Trauma-Informed Principle: Safety and Belonging in Designing for Social Justice Partnerships Short Course

Introduction

The trauma-informed principle selected for this application is **Safety**, expanded through the closely related concept of **Belonging**. Within trauma-informed practice, safety extends beyond physical protection to include emotional, relational, and psychological dimensions, ensuring that individuals feel secure enough to participate, take risks, and engage authentically. Belonging strengthens this principle by emphasising inclusion, dignity, and the right to participate without having to prove worth or resilience. Together, safety and belonging form the foundation of trauma-informed approaches, as learning and collaboration are significantly shaped by individuals' prior experiences of harm, marginalisation, and institutional trust.

Selection Rationale

This principle was selected due to its direct relevance to social justice education and partnership-based learning. Designing for Social Justice Partnerships (DSJP) requires participants to engage with power, inequality, and ethical complexity, often within institutions that have historically produced harm for marginalised groups. Professionally, my work within co-creative educational spaces has shown that what is often interpreted as disengagement, resistance, or lack of confidence is frequently rooted in prior experiences of exclusion or trauma. Integrating safety and belonging into DSJP is therefore essential to supporting meaningful participation, ethical collaboration, and sustainable partnership outcomes. The expected impact is a learning environment where participants can engage critically without fear of harm or retraumatisation.

Application Strategy

The setting for this application is a higher education course focused on designing social justice partnerships between students, educators, and institutional or community partners. Safety and belonging are operationalised through both course design and assessment practices. Actionable steps include integrating a trauma-informed design lens alongside existing power and stakeholder analyses, encouraging learners to consider how harm has been experienced and how its effects shape participation. Trauma-informed reflection is embedded into assessment, offering students structured opportunities to reflect on learning in relation to safety, power, and emotional regulation. Choice is prioritised through multiple reflection formats, transparent assessment criteria, and clear participation expectations to avoid compelled disclosure. Expected outcomes include increased student engagement, stronger relational trust, improved ethical awareness, and partnerships that are more responsive and sustainable.

Evaluation and Adaptation

The effectiveness of this approach will be monitored through reflective assessments, anonymous course feedback, and facilitator observation of participation patterns, such as engagement, collaboration, and willingness to take creative risks. Feedback mechanisms include mid-course check-ins and end-of-course evaluations that explicitly invite reflection on safety, belonging, and course structures. This feedback will be used to iteratively refine course design, assessment prompts, and facilitation practices. To ensure sustainability, trauma-informed principles will be documented within course materials and teaching

guidelines, supporting consistency across future iterations of the course and enabling adaptation to different cohorts and partnership contexts.

Conclusion

Embedding safety and belonging as trauma-informed principles within Designing for Social Justice Partnerships has the potential to deepen learning, reduce harm, and strengthen ethical collaboration. By tailoring trauma-informed approaches to the specific relational and institutional context of the course, DSJP can more fully align its pedagogical practices with its social justice commitments. This integration recognises that transformative learning requires not only critical analysis and co-creation, but also care, agency, and sustained attention to how learning is experienced.