

# Positive Education, Power, and the Seeds of Social Action:

*Trauma-Informed Perspectives on Positive Education*

## Tom Brunzell

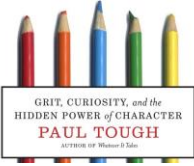
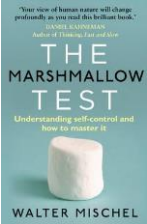

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### Circle

- Greeting
- Positive Primer
- Values & Expectations
- Announcements
- WWW





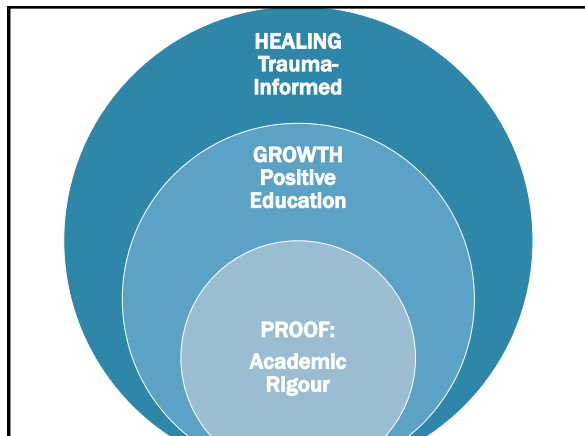
140 years in Victoria  
Family welfare, clinical, and education services



Collaboration and Evaluation:  
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**Dr Peggy Hearn**  
**Associate Professor Helen Stokes**, Youth Research Centre  
**Dr Malcolm Turnbull**



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### What is Trauma?

- Trauma is an overwhelming experience that can undermine the individual's belief that the **world is good and safe** (Berry Street Victoria, 2013).
- Directly experiencing trauma, **witnessing** another's trauma, **learning about** traumatic events, or **exposure** to aversive details can lead to trauma- and stress-related disorders such as reactive attachment disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or acute stress (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013, p. 273).
- Epigenetic factors (inherited) – impacts how we develop biologically
- Trauma can be experienced in utero. For instance high levels of cortisol (domestic violence etc) impacts how the child develops from the brainstem up.
- Neurodevelopmentally, trauma is not the event—it is the **individual's response** to the event and **continuing effects** on stress-related physiological systems (Ungar & Perry, 2012, p. 7).
- Developmental **RESILIENCY** is important.

### Childhood trauma

**Be kind to yourself**

- Family violence 25%
- Substance abuse 27%
- Divorce 23%
- Mental illness 17%
- Mother treated violently 13%
- Criminal behaviour 6%
- Abuse 11%
- Physical abuse 28%
- Sexual abuse 21%
- Emotional neglect 15%
- Physical neglect 10%

(Safety Survey, ABS, 2005; Anda et al., 2009)

- **ACE score of 3**
  - More than **twice as** likely to be **suspended**
  - **Six times more** likely to experience **behaviour problems**
  - **Five times severe** attendance issues
- **Adult medical problems triple with each point**

### Impacts on academic performance and social functioning

- Reduced cognitive capacity
- Sleep disturbance
- Poor concentration
- Difficulties with memory
- Language delays
- **Need for control**
- Attachment difficulties
- Poor peer relationships
- Home destabilisation

(Calmer Classrooms, Downey, 2007)

## Unpredictability = RISK

- The need for power is all about building predictability!
- Brodie is familiar with adults yelling at him when he messes up so that's why he 'throws' the room – even though it is maladaptive.  
*It is predictable!!*

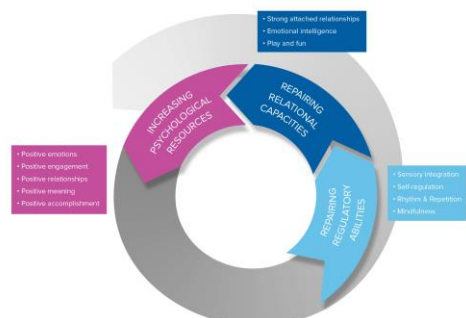
## The Role of Teachers

- Up to **25% of teachers** attribute problems with **disruptive student behaviour** as their primary reasons for **burnout**  
(Abel & Sewell, 1999; Benoit, 2009; Farber, 1991; Friedman, 1992, 2000; Gidycz, 2000; Hakanes, Bakker, & Schreier, 2009; Ingersoll, 2001; Kolkman, 2007; Pines, 2002)
- The physical symptoms of **secondary trauma-exposure** and **burnout** can be severe, long lasting, and clearly correlated to the symptomology of **posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**  
(DeLuca, 1982; Brenner & Runtz, 1988; Caplan & Taylor, 1960; Pines, 2002; Shuman, 1990; Stearns, 2010)
- **Meaning** can serve as a self-integrative process toward wellbeing; and can act as a buffer against **psychopathology, adversity, stress, or frustration**  
(Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Dege, 2012; Singer, Froese, & Zacher, 2008)
- Professionals who believe they have **Meaningful Work (MW)** are more motivated, satisfied, and report increases in their personal and professional wellbeing  
(Singer, Dik, & Dally, 2012)

## Mirror Neurons

- Specialised brain cells that allow you to learn and empathise by observing the actions of another person
- Ancient, pre-verbal systems of non-verbal communication
- Attachment co-regulation  
(Kohler et al., 2002)

### Conceptual model of trauma-informed positive education (TIPE)



Brunzell, T., Stokes, H., & Waters, L. (2016). Trauma-Informed Positive Education: Using positive psychology to strengthen vulnerable students. *Contemporary School Psychology*, 20, 63-83. DOI:10.1007/s40688-015-0070-x

**The Mind of Self-AwareNESS**  
- The midline structures of the brain

**INSULA**  
- interoception  
- emotional states

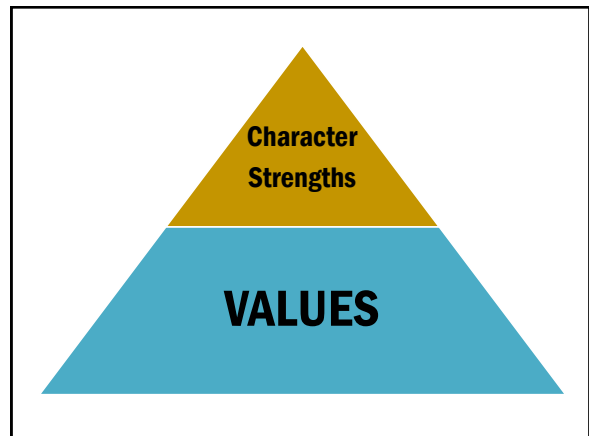
**ACC**  
- attention  
- memory  
- error detection  
- pain registration  
- social awareness

**AMYGDALA**  
- emotional states

**POSTERIOR CINGULATE CORTEX**  
- interoception  
- social awareness

**"The Body Keeps the Score"**  
- Bessel van der Kolk

- The midline structures of the brain are what make up our sense of self
- fMRI brain scans of people who had experienced severe early life trauma showed almost no activation of any of the self-sensing areas of the brain
- Trauma-affected people learn to shut down the feelings and emotions in the brain that accompany terror
- This also shuts down the parts of the brain that experience joy and let the person understand themselves
- This lack of self-awareness is sometimes so profound that the person can not recognise themselves in the mirror

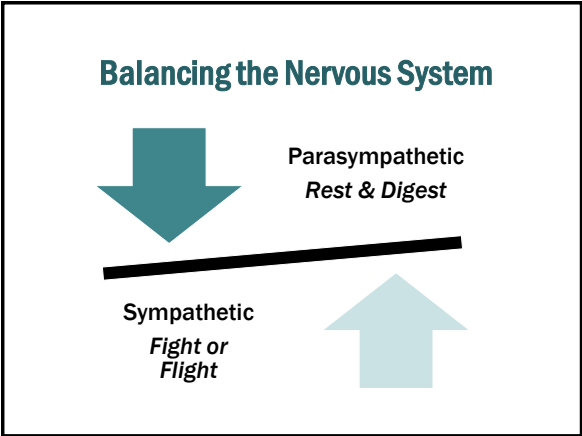
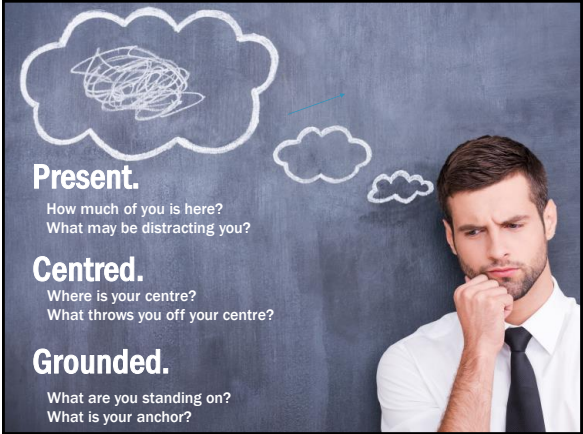


**Why teach values—to vulnerable students?**

- Struggling students have not had opportunities to determine and articulate *their* values
- Values are the *foundation* of wellbeing
- You can use values in the *triage-conversation*

**What are Values?**

- Values are core aspects of a person's character.
- Values are enduring beliefs and attitudes that guide behaviours—both big and small.
- Knowing your values, and living in accordance with them, is a pathway towards a fulfilling and meaningful life.



**"People who inherently don't have power in their own lives will go to great lengths to get it."**  
**-BSEM**

We need to talk about RESPECT.

Dominator versus Collective values

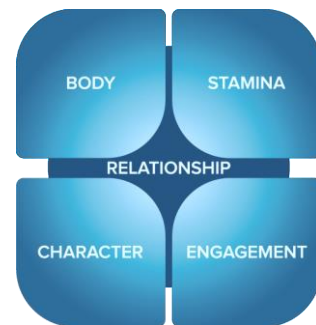
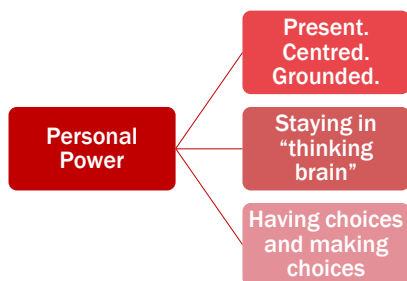
We need to talk about **POWER** because the word itself (and it's synonyms) is IMPORTANT.

It's important because many of our students want power, need their own empowerment, and use negative means to get it.

Therefore, if you are uncomfortable with the word, use a synonym, but we need to address the concept of power head-on.

Address power in the triage conversation with love in your voice (unconditional positive regard).

## Redefining Power



**Berry Street Education Model**