

Trauma-Aware Education in Australia



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Professor Judith Howard
ja.howard@qut.edu.au

School of Education (CIESJ), QUT



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Trauma-Awareness in Australia



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All educators need to clearly understand ...

What is
Complex
Trauma?



What are
the impacts
of Complex
Trauma?



What does
this look like
in a learning
environment?



What can we
do about
this?



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What is Complex Trauma?



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- Early exposure to ongoing and repeated (interpersonal) traumatic experience that includes factors such as physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse, significant neglect, and/or family (or other) violence.
- The wide-ranging, long-term impacts of this experience.

National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2014

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What are the impacts of Complex Trauma?

Can have a significant impact on the **developing nervous system (even to cellular and genetic levels)**

Which can lead to impairment in the capacity to:

- **perceive safety**
- **relate and attach to others**
- **emotionally self-regulate**

This impact can lead to concerns with **memory, executive function, emotional regulation, relating and bonding, feeling safe, language**, and therefore – with **behaviour, mental well-being, and learning**.



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What this looks like in a learning environment?

What we see	Our interpretation	Our response	What we don't see	Trauma-Aware Response
Whole Bodies Behaviours Fight, flight, freeze Lack of engagement	Challenging behaviour Deliberate behaviour Poor choices	Behaviourism-informed		Neuroscience-informed

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What is Trauma-Aware Education?

- Trauma-Aware Educators **do not need to be experts** in neuroscience, psychology, etc. They just need to **be aware and be supported** to respond in a purposeful, informed manner.
- Trauma-Aware Education is **not a program or an extra piece of work** for busy educators!
- Trauma-Aware Education is an **informed way of thinking, believing, planning and acting** in schools and early childhood education and care services - to more effectively address concerns and enhance outcomes:
 - for trauma-impacted learners
 - other learners
 - for those who are busy trying to educate/support them!

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What can we do about this?

Safety



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Relationships



Emotional Regulation



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How to implement Trauma-Aware Education?

You will hear lots of great ideas during this conference!

But remain curious – keep reading, discussing, learning!


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Where have we come from?

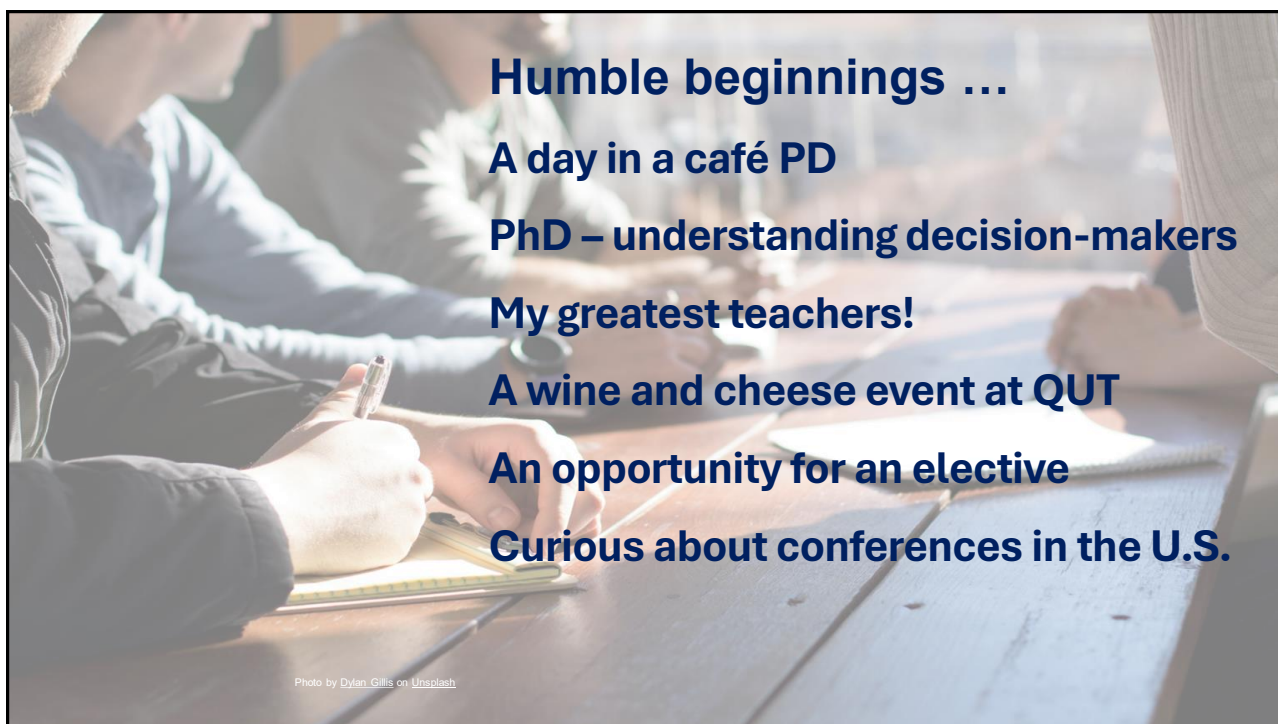
Where are we heading?


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Then the teaching opportunities took off!

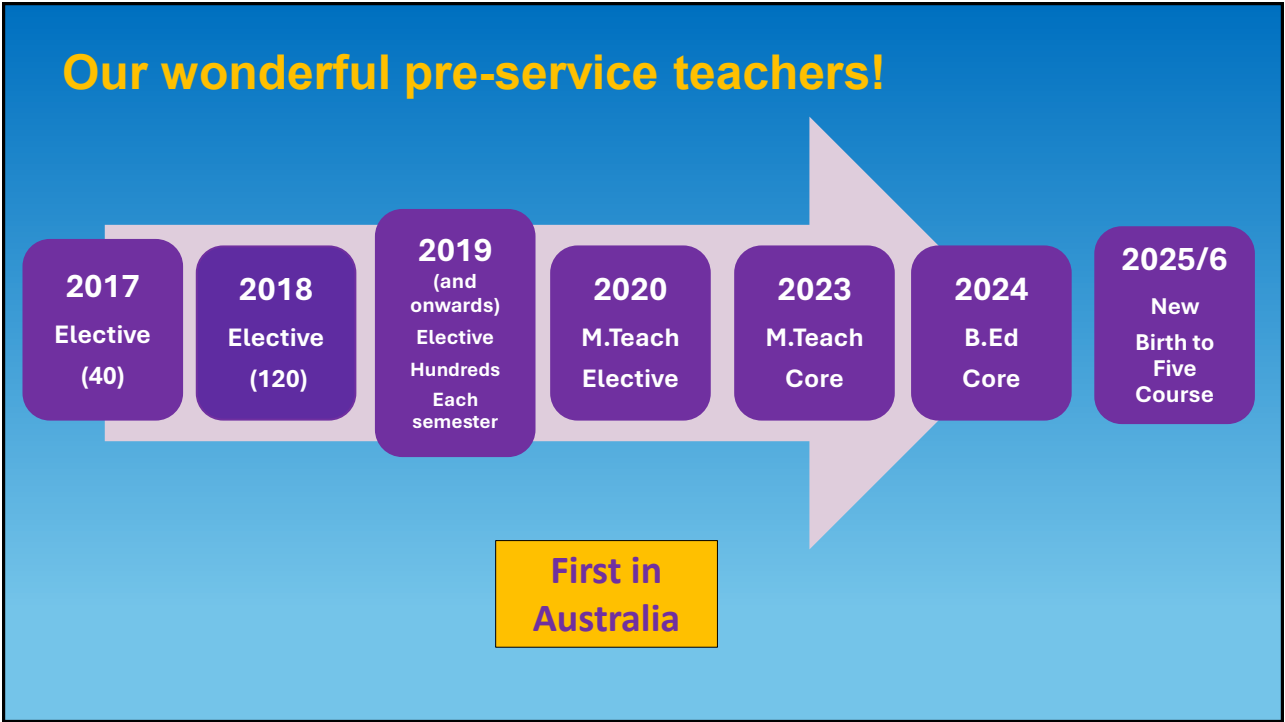
- Needed a thorough understanding of research, neuroscience that informs TAE.
- Needed to translate this into easily understood, relevant, and usable formats for educators.
- Need to share with education sites and systems.
- Needed to consider pre-service teacher education.
- Needed to consider post-graduate teacher education.
- Needed a solid plan to upscale at QUT and beyond!!

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Our wonderful post-graduate students!

Graduate Certificate in Trauma-Aware Education
Master of Education (Trauma-Aware Education)
Embedded in M.Ed School Guidance and Counselling
Micro-Credential (Trauma-Aware Education)

Growing the next generation of leaders!

A group of seven diverse individuals standing in a row against a blue background. From left to right: a woman in a white shirt and black vest, a man in a suit, a woman in a blue shirt and black pants, a man in a suit, a man in a dark sweater and brown pants, a woman in a red shirt and black pants, and a woman in a red shirt sitting in a wheelchair.

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Our wonderful doctoral students!

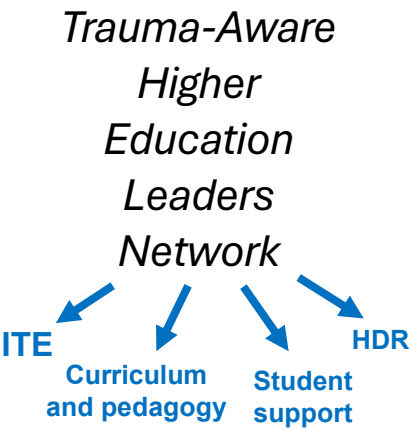
- A national agenda for trauma-aware alternative education
- Trauma-aware critical incident management by school counsellors
- Impact of pre-service teacher education in TAE
- Trauma-aware pedagogy and student support in higher education
- Teacher support of students experiencing medical trauma
- Resilience-building for adults with lived experience

INTERNATIONAL

- Trauma-aware support of students living with disability and trauma in Pakistan
- National guidelines for TAE in New Zealand
- Trauma-aware school counsellor practice in Indonesia

Adding to the evidence-base

Now working with other universities, TAFE



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Research

- QUT and Australian Childhood Foundation
- Opened up the national discussion
- AITSL Website
- S.A. and N.S.W. Central Teams
- **Trauma-Aware Education Leaders National Working Party**
 - Review and update 2026
- Advocacy, sharing, supporting development

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National Guidelines for Trauma-Aware Education



These National Guidelines for Trauma-Aware Education have been developed at a critical time for education in Australia via a collaboration between the Queensland University of Technology and the Australian Childhood Foundation.

The National Guidelines for Trauma-Aware Education have been developed in response to a rapidly growing (national and international) awareness regarding the impact of complex trauma on education and life outcomes for children and young people, and a keen desire by educators to do something to address that.

In most Australian schools and early childhood education services there are children and young people who have experienced **Complex Childhood Trauma**. This type of trauma differs from that experienced from on-off or time-limited traumatic events such as natural disasters, motor vehicle accidents or the loss of a loved one. Rather, this type of trauma involves the repeated relational harm that comes from experiences including physical, emotional or sexual abuse; significant neglect; and family and other forms of interpersonal violence. Much of this type of trauma is directed at infants and children by the very people on whom they depend for protection, nurture and care.

There is now clear evidence (particularly from the field of neuroscience) that complex trauma can have a detrimental impact on learning and educational pathways due to the harmful impact of toxic stress on developing nervous systems. This neurobiological impact can impair the capacity for effective relationships and for emotional regulation, which can lead to behavioural and learning complexities that place young students at increased risk of suspension, exclusion and disengagement from schooling. If not addressed, the effects of complex trauma can extend into adulthood where they can have an unfortunate impact on the capacity for safe and effective parenting, which can lead to the intergenerational transmission of this type of trauma.

One example:

New study: “What is it about me?”

By scanning the QR Code below, you can leave your email address to express your interest in hearing more. There is no obligation to participate.

We will email you to send you more information. Then you can take time to read/hear about the project and ask any questions before deciding whether you would like to be involved.



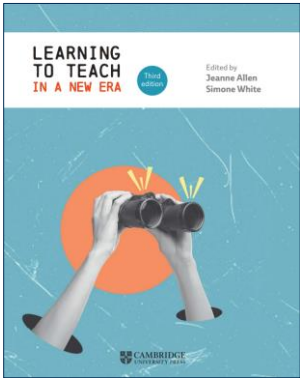
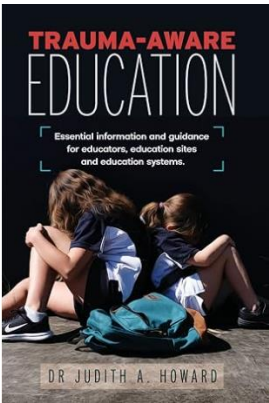
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Rapidly growing publishing across Australia and the world!

- Books
- Chapters
- Journal Articles
- Professional Papers
- Guidelines
- Resources
- Policies
- Etc.



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Trauma-Aware Education Conference 2017, 2019, 2022, 2024, 2026



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While all this was happening, exceptional other work was growing across Australia and overseas.

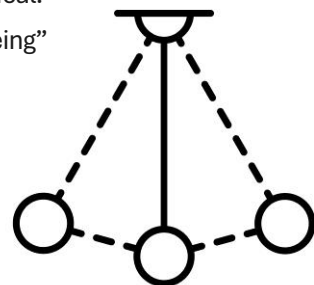
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The politics of it all!

- Education systems are ultimately complex and often ultimately political!
- Swinging tensions between “behaviourism”, “social justice”, “well-being” and therefore what is prioritised or trusted.
- Systemic solutions will take investment and commitment.
- The science is vital!
- Your advocacy is vital!!



TAE can't be “come and go”! Needs to be “quarantined” from political and leadership change.

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Declaration for a trauma-informed education workforce

<https://trauma-aware.education/>

Addressing the life impacts of trauma for Australian learners

Join our campaign!

Make trauma-aware education part of all early childhood, school and tertiary settings.

[Read the full Declaration](#) [Sign the Declaration](#)

Share the Declaration

We recognise the profound impact trauma can have on a child's ability to learn and thrive and the growing extent to which trauma is manifesting in the lives of children and young people throughout Australia.

We declare that all Australian schools and Early Childhood education programs are critically positioned to contribute towards this national solution, due to the relational and learning environments they can offer and the amount of time that children and young people spend in these environments.

Join these organisations and individuals in signing the Declaration!

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We the undersigned invite Federal, State, and Territory Education Ministers and leaders of education systems to consider the following proposed initiatives to make trauma-informed education available, consistent, and sustainable throughout Australia.

1. Australian universities delivering **Initial Teacher Education** programs to include quality learning for **all pre-service teachers**, that explains the impacts of childhood trauma and prepares all graduates for trauma-informed approaches to teaching and supporting impacted children and young people.
2. **Universities and TAFE colleges, and other associated training organisations** to provide quality learning opportunities regarding trauma-informed education for **all pre-service early childhood educators, teacher-aides/teacher assistants, youth workers, school counsellors, school-based police officers and nurses, and other support personnel** who will be working in schools and early childhood education services.
3. **Education Departments and Authorities** in each state and territory to include **central teams** tasked with delivering **workforce training and support strategies** for trauma-informed education in all education sites (note: this is already established in some states).
4. **Governments, Education Departments, and Authorities** to **fund and support state/territory strategies** to ensure all education leaders are trauma-informed. This could include on-line modules designed by specialists that are included in mandatory training for leaders in education systems and sites.
5. **Governments, Education Departments, and Authorities** to **fund and support state/territory strategies** to recruit and provide **dedicated positions** for specialist educators to deliver quality training to all education sites and to support these sites to work in trauma-informed ways.
6. **AITSL and ACECQA** to ensure trauma-informed education is embedded within the **Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and School Leaders** and the **National Quality Framework** and associated resources.
7. **Education Departments and Authorities, and universities** to **collaborate** to support development and delivery of the above recommended strategies.

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In summary, Trauma-Aware Education proposes:

- All staff are trauma-aware!
 - Professional learning and support from systems and leadership for whole-of-site and classroom trauma-aware practice, grounded in the science.
- Trauma-aware practices focus on developing student capacities for
 - a) feeling safe, b) relationships, c) emotional regulation.
 - Trauma-impacted students feel safe coming to school/ECEC and being at school/ECEC.
- Students understand the impact of stress on the functioning of their nervous systems and become adept at using strategies to address this.
- The “management” of the behaviours of trauma-impacted students draws more from neuroscience than from behaviourist methodologies (and this is reflected in policy, case management, and crisis management).



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In summary, Trauma-Aware Education proposes:

- All students are the responsibility of all staff members. The emphasis of trauma-aware schooling is teamwork and collegial support.
- The personal and professional wellbeing of staff members is paramount!
- School personnel feel empowered, justified and privileged - to “make a difference” for trauma-impacted students.

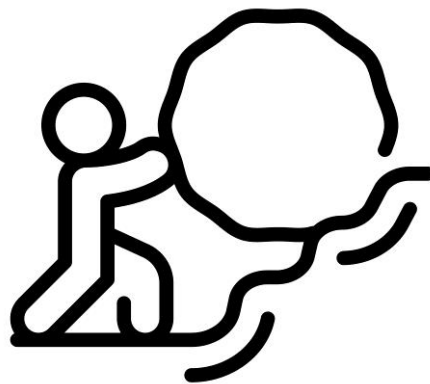


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Ongoing Systemic Goal:

**Getting this out to all schools, all
early childhood education
programs, all higher education
institutions, all education systems
– across Australia?**


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Let's hold hands... and get this done!

**On behalf of those
kids who deserve
our best efforts!**



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