Working with Young Children in a New World Replete with Assumptions

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Abstract

We lived in an assumptive world until COVID-19 told us that all forms of coziness and security seem to have vanished. By focusing on three basic assumptions about worldview, that the universe is compassionate, that the world is important, and that the world is worthy of itself, we explore how to cope with trauma and sophisticated emotional information. We focus on teachers and their relationship with young children as both groups try to develop strategies to handle their own trauma—teachers helping children cope and teachers managing their own trauma. We worked in a preschool that supports a large number of children that have experienced trauma. Our work focused on 10 teachers and 100 children. The Seasonal Model (2019) was implemented, and groups ran over a 10-week period. Outcomes showed positive trends toward helping teachers develop a deeper understanding of "big behaviours" and managing them, enabling them to help children build strategies to handle their trauma and emotions.

Additionally, outcomes showed that teachers were better equipped to handle their own trauma, whether personal or related to "taking in" the traumatic experiences of the children they were working with. Here is an attempt to knit together the assumptions of educators and young children through the language of art and social work. A conversation is carefully re-crafted around the concept of the assumptive world. This attempt also intends to see how else we can build a world with those who have survived and help them attain their well-being whilst dealing with and coming to terms with their losses.

Keywords: Assumptive World; COVID-19 Human Narratives; Dealing with Children

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Introduction

The assumptive world refers to a concept that people have ideas about how the world should work based on learned experiences and leads to developing a set of expectations. Having specific assumptions leads to the development of beliefs that give people a sense of purpose (Carnelley & Janoff-Bulman, 1992). The set of beliefs that develops can help to ground people, allowing them to deal with trauma and understand the sophistication and variety of complex responses (Beder, 2005). During a global pandemic, more people are experiencing trauma and having their assumptive world shifted significantly.

Although it has been 3 years since the pandemic has started, its cumulative repercussions are still strongly felt. Many Australian day cares continued to operate throughout the pandemic, and although some families chose to keep children at home (Baxter,2021), many of the vulnerable families continued to send children to daycares. Due to the reality that children spend so many hours at the center, teachers' support is crucial for the children's wellbeing, as they optimally function as "reliable stand-ins" (Keller, 2011). However, in the midst of a pandemic and in the months that follow, educator's emotional capacity may be compromised by cumulative trauma and stress. Educators use the term "big behaviours" to describe children whose behaviour disrupts the class with swearing, hitting, and demonstrating destructive behaviours. These "big behaviours" have the potential to interfere with educators' capacity to support vulnerable children.

Carnelley and Janoff-Bulman (1992) identified three specific core assumptions that shape belief systems and worldviews, including that the world is compassionate, the world is meaningful, and the self is worthy (p.6) (Figure 1). These three core assumptions, which are generally focused on the world being reasonable and sensible, and that the self is good, capable, and moral, are challenged when people experience trauma. This leads to a loss of the assumptive world (Kauffman, 2002). Those who experience trauma often are left disillusioned and confused, as their belief set and worldview have been disrupted and no longer make sense (Beder, 2005).

If we are to consider that the world is compassionate, the world is meaningful, and the world is self-worthy (Carnelley & Janoff-Bulman, 1992), then the set of beliefs that we develop ought to help us by allowing us to deal with trauma and give us a hint as to how we would take on board the gravity of the pandemic, and give us the sophisticated knowledge to deal with it through a variety of complex responses (Beder, 2005). Amidst these assumptions, we have decided to focus on teachers and their relationships with young children in this paper as they try to find ways to handle their own trauma in relation to the children's experiences while also processing their own traumatic reactions.

Figure 1: The Assumptive World Diagram: Core assumptions that Shape Belief Systems and Worldviews Source: Authors

The above core assumptions (Figure 1) are, as already stated above, focused on the world and its people being good and sensible, and that their self is good, capable, and moral. This is challenged when we experience a crisis or feel unduly stressed and or traumatised. Are we losing the assumptive world here? (Kauffman, 2002). As the pandemic traverses, those who experience trauma seem to be left to their disillusionment and confusion. The pandemic and other trauma experiences impact and reduce psychological wellbeing and resilience, directly impacting and weakening the quality of relationships with others (Ryff,1989).

Psychological wellbeing has roots in self-acceptance, self-esteem, success, self-actualisation, and maturity (Ryff & Singer, 1989). The development of positive relationships relies upon these factors and educators can incorporate these factors into their work with children. Educators are given the opportunity to reflect on and deepen these factors which in turn leads to a profound relationship with children they work with developing resilience and hope.

Positive relationships, along with being one of the protective factors that help overcome and heal from trauma, help children and adults find the world to be meaningful, self-worthy, and benevolent.

Research is ample supporting the importance of relationships and the role they have as a protective factor in breaking the cycle of trauma (Cyrulink, 2009; Masten, 2001; Van der Kolk, 1996; 2014), yet much of the attention in schools is given to the behaviours of the child, arming the educators with strategies to manage these behaviours, There is little focus on the relationship between educator and child with the assumptions that educators have an existing meaningful, attuned and warm relationship with the children in their care concentrating on behavioral management or teaching strategies. The COVID 19 pandemic created an opportunity that gave a glimpse into the complexities that exist within this work, taking into account not only the children, their home situation but also the educators and their personal life situation (Hergass, 2020). It allowed educators to articulate the heavy load that they carry, and the unrealistic expectations families and society has from them and the anti-attachment impact that has on the relationship with the children in their care.

Implementing the Seasonal Model (Hergass 2019) in schools that support children from vulnerable backgrounds such as intergenerational trauma, abuse, neglect, or working families has highlighted the need for dual work both with the children and the educators, shifting the focus from those of the children to the quality of the educator child relationship. Since both children and often the educators, have had past experiences that would cause mistrust with others, this is no easy task. The model relies on the principles of art therapy and facilitation of open art groups as a safe container in which deeper relationships can be formed. Additionally, this is an opportunity for children to safely and freely express their internal world. The groups are complemented with a reflective component with the educator, giving them an opportunity to digest and process both what has happened in the group, as well as an opportunity to look at behaviors and the artwork children create and reflect on their own emotions in relation to this. Two schools participated in the project, one urban and one rural, both in New South Wales, Australia. There was a total of 10 educators involved in the refection process, all volunteering to participate, and all giving permission to share their reflections. Qualitative methods and collaboration were used to collect data. This action on reflection (Schon, 1991) in a 10-week cycle block has allowed educators to share and understand their own vicarious traumatisation as a direct result for caring and working with the children in the schools. The repercussions of trauma can lead to educators who may be unattuned, withdrawn or intrusive as a way of dealing with the impact of the trauma straining their empathy (Wilson and Lindy, 1994).

Since relationships are at the core of the model, trust is developed not only for the educators and the children, but for the educators themselves in the reflective space that they are able to share

their experiences. The schools from which these experts are taken, have developed a long-lasting relationship with the author over the last 10 years, allowing for the richness and honesty. All of the reflections shared in this article have been from reflections used through the pandemic and used with permission from the educators whose names have been changed.

A concept that helps facilitate this safe space, both for reflections and for the development of the child-educator relationship within the art group, is one gifted by the ancient culture of the Aboriginal people, specifically from the Daly River of Western Australia, Dadirri. Miriam Ungunmer (2002) explains Dadirri to be akin to a deep inner listening and allowing things to unfold in their own time, just like the seasons, which is the inspiration for the name Seasonal Model. In addition, decolonising methodologies (Smith, 2005) have helped each participant become aware of their own assumptions when showing up to this work, collaborate and learn from each other.

The Educators and their Trauma

Educators are placed in a position where they spend many hours with children in their care. Having the opportunity to develop positive relationships would enhance both hope and resilience in the children and increase the educators' notion of leading a meaningful life, which in turn may positively affect their life satisfaction and subjective wellbeing (Anic and Tončić, 2013).

The current pandemic challenged many existing assumptions. Although educators are often accustomed to working with children who have experienced trauma, claiming "this is just what we are used to," (Daphne, an educator, in reflections (2020). The current situation is unprecedented and has a widespread impact. The relationship between the educator and the child is more important than ever, as families are often stressed and unable to meet their children's emotional needs, leaving educators holding and supporting the vulnerable child. However, living through a global pandemic is exhausting for everyone, and the high-quality care provided by educators takes its toll. Daphne, an educator said in reflections:

You can't pour from an empty cup...Well my cup is empty but there's nothing in the fridge, and the cupboards are bare. How do I fill my cup when there is nothing to fill it with? There is no way of knowing when stocks will be replenished. Or if they ever will be... (2020)

Educators are the tools of their trade, as are therapists, thus, their own history and life experiences influence their success in connecting and understanding the children they work with. The conscious use of self is the term used by social workers to describe the skill of purposefully and intentionally using 'his or her motivation and capacity to communicate and interact with others in ways that facilitate change' (Sheafor and Horejsi 2003: 69). Teaching beliefs and attitudes are central to effective teaching strategies and learning behaviour, being closely linked to teachers, values, view of the world and conception of their place within it (Radulescu & Iucu, 2013). The set of beliefs that we develop ought to help us by allowing us to deal with the trauma and give us a hint as to how we would take on board the gravity of the pandemic and give us the sophisticated knowledge to deal with it through a variety of complex responses (Beder, 2005). Is all this an assumption? As we focus on educators and their interactions with young children, we can learn from them as they try to find ways to handle and process both the children's experiences and their own reactions to these stories.

What is Trauma? Is it simply a traumatic experience that we have been through? Or is it more than that? We now believe it is so much more.

Trauma is an invisible force within us that dictates what we wear, how we behave, and how we find ways to integrate into the systems to which we belong. Every one of us lives in our unique world, filled with a range of traumas and experiences. These experiences shape and control us. It is different for everyone. For some reason, in my world as a teacher not only am I afraid to ask questions, I also really struggle to ask for help.

Without any clear memories of having a bad experience when asking for help, I have still had experiences that shape my behavior related to this. Now I don't have any vivid memories of being denied help when I've asked for it. I didn't grow up in a family where 'you don't ask for help' or anything like that. But for some reason I just can't ask for help. Now I get that we all have different personalities, and some things are just our own unique quirks. But, somehow, I don't think my strong repulsion to asking for help comes down to personality (Sarah Lee, in reflections July 2020).

By caring for and working with children who are often unable to ask for help, educators are experiencing a parallel process as they empathisze with the vulnerable children, creating a chaotic vortex. As in the reflection of Sarah Lee, above, who represents the voice of many educators that are feeling depleted, isolated, empty, wanting help but not being able to ask for it.

During the current COVID-19 pandemic, educators are acutely challenged. Our experiences and belief systems help us develop resilience, and this helps deal with trauma, but when experiences leave us disillusioned and confused, it is challenging to shift our thinking and continue to provide support (Prime et al., 2020). Educators are being forced to shift their thinking when trying to understand children. While this is challenging for many, this shift is important, as the connections with the children and families often provide a sense of purpose and strength, allowing educators to continue to show up, be present, and make connections with children—even when the educators themselves would rather be home and safe with their own families. The process of surviving that leads to resilience, in turn, generates optimism and hope. "Hope for many may be an impossible dream, but for those who are resilient, it is the only possible step to take to continue a purposeful life" (Pulla & Salagame, 2018, p.94). How can educators create a sanctuary for the children in their care when the "world feels like a war zone and the preschool center is a battlefield." (Elle, an educator in reflections 2020).

Amidst the battlefield, the seed of hope is planted when one creates a pocket of an oasis in the form of a deep relationship with a child. When nourished, one may lead to a sense of purpose and optimism, which leads to resilience (Prime et al., 2020). The deep connection, the ability to see the children and not just their behaviour, begin to form droplets of water that begin to fill the cup and create boundaries in that oasis so that it is protected. When educators can enter a space that is understanding while dealing with children who have experienced trauma, it is an opportunity to use the relationship to change outcomes. When children are empowered to express themselves, rather than forced to continue internalising their trauma, healing can begin, Nizar, another educator, reflected:

I see children that were once well-behaved, acting out, hurting children and educators, and trashing environments. Children that were once 'easy' become 'difficult.' I notice that educators, including myself, often become stuck with how to deal with this, helplessness. And I wonder why...I have noticed that some children, it seems like they misbehave more than their key educators. I think that perhaps this could be because they feel safest with these educators. But when you have built such a strong, secure connection with a child and they turn around and start acting aggressively towards you, it can be quite defeating. What I have learned...When children are being 'good' they are much easier. But for children that have experienced or are currently experiencing trauma, when they are 'good' they are just internalising their trauma. It is easy to identify trauma in children that exhibit "big behaviours". But for the children that go about their days doing all the 'right' things, you can't identify it, but they are just holding all of the trauma in their bodies. Although it is undesirable for children to be violent, use foul language or ruin things when they do, they are releasing their trauma and when we understand this behaviour as an expression of their trauma being released, we are able to support them to manage their behaviours and regulate their emotions. The 'good' children are really just ticking time bombs, and it is only a matter of time before they need to release their trauma in

some way. This could happen when they are children - so your 'good' child becomes your 'naughty' child. Or it could happen when they are adults, and they suffer from mental illness, struggle with addiction, or become suicidal. So, now I think it is so much better if they can act out in the preschool and be supported by an understanding educator.

Nizar's reflection shows is that as an educator she realised that after children were given a safe space they were able to really show and express their distress, and although this was uncomfortable at first she had an epiphany that by being allowed to express and act out in a safe space now it would have the potential to change the trajectory of their future. Many of the "well behaved" children are doing so due to a false sense of safe and worry that the adults in their lives will not be able to contain their behaviour and expressing their stress would come with dire consequences. Nizar's opinions are consistent with the opinions and reflections of many others within the Seasonal Model exploration.

This ability to see and allow children to behave in different ways, and the educators ongoing reflections and deeper understanding creates a cycle that allows them to be open to experiences – which is a key characteristic of the fully functioning person, that contrasts with the often-accepted stance of needing a fixed state where all problems are solved (Ryff & Singer, 1989). Again, this converges aspects of positive psychological functioning.

Questioning the Purpose of Life

Pulla and Salagame (2018) explained that when people raise questions and seek meaning and purpose in life, they are genuinely seeking wellbeing. By using their strengths and resources, resilience grows, and obstacles are removed. By looking within themselves, they find hope and paths to work through crises. Surviving itself leads to greater resilience and having pride in that survival can help remove new obstacles and problems (Pulla and Salagame, 2018).

In social care, the idea of using a strengths-based approach involves recognising the personal strengths within a person and their own resources and focusing on those to promote recovery and build resilience (Riggs & Pulla, 2014). Empowering educators and fostering self-esteem can lead to rebuilding. This is true for both children and adults.

Arts and Empowerment

Art can add significant richness to the development of empowerment. Art is a common and well-used resource in preschools and using it in a different way can create a shared connection and communication between child and educator that comes from within and can lead to the development of hope and, ultimately, greater resilience. Art appears as the child's voice, giving them a choice in what and how to use, what to share and how to share it. Through the art practice, educators and therapists can add significant richness to empowerment development. The learning that occurs is shared and emerges from the creativity of expression. Ryff and Singer (1989) presented a psychological well-being model (PWB). Falling within the Eudaimonic tradition and was initially designed to question the hedonistic view of health prevailing under the social sciences. Waterman (1984) explains eudaimonia as the feelings accompanying behaviour and consistent with one's true potential. The influence of Aristotle's view of the supreme human good involving virtue, consistent with eudaimonia, or a sense of excellence and perfection, is clearly recognised in Ryff's model (1989). She also accepts the psychodynamic and psychodynamic work of psychologists like Jung, Maslow, Allport, and Rogers (Ryff & Singer, 1989). A model of psychological wellbeing proposed by Ryff has the following characteristics (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Authors' Representation of Carol Ryff's Six Components

Contextualising Children in Daycare

Using the arts as a treatment modality provides a good fit in therapy as it respects the journey of the person experiencing trauma and leads to positive change and wellbeing. Fostering resilience (which is part of restoring the assumptive world) is important, particularly in daycare settings where children who may have experienced a variety of traumas that were repeatedly exacerbated during the current pandemic, can be supported. In the daycare centres and preschools where children receive care, many come to school with a shattered, assumptive world. Their innocence knows nothing about safety, attention, and attuned care, which we adults take for granted. Educators are not therapists or social workers. They have little or no knowledge of therapeutic frameworks to guide their difficult day-to-day work, but the key educators are often relationship holders and may be the only sense of contentment the children experience during the day. The pandemic of COVID-19 has eroded the sense of security of all children as we do not have data in terms of how many of them are coming from homes where there is a lack of food and job security? How many of these children we see in schools can remain safe from physical harm?

Educators may suggest to parents to avoid watching the news in front of young children and retain as much as possible of a daily family routine. Furthermore, educators may empower students to speak about their feelings by communicating with them or another trusted adult to give learners a safe space to reach out if they need help with something or are concerned about something (Cruse, 2020). This can only happen if the child has already created a sense of security and trust with their educators, something that takes hard work, ongoing commitment, and resourcefulness on the part of the educator who, as mentioned above, needs to understand the children's behaviours and find ways to connect with them.

In the midst of a pandemic, with even "bigger behaviours," educators are still faced with ongoing "rating and assessments" in which they are assessed and rated by their state and territory regulatory authority against the National Quality Standard on their policy and practices of the service. This has not changed; they must abide by a rigorous curriculum and documentation process, which often leaves

them in a state of despair about how to adhere to the system's requirements. Here is a reflection Daphne, an educator who has been implementing the Seasonal Model since 2012.

> What has changed is that we must now, at the same time, answer the children's needs which is not only a very demanding and time-consuming task but also is not always aligned with what they want us to do in the curriculum. This dilemma has been one that as an educator I have been thinking and talking about since we started working together almost decade ago. Where do I find or create an uninterrupted hour in the day to run an art group where children can freely and without guided direction express themselves? How do I shift the overarching curricular demands to ensure that this free expression with crayons and colour and imagination is allowed to blossom? How do I get permission for an extra hour to sit together for reflections to be able to unpack and understand the art that the children do as well as the behaviours of the children in the group?

A Model and a Supportive Space

Art-making acts as an incubator for fear, confusion, and the unknown. For the child who has experienced adversity, facing new challenges during the pandemic, the unknown is greater. The educator, for the duration of the group, is supported to both identify and "sit with" children's emotions through identifying projective identification. By meeting the experienced chaos with equanimity, educators model calmness, interest in the child and warm attuned care, Educators learn to identify and endure the children's emotions, whilst at the same time remaining actively engaged and interested in the children's creation, offering the children a mirror in which the children can find themselves being creative and curious. Focusing on being emotionally available and attuned for the duration of the group, even when the world is unstable and unknown, educators function as a secure base for the children while modelling a

good-enough relationship by providing dependable parameters. The group's safe space becomes a liminal space, one that contains within it both the anxiety of the unknown as well as hope (Pack, 2017). With the use of art materials and an emotionally available educator, children can concentrate on art-making or connect with the educator, experiencing the relational joy of being seen.

The Seasonal Model proposes that secure attachment can be practised through repetition within the art group. The group sessions have a beginning, a middle and an end that occur at the same day and time each week, even in the midst of the pandemic, where everything else is changing, the group is a constant. The 'open groups,' allow children to decide if they want to join the groups as well as how long to participate in them; this gives the child a sense of control, which is something they may lack in other aspects of their young lives. In each session, the educators create the oases of connection by modelling what Salzberger-Wittenberg (1999) describes:

> [T]he task of the educator [which] may be thought of as resembling the parental function: that is, to act as a temporary container for the excessive anxiety of his students at points of stress. It will mean he will experience in himself some of the mental pain connected with learning, and yet set an example of maintaining curiosity in the face of chaos, love of truth in the face of terror of the unknown, and hope in the face of despair (p. 60).

Sitting in the art groups, educators are prone to vicarious traumatisation from both the children's behaviours and the children's heart-wrenching stories. Children who have experienced trauma have very few positive expectations of the adults around them. The adults in their lives have often let them down, and so they replay these experiences with their educators. During the art groups that educators facilitate as part of the Seasonal Model, children are able to express themselves using different art materials, sharing their feelings. Often, they

share their life stories. Creating in the presence of an educator who has learned to stop and sit in the presence of the children, be emotionally available, and be attuned to their need and actively observing the way that they create and behave, can help them put the pieces of their life story together, and also help them both integrate the traumatic event that they experienced and with the certainty of the groups restoring the assumptive worldview.This shows them that their world is understandable, predictable, and safe, at least within their preschool setting.

Resilience is Recovery

Pynoos, Steinberg & Goenjian (1996) discuss that resilience is not resistance to trauma but actual recovery from trauma. There are common responses to stress and trauma, and in children, this is evidenced by withdrawing behaviours, outburst behaviours, sadness, hyperactivity, disengagement, and more. A child in this vulnerable space needs the connection with their caregivers, be that parents or educators, to feel less vulnerable, and more secure in their expression of emotion before healing can take place. The security in and of the art group and ability to self-express in the vicinity of a caring adult creates a way to deal with trauma and hints at how to survive the gravity of the pandemic. But then, during the pandemic, adults are often preoccupied and stressed financially, physically, and having lost control of the known

and secure. Their assumptive worlds have been significantly disrupted. In addition, the physical resources of the centres are limited. Directors had to spend many hours sourcing nappies, toilet paper, and food. Art materials are not a priority.

COVID-19 has forced us to question the way we live and find new answers, it has also required innovative solutions, and has set a place for collaboration. "There is a lack of materials as funding has run out." We know that this could be symbolic of the children's needs not being met. But what can we do? "Why don't we use natural materials?" an Aboriginal educator, Martha, asked. This led to a beautiful gesture of creating baskets for each room with some materials. She created a basket with natural materials and added this note to it:

The Bunda Room Toddlers and I would like to pass on our knowledge and understanding of our land and how to create art using natural materials. In this basket contains Lilli Pillies from the front garden, Paper Bark and Gum leaves from a tree from my home, seeds from the Bottle Brush trees from across the road, and leaves from our trees in the garden. You can use these materials to create lots of different ways, such as; using Lilli Pillies as paint, leaves as paper, and making a collage. I learnt how to use these materials from the land from my Dad living in the Bush and him creating art with us from the land, and how to care for it.

Figure 3: Magic Wand
Source: Art Made by 3.5-Year-Old Child Using Natural Materials

Figure 4: Soup.
Source: Art Made by a 3.5-Year-Old Child Using Natural Materials

Figure 5: My Family
Source: Art Made by a 4-Year-Old Child Using Natural Materials

This is an example of an adjustment to the assumptive world, and how psychological wellbeing and a sense of purpose create a different way of operating. It is an adaptation of

worldview that could lead to change. Using natural materials to create and express feelings may be the beginning of change (Figures 3, 4 and 5). It has taken a pandemic, with a lack of resources, desperation to start thinking and doing things differently, to make us realise the importance of connecting in this way. Materials and their use are still autonomous for the centre and the educators but what about their sense of a failing, inattentive system? Again, how do we adjust a system? How can we shift things that are so embedded and integrated into our sense of being that we lose the sight of the fact that it can be different?

New Belief Systems Can Develop

So often, distress and trauma make us more set in our old ways, our assumptive world has been proven again to be disruptive and frightening. Based on our past experiences, we struggle to develop a new set of beliefs and be in the world. We find it hard to acknowledge and learn from those who have gone through similar experiences and not only learned from them but accept their willingness to teach us (Arima et al., 2020). It is hard to be open to understanding that if we allow ourselves, we can learn from their answers, knowledge and experience and not only integrate the spiritual, psychic, and cultural that have contributed throughout history but also strengthen connection and inter-being.

Returning to the concepts put forth by Aboriginal elders and keeping this knowledge in our minds can help reframe current events and stressors, allowing for the entry of a safe space where shifts in worldview can more easily occur. Arima, Trinidad & Tobago (2020: pg. 14) write:

> As Amerindians/Indigenous Peoples in the Caribbean, we are historically well acquainted with a series of epidemics and pandemics. We therefore have a lot of historical experience in suffering and surviving from both local epidemics and regional pandemics. We have seen some of the worst in the past, and now the rest of the world is getting a small taste of what we had to go through. The big difference is that we did not have a World Health Organization looking into

our situation; nobody came to our assistance; there was no protection or support from the authorities; we were left to our own devices. We have survived the very worst, rebuilt our economies, and we are still here today thanks to our ancestors' survival skills. We have some lessons to offer from those experiences.

Integrating the Concept of Dadirri, Liminal Space and Psychological Wellbeing.

Aboriginal concepts can also help to reframe current events and stressors, allowing for the entry of a safe space where shifts in worldview can more easily occur. A safe space like Dadirri. Dadirri is a concept originally shared by Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann, an elder from the Daly River in the Northern Territory of Australia. Dadirri is a way of being when we are in state of stillness and deep awareness, accepting things to be as they are; allowing them to unfold in their own rhythm and pace (Ungunmerr-Baumann 2002). In a dynamic and fast-paced preschool setting, this can be a challenge to achieve. With so much attention required to literacy, numeracy, documentation and curriculum, dealing with "big behaviours" adds an entirely different and complex layer to this reality. Dadirri is a concept that makes the difficult more possible.

In a similar way to the shifting of worldviews and creating a safer sense of the world, a space of two cultures, past and present, can live adjacently. At first thought, they often co-exist in a liminal space which holds the past and the future, life and death and a pandemic. The concept of liminality essentially means, "release from normal constraints" (Turner, 1985, p.160). Within the concept of liminality, one is freed from the limits typically imposed by the world, allowing for true expression and criticism of society. In the liminal space, the educator is able to empathise with a child's emotions, and the educators are then able to better provide themselves as a comfort, helping to reassure the child as they experience growth. Liminal spaces were described by Myerhoff (1982) as *spaces of promise and peril*, without knowing in which

direction it might go. This unknowing causes anxiety, however remembering that with meaning making, growth and healing can happen within that space (Pack, 2017).

As educators explore the unknown listening deeply to the experiences disclosed by young children, they are often forced to confront their own vicarious traumatisation. It is within this zone that the practice of liminality provides space, allowing children to be able to receive support and feel safe to form healthy, sustaining attachments, changing their disrupted view of the world. The liminal space is entered together, by both educators and children. It is relationship-based, not location-based (Casey, 1993) and increased the wellbeing of both groups.

Thus, the children's narratives as they create art, as well as the processing and discussions in the reflections amongst the educators after they have witnessed the children participating in the art groups, all assist in bridging the gaps between old and new identities. The art itself is processing, even if it is not shared with a narrative. Educators can sometimes look at the art and have their own thoughts about it helping form the connection and understanding. For example, "the soup "in figure 4 made Martha, the educator who observed the child making it, reflect on how "although our life is made of different ingredients, and although things may look like they are messy, putting them in a pot and making soup, gives me the feeling that everything is going to be ok. That we can eat whatever the universe is dishing to us!" (Martha, in reflections, 2020).

The bridging of old and new identities is often linked with the educator's ability to change their assumptive world of the child and their behaviours. Practicing Dadirri and learning to listen deeply in the art groups, helps educators, understand the reasons for a child's behaviours. This mentalization of the children's behaviours (Kelly, 2017) guides educators to support the children. Bearing witness to the suffering of the community at a deep, soul level, through connecting with the children for deep healing, as educators hear the cry for help from the children, and in reflections, the educators cry for help is heard.

Vicarious Traumatisation

Educators draw from many children an overwhelming flood of experiences, many of them traumas. The effect on the nervous system of educators is immediate, as they undergo secondary distress when they witness the emotional and behavioural communications of the children and receive them. Fear and anxiety are often a result of the educators creating unconscious defences to their own traumatic experiences and those of others, these defence mechanisms help protect them from feeling overcome by the traumas experienced and reported by the children (Keller, 2011). Vicarious traumatisation can lead to disruptions of the educator's own perceptions, particularly as they relate to trust, safety, esteem, intimacy and control, for their own self as well as those they are working with (Baird & Jenkins, 2003; Cunningham, 2003).

One educator said, "when I get home, it takes me a few hours to wind down from the day, and then often I awake from dreams or thoughts about the children."

The influence of world views on development is defined by Everly and Lating (2004), specifically as it relates to the development of a defense system and a sense of security. The child will believe that their parents will always be nice to them with a compassionate worldview and a solid sense of worth. This worldview will change as the child grows, and without abuse, the child will usually become more versatile, which can be very positive. In comparison, to accommodate the danger and breach of their benevolent value system, a child who encounters trauma will change their worldview. This leads to concrete goals, such as restoring the assumptive worldview, incorporating and making sense of the traumatic experience, for the running of the art groups.

Trauma recovery includes managing the extreme arousal and making intellectual sense of their traumatic experience (Everly & Lating, 2004). These guidelines comply with Millon's (1999) personality-guided therapy methods. Outcomes

are stronger when the therapist uses a variety of techniques and individualises them to the child. The group gives children an opportunity to express their stories and often their traumatic experience, using art and the reflections after allowing educators to find creative ways to support children in regulating the intense arousal that is part and parcel of the day and often plays out as the "big" behaviours. In addition, through connecting to each child, they individualise specific interventions that are more suitable than managing behaviours. This creativity and independence lead to an embodied sense of purpose for the educators as they come to terms with how meaningful they are to the children (Ryff, 1989).

Conclusion

How is trauma healed? How is assumptive world view changed? How do we not only survive COVID -19 but manage to flourish and learn from it? Art is a powerful medium for healing. Deep meaningful relationships are vital. We have the belief that change can be implemented through early treatment of trauma and its understanding. Embodying Dadirri (Ungunmerr, 2002) and using the art groups as a space of deep soul listening, offers healing that has generously been made available and generated by ancient Aboriginal cultural wisdom. Implementing this knowledge gives birth to understanding, empathy and compassion, and a good enough relationship can unfold and perhaps, change the world view of all involved. Showing that even when the world has gone mad, some people are predictable and caring. Through this form of listening, the Aboriginal people caused their own healing in the past, and they brought that healing to us to use today.

Is it possible to learn the basis of coping with trauma? Surviving a pandemic? The Aboriginal people had the answers for millennia in the symbology of their tales of visions and in their circles of listening. Can we draw from this and create a spiritual foundation, a room of the soul where pain and misery are not only heard but taken in, processed and neutralised, in the same way that it was in in the Daly community of Northen Australia, and in the same way that

every mother does for her child as she takes in, absorbs, and transforms the pain of the baby in a way that makes it bearable.

We understand that children's and educators' values and worldviews have been interrupted, and there is no longer anything that makes sense (Beder, 2005). We address trauma in the preschool children as they battle to negotiate their crazy world in which loved ones may not be meeting their expectations or upholding their assumptions, beliefs, or worldview. When educators are supported to provide a safe space, a positive connection, and the tools that offer the child a means to express their emotions and experiences, change can happen for both the child starting their healing journey and the educators who grow in their own psychological wellbeing.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors bear no conflict of interest

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Author Contribution Statement

The article arose out of both authors' reflections about children in the space of COVID-19. Dr Shiri Hergass carried out research and reflective interviews. Both authors share the responsibility for the entire article equally.

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