p>When you are absent or not fully present in class, I genuinely worry about you and want to support you. I request that you communicate what you need to be successful so that we can have a solid connection and so that I can</p>

	to your career as a teacher. Zoom is not always an alternative to in person learning, so be prepared for spending some time with the course content you miss if you are unable to be with us in person. Because every minute of our time together is valuable and packed with learning, an alternative way of showing your understanding should not be used more than twice.	<i>sessions</i> . This should be used as a last resort because it isn't ideal and can not be used more than twice.		support your learning. Know that I try hard to practice unconditional positive regard for all humans.
<b>Participation</b> (did not have a policy on this previously)	<b>Predictability</b> You can expect to talk in every class period and engage with your peers. I will try hard not to call you out or make	<b>Flexibility</b> If something is going on that makes it difficult to participate in class, let me know in	<b>Empowerment</b> You get a choice in how you participate. I will not ask you to share what you are not comfortable sharing and you will not be forced to share with the class. You tell your own	<b>Fosters Connection</b> One of my favorite parts of teaching is engaging with students in discussion in class. I value your contribution and I hope to create a space where you feel safe to share



	<p>you speak in front of the class without some notice, but you will need to be ready to work with partners and small groups.</p>	<p>advance so that I don't worry about you not engaging with the material. I understand it's possible to be present and learn without interaction with peers <i>if necessary</i> to support your well-being.</p>	<p>story and share what you want with your classmates.</p>	<p>what you are thinking and feeling. If at any point you feel like this space is not inviting of your thoughts, please reach out. I practice vulnerability in sharing with my students because as bell hooks says in <i>Teaching to Transgress</i>, "empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks" (p. 14).</p>
<p><b>Due Dates</b></p>	<p>Former Due Date Policy: Assignments are due on the day listed on the course calendar unless you have worked out a different timeline with me prior to the due date.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>In-class activities and participation cannot be made up unless you have extenuating circumstances that are communicated with Dr. Howard.</i></li> <li>● <i>Two optional assignments (Topic Expert &amp; Community Resources Assignment) have flexible due dates and can be turned in and shared at any point throughout the semester.</i></li> <li>● <i>Reading reflection due dates are not flexible. These must be turned in the day before our discussion of the material.</i></li> </ul>			
	<p><b>Predictability</b></p> <p>Our course has a detailed calendar that includes the dates for when things are due,</p>	<p><b>Flexibility</b></p> <p>The calendar is subject to change based on the needs of the course and the</p>	<p><b>Empowerment</b></p> <p>The intention with the 48 hour "grace period" is to empower you to manage your time in order to complete work that you are proud of in this course. If</p>	<p><b>Fosters Connection</b></p> <p>If you need more time than the built-in 48 hour grace period to complete work by the due dates listed on the calendar, reach out to</p>

	<p>what we will cover in class each week, and links to the course readings to complete. This calendar will always be up to date and is always accessible through Blackboard.</p>	<p>students. Every assignment has an automatic 48 hour “grace period” unless it is required to be completed for our in class activities. If you need more time to complete an assignment in order to give it your best effort, I am happy to make a plan with you <i>if you communicate your needs with me.</i></p>	<p>you are not proud of your work or find yourself just checking things off your list instead of engaging in the learning and work, let’s talk about how I can make the assignment more meaningful for you.</p>	<p>me. I understand that college students juggle many different things and want to support your learning and well-being.</p>
<p><b>Grading</b></p>	<p>Former Grading Policy: In order to receive an “A” in this class, you must get to <b>350 points total</b>. As you can see there are 245 points available on required assignments. I leave it up to you for the rest of the points as to which assignments you feel are valuable. Assignments are due on the day listed in the course calendar unless you have worked out a different timeline with me prior to the due date. I am always happy to accommodate as needed.</p>			
	<p><b>Predictability</b></p> <p>I practice <a href="#">ungrading</a></p>	<p><b>Flexibility</b></p> <p>Ungrading is</p>	<p><b>Empowerment</b></p> <p>Ungrading is intended to empower</p>	<p><b>Fosters Connection</b></p>

	<p>which refocuses students on learning instead of grades and points. At the end of this course and a few times throughout, you will reflect and assign yourself a grade based on the +/- grading scale for Missouri State University. This is the only time your “grade” will be important to discuss and spend time thinking about.</p>	<p>intentionally flexible and allows students to deeply reflect on their progress towards meeting course objectives.</p>	<p>students to focus on learning over grades and points.</p>	<p>The summary here is that Dr. Howard cares way more about you being ready to teach in your own classroom than about letter grades and points. Show her you are prepared to apply our learning in your future classroom and you will be set!</p>
<p><b>Feedback</b> (did not have a feedback policy previously)</p>	<p><b>Predictability</b></p> <p>You can expect narrative feedback on nearly every assignment within two weeks of turning it in. This feedback will be on the Blackboard grade center or directly on your</p>	<p><b>Flexibility</b></p> <p>Everyone will receive personalized feedback based on their work. The feedback will prompt further thinking, provide some pointers for</p>	<p><b>Empowerment</b></p> <p>Research shows that narrative feedback is more meaningful to students than points and letter grades. For this reason, you will not see points or letter grades on anything in this course as they are inherently dis-empowering.</p>	<p><b>Fosters Connection</b></p> <p>Engage with the feedback! I enjoy getting to know students and see where they are in their teaching journey through engaging with your work. Please ask follow up questions if needed!</p>

	<p>document. It is important that you know how to access this feedback and that you read it carefully. Some feedback will ask you to revise and resubmit your work to better address the assignment objective. You will have three chances on every assignment to “get it right.”</p>	<p>future work, and engage with the work that you have submitted.</p>		
<p><b>Course Policy on Use of Artificial Intelligence</b> (did not have a policy on this previously)</p>	<p><b>Predictability</b></p> <p>Some assignments in this course will require AI assistance in order to equip you with the skills to use AI in your future classroom. When using AI to assist you in writing anything in this course, you need to cite what AI tool you used</p>	<p><b>Flexibility</b></p> <p>Throughout the course, you will have the opportunity to explore and engage with various AI technologies, tools, and platforms within the context of enhancing teaching and learning</p>	<p><b>Empowering</b></p> <p>AI is a fascinating and ever growing tool that will continue to make our lives easier. It is important that teachers are equipped and empowered to use any tool at their disposal that makes the hard work of teaching more doable.</p>	<p><b>Fosters Connection</b></p> <p>Teaching is hard and can feel overwhelming at times. If using AI-generated allows you to free up more cognitive space for taking care of yourself or the other things you juggle, then I encourage you to explore it! Work smarter, not harder.</p>

	<p>to support your work. Some assignments explicitly state that AI should not be used because they are reflective assignments and AI does not know your lived experiences. Assignment descriptions will clearly state whether AI can be used to assist you in completing them.</p>	<p>experiences. These AI interactions will be guided by pedagogical considerations and ethical guidelines, ensuring that you gain practical insights into integrating AI thoughtfully and responsibly into educational settings.</p>		
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## **Participants**

Students enrolled in the courses involved in this study were juniors and seniors in college taking courses that I taught. They were selected because this was the first semester I was using a trauma-informed syllabus and all students in three of my classes were invited to participate. The junior level students were enrolled in one of two sections of a Methods of Teaching English Language Arts while the seniors were enrolled in a course focused on home, school, and community partnerships. Most students besides three were traditional students who were in their early 20's. Two "nontraditional students" were in their older 20's and one was in their early 30's. Similar to the racial makeup of the university and the Midwest region, these students were 95% white with 5% identifying as students of color. Also reflecting the elementary education field, there were two male participants, one non-binary participant, and 37 female participants.

## **Data Collection**

Rewriting these policies was the first step of this project, but it was important to me to get student input to ensure students perceived them as a model for applying equity-centered trauma-informed education. Drawing on research that demonstrated the positive impacts of naming the best practices you are modeling in teacher education to preservice teachers (Hogg & Yates, 2013; Lewis, 2019), I felt it was important to explain the process of transforming my syllabi to my students. At the beginning of the Spring 2023 semester, I explained the process outlined in the table to students in 3 of my teacher education courses and shared the intention behind these updates to my syllabi were a result of attempting to model ECTIE in higher education. ECTIE is a topic they would learn throughout the semester in these three classes, so I asked students in these 3 courses to read the syllabus carefully and respond to survey questions focused on their perception of whether these policies were predictable, flexible, fostered empowerment, and promoted connection. To measure this, I asked students to respond on a Likert scale to questions about how well the course was aligned with the 4 proactive priorities. A 1 indicated strong disagreement with the statement while a 5 indicated strong agreement. Additionally, they were asked to reflect on the overall feel for the course that they gained through reading the course policies in the syllabus through a short answer question. A total of 40 students in these three courses completed the survey.

While rewriting the course policies and getting initial student reactions were important, ultimately what I wanted to discover was whether I truly implemented a course that enacted the four proactive priorities of equity-centered trauma-informed education. To dig into this, I asked students in the same 3 classes who participated at the beginning of the semester to take a similar survey at the end of the semester to reflect on the actual implementation of the course policies. This survey asked similarly worded Likert questions as the beginning of the semester except I changed the phrases to past tense and asked them to reflect on how the course implemented ECTIE overall in a short answer question. In all three of the courses that were used

in this study, ECTIE was the topic of at least two class sessions, so they were familiar with what ECTIE was by the end of the semester.

## **FINDINGS**

The goal of this study was to explore whether the course policies conveyed equity-centered trauma-informed education through the use of the four proactive priorities. Overall perceptions at the beginning of the semester showed students perceived the policies themselves as integrating the 4 proactive priorities fairly well as shown through the average responses on the Likert scale questions from the beginning of the semester survey in Table 2. In addition to these descriptive statistics, I asked students what they feel they got overall about the course just through reading the course syllabus. Some highlights of this short answer question showed students were excited to take the course (13 student responses), felt the professor cared about them (15 student responses), and the course centered student learning (12 student responses). One student summarized thoughts from several others in their response when they wrote, “I felt like I was being treated as an actual human who has other responsibilities as well as being a student.”

**Table 2: Likert Scale Findings of Student Perceptions of ECTIE in Course Policies**

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<b>Beginning of Semester</b>	
<i>Taken by students the first week of the semester after simply reading the syllabus.</i>	
<b>Question</b>	<b>Average of Responses (n = 40)</b> 1: Strongly Disagree 5: Strongly Agree
I feel like the expectations of this course are predictable as laid out in the course policies.	4.82
I understand how this course will practice flexibility to meet student needs.	4.89
I feel empowered to take what I need and reach out to Dr. Howard as needed to be successful in this course.	4.78
The course policies have a tone that fosters connection between the instructor and her students.	4.86

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**End of Semester**  
*Taken by students the last week of the semester to reflect on how policies were*

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*implemented.*

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<b>Question</b>	<b>Average of Responses (n = 36)</b> 1: Strongly Disagree 5: Strongly Agree
I feel like the expectations of this course were predictable as laid out in the course policies.	4.95
I understand how this course practiced flexibility to meet student needs.	4.90
I felt empowered to take what I needed and reach out to Dr. Howard as needed to be successful in this course.	4.95
The course had a tone that fostered connection between the instructor and her students.	4.90

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Results from the end of semester survey showcased slight movement towards a higher perception of implementation of the four proactive priorities. Keep in mind that students in all three courses had learned the basic components of ECTIE through at least one three hour class session and one reading about this topic during the course of the semester they were enrolled in the course and participating in the study. As shown in Table 2, the averages from the 36 student responses on the survey at the end of the semester showed most students strongly agreed with each statement regarding how the four proactive priorities were implemented in the course. There were no responses lower than a 4 on the Likert portion of the end of semester survey.

On the reflection question about how the course implemented equity-centered trauma-informed education overall, students reported positive experience with 21 students reporting that they “felt good” overall in the course. Fourteen students reflected on how they felt they learned how to implement ECTIE in their own future classes because of how it was modeled in this teacher education course. One student focused on how the course centered the mental wellness of students in their response, “The application of equity-centered and trauma-informed practices created a low stress environment with high support for all students.” Several students also reflected on how the implementation of ECTIE helped create a positive learning environment for them which contributed to their learning over all. One student said, “I think the laid back atmosphere of this class made it a more welcoming environment which made it more empowering to ask for help when I needed it” while three others noted that this class felt like a “safe space.” Another student echoed the sentiments of their peers when they mentioned the positive environment of the classroom helped them



communicate about what they needed to be successful, “No matter what we needed, if we asked the professor, Dr. Howard would try to help us in any way she could so we could learn better.”

## **IMPLICATIONS**

Researchers have espoused the need to move higher education to more student-centered practices that are trauma informed (Anderson et al., 2023; DeVlieger, 2023), but the question remains exactly how to do trauma-informed education. This project showcased how transforming the syllabus and policies within teacher education courses could answer that question and provide a practical way to bring theory to practice. The implications of this study extend beyond the specific context of teacher education, resonating with broader educational practices and institutional frameworks.

Firstly, the research underscores the pivotal role of the course syllabus as a vehicle for operationalizing equity-centered trauma-informed education (ECTIE). Given the course syllabus serves as the initial interface between instructors and students, its transformation can be a catalyst for fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. The findings suggest that intentional restructuring of syllabi in alignment with ECTIE principles positively influences students' perceptions of predictability, flexibility, empowerment, and connection.

Furthermore, the study prompts a critical reflection on the pedagogical design and administrative mandates inherent in university-level syllabi. The emphasis on learner-centered approaches, as advocated by Richmond (2016), is reinforced, urging educators to align their syllabi with pedagogical values and student-centered principles. The research indicates that the adoption of trauma-informed pedagogy not only narrows the gap between theory and practice but also contributes to a more holistic educational experience.

In terms of broader educational implications, the study underscores the need for a paradigm shift in higher education toward a more trauma-informed approach. As highlighted by Anderson et al. (2023), re-centering students' experiences and voices is crucial for creating a supportive educational environment. The positive feedback from students in this study, expressing excitement about the course, perceiving genuine care from the instructor, and acknowledging a focus on student learning, suggests trauma-informed practices have the potential to enhance overall student well-being and engagement.

Ultimately, the implications of this study reverberate in educational policy and practice, emphasizing the transformative power of integrating equity-centered trauma-informed education not only in teacher education but across diverse academic disciplines. The research advocates for a comprehensive reevaluation of institutional practices to ensure the principles of trauma-informed pedagogy are embedded in the very fabric of education, promoting an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students.

## **CONCLUSION**

As a teacher educator, I believe it is imperative for me to model best teaching practices for my students. A common statement in education is that we teach how we have been taught (Oleson & Hora, 2013; Owens, 2013). Dewey (1916) offered a challenge to this mindset for educators when he wrote, “If we teach today as we taught yesterday we rob our children of tomorrow” (p. 167). Creating a model for what education should feel like through implementing the four proactive priorities of equity-centered trauma-informed education (Shevrin Venet, 2021) allows students to enhance their understanding of what teaching can look like in their future classrooms. As the world becomes more polarized with inequities that produce trauma for our students and ourselves, it is vital we equip our future educators with the skills and frameworks to support their students. Enacting the four priorities of equity-centered trauma-informed education is one way to do this.

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