

## **Defining a Trauma-Informed Approach to Social Work Field Education: A Path Forward for the Profession**

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***Abstract:** Despite the recognized importance of social work field education, concerns about its dependence on already strained service delivery systems for student learning persist. The growing complexity of student needs, and the deleterious effects of COVID-19 on service systems adds to the problematic landscape. A trauma-informed approach, because it applies to individuals and environments, presents a useful framework for exploring these concerns. A trauma-informed framework to field education, once defined, could edify the profession's response to these challenges. A qualitative survey (n=103) was developed to aid in understanding trauma-informed practices that support student learning. Key findings are that a trauma-informed approach to field education entails creating safe environments where expectations and boundaries are clear, supporting students by processing and validating emotional responses, and utilizing relational, collaborative approaches to supervision. Strategies for each area are delineated. Barriers to promoting trauma-informed field education include lack of time, and lack of organizational support. Authors recommend the adoption of trauma-informed field as a universal precaution approach, ensuring that students experience the principles and atmosphere of a trauma-informed field setting, enabling them to translate these into practice. Social work programs are called upon to better support placement agencies and assume more responsibility for training.*

*Keywords:* Field education, trauma-informed, social work education, MSW students, supervision

Social work field education, widely recognized as the profession's signature pedagogy, plays a vital role in the preparation of students for practice (Bogo & McKnight, 2006). Despite its importance, concerns about its dependence on already strained service delivery systems for student learning and the availability of adequate supervision and support for students while in field persist, leading many to call for alternative models (Bogo, 2015). The growing complexity of student needs, and the deleterious effects of COVID-19 on service systems exacerbates these challenges. Supportive organizational cultures and other elements of a trauma-informed (TI) framework when applied to field education could suggest mechanisms to improve outcomes for social work students, but a TI approach to field education has not yet been well defined.

### **The Context of Field Education: Problematic Trends in Service Delivery**

The current social work field education model relies on practicing social workers to volunteer their time to mentor and teach MSW students through agency-based field

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placements. Historically, this model has been sufficient, with practicing social workers agreeing to mentor MSW students for a variety of reasons, including their commitment to the profession (Bogo, 2015). However, social and economic trends increasingly threaten the prevailing paradigm (Bogo, 2015), and practicing social workers face growing demands due to budget cuts and higher caseloads (Bogo & McKnight, 2006).

Social workers are also becoming more at risk of burnout, cynicism, or compassion fatigue due to growing caseloads and intensified needs of clients (Knight, 2013; Morse et al., 2012). Morse and colleagues estimate that 21-67% of mental health workers, including social workers, experience high levels of burnout, defined as higher levels of mental health issues, significant depressive episodes, adverse physical health outcomes, high levels of emotional exhaustion, and low levels of personal accomplishment. These authors note that worker burnout, in turn, has negative consequences for organizations, leading to higher levels of staff turnover and greater levels of absenteeism. Greater demands and higher caseloads for social workers results in less available time to supervise students, and less organizational support for permitting practicing social workers to provide field education to MSW students (George et al., 2013).

### **Student Vulnerabilities: Changing and Diverse Student Needs**

The context of field education also presents challenges for students, and the field portion of the social work curriculum is widely known to be a significant source of anxiety (Carello & Butler, 2015; Gelman, 2004). Issues of power and hierarchy, for example, can lead to anxiety and to feelings of isolation (Litvack et al., 2010), and students with high levels of self-reported pre-placement anxiety may find their learning in field to be negatively impacted (Gelman, 2004; Gelman & Lloyd, 2008). Gelman and Lloyd (2008) note that preplacement anxiety has the potential to positively impact students, preparing them to overcome perceived obstacles, and exposing them to new client populations, interventions, and programs. At the same time, however, they acknowledge that field can be emotionally challenging and potentially triggering for social work students, impacting their overall experience. Social work students come to the profession with higher-than-average prevalence rates of trauma compared with the general population (Negrete, 2020).

Once in field, students are often faced with difficult, disturbing, and even traumatic events (Didham et al., 2011; Litvack et al., 2010), and are more likely to experience re-traumatization and report higher rates of indirect trauma, particularly where placements include exposure to intimate partner violence (Knight, 2010; Tarshis & Baird, 2019). The higher levels of stress they experience related to field is predictive of high burnout and secondary traumatic stress symptoms (Butler et al., 2016).

The growing complexity of student needs in general, not specific to social work, is further cause for concern. Students entering higher education are often experiencing or at risk of experiencing mental health issues (Auerbach et al., 2018). The World Health Organization found that 35% of students in higher education reported having a mental health disorder, with depression and anxiety being the most common (Auerbach et al., 2018). Higher education is often a time of significant changes for students, including changes in self-identity, supports and roles, increased instability, and fluid social structures

(Auerbach et al., 2018). At the same time, students face various competing stressors, including feeling overwhelmed, isolated, and stress about coursework (Gruttadaro & Crudo, 2012).

### **COVID-19's Impact on Social Work**

Though there are no specific studies published at the time of this writing on the impact of COVID-19 on field education, logic would suggest that a further taxed social service system would further erode the potential for student learning. The pandemic has exacerbated the difficulties faced by nonprofits in the social sector. Despite government support and corporate donations, a third of nonprofits are at risk of closing in the next two years, and approximately one million nonprofit jobs have been lost (Candid & Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 2021; Hrywna, 2021). Since the start of the pandemic, many nonprofits have struggled to keep up with the increased demand for their services and changing operating expenses (Candid & Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 2021).

For individual social workers and other behavioral health workers, COVID-19 has highlighted existing issues across service systems that create high levels of burnout (Morse & Dell, 2021). While experiencing the shared trauma of COVID-19, social workers were expected to provide more services to more people (Cohen-Serrins, 2021). According to Cohen-Serrins, social workers are particularly at risk due to factors unique to the profession, including the expectations to navigate complex service delivery systems, the perceived value of social work related to other healthcare professions, and the wide range of services social workers are expected to provide. Of note is that Morse and Dell (2021) found that collaboration and supportive supervision – factors associated with TI approaches – buffered the degree of stress experienced by workers.

### **Trauma-Informed Approach**

Harris and Fallot (2001) first proposed a model of Trauma-Informed (TI) care in response to what was at the time a growing understanding of the high prevalence of trauma (in the general population and among service recipients in particular). Rather than acknowledge the ways in which trauma plays a role in the lives of people seeking treatment, service systems had largely ignored trauma as an important factor. The TI principles set out by Harris and Fallot - safety, empowerment, trustworthiness, choice and collaboration – provide a framework for transforming services away from one-size-fit-all models of care to ones that take the individual into account, acknowledge the impact that trauma may have in an individual's life, and are more holistic. TI systems of care are better able to accommodate the needs of trauma survivors, but also provide a better quality of services for all program recipients. Some have argued for their universal adoption in recognition of this, likening TI approaches to the universal precautions applied in healthcare settings (e.g., Raja et al., 2015; Reeves, 2015) and applying the same TI standard of care and intention regardless of whether an individual's trauma history is known.

Trauma-informed approaches have been discussed in the social work literature in relation to social work practice, and supervision. Studies have also demonstrated the need

for a TI lens in higher education classrooms (e.g., Butler et al., 2016; Carello & Butler, 2015). Largely absent in the literature, however, is attention to TI approaches in social work field education (Knight, 2018). A TI approach, because it applies to individuals and environments, presents a useful framework for addressing these problematic elements of field education. According to Knight (2018), a TI approach in field encompasses: 1) the field instructor-student relationship; 2) environmental elements that are conducive to learning; and 3) responses to the emotional reactions of students. A TI approach, with its emphasis on principles of choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, safety and empowerment (Harris & Falot, 2001), aligns well with paradigms that emphasize the field instructor-student relationship as a potential mitigating factor to field placement challenges (e.g., Bennett et al., 2008), as well as those that emphasize the need to normalize and respond to student emotional reactions (e.g., Berger & Quiros, 2016).

Knight (2018) advocates for TI approaches to social work field instruction, asserting the importance of relationships, collaboration, trust, reflective supervision, and self-care for student success, and emphasizing the need to normalize student difficulty in field. She offers several case examples of the way in which the principles can be applied as a starting point.

### **Trauma-Informed Supervision and the Field Instructor-Student Relationship**

TI principles have also been applied to models of social work supervision. Berger and Quiros (2016), for example, found that a collaborative, relational style of supervision, one that was respectful, caring, and supportive of workers, translated to a greater sense of emotional safety and empowerment. According to Knight (2019), TI approaches to field education make central the field instructor's role in supporting students. Knight asserts that field instructors can mitigate the harmful effects of indirect trauma by developing supervisory relationships that foster feelings of safety and trust, and by normalizing and validating student reactions. This is accomplished by attending to the relational aspects of supervision, and incorporating mutually reflective dialog. Unfortunately, work by previous authors suggests that students tend to seek support from friends and family rather than through their assigned field supervisor (Litvack et al., 2010). Students in this study reported feeling marginalized by placement settings and disillusioned with the profession.

While research on TI supervision has not yet been applied to students, the centrality of the field instructor-student relationship has been well documented in the field education literature. Fortune and Abramson (1993) noted the benefits of a positive, collaborative relationship for improving student satisfaction. Others have focused on the specific role supervision plays in supporting students (Litvack et al., 2010), and the role the supervisory relationship can play in lessening the impact of indirect trauma on students (Bennett et al., 2008).

The present study attempts to build on Knight's work by defining further how field instructors interpret and apply TI principles in field education. Generally missing from the literature are strategies for teaching and supporting students that attend to organizational context, the supervisory relationship, and student factors such as self-care. A survey instrument was administered to field instructors to uncover: 1) practices used to support

student learning related to trauma and TI principles; 2) the ways in which TI principles are integrated into their teaching and supervision of students; and 3) the challenges associated with the implementation of TI practices in field. Instructors were presumed to have a greater knowledge of TI approaches as it is a core component of the student's curriculum.

## Methods

Participants were 103 field instructors from a school of social work located in the Northeastern United States. The convenience sample was recruited via email and asked to complete an anonymous survey related to their role with students. A majority, 67%, were alumni of the social work program. Participants were also asked about their practice areas, their primary scope of practice, and the number of students supervised. Participants chose from various practice areas with the following being most prevalent in their work: 43% Children and Youth, 54% Mental Health, 24% School Social Work, 23% Addictions. Micro, Mezzo, and Macro scopes of practice were all identified, with the majority, 73%, primarily Micro practice. Participants were asked to report on the number of students they had supervised and 53% had five or fewer. The authors developed the survey with input from social work faculty and field liaisons considered knowledgeable about TI approaches.

Participants were asked to respond to a series of open-ended questions. These were: 1) "In what ways might you be promoting some or all of the above principles into field education?"; 2) "How do you balance providing continuous positive support while also challenging student learning and providing constructive feedback?"; and 3) "What obstacles do you believe are present in attempting to implement TI principles in field education?" A final optional question allowed for any comments.

Open-ended responses were analyzed using a consensual qualitative methodology which allows for the integration of multiple viewpoints in data analysis, systematically verifying the meaning of data to build consensus (Hill et al., 2005). Responses were read closely and coded line by line to identify the salient themes and concepts. The next phase of analysis involved developing connections and relationships between the codes to construct the overarching themes and categories that corresponded with the questions on the interview guide. Throughout the analysis, the research team came together to discuss the themes and categories, compare the data across cases, and clarify meaning within the material to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings. See Appendix A for the complete survey instrument.

## Results

Several themes emerged from the qualitative responses, including providing a physically and emotionally safe learning environment for students (orienting to agency expectations, creating clear expectations and boundaries, and field instructor openness and availability), and relational and intentional supervision between student and field educator (processing experiences and emotional reactions, fostering self-reflection and self-care, and normalizing feedback and the learning process). Obstacles to employing a TI approach

include a lack of time, lack of knowledge among other agency staff, lack of institutional support, and student lack of experience.

### **A Physically and Emotionally Safe Environment for the Student**

One theme that emerged was the need for safety within the field environment, relating to both physical and emotional safety. A sense of safety is essential for clients in service-delivery systems to progress with their goals and treatment. Findings suggest that establishing a safe field environment was also deemed essential for students, contributing to student learning and development. Field instructors reported promoting TI field education through creating a "safe working environment physically and emotionally" and "creating a supportive and uplifting environment." Several practices were reported that promote safety for students in field.

#### ***Orienting to Agency and Expectations***

Field instructors discussed the importance of orientating students to field the agency and agency expectations. These practices included allowing students to attend agency trainings, orientations, and in-services, educating students on assessment and other agency practices, allowing students to shadow the field instructor/colleagues until the student develops skill and confidence, and professional development opportunities offered to the student. Key components that field instructors reported in terms of orienting students are "letting students know about what to expect," equipping students with information about the agency, processes, people, and placement activities, and asking about student's comfort levels with activities, and talking about good professional and personal boundaries. One field instructor reported that they "establish clear responsibilities, tasks, and roles while empowering the student – leaving out judgment and building confidence." Clearly orientating students to their field organization and expectations helps build confidence, and a sense of safety and predictability for students.

#### ***Creating Clear Expectations and Boundaries***

In addition to orientating students to the field agency and to organizational expectations, an important element of a TI field environment involves creating clear expectations and boundaries for students. Students need to know what is expected of them and how success is measured in the setting. As with any new learning experience, people learn best when information is scaffolded, and experiences build upon each other. A student, for instance, is not able to thoroughly perform therapeutic interventions before learning basic psycho-social assessment skills. Field is a learning experience in which information and activities need to be built upon one another. One field instructor described their process of providing intensive training at the beginning of the internship, which "allows students to become independent early on during their field placement. Providing them with training on basic skills of the job allows them to build confidence in day-to-day tasks as they continue to grow and learn more complex and client-orientated tasks through the year." Other field instructors reported continuous conversations with their students

about the student's comfort level for tasks and skills. Many field instructors reported allowing their students to go through an orientation and shadowing phase before assigning independent and more challenging tasks. One field instructor reported, "through the year the student gains more access to challenging activities. I am there to support them through that process."

Clear boundaries are another important component in creating a safe field environment for students and promoting TI field practices. One field instructor discussed the connection between client boundaries and student: "I try to find a balance between helping students develop and refine the professional skills necessary to be an effective social worker while also emphasizing the need to recognize the humanity in ourselves and the clients. Clear boundaries and expectations are essential between the student and field instructor as well as the student and her clients. One reinforces the other." Creating clear and professional boundaries with students is good social work practice and helps students understand their role. One instructor described their process of setting expectations from the beginning in terms of a mutual commitment to a supportive, professional relationship, "with continuous 'modeling' provided through [out the] year."

### ***Field Instructor Openness and Availability (Beyond Supervision)***

The student and field instructor relationship is critical to the educational process and to promoting a TI field environment. A key theme that emerged was building rapport and establishing an emotionally safe relationship between student and field educator. Many field educators indicated that this was achieved through the field educator being open and available to students. There is much literature on the importance of the supervisory relationship on field learning and development, but field instructors reported that it is also important to be available and intentional beyond the requisite supervision time. "...there is an open-door policy for students to ask questions frequently." Another field instructor reported that they are providing "constant consultation, communication, and guidance." Others reported checking in before the start of each day, feelings check-ins with students, making a conscious effort to process difficult experiences immediately (or as quickly as possible), close daily communication, and positive support.

### **Relational and Intentional Supervision**

The second main theme that was very clear throughout the data was the importance of supervision in promoting a TI field experience. Having regular supervision was the primary way that field instructors reported that they are promoting the principles of TI care within field education. Field instructors highlighted a few essential elements to supervision that support a TI environment.

### ***Processing Experiences and Emotional Reactions***

Supervision serves as an important space for students and field instructors to process experiences in field and discuss emotional responses and reactions, especially in light of the fact that students are often faced with difficult, disturbing, and even traumatic events.

The importance of supervision in allowing students to process and discuss difficult experiences was a strong message from field instructors. "As a supervisor, after client meetings (especially with those that are anticipated to be difficult or triggering), I meet with interns to check-in/process the experience. We then meet for a longer time at supervision to really 'unpack' the experience." Another field instructor stated that they "have weekly team meetings where student interns can process their events from the week and give each other feedback." Other field instructors reported being intentional about discussing trauma and its impact (on both the clients and student) within supervision, encouraging students to talk about their own reactions to client situations they encounter, and normalizing these reactions. Another important component of being able to process field experiences is the consistency of supervision. Several field instructors reported the importance of having regularly scheduled and structured supervision time with their student.

### ***Fostering Self-Reflection and Self-Care***

Another important component of supervision reported by field instructors was creating a supervisory environment that fosters self-reflection for the student. Asked how they balance providing positive support while challenging student learning, one responded, "lots of listening, affirming positive skills, and asking what they might have done different if they could do it again." To foster self-reflection, field instructors also used strategies such as asking open-ended questions, offering students an opportunity to explore different options or scenarios, encouraging dialogue, and rehearsing situations with supervisors. Self-care was another important component that field instructors were emphasizing with students. Along with fostering an environment for self-reflection, field instructors were utilizing strategies to foster an environment that prioritized student self-care as well. Several field instructors reported including discussion about student self-care on their weekly supervision agenda, providing self-care training to students, completing a multi-level self-care plan, and connecting the practice of self-care to good social work practice.

### ***Normalizing Feedback and the Learning Process***

Many field instructors reported normalizing feedback and the learning process for students. Field instructors validated students' experiences as learners and not experts: "As a field instructor I can give them permission to take in the full experience of being a professional learner." Several field instructors discussed the importance of positive dialogue and feedback without judgment. "During supervision, I remain non-judgmental and reflect my observations, probe for their thoughts, inquire if there are ways to approach differently, look at things from another angle, etc., give statements that learning is life-long for all." Other field instructors stressed the importance of establishing a pattern and expectation of receiving feedback from the beginning of placement, highlighting strengths and opportunities for growth during supervision, and discouraging perfectionism (normalizing making mistakes, and problem-solving).

Several instructors highlighted feedback as professional development, including one who stated, "I instruct my students in the importance of preparing themselves to seek out



and to crave constructive feedback as a means of professional growth and development." Another field instructor reported that being direct and providing feedback in the moment is a helpful strategy, "this way the constructive feedback is happening in the moment and doesn't feel like anything other than a response to the situation being discussed." Highlighting students' strengths, as well as areas for growth was also an important message. One field instructor describes providing a "feedback sandwich! Making sure to praise as often as possible, providing feedback in a constructive manner and sooner [rather] than later to allow students time to make corrections and move forward smoothly."

### **Barriers to Trauma-informed Model of Field Education**

Several barriers were identified by field instructors in terms of the challenges that are present in implementing TI principles into field education. These included many issues relating to organizational structure, culture, and mission. TI system change happens best when adopted by a whole agency or organization (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014), but many individual clinicians/service providers experience tension with systems of care that are not TI. Field instructors reported resistance within their organization to a TI model, staff who are not trained in TI care and who are working with field students, inconsistency in terms of staff approaches to TI service delivery, and a general lack of awareness of the TI model. In short, many service systems have not fully committed themselves to being TI in terms of their culture and practices (both with clients and staff). Additional barriers included time (to train people and receive training), and financial and resources constraints. It is not surprising that agencies that were more familiar with TI care and treatment models were more likely to be modeling these practices with students.

Additional barriers identified by field instructors included (MSW) students' lack of experience and knowledge about TI care and practices. Many students enter their field practicum without any prior knowledge of or training in TI principles or practices. Field instructors suggested that greater training of students is also needed.

### **Discussion**

This study aimed to identify: 1) practices used by field supervisors to support student learning related to trauma and TI principles; 2) the ways in which field supervisors integrate TI principles into their teaching and supervision of students; and 3) the challenges associated with the implementation of TI practices in field.

Most participants reported being knowledgeable about the impact of trauma on service recipients and reported that they understood the way secondary and indirect trauma can impact themselves and students. The authors anticipated this result because participants were all affiliated with a school program where TI principles are central to the curriculum. These preliminary findings suggest that the survey instrument may be a useful tool in assessing knowledge of TI approaches.

Several themes emerged from the qualitative responses, including the importance of physical and emotional safety for students (orienting students to agency expectations,

having clear expectations and clear boundaries, and field instructor being available and open to students), a strong and trustworthy field instructor-student relationship (processing experiences and emotional reactions, fostering self-reflection and self-care, and normalizing feedback and the learning process), and the need for quality supervision, including supporting and normalizing students' emotional reactions to difficult situations. Obstacles to employing a TI approach include a lack of time, lack of knowledge among other agency staff, lack of institutional support, and student lack of experience. Support was found for Knight's assertion that a relational model of supervision is a key factor in advancing TI field education and that student feelings should be validated.

Table 1. *Strategies for Trauma-informed Field Education*

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Field instructor reported strategies</b>	<b>Additional practices to promote principle</b>
Safety	Promoting an open relationship; open-door policy; orienting students to field, letting students set the pace of placement (take on activities when they are comfortable)	Intentional conversation about safety concerns students may have; discussion of what might make them feel safe, review of safety protocols within agency
Choice	Allowing students to choose placement activities and/or clients (when appropriate)	Soliciting student input into scheduling of field placement; providing opportunities to shadow other staff/departments and/or talk with colleagues
Collaboration	Orientating students to field (like that of a new employee); viewing and conducting supervision as collaborative process	Collaborating on the learning contract development; working collaboratively with a student on a case and/or project; providing student access to other staff/resources within the agency
Trustworthiness	Open and honest relationship between field instructor and student; honest and timely feedback to students; scaffolding learning to promote success; promoting self-care; open door policy (conveying your interest in and support of students)	Appropriate self-disclosure about your experience as student and early professional; fostering informal ways to connect/interact (lunch together, coffee breaks, etc.)
Empowerment	Promoting student success; allowing students increased responsibility within the placement; agency trainings; scaffolding student learning and experience	Allowing students input into the direction/focus of their placement and learning contract, prioritizing what skills they are hoping to develop
Ensuring Cultural Competence	Processing experiences and emotional reactions; inviting student input regarding difficult experiences	Understanding the individualized needs of students, paying particular attention to issues of race, gender, and other forms of oppression experienced by a student

This study was helpful in further defining a TI approach to field education, and uncovered strategies that field instructors are currently using. Table 1 below highlights TI principles of safety, empowerment, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and ensuring cultural competence (Harris & Fallot, 2001; SAMHSA, 2014) and related strategies field instructors reported utilizing with students. Further suggestions from the authors of how to operationalize the principle in field education are included.

While the above findings further the profession's understanding of TI principles in relation to field education, there are several limitations. First, participants were drawn from a convenience sample of one social work program's community of field instructors, and as such may not be representative. Field instructors who participated in the survey may have been more knowledgeable than those in other communities because of their connection to a school with elements of TI care incorporated into its curriculum. Secondly, it is possible that response bias influenced results. Because of their relationship to the social work program, participants may have responded in ways they perceived to be favorable. Finally, while research on students' perspectives on challenges and support in field was cited, student perspectives were not solicited here. The inclusion of students in future research could refine further approaches to field education that enhance students' feelings of support and satisfaction.

This current study aimed to uncover TI field education strategies that one group of field educators are already using. Further work around trauma-informed field education could strengthen support for a specific TI framework for social work (and other professional training programs). Students' understanding and experiences of a TI practicum should also be considered. A well-established framework could then be used to investigate whether causal relationships exist between TI strategies and student learning, and feelings of support.

Despite these limitations, results from this study illustrate how TI principles can be applied to field education, calling attention to best practices for supporting students, and helping to identify obstacles that may be present in organizational environments. Implications of these findings for social work education are discussed in the following section.

### **Implications for Social Work Education: Call to Action**

Fallot and Harris provided a framework for service delivery that considered for the first time the potential for traumatic histories in the lives of individuals seeking treatment, leading to the model's designation as a universal precaution for service delivery. Despite the high stress related to field and the greater vulnerability of social work students to the effects of indirect trauma, the model has yet to be applied to MSW field education. We recommend adopting a TI approach to social work field education, establishing this model as a universal precaution for students. This approach honors the student position of learner and asserts the importance of student well-being.

The application of a TI approach to field education has the additional benefit of exposing students to the very circumstances we hope they will promote for service

recipients once they are practicing social workers. Emotional and physical safety, collaborative relationships, engaging in self-reflection and self-care; these elements of TI field education mirror the TI approaches now considered best practice in the social work profession. Because barriers to TI field education are pervasive in organizations, social work programs will need to assume more responsibility for assessing, training, and supporting agency partners and students. Specific suggestions for social work programs are outlined below.

### **Assessing and Supporting Agencies**

Results suggest the need for high levels of supervisory availability and student support and reveal the need for organizational level buy-in. This may be best achieved when the responsibility of educating a student is embraced by the organization (including administrators, supervisors, and other professionals) and not solely the responsibility of the field instructor. Social work programs need to assess more than the credentials of individual field instructors and their ability to provide activities that allow students to demonstrate competencies. They need to find ways to better evaluate the organizational culture and commitment to TI learning environments. Identifying assessment tools/checklists may help to better evaluate where organizations do well and where they need additional support. Social work programs should re-evaluate how they develop and monitor placement sites and the expectations they hold existing organizations accountable to when placing students.

Social work programs can also assume a greater role in training students, supplementing agency-based field placements with school-based placements, perhaps with faculty in the role of field instructor, establishing and coordinating cross-agency partnerships around student placement, and developing project-based activities that could be useful adjuncts to traditional agency-based placement models.

Orientations for field instructors, faculty liaisons, and students could be augmented by integrating best practices of TI field education. Highlighting the principles of trauma-informed care and operationalizing them into tangible strategies in field education will lead to rich learning environments where students, educators, and organizations are equipped and supported. Social work programs could provide concrete tools that can be used to promote safety, collaboration, trust, choice, empowerment, and ensuring cultural competence within the supervisory relationship and overall placement experience. Orientations would stress the significance of and provide tools for fostering physically and emotionally safe environments while providing relational and intentional supervision. Adding TI field education principles and strategies could lead to more rich learning environments and greater support for everyone involved.

Recognizing the vulnerabilities of students, and the tendency noted by Litvack et al. (2010) for students to seek support from friends and family rather than through their assigned field supervisor, social work programs could create alternate structures and opportunities for support. Students could be encouraged to meet with other students, for example, to process field experiences, provide support, and empower each other to make the most of their placement experiences. This could include strategies on self-care and

effective problem-solving. Schools could also help to create similar peer support opportunities for field instructors to share experiences and best practices with one another.

Whenever service delivery systems are impacted, so too is social work field education. Thus, social work programs need to develop new and creative ways to add value to our agency partners, better equipping them to respond to the growing needs of students. A TI approach to field education can inform these efforts and provide a path forward for the profession.

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### Appendix A

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|--|---|
| <p>1. What is your primary role with students?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Field Educator</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Faculty Liaison</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Task Supervisor</li> </ul> <p>2. What areas of practice does your agency focus on? (Check all that apply.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Administration/Leadership</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Addictions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Aging</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Child and Youth</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Child Welfare</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Community Development/Planning</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Correction/Criminal Justice</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Developmental Disabilities</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Displaced Persons/Homeless</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Domestic Violence</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Global/International Social Work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Health/Medical</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Immigrant/Refugee Work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> LGBTQ</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Military Social Work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Occupational Social Work or Rehabilitation</li> </ul> | <p>3. What is your primary scope of practice?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Micro</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Mezzo</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Macro</li> </ul> <p>4. Are you a graduate of (this social work program)? _____</p> <p>5. What year did you obtain your MSW degree?<br/>_____</p> <p>6. How many years have you been a field educator? _____</p> |
|--|---|

Harris and Fallot (2001) propose core principles of a trauma-informed environment (safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, empowerment, and cultural competence). The next set of questions will ask the strategies you are currently using in your field sites to promote these principles.

- **Safety:** Ensuring a physically and emotionally safe environment
- **Choice:** Emphasizing and encouraging individual choice and control
- **Collaboration:** Focusing on collaborative approaches and sharing power
- **Trustworthiness:** Establishing trust, making roles, responsibilities, and tasks clear; and maintaining appropriate interpersonal boundaries
- **Empowerment:** Prioritizing skill building and empowerment
- **Ensuring Cultural Competence:** Understanding how cultural context influences one's perception of and response to traumatic events; respecting diversity

In what ways are you promoting the above principles (for students) into field education?

How do you balance providing continuous positive support, while also challenging student learning and providing constructive feedback?

What obstacles or challenges do you believe are present in attempting to implement trauma-informed principles in field education?

Other Comments: