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Research article

Developing trauma-informed teacher education in England

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Abstract

Trauma-informed practice in education is an area of growing interest in England and internationally. Embracing trauma-informed practice in schools requires trauma and related content to be included in teacher education. Over a period of eight years, a short course was developed and incorporated into the teacher preparation programmes at a large university in England. Through methods of teacher educator self-study and autoethnography, we examine the process of the course's development and identify mechanisms, enablers and barriers to change in the current policy context of teacher education in England. Important factors that supported change were the gradual development, external collaboration, positive outcomes as a warrant and source of motivation, the development of champions and enthusiasts for trauma-informed practice, and departmental leadership support. Barriers to the development were the constraints of prescribed content on initial teacher education courses, prevailing

practices in some schools and settings, challenges in adapting material suitably for all education phases, and some beginning teachers' responses to personally relevant course content. The successful introduction of the short course demonstrates that inclusion of trauma-informed content in initial teacher education is possible even in an unfavourable policy environment.

Keywords trauma-informed; teacher education; teacher training; professional development

Introduction

Trauma-informed educational practice aims to respond to the needs of children, young people and adults with trauma histories, whether this is episodic trauma, the effects of chronic stress or both. The use of the phrase *trauma-informed* in relation to education is relatively recent. However, growing interest is beginning to impact policy. For example, five states in the USA explicitly refer to trauma-informed practice in teacher education curricula (Reddig and Vanlone, 2022). In England, interest is informed by policy concerns about the role of schools in mental health, including recognising areas in which schools and teachers require support in understanding topics such as emotional development and attachment (DoH and DfE, 2017).

Trauma-informed practice and related terms, such as trauma-informed care, are used in various ways both inside and outside educational contexts (Becker-Blease, 2017; Boylan, 2021; Maynard et al., 2019; Overstreet and Chafouleas, 2016; Thomas et al., 2019a). An extended categorisation of trauma-informed practice suggests that it encompasses: trauma-specific interventions; trauma-informed teaching; trauma-informed development, including professional development; and trauma-informed systems in schools and education (Boylan, 2021). In this article, we focus on trauma-informed initial teacher education (ITE).

Trauma-informed practice in education aims to improve outcomes by mitigating the negative effects of trauma and adverse childhood events, linked to worse educational outcomes (Perfect et al., 2016) and mental health needs (Overstreet and Chafouleas, 2016; Porche et al., 2016). Trauma and adverse childhood experiences relate to structural disadvantage and oppression of various kinds (Boylan, 2021). Moreover, trauma-informed practices have the potential to support values of inclusivity and to broaden educational goals. Including trauma-informed practice in teacher education can also potentially mitigate risks to teachers' well-being from vicarious trauma (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020).

Sheffield Hallam University, located in northern England, is the largest provider of teacher preparation programmes in its region. Over a period of eight years, teacher educators from Sheffield Hallam University have collaborated with Trauma Informed Schools UK (TISUK) to advance trauma-informed practice in education. TISUK is a social enterprise that provides training nationally for schools, communities and organisations to help them become trauma-informed and mentally healthy places. Through this collaboration, a short course on trauma-informed practice is now mandatory for all Sheffield Hallam University beginning teacher programmes. Approximately one thousand participants take the course each year.

In this article, we draw on our eight years of experience developing this course. Our experiences are varied, and they stem from different roles, including early years practitioners, short-course tutors, participants in TISUK practitioner training, academic departmental leaders and a postgraduate researcher with a professional background using trauma-informed practices in schools. As teacher educators, we see fostering trauma-informed practice as part of our orientation to activist (Sachs, 2003) and critical (Boylan et al., 2023) professionalism in the teacher education context. From this stance, trauma-informed teacher education is a form of transformative professional learning that can lead to critical reflection on educational practices and values (Boylan et al., 2023; Kennedy, 2014).

Within an overarching theory of change framework (Coldwell and Maxwell, 2018), we used the principles and methods of teacher educator self-study and autoethnography. We considered similarities and differences in our individual stories of how we developed our approach to trauma-informed teacher education and our professional learning. We focus on mechanisms of change, enablers and barriers, in

keeping with a theory of change approach to innovation (Coldwell and Maxwell, 2018). This is one aspect of the ongoing research and evaluation of the course.

In the next sections, we locate our study in relation to the small, but growing, body of research and scholarship on trauma-informed teacher education. Subsequently, we consider current debates and policies in England related to schooling, student behaviour and teacher education practice. Key components of the ITE short course are then described. After an account of study methods, we provide details of how the course developed and we consider the mechanisms and factors that supported development, and those that were barriers to change.

Trauma-informed initial teacher education: enablers and barriers

In this section, we draw on recent contributions to the literature to identify themes and issues particularly relevant to our consideration of the development of the short course, and specifically supportive and impeding mechanisms. We organise our account by considering ways trauma-informed content is included in teacher preparation, the motivations for inclusion, what supports or challenges trauma-informed teacher education, and insights concerning teacher educators' knowledge, dispositions and professional learning.

Where it happens, trauma-informed course content or related approaches, such as attachment-informed content, are either built into more general ITE modules or given as stand-alone units (Hobbs et al., 2019), or both. Kearns and Hart (2017) describe an example of the first approach within a module 'Understanding the emotional world of the child' in a four-year ITE programme in Scotland. Stand-alone courses and workshops are shorter and have a specific focus, with one example consisting of 3.5 hours of trauma training through a keynote lecture, group and panel discussion (Brown et al., 2022). An elective module in Australia with 36 hours of contact time (L'Estrange and Howard, 2022) took a similar approach, but was more in-depth. Alternatively, these two approaches are combined, for example, offering a specific session or course, followed by revisiting and extending material in other sessions (Thomas et al., 2019b).

Integrated courses offer opportunities for linking concepts across related topics, scaffolding material and promoting depth of understanding, whereas discrete units can focus on specific content (Hobbs et al., 2019). Positive outcomes have been reported for both formats (for example, Brown et al., 2022; Kearns and Hart, 2017). A common feature where trauma-informed material is integrated into courses is that the material is taught alongside and connected to other content. This can encourage beginning teachers' criticality about education, including the influence of societal inequalities on learners' experiences and outcomes (L'Estrange and Howard, 2022). This wider lens motivates and supports collaborative endeavour, not only for the inclusion of trauma-informed practice, but also for curriculum decolonisation initiatives and education for sustainability (Beasy et al., 2021). Where concerns with social justice are not explicitly centred, practitioners may foreground the importance of embedding trauma-informed practice in culturally relevant teaching (Rodger et al., 2020) and challenging approaches to classroom management that ignore factors such as race and racism (Thomas et al., 2019a).

In recent studies, factors that have supported or enabled the introduction of trauma-informed content are:

- linking trauma-informed practice to social justice themes and content to help justify the inclusion of material and strengthen the value of content (Beasy et al., 2021; Rodger et al., 2020)
- leadership support (Brown et al., 2022)
- positive outcomes for beginning teachers evidencing the value of including trauma-informed practice (Douglass et al., 2021)
- collaborative endeavour, including the use of specific methods to support collaboration (sociocracy in the case of Beasy et al., 2021) or collaborative professional development ('breakthrough series collaborative' methodology in the work of Douglass et al., 2021).

The barriers to introducing trauma-informed practice in education described in accounts of recent developments are:

- course accreditation requirements and accountability systems (Beasy et al., 2021; Hobbs et al., 2019) that vary across educational systems (Reddig and Vanlone, 2022)

- the amount of existing content in ITE curricula, and conflicts between academic and mental health goals (Fabiano et al., 2014)
- a narrow focus within curricula on relevant but limited content (such as child abuse), which can potentially support a view that trauma-related material is already addressed (Hobbs et al., 2019)
- initial attitudes and beliefs of some teacher educators (Beasy et al., 2021) and beginning teachers and a lack of research evaluating the impact or value of trauma-informed teacher education (Sonsteng-Person and Loomis, 2021)
- the challenge of finding time for the collaborative activity needed to develop trauma-informed content, and for collaborative professional development (Beasy et al., 2021)
- adapting trauma-informed training materials and techniques from other disciplines for school settings (Sonsteng-Person and Loomis, 2021).

Research on trauma-informed teacher education has focused on course content and outcomes for participants (Hobbs et al., 2019). There is relatively little research on the professional learning and dispositions of teacher educators who teach or facilitate engagement with relevant material. For some teacher educators, this activity appears to be an extension of existing practice. For example, early years educators link this material to an understanding of attachment (Douglass et al., 2021; Kearns and Hart, 2017) or material is added to the approach to health and physical education (Ellison et al., 2020). However, for teacher educators in other subjects and disciplines, trauma-informed content may be initially experienced as less familiar or relevant. For example, one mathematics teacher educator reported that they did not see the relevance at first, but later they were able to connect trauma-informed practice with their previous teaching around maths anxiety (Beasy et al., 2021).

Ideologies of behaviour and schooling: the wider context

In this section, we set out the broad context for the trauma-informed short course in relation to current ideological debates and policy about student behaviour and schooling in England. Schools have legal duties to take account of individual needs. The experience of beginning teachers in schools is one generally where a variety of practices are encountered as schools interpret these legal duties. Nonetheless, the rhetoric of debate about such issues is often polarised. We begin with an example that typifies recent discourse influencing schools and policy.

In October 2021, the head teacher of a free school in London, Katharine Birbalsingh (2021: n.p.), tweeted, quoting another user's tweet, that 'We are all born "bad", that is why it is so important to be morally educated and not just conditioned', and added: 'Exactly. Original Sin. Children need to be taught right from wrong and even habituated into choosing good over evil. That requires love and constant correction from all the adults in their lives over YEARS. Moral formation is a good thing.'

The school where Birbalsingh is head teacher, Michaela Community School, is known for its strict and traditional approach to behaviour, with rules rigorously enforced and children moving around the school in silence. The tweet quoted above led to considerable social media activity, with around seven hundred retweets and likes, and nearly as many quote tweets that overwhelmingly challenged the views expressed. In response, Birbalsingh distanced her views from a Christian belief in original sin, but she maintained the importance of a disciplinary approach to moral education in schools. The level of social media activity and debate was likely heightened because Birbalsingh had recently been appointed as the government's Social Mobility Commissioner, a position that served to further amplify the views of an already controversial and prominent commentator on schooling.

There are three aspects of this social media event that are important to our focus in this article. The first aspect is that Michaela Community School's approach to behaviour is sometimes described as warm and/or strict, echoing the language of *warm demanders* (Lemov, 2010), and has parallels with zero-tolerance behaviour policies (Casella, 2003; Hoffman, 2014) and methods adopted in 'no excuses' charter schools (Lopez Kershen et al., 2018; see also Cushing, 2020, for a general critique). Although other schools have similar approaches to behaviour that align with policy recommendations (DfE, 2016), Michaela's public profile has led it to become a figurehead, as well as an exemplar for other schools that have adopted such approaches. Aspects of these strict behaviour policies are promoted in policy by the government's appointed national advisor on school behaviour.

The second notable aspect is the criticism on social media of Birbalsingh's stance. As well as the 'trad' network on social media mobilising for, and encouraging, government and schools to promote

warm/strict behaviour policies, there is a vocal networked group arguing for policies that are often labelled (at least by opponents) as progressive. Critics of Michaela-inspired or -aligned behaviour policies have raised concerns that internal exclusions in secondary schools are commonplace (Barker et al., 2010; Partridge et al., 2020), that exclusions in primary schools are increasing (DfE, 2019b) and that many children and young people are informally pressured in other ways to leave schools (Parsons, 2018).

Proponents of strict behaviour policies argue that these are appropriate strategies and that poor student behaviour needs to be addressed by exclusion to protect other students (Phillips, 2022). Critics point to disciplinary pedagogies (Cushing, 2020) and a complex interplay of factors as the cause of exclusion, including strict behaviour policies and policies that encourage these (McCluskey et al., 2019). Young people also point to the role of behaviour policies (Harris, 2021). These disagreements create a backdrop of controversy and debate about student behaviour in the teaching profession, and society more generally, and so influence beginning teachers. In secondary education, some new teachers may undertake their teaching practice wholly or in part at schools that have implemented such behaviour policies, and that expect all teachers to follow them. Primary schools retain a distinct ethos, often with an understanding of care that is different from the language of 'tough love' and similar notions associated with 'no excuses' ideology in some secondary approaches. This difference is even more marked with early years education (0–5 years in the English policy context).

Although there are increasing concerns in England about child mental health (DoH and DfE, 2017), there are no links made in policy between punitive behaviour policies and risks to students' well-being, and particularly the well-being of children and young people who have experienced trauma and adverse events. However, a trauma-informed perspective suggests that harsh or restrictive interventions are likely to embed trauma and continue a cycle where challenging behaviour persists or worsens (Centre for Mental Health, 2020).

The third aspect highlighted in this exchange is that debates about behaviour in schools take place in the context of government policy of changes in the governance of schools to become independent academies, often within multi-academy trusts (Armstrong et al., 2021). Multi-academy trusts have similarities to charter school management companies in the USA (Scott, 2009). This is part of the process of marketisation and the neoliberal political agendas that have reframed the role of universities and ideas about what is appropriate teaching content (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Zeichner, 2017). Schooling and teacher education are both shaped by a focus on a relatively narrow range of educational outcomes promoted by accountability measures. This creates a complex environment for teacher education in England.

The initial teacher education short course

In this section, we briefly describe the ITE short course (further detail is available in Truelove and Boylan, 2022). The ITE short course is a mandatory part of provision for all beginning teachers on our accredited ITE routes. Teacher education is a site of contestation about the purpose and values of education. One way to encapsulate this debate is to consider the use of the term initial teacher *training* in policy, rather than teacher *education*. This is representative of the ongoing diminishment of the role of universities in teacher preparation and the promotion of a model of teachers as technicians (McIntyre et al., 2019; Mutton et al., 2017).

Participants in the short course follow routes that vary across the following dimensions and features:

- provider: university-led, school provider-led, Teach First
- educational phase: early years, 0–7, primary, secondary, post-16
- level of award: undergraduate degree courses, postgraduate certification
- school subject specialism: particularly important for secondary and post-16, but some primary beginning teachers have a designated subject specialism.

The aims of the short course are:

- to develop knowledge of underpinning research on trauma and attachment, and developmental models, appropriate to supporting relational pedagogies for children, teenagers and young people
- to reflect on the implications of teaching children, teenagers and young people who have experienced trauma, and to develop appropriate ways to respond

- to identify and use methods of social engagement to promote psychological safety in supporting children's and young people's learning and engagement
- to reflect on teachers' own stress response systems and emotional well-being in relation to their practice as early career teachers. (Truelove and Boylan, 2022: 266–7)

The short course is divided into three parts: an introductory lecture with a viewing of a documentary, followed by two workshops lasting three hours each. The first workshop focuses on children's mental health, models of brain development and neuroscientific understandings of the stress response, relational skills and the concept of an emotionally available adult.

The second workshop optimally occurs three weeks after the first. The time between the two workshops is designed to allow for exploration and consolidation of learning. The second workshop focuses on the application of knowledge and skills learned in the first workshop and of models of emotional systems from neuroscientific research.

Course tutors use material developed by TISUK based on their professional development materials for their courses and programmes for education professionals. The course is taught by members of staff, all of whom have completed a 10-day professional development course led by TISUK. The content focuses on attachment, and social and emotional development. Unlike some examples of other trauma-informed teacher education discussed earlier, the TISUK course did not originally make explicit reference to issues of social justice beyond the framework of adverse childhood experiences and their relationship to socio-economic disadvantage. More recently, the TISUK 10-day diploma has included new material that more fully addresses social justice issues.

Our short course does not fit neatly into the three structures identified in the literature discussed earlier, partly because its format varies depending on phase and course programme. For secondary and post-16 beginning teachers in most subjects, it offers a discrete supplementary experience. However, for early years and primary beginning teachers, particularly those on longer undergraduate courses, the short course offers a consolidation of, and/or introduction to, material that is embedded in other parts of their programmes.

Study framework and methods

We have undertaken ongoing evaluation to inform the design and development of the short course (Truelove and Boylan, 2022). The overarching evaluation framework is informed by theory-based evaluation (Weiss, 1997) and evidence-informed logic models (Coldwell and Maxwell, 2018). Intrinsic to this framework is the importance of identifying mechanisms for change, and contextual factors that either support or impede change processes.

Typically, in external evaluations, the views of programme developers are sought to identify mechanisms, enablers and barriers. Given our relationship to the teacher education short course, we also draw on methodologies that focus on the experiences of tutors. These are teacher educator self-study (Kitchen et al., 2020; Loughran, 2007), autoethnography (Denzin, 2014), collective biography (Davies and Gannon, 2006) and the interplay between these different forms (Hamilton et al., 2008). These reflective and interpretivist methods, and the resulting data analysis, form a backdrop to the focus on mechanisms and barriers that is more usual in realist evaluation and theory of change approaches (Coldwell and Maxwell, 2018).

Our roles and relationships with the short course are varied. Table 1 provides details of the authors and their backgrounds, their role in the short course and their contributions to the study.

We undertook interviews, with all team members interviewing and being interviewed. Interviews were transcribed, and then analysed by a third researcher to identify themes. These themes were grouped, producing a common set of themes that were applied across the transcripts. The interviewer, interviewee and initial analyst all checked the resultant themes for representation of key issues.

Because the methodological approach is based on self-study and collaborative autoethnography, the research project was not subject to ethical review under the usual university processes. However, there are ethical considerations, given the complex relationships of our different roles, both in relation to trauma-informed practice and more generally in our positions and responsibilities in our wider work context. Thus, as part of the research design, the issue of ethics was considered, and we agreed that a peer ethical review could be called on if any issues of concern arose.

Table 1. Authors' roles and relationships to the trauma-informed course

Name	Role in the course	Professional background	Interview data
Lynne Truelove	Current course leader	Early years teacher educator	Yes
Sally Pearce	Early development of the course and trauma-informed initiatives	Early years teacher educator	Yes
Sue O'Brien	Early development of the course and trauma-informed initiatives	Primary mathematics teacher educator	Yes
Helen Sheehan	Course tutor	Secondary humanities teacher educator	Yes
Tony Cowell	Course tutor	Secondary design technology teacher educator	Yes
Mark Boylan	Internal evaluator	Former mathematics teacher educator and researcher	Yes
Eleanor Long	N/A	Postgraduate researcher of teacher trauma-informed continuing professional development	No

Similarly, given the methods and focus on developments in one setting, the study is limited in terms of scope and applicability to other places. As participants in these developments, we are 'insiders', which has advantages in terms of insights that may not be available, for example, to external evaluators. Snellgrove and Punch (2022) argue that collaborative approaches can address some of the limitations of individual insider research. In addition, the way we surfaced mechanisms and barriers was not so different from the ways this happens in external evaluations presented as objective and independent.

The development of the trauma-informed course

The short course was developed over a period of eight years, and it involved four phases, which are summarised in Table 2.

Course development mechanisms and supportive factors

In this section, we describe important development mechanisms and enabling factors that supported the introduction of the trauma-informed short course. Six factors are detailed, as follows.

Gradual development over time

The short course benefited from the gradual nature of its development over eight years. There are three important and interconnected aspects:

- *Optional offer in the early phase:* An optional offer before the course became mandatory helped build confidence across the department in the value of the content and developed the capacity of staff to teach the course.
- *Progressive expansion of 'reach' over time:* The initial application of trauma-informed principles and content was by individual tutors on programmes where the new course was most aligned to existing ITE course content (early years courses), and then extended to programmes where there was less existing alignment.
- *Evolution of course content:* Initially, trauma-informed related content focused on attachment and children's emotional and neurological development, which was then extended to include models of adverse childhood experiences and trauma in the short course.

Table 2. Phases of course development

Phase of course development	Dates	Details
Individual engagement with attachment and relational practice through professional development and applied in practice	2012–13	Eight members of staff undertook a 10-day Thrive UK training on attachment and children's emotional and neuroscientific development. Tutors applied this in their own practice while also sharing their experience of doing so, thus initiating informal collaborative professional learning.
Included in early years and primary ITE professional training courses	2014–16	In 2014, an optional twilight course was initially offered to early years beginning teachers. Take-up and participant feedback led to the incorporation of the course in 2015 into regular teaching as a one-day component for 15 early years ITE beginning teachers, which was then extended to 100 primary ITE beginning teachers.
Development of the short course	2017	TISUK established and developed a 10-day trauma-informed practitioner training programme and developed a collaborative provision. Three staff trained as TISUK trainers.
Expansion of the course across all ITE provision	2018–present	Progressive roll-out of the TISUK course across phases and subjects to more than 600 participants attending the course annually, and then to more than 1,000. In 2021/2, the short course was offered online alongside other online teaching as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

External collaboration

Collaboration with external partners, initially Thrive UK and then TISUK, was pivotal to course development. TISUK's 10-day diploma helped tutors to develop the in-depth knowledge and understanding required to teach the short course. The high-quality, research-informed diploma content and materials also formed the bases of the short course. The formalisation of content in the short course was based on TISUK materials. In addition, specified requirements for staff training were introduced to teach the material, enabling an increasing number of tutors to participate in the 10-day practitioner diploma.

Positive outcomes as a warrant and motivation

Tutors experienced the value of the course content for participants and the benefits of applying the principles to their own professional and personal activities. These positive outcomes spurred the motivation of the staff involved and operated like a warrant for the ongoing development and expansion of the course. Positive feedback was received from the national regulatory authority when the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) commended the course after its inspection of our ITE provision.

Champions

The most important enabler for the growth of the trauma-informed short course was the emergence of enthusiasts and champions for the inclusion of trauma-informed practice on ITE courses. The enthusiasm of these staff members was nourished in two ways. First, the trauma-informed approach aligned with their prior knowledge and experience, and their existing professional practice and values as teacher educators. Second, as noted above, the positive outcomes for participants, and for tutors' professional and personal learning, were motivators. Gradually, a cadre of champions grew in each ITE phase. In addition to the formal curriculum leadership undertaken as course tutors, these champions undertook *adaptive leadership* work (Boylan, 2018) to make the case for the value of trauma-informed practice.

Collaborative endeavour

The sense of engaging in collaborative endeavour supported tutors' commitment to developing trauma-informed practice. A crucial stage of the collaborative journey was the 10-day TISUK diploma course, which a large group of tutors across phases and courses completed together. This experience of collective professional learning built a shared understanding of trauma-informed approaches, which laid the groundwork for successful course implementation.

Departmental leadership support

The sixth mechanism that facilitated the introduction of trauma-informed practice into the curriculum was support from departmental leadership. Trauma-informed practice was included in the departmental development plan as part of a wider focus on relational pedagogy in teacher educator practice and the ITE curriculum. The support included a commitment to resourcing course leadership and tutor time outside usual arrangements and processes for the allocation of staff time. Also important was support for tutors' attendance at the 10-day practitioner training programme.

Barriers to the development and inclusion of trauma-informed practice

We now turn to perceived barriers to the development and inclusion of trauma-informed practice in ITE.

The content and prescription of the ITE curriculum

ITE curriculum content is relatively heavily prescribed. In principle, providers have autonomy to include content of their choice beyond the required core content (DfE, 2019a). In reality, constraints mean limited scope to include non-prescribed content. Pressures are particularly acute in one-year postgraduate qualification routes. The length and form of the short course are pragmatic responses to this context, as much as an outcome of a curriculum design process. Because the short course is supplementary to the nationally required content, it is given lower priority than other modules when allocating tutors and timetabling.

The educational environment in schools

Schools, colleges and early years settings feel similar policy-driven pressures. The contexts in which beginning teachers explore trauma-informed practices may not be conducive or sympathetic to these approaches. This includes implementation in settings of the DfE's (2016) preferred approaches to addressing behaviour issues.

Scope for adapting materials across phases

We previously identified collaboration with TISUK as supportive. However, another aspect of the partnership is that tutors have less autonomy over the content of materials in the short course than if these were fully produced in-house. This is particularly relevant to secondary (high school) and post-16 (senior high school) courses, where the content, examples and activities, initially developed for early years

and primary practitioners, need adapting. A related issue concerning differences across phases is that in the current course arrangements, secondary beginning teachers have less opportunity than those on primary or early years routes for reinforcing learning in the rest of their programmes.

Beginning teachers' personal responses

Beginning teachers' personal responses also presented challenges in some cases. Although the course is mandatory, beginning teachers who are sceptical about the content may decide not to attend. The course content is not directly assessed, and attendance does not contribute to grades. Additionally, given the subject matter, some of the course material can elicit emotional responses in some participants. This can arise from over-empathising with the experiences of their students or potential students (L'Estrange and Howard, 2022). For some participants, aspects of the content can be emotionally challenging if connected to personal histories of adverse childhood experiences and/or trauma suffered as children or adults.

Supporting change: implications for practice

We now consider how the enabling factors and barriers to change identified through our analysis add to those previously identified in trauma-informed practice in teacher education.

Supportive factors that were previously identified in reports of trauma-informed teacher education, and also found in the short course, were: warrants from positive outcomes for participants; leadership support; and collaborative endeavour. In addition, three additional factors were present: gradual development over time; the value of external collaboration (in this case with TISUK); and the importance of trauma-informed champions.

The first of these additional factors points to the importance of persistence and sustained activity. What was not found explicitly in our study, but has been reported elsewhere (Boylan, 2021), was the linking of trauma-informed practice to social justice themes. In part, this reflects the material in the course, and, as noted, more recently, TISUK has begun to address social justice themes in their diploma courses. However, there is a gap between our reasons for developing and promoting trauma-informed practice that are embedded in social justice considerations and course content. This offers an area for development in the future.

Turning to the barriers identified, and relating them to those found elsewhere, there is a resonance between challenges that we have faced and educators in other contexts, namely:

- course accreditation requirements and accountability systems (Beasy et al., 2021; Hobbs et al., 2019); these vary across educational systems (Reddig and Vanlone, 2022)
- the amount of existing content in ITE curricula, and conflicts between academic and mental health goals (Fabiano et al., 2014)
- a narrow focus within curricula on relevant but limited content (such as child abuse), which can potentially support a view that trauma-related material is already addressed (Hobbs et al., 2019)
- initial attitudes and beliefs of some teacher educators (Beasy et al., 2021) and beginning teachers, and a lack of research evaluating the impact or value of trauma-informed teacher education (Sonsteng-Person and Loomis, 2021)
- the challenge of finding time for the collaborative activity needed to develop trauma-informed content, and for collaborative professional development (Beasy et al., 2021)
- adapting trauma-informed training materials and techniques from other disciplines may meet specific barriers related to school settings (Sonsteng-Person and Loomis, 2021).

Conclusion

We have outlined the evolution of a short course on trauma-informed teaching practice included on all teacher education programmes at Sheffield Hallam University, developed in conjunction with TISUK. Course development occurred against a backdrop of contestation in education in England about school behaviour policies linked to fundamental conceptions about the purpose of education. Using qualitative methods of teacher educator self-study and autoethnography, we examined our experiences of course development to identify key mechanisms of change and factors that supported progress, or were barriers to positive change.

Three factors that supported the introduction of trauma-informed content in other programmes were also identified as important enablers in the Sheffield Hallam University–TISUK course: leadership support (Brown et al., 2022); positive outcomes for participants (Douglass et al., 2021); and the value of collaboration by teacher educators (Beasy et al., 2021; Douglass et al., 2021). Other significant features that supported the evolution of the short course were the gradual nature of its development, the benefits of external collaboration and the emergence of a group of champions for trauma-informed education practice. The development of champions is an expression of activist professionalism (Sachs, 2003) and critical professionalism (Boylan et al., 2023) in relation to teaching in ITE.

Cross-cutting supportive factors were ‘warrants’ that helped make the case for the merit of the course and the allocation of resources to its ongoing development. Also supportive were credible and research-informed materials from a reputable national organisation, positive feedback from participants and praise for the short course by Ofsted following inspection of our ITE provision.

In the Introduction, we noted that trauma-informed teacher education is a relatively recent development, and that the course is unusual. Given this, based on a single example, the factors we have identified are put forward tentatively. Our focus in this article has been relatively narrow. As noted in the methods, we have only focused on mechanisms, barriers and enablers to innovation. We have not addressed other questions about personal and professional learning and, importantly, the knowledge, capacity and dispositions needed to be trauma-informed teacher educators. Having undertaken this initial scoping of mechanisms, barriers and facilitators, further research is needed to theorise these in relation to the intersection of teacher education, trauma-informed practice and the current context in England. Beyond these issues, of greater importance is what, if any, the benefits are for beginning teachers of engagement in the short course.

Introducing trauma-informed work is not without challenges, not least because of the current policy context for ITE in England. This short course demonstrates that the successful introduction of trauma-informed content is possible even in a relatively unfavourable policy environment, thanks to the creativity, commitment and collegiality of the people involved.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of interest statement

As described in the article, Sheffield Hallam University collaborates with Trauma Informed Schools UK. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the authors during peer review of this article have been made. The authors declare no further conflicts with this article.

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