

# Preparing Health and Physical Education Teachers to Become Trauma Invested



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## Introduction to Feature Series

JENNIFER L. WALTON-FISETTE 

DOUGLAS ELLISON

EDITORS

**T**he purpose of this Feature Series is to prepare health and physical education teachers, both at the P-12 and higher education levels, on how to become knowledgeable about trauma, toxic stress, and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) by engaging in trauma-invested practices. The focus on trauma-invested practices is exceedingly important at this time when we are navigating a pandemic and a national focus on racial injustice, both of which have placed mental health issues and social-emotional learning at the forefront of education discussions. Currently, licensed teachers are not prepared to educate, assist and support students who are dealing with trauma, which significantly influences their ability to learn. Our hope through this Feature Series is to provide knowledge, strategies and pedagogical practices to health and physical education teachers at both the P-12 and higher education levels.

Across the articles in this Feature Series, the content and trauma-informed practices provided center on the majority of gymnasium and classroom settings when dealing with trauma. That is, the focus is on preventative measures that teachers can engage in to minimize potential triggers and enhance ways on how to de-escalate a student who is under toxic stress. Extreme or egregious circumstances when a student may become combative, is unable to self-regulate, or escalates to a level that may cause harm to self or others are not included in this Feature Series. We understand that teachers need guidance and direction on how to navigate these situations as well, which we hope will be a forthcoming follow-up to these articles. Furthermore, looking at both trauma and social-emotional learning by addressing socially unjust practices that may enhance these issues is included.

In the first article, Walton-Fisette outlines common terminology used within the trauma-informed/invested field and relates it to potential structural inequities present in educational institutions and how socially unjust practices in these spaces have the potential to become trauma-inducing on their own. Practical suggestions are outlined that guide the practitioner in establishing a trauma-informed and socially just space. These strategies include becoming self-aware and fostering resilient learners by creating physically and emotionally safe spaces, formulating positive and healthy relationships with students, developing student responsibility, and guiding students toward self-regulation.

In the second article, Sutherland and Parker outline strategies within physical education that can help practitioners respond to the trauma that P-12 students experience. As in the first article, the authors acknowledge there are systematic barriers that exist in the education system that strain schools and districts. However, they contend that with intentional planning, physical education teachers can create equitable spaces where their students are valued and cared for and can thrive in the face of trauma. They discuss the importance of focusing on the affective learning domain and offer several suggestions and resources that can help physical education practitioners make a positive difference in the lives of their students.

The third article focuses the discussion on trauma-sensitive practice in the health education classroom. Wynard and colleagues challenge health educators to examine their practices related to curriculum and instruction. The authors provide specific examples that are connected to the National Health Education Standards that can be used by practitioners. Additionally, detailed attention is given to assisting health educators in creating a safe, supportive environment for their students. Finally, the authors provide the practitioner with some valuable recharging and self-care strategies that can help combat the realities of compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress that often present themselves when working with individuals experiencing trauma.

The fourth article moves the discussion to higher education and the preparation of the next generation of health and physical educators. Similarly to other articles in the Feature Series, Ellison and colleagues emphasize creating environments where students feel valued and supported. The authors provide specific examples and activities to assist higher education faculty in engaging students with their individual systems of meaning and creating meaningful connections within Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) and Health Education Teacher Education (HETE) programs. In addition, a roadmap is provided to help faculty incorporate lessons on trauma-informed practices within courses with the hope that teacher education programs will progress from being trauma-informed within certain courses or with selected faculty to becoming trauma-invested across the program. Invaluable resources and examples are provided to help faculty prepare teacher candidates in developing trauma sensitive practices throughout their PETE/HETE program.

Concluding the Feature Series, in the fifth article, Lynch and colleagues provide an overview of how restorative practice can be used in health and physical education settings as an alternative to traditional behavior-management practices adopted by many schools. Throughout the article, connections are made to the importance of promoting the holistic development of young people and restorative practice. The authors discuss the importance of shifting the power dynamic within schools and classrooms by including young people in the decision-making process related to resolving conflicts and developing the content we teach. The authors contend that by incorporating democratic processes such as restorative practice schools will become more socially just and trauma invested.

It is our hope that in the following articles of this Feature Series we can provide the reader with important resources that ease the difficulties that come from working with students navigating the spectrum of trauma. This Feature Series is intended to serve as a starting point for educators to begin the work toward becoming trauma-informed practitioners. **J**

## ORCID

Jennifer Walton-Fisette  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2753-4400>