TEACHING STUDENTS STRUGGLING WITH TRAUMA: A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF IMPACT UPON CURRICULAR GOALS

by

Michael Anthony Emmart

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to understand the impact of childhood trauma upon curricular goals for elementary school teachers in the northeastern United States. A qualitative effort was employed in an effort to examine the lived experiences of teachers working with students affected by trauma. Data were collected from interviews with six female elementary school teachers (mean experience: 18.3 years) working within what might be characterized as a small urban district, with the interview transcripts analyzed according to processes provided by Moustakas (1994). All of those interviewed were able to identify numerous students within their classrooms (past and present) who had experienced a trauma, from sexual victimization to abandonment, and noted that these experiences often manifest themselves in behaviors that are disruptive to the delivery of instruction. Teachers reported on great lengths in attempting to support and manage students struggling in the aftermath of trauma; however, most of these efforts are characterized as trial-and-error with none of the participants able to identify having received any formal training on how to best support these students. Teachers reported an increasing amount of aggression among these students over time, with the issue becoming a growing concern in recent years due to a corresponding escalation in disruptive behaviors that interrupt or cease instruction.

Keywords: childhood trauma, learning interference, disruptive behaviors, teacher goals

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Autonomic Nervous System (ANS)

Developmental Trauma Disorder (DTD)

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)

North East School District (NESD)

National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)

Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS)

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Depending upon the definition of trauma and the source of data, between 25% and 70% of American school children have experienced at least one traumatic event in the past year, with many school-aged children reporting multiple exposures over the course of their lives (Berson & Baggerly, 2009; Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005; National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2003). Children who have been exposed to traumatizing experiences display a variety of reactions that may include problems with self-regulation, difficulty with attachment, dissociation, depersonalization, and impulse control (Ardino, 2011; Maschi, Morgen, Hatcher, Rosato, & Violette, 2009; Simpson, Peterson, & Smith, 2011). While many children who have experienced trauma are not identified as having special education needs related to resulting emotional dysregulation, their behaviors often call for similarly specialized strategies because they prove disruptive within a classroom setting (Esturgó-Deu & Sala-Roca, 2010; Ford, Fraleigh & Connor, 2010; Pritchard, Bowers, & Birdsall, 2009). Mitigating the effects of trauma in the classroom has traditionally focused on the need for teachers to understand its influence on the process of learning; however, little is known about how children struggling with trauma impact teaching (Borrowman & White, 2006). There is a need for greater understanding relative to the experiences of teachers who have taught children struggling with post-traumatic dysregulation.

Background

The case for teacher response with regard to the needs of the special education student has been well made. Efforts aimed at supporting the needs of students identified with developmental and learning disabilities certainly predate the 2001 passing of No Child Left Behind. The progression toward inclusion has led to increased collaboration between teachers,

including the use of paraprofessionals and push-in services (Ingersoll, 2012). As with inclusion, students struggling with trauma—many of whom present interfering behaviors in classroom settings—can present a significant challenge for teachers (Flores, Patterson, Shippen, Hinton, & Franklin, 2010). Unfortunately, there is little research examining the impact that supporting children struggling with trauma has upon curriculum. What is known is that many teachers express feelings of uncertainty in trying to support children struggling with trauma during a time when childhood exposure to these experiences is high (Alisic, Bus, Dunlack, Pennings & Splinter, 2012). Educators are typically faced with what Bloom (1995) refers to as the "intolerable burden: how to educate children who are disturbed, distracted, hyper-aroused and whose behavior often interferes with their own learning and the learning of others" (p. 403).

Situation to Self

In nearly 15 years of counseling youth who had been removed from their homes due to persistent delinquency, I had the opportunity to review case files that repeatedly spoke of obvious traumatic incidents during their elementary school years. Many of the youth in my charge were routinely abused, witnessed horrific domestic violence, experienced incredible poverty, were cared for by parents or guardians struggling with addictions, and lived in areas of high community violence. Some of them suffered through life-threatening illnesses or lived through a near-death accident. It appeared almost all of them lived through at least one identifiable traumatic event, in keeping with research indicating the prevalence of traumatic experiences among school-aged children (Briere, Kaltman, & Green, 2008). However, their responses to these traumas were often viewed through a behavioral lens, with little consideration to the influences that these experiences may have had upon their behaviors. Like many teachers, they had a limited understanding of how to manage connections between the traumatic

experiences of these children and resultant behaviors. This limitation is identified in numerous studies (Alisic et al., 2012; Duplechain, Reigner, & Packard, 2008; Martin, Cromer, & Freyd, 2010; Pritchard et al., 2009; Sitler, 2008).

The effort that follows is derived from an ontological, methodological framework allowing the perspectives and experiences of teachers addressing the needs of traumatized students in the classroom setting to shape the study. I sought to employ a social constructivist approach in an attempt to examine the extent to which teachers understand and respond to the needs of traumatized students within their classrooms. Ultimately, the purpose of this phenomenological effort is to provide a conduit for teachers to communicate their shared experiences in working with traumatized students: specifically, how management of trauma-related behaviors impacts teaching.

Problem Statement

This study sought to engage the problem of students responding to traumatic experiences with behaviors that often interfere with learning (theirs and others) in ways that call upon teachers to employ behavior management strategies, which then impact curricular goals (Alisic et al., 2012; Martin, et al., 2010; Maschi et al., 2009; Ozkol, Zucker, & Spinazzola, 2011; Wherry & Marrs, 2008). At this time the literature on trauma in the classroom appears limited to (a) examining its influence on the process of learning or (b) understanding compassion fatigue among faculty. Little is known about how children struggling with trauma impact teacher efforts to reach established curricular goals; this phenomenon is clearly identified as a gap in the existing research (Borrowman & White, 2006; Hill, 2011).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the impact of childhood trauma upon curricular goals for elementary school teachers at a school district in the northeastern United States (henceforth referred to as NESD). Impact upon curricular goals was defined as responses to behavior that cause teachers to deviate from their curriculum in such a way that it is disruptive to the achieving of established lesson plan goals.

Significance of the Study

Fallot and Harris (2009) noted that "trauma touches many areas of life not obviously or readily connected with the experiences of the trauma itself" (p. 1). The ways in which traumatic stress is expressed within learning environments is a yet to be understood phenomenon; however, it is known to coexist with attention disorder, conduct disorder, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Burgic-Radmonovic and Burgic (2010) indicated that some post-traumatic stress may be misdiagnosed as ADHD because of an overlap of symptoms. Understanding of trauma's impact in the classroom is further complicated by the fact that the children who have experienced trauma often display a wide variety of subsymptomatic behaviors; not severe enough to warrant diagnosis, but still present as disruptive in the classroom setting (Briere et al., 2008).

Mitigating the effects of trauma in the classroom has traditionally required teachers to understand its influence on the process of learning (Borrowman & White, 2006). Other trauma-informed or trauma-sensitive approaches have sought to increase awareness of traumatization among student populations as well as correlation with disruptive behaviors (O'Neill, Guenette, & Kitchenham, 2010; Stanwood & Dolittle, 2004). Recent efforts have also sought greater

understanding concerning how trauma impacts teacher burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion fatigue (Hill, 2011; Van Hook & Rothenberg, 2009).

Through participation in this study, teachers within the NESD had the opportunity to discuss and process their lived experiences teaching traumatized students as well as the chance to consider the data presented at a roundtable discussion of their peers. Placing the focus on trauma as opposed to behavior may have significant value to teachers by generating further awareness of why traditional disciplinary interventions fail to curb disruptive classroom behaviors when these behaviors are due to traumatic experiences. Since the failings of traditional efforts often leave faculty with feelings of inadequacy concerning their classroom management abilities, practical knowledge regarding the impact of teaching traumatized students holds the hope of supporting effective strategies (Esturgo-Deu & Sala-Roca, 2010; Martin et al., 2010; Pritchard et al., 2009). These strategies begin with the communication of teacher experiences as expressed within this research. Building upon that which can be gleaned from understanding teacher experiences, future research can work toward the establishment of teaching theory and practices that are better informed with regard to the needs of the practitioner-teacher.

Research Questions

With the understanding that traumatic stress is not specifically served within existing special education constructs—even though children struggling with traumatic experiences may call for many of the classroom supports by diagnoses which are—this study sought to examine a number of questions.

1. What are teachers' experiences with students who are struggling with trauma? This central phenomenological question seeks to reveal the broad, lived experiences of elementary school teachers, the majority of whom routinely

encounter students who have been exposed to at least one traumatic event in the past year (Berson & Baggerly, 2009).

2. How do teachers describe their preparedness to teach students struggling with traumatic experiences? While there have been some studies (e.g., Pritchard et al., 2009; Sitler, 2008) that sought to understand university faculty feelings of preparedness concerning their work with traumatized college students, few attempts have been made to evaluate this sentiment among elementary teachers.
3. How do teachers characterize their responses to trauma within the classroom setting? There is a wealth of literature on the impact of trauma upon internalizing and externalizing behaviors in the classroom, but very little is known concerning how teachers respond (Ivanov et al., 2011; Vandenberg & Marsh, 2009). Of equal importance to this study are the specific experiences of teachers seeking to manage these trauma-related behaviors.
4. How does the management of trauma-related behavior influence teaching efforts? This final question speaks to the need for specifically addressing the gap in the literature concerning teacher experiences related to the ways that working with students who struggle with trauma negatively affect the ability to reach lesson plan objectives. In an age of increasing accountability for teachers there is great need to understand how they manage these experiences.

Research Plan

This purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of public school elementary teachers working with students who have experienced trauma as well as the impact of these experiences upon management of curricular goals. I will pursue a greater understanding of

these experiences by listening to their voices through a process of surveys, interviews, protocol writing assignments, and roundtable (i.e., focus group) discussions. A qualitative approach employing a transcendental phenomenological design is appropriate to understand the context in which teachers address a problem or issue—in this case, the experience of teaching traumatized students (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The diverse accounts of teachers, the individualized needs of traumatized students, and the element of perspective related to curriculum management would be difficult to measure holistically within a quantitative study, which led to the choosing of a qualitative approach. A phenomenological design was chosen in an effort to provide a voice to the experiences of teachers working with traumatized students. A transcendental effort was required because, although I have considerable experience working with traumatized youth, this experience was not acquired within the public school setting. Husserl (1977) described an epoche process in which the transcendental researcher comes from outside of the experience—as naïve as possible—in order to allow the participant co-researchers to communicate their experiences regarding the phenomenon being investigated.

Delimitations

In an effort to strengthen the participant pool, I chose to restrict potential co-researchers to those with at least five years of teaching experience within Title I schools at the elementary level. Given the aforementioned prevalence of childhood trauma, my hope was that this delimitation would provide richness to the data collected. Potential co-researchers were directed to a survey that identified their experiences with traumatized students. Those who reported no exposure to students struggling with trauma were not included in the study. There was no minimum exposure level because of the difficulty quantifying what is or is not trauma, especially in light of the limited training teachers receive in identifying trauma. Sampling remained open

until the research achieved thorough saturation. Teachers who reported limited exposure still had something to contribute to the discussion and may have had more exposure to traumatized students than they were aware of. I chose to include co-researchers from only one school district in order to manage the effort required in obtaining requisite permissions from administrations.

Definitions

Autonomic nervous system (ANS) - functions independently and continuously without any conscious effort to regulate an organism's internal state to changes in the environment through modulation of sensory, visceral, motor, and neuroendocrine functions (Critchley, Mathias, & Dolan, 2002). Has two major components: the sympathetic nervous system and the parasympathetic nervous system.

Comorbid - symptoms of two or more disorders/illnesses whose interaction affect the course, prognosis and treatment of both (US Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2010).

Compassion fatigue - a gradual lessoning of compassion over time experienced by those working with trauma victims; may be manifest in feelings such as hopelessness, loss of pleasure, anxiety, and a pervasive negative attitude (Putman & Lederman, 2008). Also referred to as **secondary traumatic stress** and **vicarious traumatization**.

Curricular Goals – measurable outcomes that identify what a student should understand or be able to do at the end of a period of instruction. Goals are identified as the product of teacher plans to address the gap between existing knowledge/abilities and that which is required for students at a given level of instruction (Nieman, Monteiro, Kizlik, & Brownfield, 2007).

Depersonalization - a feeling of watching oneself act without having control over the behavior(s); chronic depersonalization can occur in cases when individuals have experienced severe or prolonged stress/trauma (Sass, Pienkos, Nelson, & Medford, 2013).

Dissociation – a coping or defense mechanism seeking to minimize stress through detachment from reality; understood as including a wide range of events from daydreaming to altered states of consciousness - including alterations in personal identity and amnesia (Dell & O'Neil, 2009)

Emotional Dysregulation - emotional responses that fall outside the conventionally acceptable range; often characterized by explosive reactivity to environmental or interpersonal stressors (Beauchaine, Gatzke-Kopp & Mead, 2007).

Hypervigilance - abnormally heightened state of arousal to environmental stimuli in an effort to scan the environment for potential threats; often associated with paranoia and delusional states (O'Toole, 2005).

Parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) - serves to restore equilibrium to the ANS following a stressful experience; a counterbalance to the SNS (Critchley et al., 2002).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - diagnosis given to a condition that may develop after an individual is exposed to one or more traumatic events; based upon a grouping of symptoms including disturbing flashbacks, avoidance, numbing of memories, and hyperarousal that remain for more than a month after the event(s) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Protective Factor - conditions within families and communities that serve as buffers to stressful conditions, allowing for access to supports and coping strategies; serve to mitigate risk factors (DHHS, 2013).

Resiliency - processes (as opposed to character traits) within an individual that facilitate coping and allow for continued normal functioning during times of stress or adversity (Masten, 2009).

Risk Factor - conditions within families and communities that increase the chance of child abuse and neglect as well as unhealthy risk taking by children and adolescents (DHHS, 2013).

Sympathetic nervous system (SNS) - activates body processes (e.g., neuroendocrine, cardiovascular) in response to emotional or physical exertion, including the attentive state known as "fight or flight" (Critchley et al., 2002).

Teacher burnout - endpoint of coping unsuccessfully with chronic stress characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and chronic fatigue as well as cynical attitudes about both students and colleagues (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

Trauma - generally understood as an event or experience that threaten one's perceived personal safety or the perceived safety of another person to an extent that sense of safety is negatively impacted—perception being an important element within this definition. For children, the most common experiences of trauma include: accidents, abuse, neglect, and exposure to domestic and community violence (Zero to Six Collaborative Group, 2010).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of public school teachers who work with students who have experienced trauma, and specifically examine the impact of these experiences upon management of curricular goals. A review of existing literature finds the topics of compassion fatigue and secondary stress among teachers are both well-represented as are the strategies that might be employed with regard to classroom management. However, research regarding the impact of traumatized students upon actual teaching efforts is very limited.

Theoretical Framework

While the majority of teachers certainly intend to be sensitive to the needs of their students, their lack of preparation in working with those impacted by trauma likely places strain on these efforts. Children struggling with trauma often react in unpredictable manners to seemingly innocuous stimuli, while teacher efforts to employ behavior management strategies that are usually successful seem to only instigate the issue further. Within this environment, the impact of trauma can make the reaching of curricular goals seem beyond one's control.

Ajzen's (1985, 2002) theory of planned behavior (TPB) provided an important perspective in the shaping of this effort. In brief, he posited that human behavior is guided by three different considerations: beliefs about the potential consequences of behavior (behavioral beliefs), beliefs about the expectations of others (normative beliefs), and beliefs about variables that might help or hinder performance (control beliefs). Behavioral beliefs impact attitudes toward a given activity, normative beliefs shape the perception of social pressures, and control beliefs lend to the perception of how hard a given task may be to perform. Combined, these

three beliefs lead to the formation of intent, which is viewed as the "immediate antecedent of behavior" (Ajzen, 2002, p. 665). It is the issue of perceived control beliefs that was important to the formation of this study when looking at the activity of teaching when the variable is defined as students affected by trauma. The perception of control is identified as very powerful in influencing intentions, even when unrealistic. When an individual perceives a high level of control he or she is more motivated to perform a given behavior, even when it calls for increased effort. On the contrary, when the individual perceives low levels of control, the result is a decrease in both effort and perseverance related to the task. This relationship is established due to the influence that perceived control has upon intention, which serves as the indicator of effort toward a given performance. Through the lens of TPB, it would be posited that the lived experiences of teachers working with traumatized students need to be understood as influencing the ability to achieve curricular goals, because the perceptions of control formed through these experiences have an impact upon the intent to do so.

Historical Summary

It is difficult to identify what is and what is not traumatic stress because its definition is not dependent upon the act, but refers to the reaction of the participant/victim; how the individual perceives and responds to the trying experience. However, trauma might be generally understood as "stress events that present extraordinary challenges to coping and adaptation" (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005, p. 196). The DSM-IV (2000) defines these stressors as "experiencing, witnessing, or confronting events that involve actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others" (p. 467). It is therefore the impact of the event upon the individual—not the level of stress perceived by an observer—that constitutes traumatic stress, according to available definitions. Further complicating the issue, resiliency plays a role

in how people respond to these experiences, including the extent to which post-traumatic stress, including PTSD, is experienced.

The development of traumatic-stress among children has been linked to numerous experiences, including: violent/horrifying images on television, disrupted maternal attachment, isolation, poverty, child abuse, neglect, witnessing domestic violence, and homelessness (Sugar & Ford, 2012). Cohen and Mannarino (2011) pointed out that the grief associated with loss of a significant loved one also contributes to traumatic-stress in ways that interfere with healthy development and learning. Traumatic-stress has also been associated with serious accidents, injury-related hospitalization, and terrorism (Sugar & Ford, 2012). However, research conducted with elementary school-aged children found that family violence and violent crime (both victim and observer of) were the most consistent precipitating events associated with the traumatic-stress (McCloskey & Walker, 2000). Additional research has noted that Hispanic and African American children report significantly more exposure to violence than Caucasian children, with children from low and middle-income families also reporting significantly more exposure (Duplechain, Reigner, & Packard, 2008).

It is important to understand how traumatic-stress alters the way in which children view an increasingly insecure world. The difficulties that many adults have in coping with economic uncertainty, increased community crime, and even the aftermath of 9/11 are exacerbated within school-aged populations because they simply lack the processing skills necessary to develop coping mechanisms. Children, even those within the most supportive home and school environments, are also inadvertently provided with inadequate support because of the way they seek to cope. Due to their being in the midst of brain development, elementary school-aged children will typically respond to traumatizing events—both in the immediacy and long-term

events such as abuse and neglect—with numbness or dissociation. From a clinical perspective, dissociation is the compartmentalization of experiences related to trauma; elements that the individual is unable to integrate into his or her psyche. There is an element to the trauma that is so far outside of the individual's sense of self that the experience can only be understood outside of the collective consciousness.

In an effort to explain dissociation, Smyth (2011) identified three specific types that are responsive to traumatic experiences: primary, secondary, and tertiary. In primary dissociation, the memories associated with the experience of trauma is fragmented in such a way that physical memories are stored separately from an emotional context; again outside of the ordinary consciousness. For this reason a sound or a smell might act as a trigger to those who have experienced trauma without their understanding why they are being triggered. A child abused during a thunderstorm may not have an emotional memory of the abuse but will experience significant dysregulation during a thunderstorm (even audio-visual representations of thunderstorms). Secondary dissociation, which is also called peritraumatic dissociation, occurs when there is a separation of the observing and experiencing egos. In cases of secondary dissociation, children might report watching themselves from above as a trauma occurred; as if they were having an out of body experience. Many times sexual abuse results in secondary dissociation. Finally, tertiary dissociation is understood as the development of distinct ego states that contain traumatic experiences, each with their own complex identities, including complex cognitive, affective, and behavioral patterns. Many individuals experiencing tertiary dissociation develop dissociative identity disorder (DID), which is often confused with dual personality disorder because of the similarity of symptoms. In cases of tertiary dissociation, or DID, an

individual in his or her “normal” conscious state does not have an awareness of the traumatic experience; instead these memories are contained within the traumatized ego identity.

When a child feels safe, the numbness begins to dissipate and experimentation with coping mechanisms begins. In the case of significant dissociation this can take months or even years to occur. Since these coping attempts are often associated with acting out, teachers often view them as sudden and distressing behaviors without realizing any connection to previous trauma. Unfortunately, even available adults in the student’s life have often moved beyond recalling the significance of the event at the time when the child is only beginning to deal with related issues (Terr, 1990).

The effort to understand the role of mental health and its impact upon learning, specifically within the classroom setting, is certainly not a new phenomenon. The mental hygiene movement of the early 20th century, with its goals of seeing the development of personality and the critical task of public education, has certainly had a significant impact upon contemporary American education (Cohen, 1983). Indeed, since the late 1930s, teachers have been encouraged to pay more attention to issues extraneous to academic achievement and intellectual development. Although the impact of the mental hygiene movement is a debate beyond the scope of this effort, the experience of trauma during childhood is clearly associated with poor functioning and cognitive defects as well as a variety of school-interfering behaviors, including poor concentration, loss of interest, “don't care” attitudes, and school absence (Bucker et al., 2012; Greenwald, 2005). Sadly, the experience of trauma during childhood is now so common that it is considered normative (Green & Smyth, 2012).

Of course, this is not to argue that every child who experiences trauma necessarily experiences post-traumatic stress or even that nearly every child will engage in disruptive

behaviors that are responsive to experiences of trauma. Smyth (2011) presented a number of factors that influence the impact of trauma, including temperament, attachment, severity, and frequency of the experience(s). There are certainly also a number of protective factors that are widely identified within the literature on child development, which speak of the benefits related to family, adult role models, cultural values, etc. It is generally accepted that these protective factors do play a role in mitigating the impact of traumatic experiences as does the existence of pre-trauma psychological functioning and coping skills. That said, the experience of trauma during childhood has a specific impact upon the way a child sees the world. Janoff-Bulman (as cited in Smyth, 2011) discussed three specific shattered assumptions about the world. First, the children experiencing trauma lose the assumption that the world is benevolent, which is replaced by a knowledge that people will hurt them. At its extreme, children may come to feel that everyone with certain characteristics (e.g., all men, or all those in authority) is liable to hurt them. Second, children lose the assumption that the world and all of its experiences are meaningful; that everything happens for a reason. This is replaced with feelings of helplessness in which children experiencing trauma begin to feel as if they cannot prevent bad things from happening to them. The final shattered assumption relates to self-worth: instead of feeling valued, children experiencing trauma often feel defective and lose the sense that they matter.

The Characteristics of Crisis

Bowers (2009) pointed out that the "characteristics of a crisis situation provide the layers of perception through which the crisis is experienced" (p. 7), allowing one to conceptualize a context for loss and traumatic experiences through a variety of characteristics as well as the ways in which individuals may respond. First, he noted that the way in which one reacts to trauma may be different on the basis of whether or not it could have been expected. The experience of

an F5 tornado is characteristically different from the experience of ambush for a soldier on patrol, even though they may be equally traumatizing. Next, time is an important characteristic: people respond differently to the sound of an explosion at midnight than they might at noon. Another important variable is the duration of time from the beginning to the end of a crisis event. Additionally, Bowers (2009) identified the important ways one might differentiate between a natural versus man-made event. In the case of a man-made event, the ability for an individual to assign blame can impact the perception of the experience. He also noted that the intentionality of the event is significant (e.g., the planes crashing into the World Trade Center on 9/11 would have a different impact than the loss of an airliner due to mechanical malfunction).

The scope of the impact upon individuals is also an important consideration in measuring crisis. The loss of seven lives during a house fire presents a different variable than the loss of one life. Bowers (2009) also noted that the preventability of the event is important, as is the level of suffering. Finally, Bowers (2009) discussed the importance of the post-crisis environment as being critical to determining an individual's ability to adjust to the outcomes of an experience in a healthy manner.

The Neurobiology of Trauma

Students exposed to trauma often suffer from neurological difficulties due to imbalances caused by the autonomic nervous system (ANS). The ANS is comprised of the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) and the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS). The SNS works to regulate arousal in response to threats while the PNS responds to arousal with hormones that relax the nervous system (Smyth, 2011). Typically, the nervous system maintains balance through a hormonal structure that allows one to perceive threats in a realistic manner. For example, when someone is startled by a loud clap of thunder, his or her SNS system responds

with the release of adrenaline from the adrenal glands that prepare him or her for a fight or flight response. People feel this through a number of physiological changes, including increased heartbeat, etc. However, the PNS quickly reestablishes hormonal homeostasis through the release of cortisol and other endogenous opioids allowing one to process the "threat" as nothing other than harmless thunder. Unfortunately, the experience of trauma dulls the body's response to the PNS. When this occurs, it becomes difficult for an individual to process sensory input because the connection between the amygdala and the hippocampus is disrupted. In layman's terms, a sensory experience is first transmitted to the thalamus and then passed on to the amygdala, where it is associated with some emotional significance. This emotional significance is then interpreted or otherwise viewed through a cognitive map maintained by the hippocampus. Once the sensory experience is understood cognitively, this message is passed on to the pre-frontal cortex where integration and planning takes place. For explanation: I smell cookies baking and immediately feel happy; this emotion of happy is processed by a cognitive map that reminds me how much I like the taste of cookies, which then triggers my plans to note that the timer says forty-five seconds: just enough time to pour a glass of milk.

When the emotional significance of a stimulus (provided by the amygdala) is not interpreted through the existing cognitive map (the work of the hippocampus) or passed on to the pre-frontal cortex, where higher thinking decisions of integration and planning occur the resulting breakdown of neurological communication can be quite disruptive for the individual and those around them (van der Kolk, 1999). The impact of this breakdown is quickly apparent in a classroom setting when a clap of thunder is left without cognitive interpretation by a student who experienced abuse during a thunder storm. Instead of being able to overcome the sudden jump-response and quickly return to his or her course of study, the student dealing with the

aftermath of traumatic abuse is likely to experience extreme autonomic arousal: his or her heartbeat struggles to return to normal and he or she remains fixed within the flight or fight response, making any higher level functioning virtually impossible at a neurological level and leaving the student's behaviors to be interpreted as purposefully disruptive (or at the very least a lack of discipline).

Developmental Trauma Disorder

A report of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN, 2011) pointed out that in the majority of situations, traumatic stress during childhood does not occur in isolation, instead it is often characterized by "chronic types of victimization and other adverse experiences" (p. 2). In light of this, the NCTSN is working with network partners to propose an additional diagnosis for inclusion within the fifth iteration of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) published by the American Psychological Association. The proposed "Developmental Trauma Disorder" (DTD) identifies as key criteria, including exposure to repeated trauma and detrimental effects related to the child's self-concept, sense of the world, ability to focus, and ability to self-regulate (Bowers, 2009; NCTSN, 2011).

Manifestation of Trauma in the Classroom

Current research on the manifestation of trauma-influenced behavior in the classroom setting has found that exposure to maltreatment and violence during childhood is linked to increased aggression, externalizing behavior problems, poor social competence, anxiety, developmental delays, increased risk of substance abuse, depression, and internalizing behavior problems (Esturgo-Deu & Sala-Roca, 2010; Ford, Fraleigh & Connor, 2010; Ivanov et al., 2011; Ozkol, Zucker & Spinazzola, 2011). As expected, the issues of comorbidity, especially separation anxiety and oppositional defiant disorder, are common in working with children

impacted by trauma (DeYoung, 2012). This can often further complicate efforts to understand the manifestation of trauma in the classroom as practitioners seek to identify causal relationships among behaviors.

Learning requires several processes that are negatively impacted by traumatic-stress, among them attention, organization, comprehension, memory engagement, and trust (Wolpow, Johnson, Hertel, & Kincaid, 2009). When in a state of trauma-influenced anxiety, a child of elementary school age cannot recall prior learning, even if this learning occurred during a period of decreased stress. This is because childhood trauma actually interferes with brain development and neuropathways in a way that weakens the prefrontal cortex's ability to modulate the limbic system (Solomon & Siegel, 2003). Perry (2002) pointed out that children living in unpredictable or unsafe environments experience altered brain development for survival purposes: they learn to be alert for threats, even if they do not remember the traumatic experience.

When the child perceives a stressor (trigger) that is in some way connected to traumatic experiences or is perceived as traumatic in the immediacy, the limbic system overrides the neocortex, often keeping the child in what is commonly referred to as fight, flight or freeze, eliminating the possibility of higher level problem solving (Bailey, 2000). Not only does this increase the likelihood for disruptive student behaviors, but it makes the student incapable of learning since the neocortex is the place where logic, problem solving, language and learning occur. This leaves the child with limited to no ability in understanding classroom instructions or explanations. Obviously, this limits the child's ability to reflect successful teaching or engage testing in a successful manner. The student's lack of ability to move beyond this impaired state during assessments is cause for concern not only for the student but also the teacher, principal, and school—especially in an era of high-stakes testing.

It is also important to note the ways that traumatic stress influences executive functions, like planning, identifying consequences for behavior, setting and carrying out goals, or reflecting on past experiences. Unfortunately, although these skills are vital for academic success, especially as children progress through elementary and secondary education, they are often points of weakness for children who have experienced traumatic stress (Wolpow et al., 2009). These children are often viewed as acting without a plan.

While learning interference is certainly cause for concern, the area in need of immediate address with regard to interruption of curricular goals is the issue of behavior; specifically the ways in which children struggling with traumatic stress act out when triggered within classroom environments. Research conducted by Esturgó-Deu and Sala-Roca (2010) noted that there was a significant relationship between disruptive behaviors and student stress management abilities. Allen (2001) noted that when students' prior traumatic experiences confront related stressors they experience a stress pileup that can be very painful to manage. These stress pileups often present as self-destructive actions, depression, rage, violence, and aggression (Oehlberg, 2006).

Children affected by trauma can find specific struggle during times of transitioning between activities, even when (or because) they feel safe; they often identify any change with danger. It is also important to remember that childhood perceptions of what is or is not threatening can be different from those of adults; this difference can be even more dramatic when working with traumatized children (De Young, 2012). Common classroom adaptations employed by children experiencing traumatic stress include defiance, withdrawal, perfectionism, reactivity, impulsiveness, and rapid/unexpected emotional swings (Wolpow et al., 2009). There is also growing debate among trauma researchers as to the association between traumatic stress

and other comorbid diagnoses, such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder, and bipolar disorder (Silva, 2004).

When researchers discuss aggression, they often differentiate between reactive aggression and proactive aggression. Reactive aggression is understood as a defensive response to perceived threat or provocation; while proactive aggression is usually associated with deliberate and coercive behaviors (Ford, Fraleigh, & Connor, 2010). The differences are important, since reactive aggression is not known to respond to external reinforcements/ punishment; however, it is almost always the type of aggression associated with childhood trauma. This is important to understand when seeking to develop a response to aggressive interruptions within the classroom environment: traumatized students simply do not experience aggression in a way that makes them responsive to traditional classroom management techniques that are often overly reliant upon punishment.

Ozkol, Zucker and Spinazzola (2011) investigated the relationship between exposure to violence, the development of posttraumatic stress, and engagement in aggressive behaviors. Their results indicated a clear relationship between exposure to violent traumatic stress and childhood aggression. There is evidence that children exhibiting oppositional defiance, including those diagnosed with conduct disorder, report significantly higher incidents of traumatic experiences, especially males (Vandenberg & Marsh, 2009). Unfortunately, youth who are affected by trauma have often learned that aggression can be a critical life skill, as they recognize the power that comes with feeling the control often associated with aggression. This can be so satisfying that it offsets any punishment or peer rejection that follows (Kagan, 2004).

Strategies for Working with Traumatized Children

The dysfunctional coping strategies typically employed by students affected with trauma often disrupt relationships with teachers as well as other students. The intrusive experiences are compounded by failed efforts to manage them, reinforcing a traumatized student's sense of hopelessness and estrangement from others (van der Kolk & Greenberg, 1987). For this reason, the supportive efforts engaged by teachers and other professionals must be deliberate but remain very complicated. Stanwood and Doolittle (2004) noted that answers must be systemic and not limited to individual work with students but include each element a student comes in contact with throughout his or her day.

Often, involuntary memories of traumatic-stress are triggered by sensory experiences quite common within a school environment: a light being turned on or off; the smell of food cooking; the sound of a passing siren; or simply being touched. The propensity that traumatized children have toward hypersensitivity and hypervigilance can mean that triggers often go unnoticed by teachers. Of course, a teacher's ability to manipulate even the most controlled educational environment is limited. While many potential triggers cannot be removed, the ability to relocate to places identified as safe is of vital importance to students affected by trauma. Students can be conditioned to relocate themselves when feeling unsafe—moving to more secluded areas in the classroom, drawing near to a teacher's aide or next to some other safe person.

Of equal importance is discussion of how schools respond to instances of aggression from youth struggling with traumatic stress issues. Unfortunately, the primary theory employed by schools reflects contemporary American culture concerning "bad" behavior: punish. However, punishment more often than not fails to teach; it also fails to hold students accountable

for their disruption in a way that affords other students a way to communicate their feelings in community-building ways. Oehlberg (2006) pointed out that failure on the part of schools to take advantage of teachable moments prompted by unacceptable behaviors means the inability to build constructive, future-oriented solutions. Oehlberg (2006) added that a restorative justice model within school environments would do well in allowing for restoration of safety for all students in a way that allows for the offending students to (a) understand how their behavior negatively affected others and (b) replace interrupting behaviors with more appropriate ones.

Bloom (1995) pointed out that children struggling with traumatic stress do have the ability to develop a network of supportive relationships within the classroom environment when it is structured toward such an effort. She further indicated that this can be accomplished without placing the burden solely upon teachers by developing a classroom culture in which mutual support and concern is the expectation. Indeed, this will have a positive effect on traumatized and non-traumatized children alike. Bloom (1995) explains this idea further:

> The attitude of "I am my brother's keeper" is not a value to which children have any consistent exposure and yet it is the only attitude that can get us out of the deteriorating spiral of alienation within which our culture is presently gripped. (p. 417)

Teachers do well to realize that the positive relationships necessary for such an effort grow not from control-oriented rules, but facilitation of discovery through dialogue with students about the importance of cooperation and positive relationships. From a position of control, compliance is only achieved in the presence of authority; however, the truly supportive classroom helps students develop intrinsic motivation toward peace and cooperation (Stanwood & Doolittle, 2004). Such an effort can also work to support transition toward self-governance, which is necessary for positive peer relationships during later adolescence.

Traditional concepts related to curriculum and instruction acknowledge that how teachers communicate subject matter to students can be just as important as the content of that subject matter (Parkay, Hass, & Anctil, 2010). This is especially relevant when investigating the role of power within the teacher's role. Student responses to trauma often run the gamut between disruptive and passive, both of which can present interference with teacher curricular goals. Many of the models for classroom management are appropriately built upon the authority teachers have over students. Teachers are called upon to recognize inappropriate student behaviors and hold students accountable for them. However, when working with traumatized students, teachers must remain cognizant that interfering student behaviors may be occurring beyond the student's awareness or control (Wolpow et al., 2009). This does not mean that disruptive student behaviors should be ignored; however, they must be addressed in ways that are not disempowering, as this will often only worsen the behavior. Teachers do well to understand that classroom discipline should never resemble the behaviors of those who might have been involved in the victimization of traumatized students. Yelling, threatening, and sarcasm should always be avoided. Sarcasm can be a difficult issue for teachers to manage in working with students affected by trauma, especially considering its place in contemporary American society. Unfortunately, seemingly innocent uses of sarcasm or humor can be misinterpreted as a cue for danger and thus act as a trigger for interfering behavior among traumatized students.

Benard (2004) noted that one of the more powerful tools teachers can develop when working with traumatized children is the concept of unconditional positive regard, in which student feelings are accepted even when they are presented in a way that is adversarial. However, this is not to imply that guarding against disempowerment or displaying unconditional

positive regard should leave teachers hesitant to set limits or have low achievement expectations. Instead, teachers should seek to develop a flexible framework of high expectations that supports attachment, self-regulation, and competency (Kinniburgh & Blausstein, 2005).

In arguing for pedagogy that she referred to as teaching with awareness, Sitler (2008) noted that "our judgments of students, too often erroneous, frame our interactions with them" (p. 122). Within this model, Sitler (2008) advocates for teachers to have a greater understanding of how trauma manifests itself in learners while also giving attention to students in ways that reflect their complete personhood with regard to their needs: physical and emotional receiving equal attention as cognitive. Of course, increased class size and demands on teachers that are more responsive to current testing cultures than the needs of students makes the goals of teaching with awareness seem difficult to comprehend beyond the theoretical. Nevertheless, understanding the current experiences of teachers with regard to teaching traumatized children can respond to a number of worthwhile efforts. First, it can help to identify and correct teacher behaviors that are clearly counterproductive to effective management of disruptive behaviors among students affected by trauma. Second, it can work to find connections between research and practice with regard to best practices. Third, it can allow administrators and policymakers greater insight on teacher need for support in working with traumatized students. Finally, it may initiate greatly needed teacher discussion among colleagues concerning the needs of individual students affected by trauma and potential strategies in the meeting of these needs.

During a crisis, not only is there a potential for students to be traumatized, school staff are also at risk for traumatic stress since the sense of community within the intimate setting of a school can often feel shaken by a tragedy. Teachers often find it difficult to know how to support students after trauma, while also reporting difficulty in not becoming emotionally

involved in the student's difficulties (Alisic et al., 2012). However, during crisis, schools may be the only available refuge for children struggling to deal with their emotions. Schools would do well to be prepared for crisis response through various planning and drills, but must also recognize the potential that frightening events (or merely the preparation for their potential) can serve as triggers for students with existing traumatic stress issues. Openshaw (2011) noted that helping children discuss and process traumatic events in group settings can prove especially helpful in countering feelings of isolation as well as reducing student anxiety and related symptoms associated with traumatic stress.

The process of recovery from trauma is dependent upon its impact upon the student. Many students experience trauma with few long-term effects and are able to overcome these ordeals through various coping strategies and general resiliency. However, other students experience lingering effects that could lead to diagnoses of acute stress disorder or PTSD. Although a variety of treatments exist, a consensus model of three phase-oriented treatment stages exists (Evans & Sullivan, 1995; Smyth, 2011). The first stage is *safety*, in which the primary effort includes a reduction of immediate risks to self and others. The individual struggling with the lingering effects of trauma is aided in reducing self-injurious activities, observed for suicidal ideations, and provided with skills aimed at reducing aggression. In the second *stabilization* stage, the individual is led through the development of coping skills needed to manage symptoms and cope with everyday life in an effective manner. In the final *survivor* stage, an effort is made to integrate traumatic memories, change trauma-related beliefs, and help the individual develop secure relationships.

Conclusion

The hesitation of both researchers and practitioners to place delimiters upon what is or is not trauma requires those exploring the issue to maintain a tolerance for ambiguity and willingness to accept that a number of issues, including individual resiliency, play an important role in understanding how and why trauma might manifest itself within the learning environment (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005). Indeed, the development of traumatic-stress responses within children is quite varied and can include numerous different experiences, from disruptive parental attachment to the experience of abuse and neglect to the witnessing of violence, either in person or via media (McCloskey & Walker, 2000). The strain associated with the loss of a loved one, particularly a member of the immediate family, can also cause grief that manifests itself as traumatic stress, with a similar impact upon the ability to learn and grow (Cohen & Mannarino, 2011). Stress responses to trauma have also been associated with having had an injury-related hospitalization or fears associated with terrorist threats (Sugar & Ford, 2012).

Regardless of the cause or definition of boundaries, trauma impacts the way children see the world. Specifically, trauma weakens their feelings of security at a time when they are limited in their ability to process and thereby cope with their experiences (Scaer, 2014). Smyth (2011) reviewed a number of "shattered assumptions" about the world that often result from the experience of trauma, including the loss of belief in a benevolent world in which they are a valued member of society and to which things happen "for a reason." Children instead are faced with an early realization that the world is a dangerous place containing people that will and do hurt them. Janoff-Bulman (1992) noted that this perspective often leaves children feeling defective and insignificant.

The impact of traumatic experiences upon children was further summarized by van der Kolk's (1999) conceptualization that the body keeps score. First, trauma compromises the immune system. Students who have experienced trauma are likely to exhibit a higher rate of absence due to higher rates of typical childhood illnesses as well as experiences of somatization (in which psychological distress manifests physically). Second, the experience of trauma often presents attention, learning, and memory problems due to a variety of factors understood through the lens of neurobiological imbalance. Third, the experience of trauma often presents as impulsive behavior above and beyond that which is normally attributed to childhood immaturity or normal adolescent development due to impaired management of emotions and the experience of hyperarousal. The experience of trauma during childhood becomes clearly associated with a number of learning-interfering behaviors, including: poor concentration, loss of interest, apathy, and poor attendance (Bucker et al., 2012; Greenwald, 2005). It is also known to impair higher-level executive functions needed for academic success such as planning, foreseeing the consequences of behavior, setting and working toward goals, and learning from past experiences (Wolpow et al., 2009).

The propensity of exposure to trauma among K-12 students presents a number of concerns relative to their development of relational and coping abilities. Further, it raises concern with regard to the way teachers are prepared to work with their students—students that are increasingly reporting numerous traumatic experiences before reaching middle school (Finkelhor et al., 2009). While several legislative efforts have been implemented to meet the needs of students with a variety of learning disabilities, very few supports are provided to teachers in working with students struggling with trauma, even though the presenting behaviors are often quite similar. The traditional classroom management strategies employed by teachers

in an attempt to redirect disruptions and help students return to a focus on instruction not only do not work with students who are struggling with the aftermath of trauma, they can lead to even more disruptive behaviors (Bornstein, 2014). As there remain significant gaps in the literature relative to how teachers can most appropriately respond to the needs of traumatized students, it is difficult to identify how greater support might be organized.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Introduction

Having provided a review of the current literature relevant to childhood trauma and its occurrence within the classroom, this chapter is an overview of the study that was conducted in an effort to seek to understand the impact that teaching students affected by trauma has on curricular goals. This chapter outlines the design, setting, and methodologies that were used in seeking to understand the shared experiences of elementary teachers relative to teaching traumatized students, specifically how the efforts they make to manage behaviors influenced by traumatic experiences impacts their abilities to reach established curricular goals.

Design

In seeking to understand the shared experiences of teachers working with traumatized students, I chose a qualitative study employing a transcendental phenomenological approach. This design was appropriate as I was seeking to understand the context in which teachers address a problem or issue - in this case, the experience of teaching traumatized students (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The diverse accounts of teachers, the individualized needs of traumatized students, and the element of perspective related to curriculum management would be difficult to measure holistically within a quantitative study, which led to the choosing of a qualitative approach. A phenomenological design was chosen in an effort to provide a voice to the experiences of teachers working with traumatized students. A transcendental effort is required because, although I have considerable experience working with traumatized youth, this experience was not acquired within the public school setting. Husserl (1977) described an epoche process in which the transcendental researcher comes from outside of the experience—as naïve as possible—in order to allow the participant co-researchers to communicate their

experiences regarding the phenomenon being investigated. Moustakas (1994) noted the method's ultimate goal is communicating the essence of the lived experiences from the perspective of co-researcher participants, who share "from the vantage point of an open self" (p. 34).

Primary within this model is the development of empathy to the goal of discovering intersubjectivity, which might loosely be understood as an awareness and acceptance of experiences beyond one's own. As I have never filled the role of elementary teacher, I needed to explore their experiences purely in a way that brackets out any presuppositions. This bracketing effort is quite deliberate within the phenomenological design suggested by Moustakas (1994). It calls for the purposeful putting aside of agendas so that the process of engaging each co-researcher occurs within as pure an emotional and mental environment as possible. The focus of the research is placed in brackets with all else set aside. As a result of this effort, I expected to communicate the essence of teaching traumatized students as well as the impact is has upon curricular goals through the lived experiences of my co-researchers. This was possible through a process of data analysis that allowed for the construction of a composite of the textural-structural descriptions provided by my co-researchers, as it integrated their individual experiences into a description that represented the group in its entirety (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed within this study:

1. What are teachers' experiences with students who are struggling with trauma?
2. How do teachers describe their preparedness to teach students struggling with traumatic experiences?

3. How do teachers characterize their responses to trauma-related behavior within the classroom setting?
4. How does the management of trauma-related behavior influence teaching efforts?

Participants

To conduct this research, I used a purposive, convenience sample employing three criteria in the recruitment of participants: (a) a minimum of five years of elementary classroom teaching experience at the elementary level, (b) current employment as a general education elementary teacher within in the NESD, and (c) the ability to identify at least one of their students as having experienced some measure of trauma before or during enrollment in their classroom. As mentioned previously, these criteria are based upon an effort to support rich data collection and limit the amount of time spent acquiring school district permission to work with current teachers. Of the 10 teachers who responded to an email invitation to participate, six were ultimately interviewed in the course of this study; the remaining four failed to respond to additional follow-up efforts aimed at making an appointment for the interview. I was aware that this presented a significant departure from Creswell's (2007) suggestion for 15-20 participants; however, a second round of email solicitations and effort toward snowball sampling yielded no further participants, even though the district includes more than 150 eligible teachers. All of the respondents identified as females and reported teaching within a general education classroom for at least five years (mean: 18.3 years). The teacher with the longest tenure in the district reported having been there for 32 years, while the shortest tenure reported was six years. All of the respondents identified as "White" and they represented four of the five elementary schools within the district. In addition to their general education certification by the state in which they

taught, two were dual certified in special education; one was certified in reading, and one in early childhood education (birth to grade 2).

From the point of their selection, participants have been referred to as "co-researchers" in accordance with the supposition provided by Moustakas (1994) that they fill an integral role within qualitative research.

Setting

The NESD is a small urban district located in the northeastern United States. It is comprised of five elementary schools, all of which are designated as Title I. While the experience of childhood trauma is not limited to any particular group, low socioeconomic status (SES) does lead to slightly increased risk related to the development of post-traumatic related disorders (Ozkol et al., 2011; Vandenberg & Marsh, 2009). I purposefully chose NESD as the setting for this study not only because of existing economic factors, but also due to the unfortunate existence of numerous issues related to urban decay—including high rates of community violence (e.g., murder, rape), drug crime, domestic violence, juvenile gangs, etc.

Procedures

This transcendental phenomenological study began after receiving approval from Liberty University's IRB and permission from the NESD school district administration. Although this research did not require student data, district permission was sought as both a matter of courtesy and in an effort to secure willingness among potential participants. All of the district's elementary school teachers were contacted via an email sent to their district address; a copy of the email used for solicitation of participants is provided in Appendix B. Those interested in participating in the study then followed a link embedded within this message to a survey maintained by the website Survey Monkey. Upon reaching the survey, potential co-researchers

read information related to acknowledgment of informed consent. Those who declined to give consent were led away from continuing. Once informed consent was established, responding teachers were prompted to enter their contact information and experiences working with children who have experienced trauma. Those meeting the criteria discussed were contacted for individual interviews that were recorded and transcribed, with co-researchers asked to review a transcript of their interview for clarity and to ensure that there was no information they were uncomfortable having included in the study.

The Researcher's Role

It is important for every researcher to understand his or her role as a human instrument within the context of undertaking a transcendental, phenomenological approach. Moustakas (1994) clearly indicated the need to bracket out any preconceived notions that I might have had about the teachers or the experiences that they shared with me concerning students struggling with trauma. The need for bracketing, as explored further through review of Husserl (1977), was supported in a number of ways. I was very purposeful in preparing to meet with participants, avoiding the temptation to learn anything about them before our meeting. I had no idea of their reputation within their school or district nor any knowledge of their teaching style. This effort was undertaken in order to avoid the risk of prejudging the value of their contribution. I also avoided any review of their educational preparation or years of service within the district so that there would be limited tendency to view one participant as more or less interesting in the course of our interview. Next, an effort was made to be present in the moment during each interview, focusing on the environment in which the interviews took place and the reactions that participants had to the environment during each interview. I made note in my memoing efforts of where the interview took place, lending awareness to the possibility that an interview taking

place in a classroom might be different from one that took place in the library, and that different from one that took place in my office. Finally, in the course of every interview, I made sure that the participant and I were speaking the same language whenever any technical term was used. I asked follow-up questions related to their view of trauma, their understanding of behavioral interventions, and what they thought of their efforts. Teachers were often quite focused upon what others thought of their efforts, but I worked hard to bring our conversation back to their views, so that it was their voice that would be heard herein.

The entirety of this effort was focused solely on asking the questions that I developed and, more importantly, the answers of the teachers that I had the opportunity to work with. This epoche process spoken of by Moustakas means that research on the subject, experiences as a counselor, and judgment of the need for teachers to become more trauma-informed needed to be purposefully put aside so that I was able to receive the descriptions of my co-researchers in a way that was free of my interpretation for meaning. Such an effort was critical if I was to communicate the essence of their lived experiences as teachers working with students who are struggling with trauma.

Data Collection

The effort to collect data, in the form of teacher narratives concerning their experiences, was vital to the purpose of this research effort. As such, the following methods of data collection were be undertaken in the chronological order in which they are provided.

Online Surveys

Following the receipt of approval from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and permission to proceed from the NESD, all elementary school district teachers received an email inviting them to participate in this study. This email briefed them as to the

delimitations of the study and provided a link to the Survey Monkey website, which was to be used to collect information about their roles as potential co-researchers. The results of this survey provided the necessary contact information needed to arrange for interviews.

Interviews

Each willing teacher was scheduled for one interview, with the possibility for follow-up as needed. I then employed an unstructured, open-ended format in adherence to the procedure outlined in Moustakas (1994) with participants asked two broad, general questions:

1. What have you experienced in terms of teaching traumatized students?
2. How does the experience of teaching traumatized students impact upon your reaching the curricular goals you set for your classroom?

While these two questions provided the focus for gathering data to be coded, additional questions were posed for clarification and exploration during the individual interview process. These questions included the following examples:

1. What type of classroom management strategies do you employ in seeking to support students struggling with management of traumatic experiences?
2. How do you see trauma manifested in your classroom?
3. What support/training are you able to call upon in managing and/or supporting students struggling with trauma?
4. How do you differentiate between trauma-influenced behavior and behavior that may be more willful (discipline related; “behavioral”)?
5. What types of trauma do your students confront in their lives?
6. What types of student trauma become most persistent in your classroom setting?

7. Which types of interventions are successful in working with traumatized students? Which of these interventions has been less successful?

Researcher Reflection/Memoing

In an effort to support validity and triangulation, I engaged in a process of memoing immediately following each interview. Glasser (1998) described this as a process that allows for personal reflection on the data provided as well as the documentation of objective observations related to each of the interviewees disposition. This process in particular called for careful attention to be paid in regard to the requirements that I engaged in the processes of bracketing and epoche, as spoken of by Moustakas (1994). Data collected from these efforts were not included in analysis and these notes were provided the same confidentiality afforded all other forms of data related to co-researchers.

Although Groenewald (2008) noted that there are no particular rules related to the process of memoing, I sought to include as much information as possible relative to the co-researchers' displays of emotion and body language. I also sought to capture as much as I could regarding their expressing of passion for students they have worked with who were struggling with the aftermath of trauma. The following is an example of one such effort:

> Our conversation took place in her classroom during an extended holiday break; no students were present although there were several teachers in the building and some sort of construction going on down the hall, with several employees from a local construction firm milling about in the hall. Teacher (name withheld) was quite focused on the issue of connection and displayed quite a bit of emotional vulnerability throughout our interview, becoming teary-eyed on at least three occasions when speaking about her past students. I asked before and during if she wanted the door closed, but she preferred it remain open.

She appears very proud of the connections she maintains with previous students, speaking with great emotion pride about connections with students who are well into adulthood, many of whom have experienced some measure of trauma in their lives. At points when she speaks of their struggles, she is very detailed – impressive considering the time since these events. She is very sure and seems certain of the value that her relationship with the student has in their moving toward potential. She is very secure in her strategies when working with traumatized students. During this portion of our interview, she sat straight in her chair and was noticeably very commanding, using the term "alpha" on several occasions to communicate her place within the teaching team (one teacher assistant and an aid that is there for part of the day). There appears to have been some amount of trauma in her life – she hinted at "things she didn't have" but didn't elaborate. When I moved toward greater discussion of this element and its potential connection to her work with these students her body language made clear it was not a topic she was going to explore with me; I moved on quickly. At the culmination of our interview, she desired to speak with me about her husband who had just recently retired from teaching and the way in which he shared her interest in the emotional health and well-being of their students. She spoke further of the way they seek to reach out to kids, enjoying taking children that she knows are having trouble in the home to the movies or to her home for pool parties with other groups of students. She is careful to note that she's never one-on-one with a student but also seems aware that the district would probably not sanction her activities. Unfortunately, her husband did not teach in an elementary school setting, so no effort was made to recruit his participation.

I found the effort of memoing to be quite helpful in recalling the tone of interviews with co-researchers, especially when beginning the process of interpreting interview data. Mention of these efforts is provided here because of the way that memoing might have influenced interpretation of co-research interviews while also serving as a measure of triangulation.

Member Check

To support quality control, this effort employed a two-stage member checking process. First, during the course of the interview, an effort toward active listening was made. Information was summarized and restated for interpretation in an effort to ensure that co-researchers were confident in the information they were providing. Co-researchers should agree that the summaries reflect their views and experiences in order to support the validity of a study (Creswell, 2007; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). A second member checking process suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided co-researchers with transcripts of the interviews so as to allow them the opportunities to correct any inaccuracies or misinterpretations. These transcripts included highlighted portions which communicated elements of analysis and comments on the formulated meaning taken from their narrative. Member checking was understood as important in assuring that findings were valid in order to meet the criterion of confirmability (Schwandt, 2007). As was explained to co-researchers during the process of acquiring informed consent, these transcripts were emailed to them in an effort to provide two-weeks for feedback. If feedback was not received at the conclusion of this period, the researcher was able to assume that the transcript and formulated meanings were found acceptable. Only one co-researcher responded to this email, with a request that one portion of the transcript be removed as she felt it may disclose her identify if reviewed by district administrators. Although this portion was not

among the highlighted data intended for analysis, I complied with her desire to strike it from the transcript.

Data Analysis

In an effort to align procedures with the design chosen for this study, data analysis involved the progressive coding efforts as discussed by Moustakas (1994).

Horizonalization

The first phase of data analysis involved the reading and rereading of individual co-researcher interview transcripts in an effort to identify "significant statements" taken from their experiences working with traumatized students. The nearly 175 pages of transcripts were analyzed over the course of several days for pertinent quotes in an effort to develop an understanding of how experiences teaching traumatized children impact teachers' curricular goals. This process involved printing out two copies of each interview transcript and, beginning with the third reading, highlighting potential significant statements on each transcript. Differences between that which was identified when comparing the two highlighted transcripts were evaluated. Ultimately, from the six verbatim transcripts, this effort yielded 77 significant statements, all of which appeared directly related to the phenomenon being studied. An example of several such significant statements are listed in Table 1 below.

Clusters of Meaning

After identifying the significant statements, I made an effort to interpret "formulated meanings" from these statements in accordance with an additional step for data analysis suggested by Colaizzi (1978). Admittedly, this step is not clearly addressed by Creswell (2007), but it seemed helpful within an effort to identify "clusters of meaning," which Creswell identifies as the step immediately following horizonalization. This process seeks to group information

from co-researcher interviews together for greater understanding of meaning or according to topic. A review of both significant statements and their formulated meanings was undertaken, leading to the emergence of 10 themes (described further in the chapters that follow). These themes, or clusters of meaning, were akin to chapter headings under which the information provided by co-researchers might be grouped beneath, allowing for an organized picture to emerge related to their lived experiences. In the examples shown in Table 1, one is able to see the process of moving from significant statement to formulated meaning and then to identified theme.

Table 1

Examples of Significant Statements of Teachers, related Formulated Meanings and alignment with emerging theme.

Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning	Theme
"How is that horrible, terrible student who is making my day so miserable that I want to go into the corner and cry right now; how is that student going to make me a better teacher? It comes down to: because your job is to teach that child."	Teaching traumatized children pushes good teachers to become better teachers.	The struggle to manage stress.
"It's about connections: they need connections. They've been through trauma and they don't want to make the connections – they're afraid they're going to get hurt."	Teachers are aware of the impact that trauma and its aftermath has upon students and their ability to connect.	Building relationships.
"It was a lot of trial-and-error to just get through the day to find out what each kid needed and then how to fit it all in to get any kind of academic anything accomplished."	The delivery of instruction often takes a back seat to figuring out how to manage the needs of traumatized students.	Management by trial-and-error.

Textural description

Next, an effort was made to develop a written description of participant experiences in order to organize clusters of meaning into narrative accounts. The first step of this process proposed by Moustakes (1994) is a textural description. This narrative takes a "just the facts" approach to the co-researcher's experiences. In this study, an effort was made to understand the shared experiences of teachers working with traumatized children. For example, one such textural description sought to capture the details related to teachers needing to remove their students from the immediate classroom environment due to an aggressive student throwing items throughout the room. Looking at this given situation, I sought to understand what types of

aggression the co-researchers spoke of in leading them to leave the classroom, what they do once out of the classroom with the remaining students, whom they needed to contact in order to have the disruptive student removed, how long this took, etc. A purposeful effort was made during this particular step of data analysis to focus on behavioral and objective statements that allowed for the further exploration of themes, with the knowledge that interpretation of the circumstances was a separate step that followed during the process of structural description.

Structural description

The effort to engage structural description, as described by Creswell (2007), involved seeking to understand how these experiences might have been understood by co-researchers; how subjective conditions within their classrooms inform or otherwise influence the behaviors they encountered or their responses to these behaviors. In short: How did they experience what they experienced? I sought to speak on the way that stress accumulates and, for example, the frustration that teachers felt when struggling to find help in dealing with the aggressive student causing them to vacate the classroom with remaining students. This was also an important element in attempting to communicate the ways in which co-researchers spoke about behaviors escalating over time as they looked over the course of their careers—especially those who had taught for 18 or more years (four of the six included in this study). The process of structural description allowed for the inclusion of mitigating factors that may have existed within the individual teacher experiences.

Since these circumstances have the potential to skew results by distracting the researcher, the purposeful separation from the process of textural description was very meaningful. For instance, one particular teacher spoke about a student in her classroom interrupting an ELA lesson to divulge the way that her older sister was sexually abusing her each night before bed.

This was obviously very unsettling for the teacher involved and emotionally distressing for her to recall during the process of the interview. It is a compelling story, but an anomaly when exploring the experiences of teachers and their responses to trauma. It was important within this process to capture her experience, but not communicate it as a norm, since none of the other co-researchers spoke of such a revelation occurring in their class (to the contrary, they all spoke of the ways that students were often careful to mask the abuse they experienced at home).

An effort was also made to view the textural description through the lens of context or setting. While all of the teachers participating as co-researchers within this study were working at Title I schools, all accepted that there were important differences between two of the schools when compared to the others. Two of the schools in the district serve a distinctively disadvantaged population of students due to existing demographic characteristics within the district. This piece of data was important to understand when speaking about the experience of trauma. Co-researchers in this school were more apt to speak about the normality of police raids upon the homes of their students or the likelihood of teenage siblings having children. There was also a marked difference in the number of children being raised by someone other than their parents; many parents in these two particular schools were spoken of as being either incarcerated or struggling with mental health issues. Seeking to have the lived experiences of all teachers within the study corroborate with the findings contained herein meant having an acute awareness of the way these differences could become a distraction. A purposeful effort was made to seek balance among the lived experiences of all co-researchers.

Essence of Experience

The final effort of data analysis is the harmonization of textural and structural descriptions in an effort to synthesize the voices of co-researchers with regard to the essence of

the experience of working with students who are struggling with trauma within the classroom setting. It is generally understood that this synthesis is limited to the time and location being studied.

Trustworthiness

Data collection and analysis was engaged in a process that sought to support trustworthiness. Credibility was established through the employment of triangulation of data (interviews, member checking, and memoing). These procedures increased the credibility of the study by allowing corroboration of data from different sources as well as enabling co-researchers to reflect on initial coding efforts (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Schwandt, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability was supported through an effort toward thick descriptive data that developed an exhaustive narrative in presenting the voice of my co-researchers. Finally, an audit trail was used to carefully chronicle all activities related to research. Dates, times, and activities were logged and can be made available to those seeking to replicate the research. Such an effort supports dependability and confirmability by allowing outside parties to understand the processes involved in research efforts, if seeking to replicate the study.

Ethical Considerations

Co-researchers willing to engage in this type of effort needed to be provided the confidentiality necessary to support their sharing of experiences. Responses viewed as negative or insensitive could reflect negatively on individual teachers, principals, schools or the district in general if confidentiality is in any way compromised. This was addressed and resolved by using pseudonyms for all participants and locations. In the course of their responses, teachers often did reveal details related to individual students (or incidents known to the researcher as relating to an individual student) without appropriate consent. When this occurred, it was addressed by (a)

reminding teachers that consent is lacking, (b) removing any identifying characteristics from narratives provided within this research, and (c) removal of all names and identifying characteristics from interview transcripts.

Increased awareness of trauma among students could lead to realization of secondary trauma (or its impact) among teachers. The potential for this occurrence was validated during informed consent, with teachers provided information linking them to the Member Assistance Program (MAP) which provides teachers with access to short-term counseling, connection to community groups, and referral services. It is a free service provided to all teachers within the school district.

Finally, all data were provided necessary protections in support of these confidentiality efforts. All hard-copy documents were placed in a locked filing cabinet in the home of the researcher; electronic documents were placed within a password protected folder on a computer that is not connected to any network. Access to information provided via the Survey Monkey website was password protected, utilizing an original user name and password.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to understand the impact of childhood trauma upon curricular goals for elementary school teachers at a school district within the northeastern United States, which has been referred to by the pseudonym NESD throughout this effort. After conducting interviews with six different individual teachers employed by the district, 10 specific themes emerged with regard to their experiences with students who are struggling with trauma. They spoke of efforts they make to continue the delivery of curriculum in spite of often daunting circumstances that run the gamut from students throwing books and pencils at them as they attempt to teach to students revealing ongoing sexual abuse in the midst of an English class. They speak of trauma leading children into silent depression as well as outbursts so violent they have to protect the remainder of the class by removing them from the classroom. None spoke of any preparation for working with traumatized children nor any particular training or plan within their district or school; instead, they speak of a trial-and-error process in seeking to manage the particular needs and behaviors of each individual child that they might encounter.

Participants

While a pool of six willing participants was much smaller than expected, their contributions to this effort were nothing short of exhaustive. They brought a combined 110 years of teaching experience (mean: 18 years), the overwhelming majority of which had occurred within the district being studied. Although two held special education certifications, they all had purposefully dedicated their careers to teaching in general education classrooms and were seemingly excited about the districts' recent movement to "full inclusion," even though it meant that they would now have to manage the potential disruptions of special needs students in

addition to the students struggling with trauma that they were speaking of within this study. While they defined trauma differently, all could identify numerous types of traumatic experience in the lives of present and former students. Finally, although none of the teachers involved in this study could speak to a specific training or guideline having been provided to them on how to best manage and meet the needs of students struggling with the aftermath of trauma, all told of the incredible lengths they went to in an effort to do exactly that. Sometimes this led to consternation from administrators and other times alienation from their peers. Each shared an incredible passion for their students that was clearly evident throughout every moment of their respective interviews.

Results

From six verbatim transcripts, 78 significant statements were identified and extracted and then examined for the identification of formulated meanings. These formulated meanings were arranged into clusters, resulting in 10 clear themes; Appendix E provides a list of these significant statements, their formulated meanings, and associated themes.

Theme 1: The Struggle to Manage Stress

The obvious stress associated with working with troubled populations was a prevailing theme for teachers working with traumatized students. This stress was likely due to something nearly all of the participants touched upon: there was only so much that could be done for their students. As one co-researcher noted, "You either have to say that I can do the best I can with them right now or I have to quit." This sense of acknowledging limits seemed an important coping mechanism for the teachers; however, there was a keen awareness of their resiliency as well. One teacher with 25 years of experience noted, "I have to sit back and keep reminding myself that the next day is a new day and that these kids will get over it faster than you're going

to get over it." Another argued that while it's important to be aware of the situations her students find themselves in, pitying them does little for their future: "Don't come and pity my kids. They don't need you to feel sorry for them; they need you to teach them." This same teacher spoke of the need for radical acceptance, particularly when working with underprivileged populations by remarking that she'll often tell aspiring education majors at her alma mater, "If you can't sit next to that kid with chronic head lice or because he smells—if you're afraid to touch that child—you're in the wrong place, so get out. Admit it to yourself."

Speaking with these teachers about their stresses presented an interesting phenomenon: they were overwhelmed, but at the same time amazingly motivated and reflective about their work. They all shared an awareness that teaching traumatized children pushed good teachers to become even better teachers. One teacher, who later in our interview noted that she's often asked to leave the school she's in for a position in a more affluent district, spoke about how she will often ask herself, "How is that horrible, terrible student who is making my day so miserable that I want to go into the corner and cry right now—how is that student going to make me a better teacher?" Another said, in an equally moving manner:

> The one thing I want to say is that all of these students I've worked with have made me a better teacher. I come into the classroom with a plan because I don't know what to expect…I'm met with a challenge. I enjoy the challenge because it makes me a better person.

These feelings seemed to capture the idea that teaching is as much a calling as it is a skill to be developed through the coursework and related experience. There was a feeling in their responses that one needs to enter teaching for the right reasons, "Someone has to go into teaching because they want to teach."

Recent issues related to decreased retention for teachers was echoed in the sentiments of a teacher with more than 30 years of service to the district in speaking about the decision made by one new hire who said, "I can't do it anymore, I'm giving up." Her response to this young educator was: "Well, are you doing any more good in giving up and just walking away from it then what you would be in saying, 'I'll do the best I can with it?'" Newly hired and/or young teachers might be especially susceptible to the stress of working with students who are struggling with trauma; at least that's what one teacher with more than 25 years of service thinks:

> Fortunately, my children are grown—I have the time to devote to this; I don't see how somebody who's a new teacher, with a baby or young children can do this…I've had a lot of friends who've left this school just for that.

A teacher with nine years of teaching elsewhere reflected on her first year in a new school, a Title 1 school serving an underprivileged portion of the community:

> I got a very different perspective on students this year…a lot of the time those students come from traumatized backgrounds of some sort and they have some kind of past that has affected them in some way. It really changed my perspective on what I was doing.

Later, this same teacher spoke of a young girl in her class revealing the sexual abuse she was experiencing in home at the hands of an older sibling "out of nowhere in the middle of the ELA lesson." She remarked, "It was going on all year and I would have never known. When they come to school and you try to teach them curriculum—what was going on in her mind, you know?" Having worked late into the evening with administration, the child's parents, and the authorities, the strain upon this teacher was obviously present the next day: "It was really hard the next day to see her because she came up to me and gave me this huge hug. I cried. I tried to

walk out of my room—my heart broke for her." Yet, the sanctuary of the classroom continued, she to her teaching and the child to her learning, as best as they both could.

Theme 2: Teaching Through Disruption.

That teachers would have to persevere through numerous distractions reveals nothing unknown about the profession; however, the lengths that teachers will go to teach through is remarkable.

> I can remember standing in class and teaching through days of having a desk hit me in the back of the legs and just continuing on with the lesson like it never happened; or books thrown. . . I'm sitting there thinking, "Is this really happening?"

Sometimes their lessons are interrupted by a threat or effort toward intimidation:

> One student . . .would get so mad that he would hold on to the back of a chair like he was getting ready to throw it and then he would quietly put it down—like he knew he couldn't throw the chair but he wanted to show me he was angry.

Teachers spoke about disruptions of every kind, from a "kid sitting under his desk" to another "poking everybody" to numerous instances of violence against themselves or other students. It is an almost constant battle to get to instruction. "All day long, I'm like playing table tennis—you know, hitting something back, hitting something back, so you know, it can become very time consuming." It is difficult for the teachers to identify what behavior may be related to a student's experience with trauma. Is the child sleeping in class tired "because of his traumatic background or is he just up late playing video games? It's such a fine line of figuring it out." Some children come from environments that are so toxic that they will seemingly act in a manner that purposefully sabotages their relationships with teachers, noted one participant:

> They have this concern about not being liked; they want to make sure you don't like them. They get really aggressive toward you, because there's no chance that if I like you on Monday I'm going to be disappointed with you on Wednesday and I'm not going to like you anymore. They can't handle that.

She noted further, "These children stop instruction; they bring it to a standstill…if a child doesn't feel like they belong, they feel a need to just trash everything in their path."

There are times when the disruption is subtle, like watching a child struggle with hypervigilance. Noted one of the participants:

> She was always on edge. She was that child who could be writing something down, and hearing the conversation in the hallway, and know that my cell phone was buzzing on my desk. She was so aware of her surroundings that it was actually unbelievable. I just kept thinking that it has to have some kind of effect on her.

Sometimes planned ignoring is all that is needed:

> I'll ignore the student for a bit and tell the class that they need a time out or a break so that I can get the other students started on something and then go back to the other student who needed the break.

Other times, the disruptions are seemingly too much to handle. Noted one teacher:

> The behaviors I've seen are shocking to me--between open masturbation or the self-inflicting of pain. I had a child who would purposefully self-inflict pain because he was angry. He would just say what had happened in the past—yelling stuff out. I would sit there. I was shell-shocked. I didn't know what to do.

Sadly, there are times when they find little support from administration. A teacher with nearly 20 years of experience recalled a time when there was nearly daily fighting in her

classroom amongst a group of boys: "I had physical fighting in my classroom every day, to the point that the principal said, 'You can't keep sending them to the office because there's nothing I can do about it, so you'll have to figure it out.'" Teachers realize a hierarchy of needs in the lives of their students, but are often limited in their ability to meet these needs. One of the teachers observed:

> There's just so much in their background that they have that they just—they're not ready to come in and learn. They're coming from such disheveled home lives; they don't have their basic needs met. And it wasn't one or two of them—for me it was really taking a step back and figuring out how I'm going to deliver instruction to these kids because they're not getting it.

Another common frustration among educators was the lack of clear support structure for students struggling with the aftermath of traumatic experiences. One teacher expressed her frustration:

> A lot of times I think they might have come in traumatized, but we're not really aware of it. If it's an academic issue, they have an IEP and we can read all about this child—about how they are socially, emotionally, developmentally. But these students come in with all of these different backgrounds and they might even be on medication to counteract some sort of trauma in their lives, and I don't know anything about it.

Theme 3: Unsafe or Unusable Classroom Environments.

One disruption was so prevalent in their responses, that it warranted its own them: the loss of the classroom environment due to safety or behavior so obtrusive that the teacher can no longer use the space. One teacher noted, "I've moved my entire classroom into the hallway; he can scream all by himself if he wants to and I'll teach the class in the hallway." Another

commented, “I’ve been in a classroom where kids are throwing books. The whole class had to be removed from the classroom because it wasn’t a safe environment.” Removal of the remainder of the class is sometimes necessary because teachers are not to physically intervene to control a disruptive student. A third teacher spoke of losing the classroom:

> Sometimes the response to it is that we just remove the kids for safety reasons and try to call for somebody to come up and help. What happens is finally when we get somebody who can physically restrain the student, which is something that as a teacher we’re not allowed to do.

The loss of their learning environment has a predictable impact upon instruction, says still another teacher: “You just do the best you can with whatever it is you have (when you leave your room). It’s obviously not the quality of the lesson it was going to be…in some cases the lesson is totally dropped.” The loss of their classroom often leads to the entire class “walk(ing) around the building four or five times until somebody comes and can remove the child who’s having the problem.” This often takes quite a bit of time. I asked one teacher to give me an estimate of what this lost or diluted instruction time might look like:

> I’d say it’s usually about half an hour by the time you have the child in crisis and then get a hold of someone to come down and they actually get down there (that can be 10 or 15 minutes right there). By the time the person comes down and can actually get the child out or get the child removed and you then notify the classroom teacher, it’s a good half hour.

The loss of a suitable learning environment is a growing issue for teachers, even those with an average of 18 years in teaching, like those in this study. “Again, all of these behaviors have escalated over the last half of my teaching experience…where it’s gotten to the point of kids

needed to be physically removed from the classroom for the safety of the kids," said the most senior of the participants.

Theme 4: Management by Trial and Error

It becomes quickly evident that teachers seek to manage the behaviors of traumatized students through a process of trial and error, since they have little training or support in working with the population. "The trick is that you kind of learn the ins and outs of the individual student on what works with them," said one teacher. The delivery of instruction often takes a back seat to figuring out how to manage the needs of traumatized students. Another teacher noted, "It was a lot of trial and error to just get through the day to find out what each kid needed and then how to fit it all in to get any kind of academic anything accomplished." Yet another stated, "I have so many kids that I think are like a puzzle. Once I knew the pieces and I knew what they needed in order to fit, then our day ran smoother, but without those specific things my day was set off and anything academic almost couldn't take place." The process involved can become very frustrating for one of the participants:

> It took me I think 3/4 of the year to figure it out and I think that was my biggest gripe. If you don't almost fish for information on why is this kid that way or why does this happen, how do you know? They don't just come up and tell you. How do you know how to teach them?

Left to their own devices in trying to work with students struggling with the aftermath of traumatic experiences, one of the participants was left feeling a bit ostracized from her peers.

> I think I tend to be a little more untraditional than some teachers, I don't know. "Why is that kid sitting on a yoga ball? How is that fair to the rest of the kids?" I don't know if that's fair. It's trial and error, it's not training. It's just what works.

Techniques that work might not be perceived as acceptable, which is a problem for this teacher when students switch teachers for a particular class or learning module:

> She would go across the hallway for 45 minutes and there was no gum chewing allowed or yoga balls in that room, so certain strategies that I had found to work, she didn't want in that classroom and I had to respect that. But they would come back to me and it would take me a good 20 minutes before I could get started with math because I had to sort of desensitize the kids to get them back to "you're alright."

A different teacher commented about how she had a "safe place in my room, sheltered off that was his…but other teachers wouldn't allow that."

Sometimes trial and error leads to behaviors on the part of teachers that may conflict with district policies. Said one teacher:

> There are many teachers who will say, "Never touch a student," but what if a student needs to touch your leg while you're teaching them. By all means they need to have their hand on your leg while you're teaching, especially the young kids.

Another teacher remarked on her use of touch control, "She would constantly come over and if I pressed on her back it would calm her down. It's so hard; it was more trial and error."

Theme 5: Planning to Avoid Triggers

This theme seeks to capture the effort teachers make to adjust classroom plans in order to minimize the impact that any variable might have upon students struggling with the aftermath of trauma. "I try to think about everything I'm going to say to them, every action I'm going to make; every part of my day has to be planned for them." Another teacher asked, "How do I get through the desk throwing and all this?" The answer: "I think a lot of this is preplanning. How

is this gonna set this kid off?" These planning duties are an effort for even the most experienced teachers:

> My husband says, "You've been teaching this many years, can't you reuse the lesson plans?" I say, "No, I can't, and I can't because my classroom isn't the same year to year." I have students who have different needs and it changes the whole way I'm going to teach for the day.

Working with traumatized children has an effect on planning for absences as well, with many of the teachers speaking about the extraordinary lengths they will go to support their students if they are going to be out, even for just part of the day:

> I'm one of those teachers that I work really hard if 'm going to be out; I make sure my students, especially my students who I know are going to have a hard time with that,- know why I'm out. I always tell them. It's gone to the point that I've gone to their house the night before or called their house to say, "Listen, I'm not going to be there." I call their parent to let them know because I want them to come in and know exactly what the day is going to be like.

That said, sometimes a teacher's best efforts to incorporate support into his or her planning can come up short, and the resulting disruption can be overwhelming. One teacher noted when talking about these shortcomings, "Sometimes I have to say, 'Everyone put your heads down,' not because they're misbehaving but because I need time to stop and think of a strategy to use next. I need to figure out how I'm going to deal with this." Sometimes they're left with little more than a direct appeal: "I'll say to a kid, 'We have to stop this before you get frustrated with me, because I still have to do what I'm doing.'"

Theme 6: Struggling to Access Interventions

Although not spoken of in all of the participant interviews, this theme is included because of the power that teachers spoke with in regard to the efforts they made in attempting to access services for the youth they're working with. Sadly, existing mechanisms, programs that should be triggered when a student is struggling with the aftermath of trauma, are so overwhelmed and underfunded that they provide little refuge for these students or comfort for their teachers. "It was frustrating because I'm filling out the discipline forms and this child isn't yet receiving the counseling that he needs," remarked one teacher as she recalled a depressed and withdrawn student. Another teacher noted:

> There really was no place for a lot of these students to go. When I talked to the principal or the social worker at that point, everyone's hands are tied, no one knows what to tell you. I mean there's really no clear answer at this point or what we're using as a district.

Teachers struggle to manage these students because they often don't meet the requirements for services that might come attached to a special education designation. Noted one of the teachers, "This one student I had in fourth grade, the same thing: throwing things and tossing things and screaming obscenities in the classroom. Again, none of these students I've talked about so far are labeled or receiving any special ed or aid."

Administration is often just as overwhelmed as the intervention programs. Noted one teacher: "When I go down to the office to express my concerns to the principal there's 10 to 15 other kids that are in there or there's five other teachers waiting to see him with the same thing."

Theme 7: Encouraging Compartmentalization

Another theme in evaluating the impact of trauma upon instruction is seen in the effort that teachers make in trying to help their students focus on learning within the safe environment

of the school. Part of this is found in the reality that changing the lives of these children is not that simple. As one teacher aptly noted, "You can't fix what's the problem at home. We'll get some things in place, but…You can't fix it, but what you can do is control your own life and make it better." Another teacher often tells the students, "This is your job. School is your job and we're gonna focus on school at this time." She realizes that if she can be successful in getting them to compartmentalize their lives in this manner she might have the chance to provide some instruction: "You try to refocus them to the task at hand so that they can still get the education."

This effort is quite purposeful. One teacher noted:

> My whole month of September is about the classroom. If I can get September to be about the classroom, maybe not a lot of academics, but I spend all of September on the rules: how we treat each other and focusing on all that, and dealing with our daily schedule.

She added, "I want the best expectations for that student. I'm not going to let this student say, 'I had a bad night.' I know you did, but what are you going to do about it now? That's how it has to be."

Theme 8: Building Relationships

Participants universally noted the importance of relationship when working with students who are struggling with trauma. In fact, much of the effort to manage trauma and its impact upon instruction is found in the time required to build strong relationships. "It's about connections: they need connections, but they're afraid to make them. They've been through trauma and they don't want to make connections. They're afraid they're going to get hurt." She continued,

> I know it's not about me: their father left, their mother is dissociated from drugs or whatever; they're unlovable. Everyone is going to not love them so they might as well be really crazy and make sure that people hate them.

The depth of the relationship teachers are able to build with their students is something to consider when looking at the impact upon instruction. One teacher in particular noted, "They can't like me and I guess what I do is I get them to like me and then I get them to love me and then they know I love them and they want to behave for me."

Many of the teachers spoke about adding to their responsibilities by engaging in extracurricular activities, which took personal time that they might not have had, but that they have to make time for in order to build the relationships necessary for instruction to be possible: "If you taught here, you'd know that some of this is for your own survival—to make connections with these kids." The development of these relationships allows a teacher to recognize changes in behaviors that might lead to a spike in disruption. One in particular noted:

> A lot of times it's a change in behavior—if it's not usually behavior and then all of a sudden or it could be a beginning of the year behavior that's representing itself part way through the year again. You wonder what's going on at home that's causing this to come back up again.

Relationships also allow teachers to see past the labels that might be placed on a struggling child: "As the year went by he was able to turn it around and he ended up being a stronger academic student, but you couldn't see that at the beginning of the year."

Some of the structures within schools can be very helpful in supporting students in their relationships with adults. One teacher in particular noted the benefit of the districts movement toward full inclusion:

> I think the thing that helps with full inclusion is that there are extra people for the child to build relationships with. I'm not the only person they feel comfortable talking to; they have the aid or another teacher they can talk to.

However, others are much less helpful. For instance, student awareness of moving from teacher to teacher with each progressive year presents a significant weakness in the efforts to support students who already experience difficulties when attempting to build relationships. One teacher sought to sum up student feelings about these transitions: "Yeah, so we're going to get close and we're going to get tight and then you're going to leave me and I have to do this whole thing all over again." This reality aside, many teachers spoke about being called back into the lives of their former students during a crisis.

Theme 9: It's Getting Worse.

Another universal theme noted by participants was the feeling that things are getting worse and their job is getting harder. One of the more experienced participants looked back on her career:

> I look at some of the kids I taught 20 years ago and thinking that this kid has the worse problems in the world—he's the worst kid I could ever deal with. Now I have five or six in every classroom.

Another noted an escalation in the way trauma seems to be influencing violence between students:

> What were behaviors that we might categorize as being somewhat "bullyish" in what they did with or to other kids is now striking out—kids who have to be physically removed from the classroom (because of having assaulted another student). So behaviors have really negatively escalated from what I've seen.

Another echoed these sentiments: “If I say things have gotten worse since I’ve been here, it’s the truth. I don’t think it’s because I’m worn out. I think that our families are having more and more trauma within their own homes.” Yet another teacher noted that students struggling with trauma were engaging in behaviors that, over time, are “a lot worse and a lot more disruptive and violent.”

Theme 10: Improved Preparation and Support.

This final theme was at least partially established by a line of questioning that developed while meeting with the first participant: What do you think that we can do to support aspiring teachers as they come into a classroom that is increasingly being disrupted by a growing number of children struggling with the aftermath of trauma? Their answers suggest just as much about their own struggles as it does in their hopes for future educators. One teacher noted,

> I think-- and I may be wrong—I don’t think that the training has changed a whole lot but the kids have changed a whole lot and the families have changed a lot. They do need to be aware that it’s very different.

The need for teachers to be trained in supporting each other was also indicated by one teacher who noted:

> I think it’s important for teachers to be knowledgeable about traumatic situations and how they present and what to do to know it’s going to be coming, and make sure that they’re communicating with the other colleagues in their building: the teachers that are also working at that grade level.

This informal consultation seemed beneficial for students and the teachers seeking to manage everything that comes with this work.

There was an almost universal call for more classroom time in the training of new educators. One teacher in particular thought it was important that aspiring teachers knew exactly what they were getting themselves into:

> I mean the general public doesn't know. When they see advertisements on TV for schools, the kids are all sitting there, raising their hands, their mouths closed. It's not like that at all. It's not really fair to future teachers. These kids are going in under the impression that's what it's like.

Another teacher added that while those teaching a significant population of children with trauma histories are often the busiest and therefore least likely to take on student teachers or even classroom visits, that this is the very exposure aspiring teachers need:

> You can teach them as much as you want, but until they experience it—and I don't know how you get them into the field a bit more. They have to see teachers work with these students. They come into my classroom and I share with them what's going on - I give them my statistics. I give them all this and they come back to the classroom. Educators don't have the time, but I have the time to sit with them because it's important to me.

One final voice provided a call for some measure of standardization in the manner schools might seek to respond to children who are struggling with trauma and then building this into the preparation of aspiring teachers:

> I suppose addressing how are you going to deal with that—real life situations. You may actually have a student that is so disruptive that they have to be removed. What are you going to do? I know it's very different from district to district on how they manage these things, but I think there are a few givens in there that could maybe be incorporated into a few courses.

Summary

Suffice it to say, the experiences teachers encounter when working with students who are struggling with trauma is as broad as their definition of trauma. When asked, some of the participants were apt to speak of issues like neglect and the aftermath of divorce, while others were able to speak about the impact of physical and sexual abuse. It is important to note that all were easily able to identify numerous instances in which they encountered such children as well as equally numerous ways in which the aftermath of trauma manifests itself in their classrooms, much of the time in ways that are quite disruptive. Unfortunately, they were also quick to report a general unpreparedness to this experience, with the theme of trial and error quite constant throughout their stories. Teachers spoke of special education systems that do not account for the needs of traumatized students, administrative partners who are overwhelmed by their needs, and classroom environments that are often so dangerous that they have to remove the other students from the classroom because there is simply no alternative. None of the teachers were able to report any specific trainings they had attended in an effort to help them manage the needs of these students. None of the teachers spoke of any specific district or individual school policy that worked to prepare a response to the needs of these students. They were completely unprepared and, largely, on their own.

Their response to trauma was equally varied, from becoming akin to surrogate parents, to going to extraordinary lengths in helping, to providing stability, to crying in the face of a hug the day after a student reported horrendous sexual abuse. Interestingly, all appeared to be managing the emotional toll that one might assume becomes overwhelming after years of working with troubled populations. None spoke about any type of vicarious traumatization and none were able to speak about ways that it significantly impacted their functioning, whether speaking to their

role as a teacher or any other roles outside of teaching (spouse, parent, etc.). All seem to characterize their responses to working with traumatized students by restating their primary duty: teaching. Their effort to encourage students to compartmentalize their experiences seems to help them as well. Obviously, they were not immune to the impact of trauma in the lives of their students, but there was radical acceptance within their stories. The lives of the children they are working with are often very hard, and while they have little capacity to effect change, they can provide an opportunity for learning and perhaps that learning will provide the chance for change (Linehan, 1993). This seems a learned capacity for the teachers who responded as participants for this study, and most spoke about those who were not able to make such a distinction and chose to either leave the district or the profession.

Finally, this effort sought to understand how the management of trauma-related behavior influences teaching efforts. Co-researcher responses spoke clearly to the ways in which behaviors that these teachers were certain resulted from trauma impacted the classroom, often halting efforts to teach at least momentarily and in some instances leading them to vacate the classroom. Participants were quick to identify their concerns with how these numerous interruptions might impact their ability to meet curricular goals, both in the moment and throughout the year. More than one noted a concern about the way it may impact their yearly evaluations, because of the way that high-stakes testing is connected to these evaluations. There was little doubt that these children often slow and sometimes stop learning in their classrooms in ways that are difficult to manage in spite of often heroic efforts to do so.

It becomes quickly evident, with even a cursory review of their commentary, that the teachers who chose to participate in this study are engaged in a remarkable effort to manage the needs of traumatized students while also effectively reaching the important curricular goals of every

student in their charge. They carefully plan in attempt to avoid anything that might trigger a student disruption, struggle to help their students access very limited resources, and continuously invent new ways of creating a trauma-sensitive environment within their classrooms, all through the lens of relationship-building with these needy students. They are on the front lines, so to speak, in working with an increasingly traumatized population, and in spite of almost non-existent support, they continue to teach. Said one participant in the most succinct terms possible, "Nothing is going to keep me from teaching."

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to understand the impact of childhood trauma upon curricular goals for elementary school teachers working in a particular school district located in the Northeastern United States. Understanding trauma's impact within the classroom is complicated by a number of issues, including misdiagnosis, coexistence with other disorders, and wide variety in subsymptomatic behaviors in students (Briere et al., 2008). The variety of ways in which students might respond to trauma is often met by an equal variety of creativity in the efforts that teachers make to manage its manifestation within the classroom setting in an attempt to salvage some measure of instructional time. A review of these efforts found them nothing short of heroic.

Review of Methodology

As noted within Chapter Three, I employed a transcendental phenomenological approach as I sought to understand the lived experiences of teachers working with traumatized students. Specifically, I wanted to know how the needs of these students and lack of support for addressing these needs impacted the delivery of instruction. As a qualitative effort, the study relied primarily on the reports of six participants, who shared their years working within public school settings. In interviews lasting approximately one hour each, on average, teachers spoke about what experiences they had with students who had experienced trauma, how prepared or unprepared they felt in attempting to meet the needs of these students, their responses to trauma-informed behavior during instructional time, and the ways in which the management of trauma-informed issues influenced their ability to meet curricular goals. These interviews were

transcribed and then analyzed according to the progressive coding efforts suggested by Moustakas (1994).

Summary of Findings

There is a significant gap in the literature with regard to the disruptive impact that trauma-responsive behaviors among students has upon a teacher's ability to teach within the traditional classroom environment. While multiple efforts have been made to study the impact of vicarious traumatization and other stress-related symptoms for teachers working with students (e.g., Crosby, 2015), this research overlooks the need to evaluate what effect the trauma is having upon actual teaching: the delivery of learning to students, both those struggling with the aftermath of some traumatic experience and the classmates with whom they share the classroom. Numerous efforts have been made in recent decades to mainstream students with special needs, including efforts toward the "full inclusion" of students within the district being studied. However, unless some concurrent disorder or special education diagnosis also exists there are scarce resources for serving students who have experienced trauma. If trauma is the "only" thing a particular child is dealing with, they are very unlikely to have any of the supports that a child with a special education designation might have, even though they may exhibit a similarl (or worse) disruption to the learning environment (Nash, Schlosser, & Scarr, 2015). Unlike students with special education designations related to behavioral and conduct disorders, students struggling with the aftermath of trauma are unlikely to have a plan for behavioral intervention if they are triggered, even though these triggers could lead to dangerous or life-threatening behaviors. The current educational system in the United States simply has limited formal mechanisms to support these students or their teachers' efforts to teach with them in the classroom.

This study sought to answer the following questions: What are teachers' experiences with students who are struggling with trauma? How do teachers describe their preparedness to teach students struggling with traumatic experiences? How do teachers characterize their responses to trauma-related behavior within the classroom setting? How does the management of trauma-related behavior influence teaching efforts?

Insight on the Questions Posed

Question 1: What are teachers' experiences with students who are struggling with trauma? Teachers interviewed in the course of this study reported a wide range of experiences with trauma, which were informed by their conceptualization of trauma. Some teachers focused on the issue of abandonment and neglect as the most pressing traumatic experience encountered by their students. They spoke of the impact that parental absence due to divorce, incarceration, addiction, and/or distraction had upon their students. This often led them to encounter students who seemed to purposefully sabotage their relationships in an effort to "not be liked"; the child's rationale being, "if you don't like me, then I won't like you and it won't hurt when you don't want me anymore." This effort to protect oneself from rejection by being the first to reject others is quite clearly associated with an avoidant personality, which is itself associated with the aftermath of traumatic experiences (Galinha, Oishi, Periera, Wirtz, & Esteves, 2012; Lecic-Tosevski, Gavrilovic, Knezevic, & Priebe, 2003). Interestingly, none of the teachers spoke about the loss of a deceased parent within their stories, although several did touch upon the topic as fitting within their conceptualization of a traumatic experience during childhood. This type of trauma did not appear to manifest itself within the classroom environment the way that divorce and neglect did, which is not altogether that surprising given what research is revealing about the

impact of divorce upon child development—namely that in some cases, divorce has a more detrimental impact upon children than does the death of a parent (e.g., Clark, 2011).

Other teachers focused more on their observations of physical abuse and sexual victimization. They spoke of violence within their classrooms among children who seemed to have limited coping skills beyond physical aggression. This connection between victimization and aggression in the classroom is also well established in the literature, given that students who have suffered physical and sexual abuse are often prone to externalizing behaviors, many times directed at their teachers (West, Day, Somers, & Baroni, 2014). There are numerous instances where participants reported being hit and having items in the classroom thrown at them. Many teachers reported the need to regroup their remaining students while one particular student was in crisis, either in a different portion of the classroom or outside of the classroom entirely. One teacher spoke of several instances where students whom had been molested were openly masturbating during class. Another described the aftermath of a student who revealed sexual abuse in the midst of a lesson: the normally quiet and obedient child became quite disruptive after the revelation, perhaps (the teacher suggested) because she now felt safe in exploring/expressing the feelings of anger associated with her abuse.

Question 2: How do teachers describe their preparedness teach students struggling with traumatic experiences? It is well established that the experience of trauma impedes cognitive, social, and emotional development throughout childhood, making the need for a trauma-informed teaching model important not only for managing behaviors but for improving academic success as well (Crosby, 2015). Unfortunately, teachers within the present study reported a universal lack of preparedness in working with students who were seeking to manage the aftermath of trauma. They could point to no specific training during their undergraduate or

graduate preparation, nor could they articulate any specific district or school-specific plan for coming alongside of these students. It does not appear that the district has included this among any of the opportunities for professional development either. There are some generic counseling programs that teachers can refer students to within the district, most of which are funded through grants that were characterized by participants as grossly inadequate to serve the number of students that have need.

Teachers use traditional methods of referring students to school administrators, psychologists, and specialized professionals, to varying degrees of success. Teachers note that they are able to rely on their building principal, but that this individual is often overwhelmed by the needs of the student population. They spoke of an ability to involve counseling services, but that this effort was done in a pull-out fashion that failed to provide any feedback on how to better manage the student the next time they experienced a trigger. As part of their on-the-job experience, teachers come to learn which colleagues can provide support, but there is no mechanism for a procedure of acquiring this support; teachers do not know unless they know to press and ask questions.

Question 3: How do teachers characterize their responses to trauma-related behavior within the classroom setting? The management of trauma-related behavior in the classroom is seemingly limited to individual trial and error, something each teacher spoke of in a variety of terms. They engage in a feeling-out period during which time they learn about what triggers the student and seek to manage these triggers through the employing of whatever tools are available. This is often an exhausting process for teachers and something that invariably will interfere with their ability to deliver instruction. It is also remarkably ineffective, as Freiberg (2002) noted that this type of haphazard strategy for professional development may take several

years to master, with teachers struggling mightily due to their lack of preparation. Ultimately, this contributes to the loss of frustrated and struggling teachers from the profession.

It is also important to recognize the ways that teachers characterize the responses of colleagues in their efforts to manage disruptive classroom behaviors attributed to the aftermath of trauma. Their attempts to find "anything that might work" led to numerous non-traditional approaches, including the utilization of exercise balls instead of a chair; allowing the chewing of gum; allowing children passes to walk the halls; planned ignoring of intrusive behaviors; and in one particularly untraditional example a teacher brought in a mixed martial arts dummy from home so that a very aggressive student in her class could go to the back of the room and assault the dummy when he became agitated instead of assaulting another student. These efforts are sometimes openly scoffed at by their peers, often leading to feelings of being ostracized for their efforts.

Finally, teachers often admitted that their efforts toward intervention stood in potential contrast to established policies. Teachers often characterized a need for physical contact with students as worrisome, considering the district's relative "hand's off" policy. They noted, at times, having to grab and hold a student, hugging students, and in one example, utilizing touch controls (pushing down on a student's back). They also spoke of driving students home when there was no one to pick them up, taking students to the movies, and conducting unsanctioned home visits. Although they universally acknowledged that these methods were at least potentially in contrast to district policy, they characterized their efforts as uniquely necessary in working with these students.

Question 4: How does the management of trauma-related behavior influence teaching efforts? The comments of one teacher interviewed during the course of this study stands out in response to this last question: "These children stop instruction; they bring it to a standstill." It was evident throughout the interview process that the aftermath of trauma has a significant and detrimental impact upon teaching efforts. Previous studies have concluded similarly with regard to the learning interfering factors often presented by students struggling with the aftermath of trauma as well as the efforts required of teachers to re-engage students in instruction (Adelman & Taylor, 2013).

Attempting to teach students struggling with trauma may also mean needing to teach through physical interference. While none of the teachers interviewed characterized their treatment as being assaulted, it is difficult to conceptualize trying to teach while desks are pushed into you and pencils or books are thrown in your direction; however, this is reported by all of the teachers in this study (to varying degrees). Teachers sought to manage these interruptions through a variety of means typically associated with the classroom management policies proposed first by Redl and Wineman (1952) and then Levin and Nolan (2004), including: regrouping (moving the student closer to them), eliminating tools (removal of pencils, books, etc.), and planned ignoring (one teacher in particular spoke of needing to "bob and weave" while attempting to teach).

There are other times when these student disruptions impact the learning opportunities of all students, like when the violence displayed by students struggling with trauma leaves teachers with no choice but to lead remaining students outside of the classroom until help arrives; help that is capable of de-escalating or physically removing the student from the classroom. The removal of students from the classroom would seem to have the most significant influence upon

teaching, due to the limitation of space and tools in support of delivering curriculum. Teachers reported that these instances often led them to be outside of their classroom for thirty or more minutes at a time, often without any materials. Sometimes teachers have their class walk around the building numerous times, waiting for the principal or school resource officer to either help the student in crisis to regroup or decide that they would be physically removed from the environment. There are some attempts to, at times, continue a lesson in the hallway, but these seemed the exception rather than the norm, as the focus was typically on removing the other students as quickly and safely as possible, leaving little time to grab materials. This time lost from structured teaching is important to measure, with Hill and Hollis (2011) having recognized that lost instructional time due to teachers needing to address physical and mental health issues during valuable school hours has the potential for a considerably negative impact upon student achievement.

Relationship to Prior Research

Existing literature on the experience of trauma among children notes that student responses to trauma are often quite varied, running the gamut between disruptive and passive, with both presenting interference to teachers seeking to deliver instruction (Crosby, 2015). Within both traditional and contemporary theories of classroom management, teachers are called upon to recognize inappropriate or otherwise disruptive behaviors and hold students accountable for them so that instruction can continue; however, when working with traumatized students Wolpow et al. (2009) noted that teachers must possess a keen awareness that student behaviors may be beyond their awareness or control. This was a theme recognized by many of the participants in the present study. The struggles of school-aged children to manage the feelings associated with traumatic backgrounds are certainly exacerbated by their lacking the processing

skills necessary to develop appropriate coping mechanisms. The pre-frontal cortex, required for higher level processing in response to stimulus, is not fully formed until an individual reaches his or her early twenties. The prevailing expectation for children in educational settings to properly process their feelings and effectively strategize a response is simply unreasonable; they are not equipped to do so (van der Kolk, 1999). The teachers contributing to this research communicated similar feelings of being ill-equipped for the task.

The effort to learn requires several processes that are negatively impacted by traumatic stress, including things like attention, organization, comprehension, memory engagement, and trust (Wolpow et al., 2009). The experience of trauma is often exacerbated by triggers that are connected in some way to these stressors and, when triggered, there is a significantly increased likelihood for students to engage in disruptive behaviors (Bailey, 2000). This was spoken of at length by teachers in describing the great lengths that they will go to in order to help manage the structure and schedule for students struggling with traumatic histories. Teachers were able to identify a number of strategies aimed at limiting triggering events even though there was no guarantee that any of these efforts were going to be successful. Teachers worked very hard to prep students for each day, often speaking with parents and guardians the night before each day; one teacher noted that she even became involved in almost nightly conflict resolution between one of her students and the student's grandmother, noting that if she did not, it was likely that the issue was going to disrupt the following day's activities. Teachers who know in advance of an absence due to training or medical appointment are very careful to remind the students of their intent to return and the timeline of their return. They spoke of the need to do what they could to avoid discussions related to video games or movies, noting that many of the children were

exposed to material inappropriate to their ages. Two of the teachers reported that they no longer do Father's Day activities, because of the ways that this triggered many of their students.

The respondents also went to great lengths in providing an environment that would "work" for the struggling students with whom they were working, often to the detriment of their relationships with other teachers, those who were less aware or willing to attempt a more trauma-informed environment. These feelings of isolation are very similar to those most often communicated by special education teachers who are apt to report that their sometimes untraditional methods can leave them feeling disconnected from other professionals in the field (Hunt, Powell, Little, & Mike, 2013). They attempted a great variety of nontraditional classroom management strategies and often employed techniques that might have difficulty measuring up to district polices related to physical contact between faculty and students or contact with families outside of the confines of the school day. However, in every circumstance, the effort was made because the teachers being interviewed spoke passionately about their desire to reach these students, and that it was worth the effort to do so, even if that effort left them feeling ostracized from their peers.

Although universally reporting a lack of any formal preparation in working with students who are struggling with the aftermath of trauma, the teachers had become aware of something critical within the research: there is a significant relationship between disruptive behaviors and student stress-management abilities (Esturgó-Deu & Sala-Roca, 2010). If students who are already struggling with trauma-related stressors confront new stressors in the learning environment, they can often experience what Allen (2001) referred to as a stress pileup. These stress pileups, if unresolved, will often be associated with behaviors that are certain to disrupt the learning environment: violence, aggression, withdrawal, impulsiveness, and rapid emotional

swings (Oehlberg, 2006; Wolpow et al., 2009). They identified the often Herculean effort to support these students as necessary if they were to gain just enough control over the situation so that they might teach the next day.

Teacher responses regarding the nature of trauma were certainly in keeping with the literature; most were willing to accept a broad definition of trauma provided by Sugar and Ford (2012), including issues related to neglect, family violence, and sexual victimization as well as witnessing violent or otherwise horrifying images on television and during the playing of some video games. They also seem to understand the role of individual characteristics as discussed by Agaibi and Wilson (2005) who, in noting that stress must be understood in relation to available coping mechanisms, acknowledged that resilience plays a significant role in how people respond to traumatic experiences. With the exception of discussion related to sexual victimization, all of the respondents noted that some students appeared to handle distress better than others. This spoke not only to their life experiences, but their classroom experiences as well.

Duplechain, Reigner, and Packard (2008) have written extensively about the role of poverty and ethnicity with regard to the experience of trauma during childhood and their conclusions were strongly supported within this study. While the research was conducted within one school district where all of the elementary schools are serviced by Title I standards, there are glaring differences in the populations serviced by each, with two of the schools clearly serving students from much more disadvantaged backgrounds. Unsurprisingly, teachers at these two schools identified trauma much differently than their colleagues teaching at the other institutions, focusing much more on family violence and parental incarceration than their cross-district peers. Teachers working at the remaining schools were more likely to speak about the influence of divorce and parental neglect. They also reported fewer experiences with children that they

would identify engaged in disruptive classroom behaviors in response to traumatic backgrounds/experiences.

Unfortunately, the experience of trauma during childhood is almost so common as to be considered normative within contemporary American society (Green & Smyth, 2012). The idea that the experience of trauma is a worsening condition within modern society, with predictable increases in trauma-responsive disruptive behaviors is supported by the results of this study. Teachers universally noted a worsening of trauma-related disruptions within the classroom, with one of the more experienced teachers noting that what might have been an isolated nightmare scenario when she first began teaching was now common in today's classroom; now there might be "five or six in every classroom." The resulting behavior is worse as well, with teachers experienced enough to recall noting that the behaviors have escalated significantly: they are categorized as "much more violent" and "a lot more disruptive." With the experience of trauma being clearly associated with a variety of school-interfering behaviors (e.g., Bucker et al., 2012; Greenwald, 2005), the connection between an increasingly traumatized culture and escalating classroom disruption would appear to be clearly established in the lived experiences of teachers who participated in this study.

Childhood experiences with trauma impact the way that children see their world, specifically, their value in the world in which they live. Instead of feeling valued, children struggling with the aftermath of trauma often identify as defective or feel that they do not matter to anyone (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Within the present study, teachers spoke about the ways that children will seek to limit efforts toward building relationships. One teacher in particular explained that these students often seek adversarial relationships with teachers under the seeming presupposition that if the teacher does not like them then there will be no loss of relationship if

disappointment with their behavior occurs. This connects as well with thoughts related to learned helplessness. Children feel as if they cannot prevent bad things from happening, but they might be able to limit the aftermath of impact upon relationships.

Bloom (1995) noted that in spite of their struggles, students that are struggling with the processing of their trauma and related stress do have the ability to build supportive relationships with adults in the classroom environment, especially when there is a purposeful effort on the part of the adults. This was an obvious focus among the teachers participating in this research. They often reported that much of the effort to manage trauma and its impact upon instructional efforts was found in the time required to build strong relationships with these struggling students; it was primary to the establishment of safety for these and all students, so that learning could occur. Participants reported significant time being spent building these relationships, especially after the end of the school day, including leading extracurricular activities like clubs and intermural programs. One teacher in particular noted that while they do not truly have time for these activities, they do not have time not to be involved either because of the way that this involvement can help support instruction through the development of stronger relationships. It was called a "matter of survival." The time and effort that go into the development of strong student-teacher relationships also allows for teachers to identify when there are changes in the demeanor of a particular student. Astute teachers who know their students seem able to recognize intangible changes; they know when something has occurred at home the night before or when something during the day has triggered a student. Finally, these relationships allow the teacher an ability to look past the behaviors and avoid negative labeling that often comes to identify these "disruptive" and "disconnected" students (Benard, 2004). Several of the teachers interviewed in the course of this study reported that stronger relationships not only supported the

student, they allowed teachers to more clearly see existing academic abilities within these students.

Teachers also reported a direct connection between these relationship-building efforts and structure of their classroom environment. They recognized the importance of a clear schedule so that there was predictability within the classroom environment, and included high expectations within this structure. They were nearly universal in noting that, although struggling, students dealing with the aftermath of trauma had an ability for competency that was distinctively different from students with severe learning disabilities. Kinniburgh and Blausstein (2005) noted that a framework of high expectations for students struggling with trauma can have a significant impact upon their achievement. Teachers working with traumatized children do well in recognizing the need for heightened expectations for these students. This is not to say that teachers should rely on punishment in support of high expectations. Ford, Fraleigh and Connor (2010) recognized that traumatized students are not often responsive to traditional classroom management techniques that rely on punishment. Teachers within the present study seemed to recognize this and instead spoke about working with students so that they might recognize their behaviors and act proactively to avoid disruptions. This involved the use of safe spaces within the classroom, using passes to provide temporary absences from the classroom, and the use of untraditional tools within the classroom environment (e.g., yoga balls, gum chewing, etc.). In those circumstances when students displayed minor aggressions (e.g., hiding under their desks, refusing to participate in activities), teachers allowed them to rejoin the class when they were able without reprisal. In this sense, the high expectations involved a focus on achievement within a structured environment, not necessarily pure submission to the environment. Of course, this was not without additional stress upon the teacher in their efforts to deliver instruction.

Theoretical Implications

The issue of perceived control on the part of teachers to come alongside struggling students marks Ajzen's (2002) contribution to this study, within the context of his Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Through the lens provided by the TPB, an effort is made to understand how teachers continue to summon remarkable resolve in seeking to support students struggling with the aftermath of trauma, and often numerous traumatic experiences. Ajzen might suggest that their motivation to do so is, at least in part, due to their perception that these children can learn in spite of their past experiences and their present behaviors, even though it calls for an increased effort on the part of these teachers. This willingness is clearly communicated within their interview transcripts.

The effort to understand potential links between belief and behavior as suggested by Ajzen (2002) provided clear direction in the development of the research questions addressed by this study. Exploring teacher experiences, which is the primary focus of this phenomenological effort as seen within the first research question (RQ1), allows for the understanding of normative beliefs within their environment, in keeping with TPB. How do teachers identify behaviors among students that deviate from "normal" interruptions when there is a likelihood that these interfering behaviors are in response to trauma? Understanding how they quantify these experiences as "trauma responses" (or not) is critical to incorporating Azjen's theoretical lens. That teachers' identification of what did or did not present as trauma within their classrooms was different from interview to interview speaks to the importance of this being a "subjective norm".

Exploring the ways in which teachers described their preparedness to teach students struggling in the aftermath of trauma (RQ2) was an effort to identify what Azjen's theory describes as "perceived behavior control," and that direction tied to intention. An effort to

support teachers and students must begin with an answer to the question, "Do teachers feel capable?" If they do not feel capable, it would seem unlikely that they would be able to garner the herculean effort that it can take to manage students struggling with post-traumatic stress; the connection between perceived behavioral control and intention having been clearly established by Azjen's contribution to this study. In the telling of their stories, the way that teachers characterize their responses to trauma within the classroom setting (RQ3) similarly speaks to the issue of behavioral intent described within TPB: teacher attitudes about teaching, their appraisal of normal classroom environments, and their attitudes with regard to their own abilities to respond when interference occurs will most certainly inform their approach.

Finally, teachers sharing their reflections on how the management of trauma-related behaviors influences their teaching efforts (RQ4) speaks to the overall nature of Ajzen's analysis concerning behavior as expressed through his theory: it is the intent in action, so-to-speak. Their "intention" when teaching such a student or group of students is brought together by their attitudes about working with traumatized students, their subjective understanding of normal childhood experiences and behaviors within the classroom, and their ability to navigate interference toward the achievement of curriculum goals.

Implications for Practice

The participants in this study were concordant in recognizing the stress that working with traumatized students placed upon their ability to deliver instruction. The growing number of students who are identified as having experienced at least one significant traumatic experience before the end of their elementary school experience coupled with the growing dysfunction within many American family units speaks to the need for addressing teacher needs, specifically connected with achieving curricular goals. While much research has focused on the

development of a trauma-informed environment within schools and upon the impact of vicarious traumatization for teachers (both certainly warranted) very little attention is being paid to the way that trauma-responsive behaviors, and teacher efforts to address and manage them, impact instruction. Teachers recognized this in their lack of preparedness to deal with the needs of traumatized students and displayed this lack of preparedness in the "trial and error" nature of their efforts to respond. There must be an increased effort on the part of school administrators and researchers to work collaboratively in order to come alongside the efforts of teachers throughout the U.S., especially in an age of increased reliance upon high-stakes testing in the evaluation of teacher performance. Failing to do so would likely have a detrimental effect on teacher recruitment and retention as well as widening the gap between performing and underperforming schools.

Teacher Preparation Programs

The teachers who shared their stories herein noted that those aspiring to be a teacher need to be better informed of the impact that trauma will likely have upon their careers and the classrooms in which they teach, since not informing them leaves newly graduated and certified teachers ill-prepared to enter those classrooms. They need greater exposure to students who are struggling with trauma while engaged in student-teacher assignments, even though it is recognized that the most toxic classroom environments are often the most difficult to gain access into since the regular teachers within such a classroom may be the least likely to have the additional time and energy needed to provide mentorship. The words of one participant are worth restating here:

> You can teach them as much as you want, but until they experience it—and I don't know how until you get them into the field a bit more. They have to see teachers work with

these students. They come into my classroom and I share with them what's going on—I give them my statistics. I give them all of this and they come back into the classroom. Educators don't have the time, but I have the time to sit with them because it's important to me.

The level of dedication communicated above speaks to the influence of Ajzen's (2002) Theory of Planned Behavior upon this study: teachers rightly believe that they can make an impact upon students struggling in the aftermath of trauma in collaboration with those they are or will be working with—in spite of very little evidence that they have been prepared to do so or even know where to begin. It speaks to an element of hope; hope that inspires teachers toward the herculean effort necessary to reenter the classroom environment each and every day. Ajzen's observation that (a) attitude toward the task and (b) perceived ability to affect change in the environment are each critically responsible for determining intention (and ultimately behavior), is perhaps no more clearly supported than when looking at teachers working in the American classroom.

It was generally recognized by participants that the education offered to aspiring students in the area of classroom management and behavioral support has changed little over the past 20 years (with exceptions related to the inclusion of special needs students within the general education setting); however, the students have changed quite a bit because of an increased prevalence of trauma in their lives. The preparation of teachers needs to be much more responsive to the significant changes evidenced in American culture related to the aftermath of trauma within the learning environment. This should be reflected in coursework that specifically speaks to the issue of trauma, training in classroom management strategies that are informed by the specific issues presented by trauma responding behaviors, and exposure to classrooms that

might be identified as toxic learning environments due to the number of students dealing with the aftermath of trauma.

Support for Students

There is significant need for increased funding to support traumatized students within the learning environment. Teachers within this study identified significant difficulties in helping their students gain access to programs due to the limited nature of the grants that often fund these programs, noting that it sometimes took months for the meeting with a counselor to occur. Existing mechanisms are simply overwhelmed and underfunded. Teachers also noted the additional responsibility placed upon them to explain the parameters of interventions and gain parental permissions for treatment. There appears obvious need for greater availability for mental health professionals to provide screening and opportunities for support in serving the needs of students and families so that teachers can return to a focus upon curricular instruction. There is an obvious cost associated with the provision of these services that will, unfortunately, need to be addressed by school boards likely struggling with existing budgetary limitations. Supporting students in this manner will call upon these school boards to engage the public as to the issue of trauma in the classroom. Researchers must also play a role in communicating the dire situation present in many of the nation's classrooms.

Professional Development for Teachers Already in the Classroom

As mentioned previously, the teachers within this study were unanimous in noting that they had not been provided (nor sought out) professional development opportunities supportive of working with students who have experienced trauma. It has also been noted that the traditional methods of classroom management employed by teachers in contemporary classrooms not only does not work to modify behavior that is responsive to trauma, it likely exacerbates the

interfering behaviors, leading to a furtherance of the interruption to learning. While I would call upon districts to undertake a more formal approach to addressing trauma in the classroom, teachers may have to take the initiative necessary to seek out this training on their own, particularly until an awareness of the role that trauma plays in teaching becomes a more widely held concern.

Those who provide these services to teachers must come to differentiate existing efforts that are currently singularly focused on the needs of the student struggling with trauma and provide an additional focus upon teaching to curricular goals. An effort must be made to explore ways that teachers can effectively work through interfering behaviors and towards curricular goals. There is need for an awareness of this issue to be "operationalized" toward the creation of best practices that minimize the impact of trauma in the classroom.

Many teachers spoke about the litany of ways in which their principals and other administrators were overwhelmed by efforts required to manage not only the needs of students struggling with trauma but countless other student needs as well. The typical classroom is beset by disruptions that are often overwhelming for even the most seasoned teachers; however, with building administrators often at maximum capacity, there may be little in the way of support. Teachers often find themselves and their classes confronting students acting dangerously and are left with little alternative but to evacuate the learning environment until an administrator can be located to intervene. Since teachers and related paraprofessionals are not prepared to manage increasingly aggressive students, many of whom are struggling with the aftermath of trauma, there is significant instructional time lost throughout each school year as they seek to find the support needed to re-establish basic safety for all students so that they can return to teaching. Teachers were quick to point out, universally, that this was not a condemnation of building

administrators, who they identify as completely overwhelmed themselves. There is need for district-level evaluation of how building administrators might be better supported so that they, in turn, can support teachers working with traumatized students so that these teachers might be able to recapture some of this lost instructional time.

Supportive Policy Development

The effort to strengthen teacher preparation programs while at the same time working toward greater support for students and teachers already in the classroom, requires informed and purposeful policy development at the school and district level. Based on the findings of this study, there should be, at minimum, two specific efforts be undertaken. First, districts should work to employ Foa, Johnson, Feeny and Treadwell's (2001) Child PTSD Symptom Scale (CPSS) as a universal screening for trauma among all students on a yearly or "as needed" basis (the instrument looks to assess the child's feelings over the past two weeks, which would allow for as needed use throughout the year). The CPSS is a brief, twenty-four question instrument that has been found reliable and valid with both children and adolescents. It can be administered to a group of 15-20 students in less than one hour, providing important insight into the experience of trauma within each classroom. The feedback provided by the analysis of the instrument will provide specific insight on the students within each classroom, while also screening children who have need for significant intervention. Those in the appropriate positions at the school and/or district level should be working with teachers to develop detailed plans for how they might respond in support of students who have known trauma histories as well as provide opportunities for professional development that work to inform teachers on best practices in the implementation of these plans.

Second, I would advocate the development and use of “safety plans” for all members of each school community, students, and staff. Bloom’s (2010) “safety plan” concept is simple: supporting each individual in the creation of a list of activities that they can choose from when feeling overwhelmed as an alternative to unsafe or otherwise toxic behaviors that they might typically employ when stressed. The safety plan provides an opportunity for the grounding and self-soothing necessary to regulate one’s own emotional state. They have been found quite effective in a variety of settings, including the classroom, and are supportive of building a larger “trauma informed” community (Bloom, 2005). Working with students on the development of a plan for when they become emotionally dysregulated will not only help curtail interruptions within the classroom setting, but also support the development of important life skills needed beyond the classroom.

I would also call upon state education leaders to acknowledge the need for formalized efforts to address the impact that student trauma has upon the ability of teachers to reach curricular goals. This understanding must be reflected in state-wide efforts aimed at teacher assessment, particularly those associated with the "Race to the Top" initiative funded by the US Department of Education. The desire for considerable grant monies and the resulting efforts to develop quantitative teacher assessments have failed to realize the impact of traumatization within the classroom. The need to adjust for trauma in the classroom should bring about the same pause that seeking to acknowledge the impact of non-native English speaking learners does, if not more. An approach informed by this research would advocate a “value-added” measure to any quantitative assessment that recognizes the outcome of screenings discussed above in an effort to compensate for the known learning interference that occurs within the contemporary classroom environment. Unfortunately, the value of this compensation must be

prescriptive to each individual teacher assessment instrument, meaning that an implicit direction cannot be provided herein.

Limitations

There are several important limitations existing within this study. While a significant effort was made to provide a rich narrative detailing teacher experiences in working with students that they identify as struggling with the aftermath of trauma, it was somewhat limited in scope. Specifically, it was only possible for research to be conducted within one school district and a very limited sample of teachers within that district. Although solicitations were sent to the over 150 teachers within the district, ultimately only six were willing and able to participate. It is possible that these teachers were most willing to participate because they were most aware of trauma in their classrooms or because they have had an abnormally high number of students who had experienced some measure of trauma before or during their time with these teachers. There is also a possibility of the respondents seeing trauma where it is not, perhaps because of an experience of trauma in their own lives. Ultimately, there can be no conclusion that the experiences of these teachers are representative of all teachers within the district or that the experiences of teachers within this district (even if representative) would correlate to those who teach in other districts.

The lack of clear definition for what is or is not considered to be an experience of "trauma" within the literature is another clear limitation of this study. In response to the lack of clarity in the field, teachers were left to define trauma in any number of ways, and variety of focus led to variety in the nature of their responses, with some respondents focused on issues related to divorce, others to neglect, and still others to the aftermath of physical violence and sexual abuse. It is difficult, if not impossible, to consider the numerous differences in the way

trauma might manifest itself in the classroom considering such variety of experiences and definitions, even if the field of trauma research works hard to prevent much in the way of restrictions in the way trauma is defined. It is also possible that, given the potential of co-occuring disorders among students struggling with trauma, it may be difficult to ascertain which interfering behaviors are due to childhood trauma and which are symptomatic of an alternate disorder/diagnosis.

While not having had the first-hand experience of working within an elementary school setting, I have extensive experience working with adolescents struggling with the aftermath of trauma in residential school programs. A purposeful effort to triangulate data, through the process of interviewing, memoing/journaling, and member checking was engaged, in an effort to eliminate bias; however, there remains a potential for its continuance.

Recommendations for Future Research

Foremost, I hope that future research would begin by engaging a larger sample of teachers so that additional themes might be generated in seeking to understand their lived experiences in working with students who are struggling with trauma. It would be beneficial to explore the experiences of teachers working in more affluent districts, since all of the schools within the district studied are identified as Title I schools in accordance with federal standards. Additional qualitative efforts have the potential for providing greater breadth in seeking to understand the impact of trauma upon the classroom setting, specifically with regard to the delivery of instruction. In addition, quantitative research that seeks to evaluate some means of how individual teachers, schools, and even districts seek to respond in the management of these disruptions could help to provide some standardization for both teacher education programs and districts to employ in helping to support both teachers and students. For example, the many

"trial and error" methods employed by the teachers within this study would provide quite a few opportunities for research that might be conducted into the effectiveness of these measures. I would also propose measuring the impact of increased trauma-responsive preparation for aspiring teachers, including the purposeful matching of teachers within environments known to include students (and teachers) struggling to manage the aftermath of trauma and its manifestation within the classroom. Finally, there is considerable need for the development of plans to support students who are struggling with trauma, similar to the intervention plans provided for students serviced by an IEP. This need may be met by the incorporation of the "safety plans" described above, but there is likely need for a more individualized approach, particularly with students having significant struggles in the aftermath of trauma. The development and support of this planning would need to be preceded by additional research.

Summary

The teachers within this study were steadfast in their efforts to realize the impact of trauma in the lives of their students while seeking to incorporate managing its effects so that they could get to instruction. The mantra of one teacher in particular in noting that "Nothing is going to stop me from teaching" seemed to characterize all of their efforts. Yet what they face is daunting.

Those seeking to teach within the contemporary elementary school setting are working with an increasingly traumatized student population that appears to be getting more aggressive in response to their troublesome life experiences. They are often disruptive and difficult to manage. Teachers are forced to spend considerable energy attempting to provide some semblance of safety for all of their students, especially during times when the aftermath of trauma leads to explosive behavior in the students struggling to manage it. There is very little formal support to

be found within already overwhelmed administrators and little for them to call upon from any formal education or professional development. They are left with a never-ending process of trial-and-error that sometimes ostracizes them from their peers and almost always calls for them to deviate from time for instruction that is desperately needed in today's climate of reliance upon high-stakes testing for their evaluation.

The findings of this research clearly point to the loss of instructional time for teachers working with traumatized populations, which means that all students experience a loss of opportunity to learn. This is troublesome for both teachers and students – and should be the cause for concern among parents, who generally have no idea of the learning environment that their children find themselves within. The purpose of this study was to highlight the needs to provide increased support for teachers and students, which in turn would lead to increased opportunity for instruction and greater opportunity for learning among all students.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

Teaching Students Struggling with Trauma
Michael A. Emmart, Principal Investigator
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be part of a research study of the impact that students struggling with trauma have upon the achievement of curricular goals. I am seeking to solicit the experiences of teachers who have worked at least five years within your school district and are able to indicate at least one experience of working with a student who has experienced trauma. Upon communicating informed consent through a review and acknowledgement of the items below, you will be asked to proceed to a brief demographic survey. This "next step" will ask you about your background, education, and experience teaching traumatized students. Should you indicate such experience, I may ask for the chance to interview you and include your input within the study. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. A "hard copy" of this document will be provided to all participants who enter the interview stage (described below) as their signature will be needed in order to proceed. Those who choose not to participate or are not chosen for the study will be provided a copy of this information via email attachment.

This study is being conducted by Michael A. Emmart, candidate for the Doctor of Education degree at Liberty University's School of Education. Your participation in this study has been approved by District Superintendent, Constance Evelyn, with this approval having been communicated by her office to each of the district's elementary principles. (I would be happy to share evidence of this approval with you, if desired.)

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to understand the impact of childhood trauma upon curricular goals for elementary schools in your district. For the sake of participation, impact upon curricular goals will be generally defined as responses to behavior that causes teachers to deviate from their curriculum in such a way that it is disruptive to the achieving of established lesson plans. Childhood trauma can be difficult to define, and may include experiences of abuse, neglect, witnessing violence, and other loss (including the death of a loved one). For the sake of this research, participants are not limited to any particular definition of trauma.

Procedures:
Those interested in participating in the research would proceed to the demographic survey (see link within the body of email) in order to provide background and contact information as well as experience with students struggling with trauma. This should take you approximately 3-5 minutes. If you meet participant requirements and agree to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: (1) meet with me at a quite location of your choosing for one recorded (audio only) interview that seeks to glean from your experience working with children who have struggled with trauma and (2) review the transcript of our discussion, when it is prepared, in order to make sure it reflects what you wish to have communicated during our

interview. I anticipate that the interview will take approximately one hour and the review of the transcript 20-25 minutes.

(Please note that I will send the transcript of our interview to you as an email attachment within one week of our meeting. It is my hope that you would have the chance to review its content and communicate any changes you would like to see within one week of receipt. If I have not heard from you after two weeks of having sent out the transcript, I will assume your approval of its content.)

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:
The study is not without risk; however, the risks are no more than you might encounter in everyday life. There is a slight chance that the recollection called for during the interview process may contribute to the experience of secondary emotional distress. In the event this does occur, you are encouraged to contact counseling available to them through the districts free Employee Assistance Plan (EAP).

The benefits to participation are indirect, since participants are not compensated for their involvement. However, there may be a benefit to society derived from their participation. The experience of trauma among school-aged children presents a number of issues within the classroom environment, including potentially disruptive behaviors and cognitive impairment. This project contributes to the knowledge base by beginning a long needed discussion concerning the impact of these traumatic experiences within the classroom environment from the perspective of teacher curricular goals.

Compensation:
You will not receive any type of compensation for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Privacy of participants will remain primary throughout this process. All electronic information will be password-protected on my personal laptop and all hard-copy information will be maintained in a locked filing cabinet at my home. In the course of recording interviews, names will not be used. Instead, recordings will be identified by a number associated with the interviewee with these associations maintained within the aforementioned password protected file. All recordings will be made using a digital recorder, with the electronic files similarly maintained within a password protected file. My narrative will not include the names of any teachers, nor will it speak of the district or individual schools within the district. The district itself will be identified only as a school in the northeastern United States. There will be no identifiable descriptors of the area in which the district is located. Access to all participant information will be limited solely to the researcher. All electronic data will be deleted and all hard copies destroyed three years after the conclusion of this research.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or the Auburn City School District. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to withdraw from the study:
You may withdraw from this research effort at any time by simply informing me of your desire to do so. Withdrawal will lead to the destruction of all electronic and hard-copy data related to your participation up to the date of your withdrawal.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher conducting this study is Michael A. Emmart. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him via email at (omitted) or by phone/text at (omitted). You are also welcome to contact his chair, Dr. Michelle Goodwin at (omitted) or (omitted).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ Please initial this within this box if you will permit the use of an audio recorder during our interview.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

IRB Code Numbers: 1728.040114
IRB Expiration Date: April 1, 2015

Appendix B: Participant Solicitation – Email Invitation

Dear (District Name Withheld) Teachers,

As an educator interested in the impact of trauma upon child development, I'm currently conducting research on teaching children who are struggling with trauma. My effort is focused on the way in which trauma impacts upon youth in the classroom - specifically the ways in which it interrupts teacher ability to reach curricular goals. As I'm sure you are aware, trauma often manifests itself in ways that are very disruptive to learning processes; however, teachers often receive limited support when working with traumatized students. I am hopeful that by allowing teachers to communicate their experiences we can develop a greater understanding of their needs when working with emotionally troubled students. This is a "phenomenological, qualitative study", which means that there are no surveys and no statistics – just the communication of participant experiences. You're receiving this message in the hope you might participate.

If interested, you'll be asked to schedule a personal interview that should last approximately one hour at a location of your choosing. Although recorded and transcribed, your participation will be completely anonymous within the research narrative: no identifying information related to teacher, school or district will be provided. I should also note that I'm not interested in any student data: I am seeking to understand and report solely on teacher experiences. In an effort to assuage any concerns about participating, I've attached a letter from Superintendent (Name Withheld) that provides permission for my work with district employees.

To participate, please take the time to review the informed consent information (also attached to this message - my apologies in advance for the length of this document). Then click on the link provided below; this will take you to a survey site, where you'll be asked to enter some basic demographic and contact information (less than 2 minutes to complete). I will then contact you to schedule an interview at a location of your choosing.

Thank you very much for taking the time to consider participating in this important research. If you'd like to know a bit more about my education or experience, feel free to visit my "about.me" profile (HERE).

Click HERE to participate.

Respectfully,

Michael A. Emmart
Ed.D. Candidate, Liberty University

Appendix C: Liberty University IRB – Notice of Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 1, 2014

Michael A. Emmart
IRB Approval 1728.040114: Teaching Students Struggling with Trauma: A Transcendental Qualitative Investigation of Impact upon Curricular Goals

Dear Michael,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

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Appendix D: IRB Approved Interview Protocol

Initial participant teacher interviews will follow the completion of online surveys used to gather contact information. Each willing teacher will be scheduled for one interview, with the door left open for follow-up as needed. I with then employ an unstructured, open-ended format in adherence to the procedure outlined in Moustakas (1994) with participants asked two broad, general questions:

3. What has been your experience in regard to teaching students struggling with trauma?
4. How does the experience of teaching traumatized students impact upon your reaching the curricular goals you set for your classroom?

These two questions will provide the focus for gathering data to be coded. As mentioned, they are intentionally vague in accordance with Moustakas' direction for the researcher to take measure of (a) the co-researcher's experience with the phenomenon being studied and then (b) the context and situations that have influenced the impact of said phenomenon. To that end, the present research seeks to understand teacher experiences with trauma through the lens of its impact upon the effort of teaching. In its purest form, a phenomenological effort seeks to answer only these two questions. However, these will be accompanied by additional questions posed for clarification and exploration in the individual interview portion of data collection:

8. What types of trauma do your students confront in their lives?
9. How do you see trauma manifested in your classroom?
10. How do you differentiate between trauma-influenced behavior and behavior that may be more willful (discipline related; "behavioral")?
11. What types of student trauma become most persistent in disrupting your classroom setting?

12. What type of classroom management strategies do you employ in seeking to support students struggling with management of traumatic experiences?
13. Which types of interventions are successful in working with traumatized students? unsuccessful?
14. What support/training are you able to call upon in managing and/or supporting students struggling with trauma?

The purpose of questions related to presence of trauma within the classroom and the manner in which it is manifest is intended to gather information concerning co-researcher experiences with trauma. While an ability to identify students who have experienced trauma remains a delimiter throughout this study, these questions seek to provide a measure of support for the affirmative response indicated in the initial survey. This information may also provide relevant comparative data for Chapter 5 (discussion) within this effort, should it become evident that there are observable differences in the ways that varying types of student trauma impact upon curricular goals. There is also need to account for the difficulty in isolating trauma response among students and differentiating it from co-occurring disorders and discipline related deficiencies: struggles related to trauma (including PTSD diagnosis) in children often coexist with other issues, including attention and conduct related disorders (Brunsvold & Oepen, 2008; Sutherland, Lewis-Palmer, Stichter, & Morgan, 2008). This data can often become further muddled when considering that many children struggling with the aftereffects of trauma fail to meet the criteria for PTSD diagnosis (Buckner et al, 2012; Burgic-Radmanovic & Burgic, 2010). Question 3 seeks to gather data on this difficulty from among co-researchers. Question 4 supports the effort of isolating trauma-specific responses among students while also allowing for

a connection to be made between generic trauma-response behaviors and those which become disruptive to the achievement of curricular goals (Buckner et al, 2012).

Alisic (2012) noted that elementary school teachers are often uncertain about what to do in support of students who have experienced trauma; similar research indicates a lack of guidance with regard to how teachers might balance the needs of one particular student (or group of traumatized students) with those of the remaining children within the classroom (Alisic et al, 2012, Ko et al, 2008). This lack of preparedness and uncertainly about their role informs the final three questions. In most cases, students disruptions result merely from impulsiveness and inability among students to control themselves; however, children struggling with the aftereffects of trauma do tend to exhibit more disruptive behaviors than their peers – including higher rates of aggression an disrespect to authority figures (Anthonysamy & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007; Esturgo-Deu & Sala-Roca, 2010; Martin, Cromer & Freyd, 2010). While the majority of elementary school teachers will receive some amount of training regarding classroom management strategies, the issues contributing to trauma-responsive disruptions may mean students don't respond to these traditional strategies: "…most teachers, K-college, know little about how to manage the classroom effects of trauma" (Sitler, 2008, p. 119). To this end Questions 5 and 6 seek to better understand the teacher experiences in making an effort to manage trauma-responsive behaviors. Finally, Question 7 was developed in an effort to understand what training, if any, co-researchers call upon in working with students struggling with trauma. Alisic et al (2012) reported that less than 10% of elementary school teachers identified having participated in training that they noted as relevant to supporting children after trauma.

Appendix E: Significant Statements, Formulated Meanings & Themes

	Significant Statement	Formulated Meaning	Theme
1	You either have to say that I can do the best I can with them right now or I have to quite; I have to give up. I know a teacher who did that - she said, "I can't do it anymore, I'm giving up." Well, are you doing any more good in giving up and just walking away from it then what you would be in saying, "I'll do the best that I can with it?"	Part of effectively teaching students struggling with trauma is found in the realization of limits: there is only so much I can do for these children. It is an important coping mechanism.	The struggle to manage stress
2	I have to sit back and keep reminding myself that the next day is a new day and that these kids will get over it faster than you're going to get over it.	Awareness of student resiliency is an important coping mechanism.	The struggle to manage stress
3	First of all, someone has to go into teaching because they want to teach. How is that horrible, terrible student who is making my day so miserable that I want to go into the corner and cry right now - how is that student going to make me a better teacher? It comes down to: because your job is to teach that child.	Teaching traumatized children pushes good teachers to become better teachers.	The struggle to manage stress
4	When I speak to (education majors at her alma matre) I say, "Don't come and pity my kids. They don't need you to feel sorry for them; they need you to teach them." If you can't sit next to that kid with chronic head lice or because he smells - if you're afraid to touch that child - you're in the wrong place, so get out. Admit it to yourself.	Radical acceptance - for the children and of their situations - is an important coping mechanism of working with traumatized children.	The struggle to manage stress
5	The one thing I want to say is that all these students that I've worked with have made me a better teacher. I come into the classroom with a plan because I don't know what to expect and now I'm met with this challenge and although I'm tired of the challenge, I enjoy the challenge because it makes me a better person.	Teaching traumatized children pushes good teachers to become better teachers.	The struggle to manage stress

6	Fortunately, my children are grown. I have the time to devote to this; I don't see how somebody who's a new teacher, with a new baby or young children at home can do this and be…I've had a lot of friends who've left this school just for that, because it's wearing. It's wearing every day to go home with that. Do I think a teacher should have to do that? No, I don't. But I have to do what I have to do so that I can come in the next day and be successful.	The time requirements of working with a highly traumatized population are taxing - perhaps too taxing for younger teachers.	The struggle to manage stress
7	I got a very different perspective on students this year…teaching students with disabilities and a lot of the time those students come from traumatized backgrounds of some sort of they have some kind of past that has effected them in some way. It really changed my perspective on what I was doing and I would say that this year was the most eye opening for me in dealing with traumatized students in general.	New teachers are challenged to realize the extent to which trauma disrupts their classroom.	The struggle to manage stress
8	She came to me one day and just started crying out of nowhere in the middle of the ELA lesson. I took her into the hallway…for a half hour she completely spewed out all of this information that her sister was sexually abusing her. It had been going on all year and I would have never known. When they come into the school and you try to teach them curriculum - what was going on in her mind, you know? You just don't know what these kids have went through.	Teaching traumatized children calls for the realization that it may present at any moment and without apparent cause.	The struggle to manage stress
9	It was really hard for the next day to see her because she came up to me and gave me this huge hug. I cried. I tried to walk out of my room - my heart broke for her.	There is an obvious lingering emotional toll upon teachers working with traumatized children.	The struggle to manage stress

10	I can remember standing in class and teaching through days of having a desk hit me in the back of the legs and just continuing on with the lesson like it never really happened; or a book thrown. I had a young man who would throw things right and left and I'm sitting there thinking, "Is this really happening?" It's so surreal; you're trying not to react.	Sometimes teachers feel completely unequipped in dealing with student disruptions.	Teaching through disruption
11	I have had situations where the kid is sitting under the desk but poking everybody. I told the students to just move to the bean shaped table - to get out of the way. If the other students aren't sitting there - it's fine he can sit under the desk. When you're ready to join us you can come back and join us.	Teaching often continues through the restructuring of the learning environment.	Teaching through disruption
12	Many times when it comes to a major disruption of the class, I'll do what I can to get the other kids into something else. I'll ignore the other student for a bit and tell the class that they need a time out or a break - so that I can get the other students started on something and then go back to the other student who needed the break.	Teachers will often move on with the lesson and then, during more independent work, try to bring the struggling student back into the fold.	Teaching through disruption
13	The behavioral stuff was fist fighting - I had physical fighting in my classroom every day, to the point that the principal said, "You can't keep sending them to the office because there's nothing I can do about it, so you'll have to figure it out."	There are times when teachers feel entirely unsupported by administration - and yet have to find ways that instruction can continue.	Teaching through disruption
14	I have had to drag students out from under a desk while I'm teaching. I'll continue to talk to the students or I'll say, "Do a turn and talk" and I'll come get the child. Other times, I've had to teach with students sitting on my lap so that I can continue.	Teachers often employ a heroic drive to continue teaching in spite of disruptions.	Teaching through disruption

15	The one student that I had so many problems with last year would get so mad that he would hold on to the back of a chair like he was getting ready to throw it and then he would quietly put it down - like he knew he couldn't throw the hair but wanted to show me he was angry. He'd push it to the ground to show me he was angry.	Intimidation is another important disruption to the delivery of instruction.	Teaching through disruption
16	I think sometimes it's easier to look at a kid and think, "They're sleeping in class" or "They're being a pain or defiant" - get up, get up! You're initial reaction is PAY ATTENTION! But then there's other times when you kind of observe this over the course of the day or week or something...you wonder. Is that b/c of his traumatic background or is he just up late playing video games. It's such a fine line of figuring it out.	Awareness of trauma may lead to second guessing of the ways disruptions are handled by teachers attempting to deliver curriculum.	Teaching through disruption
17	There is so much background that they have that they just - they're not ready to come in and learn. They're coming from such disheveled home lives; they don't have their basic needs met. And it wasn't one or two of them - for me it was really taking a step back and figuring out how I'm going to deliver instruction to these kids because they're not getting it.	Teachers realize a hierarchy of needs in the lives of their students but are limited in their ability to meet these needs.	Teaching through disruption
18	The behaviors I've seen are shocking to me - between open masturbation or the self-inflicting of pain. I had a child who would purposefully self inflict pain because he was so angry. He would say what had happened in the past - just yelling stuff out. I would sit there - I was shell-shocked and didn't know what to do.	The role of vicarious trauma is important to evaluate when seeking to understand the delivery of curriculum in toxic environments.	Teaching through disruption

19	A lot of times I think they might have come in traumatized but we're not really aware of it. If it's an academic issue, they have an IEP and we can read all about this child - about how they are socially, emotionally, developmentally. But these students come in with all of these different backgrounds and they might even be on medication to counteract some sort of trauma in their lives - and I don't know anything about it.	There is a known lack of support structure for students struggling with trauma when compared with the support structure available for students who are, for example, struggling with developmental delays.	Teaching through disruption
20	She was always on edge. She was that child who could be writing something down, and hearing the conversation in the hallway, and knows that my cell phone was buzzing on my desk. She was so aware and in tune of her surroundings that it was actually unbelievable to see her and know all of those things were happening. I just kept thinking from her past that it has to have some kind of effect on her.	Teachers are also aware of students struggling with hypervigilance.	Teaching through disruption
21	What I do is, I tell my kids to go do something else. There's been times also when I said, "Okay, you've won an audience, but you're not going to have an audience. Boys and girls stand up and go out in the hall, get a book and go out into the hall". And all the kids go out into the hall and one child is left in there and they really just, they kinda stop or start really crying.	Sometimes disruption is dealt with by the removal of all stimuli from the child who is acting out.	Teaching through disruption
22	All day long I'm like playing table tennis - you know, hitting something back, hitting something back, so you know, it can be very time consuming.	Teachers have an awareness of the time required to manage children struggling with trauma.	Teaching through disruption

23	I had this girl and she's like…"I'm out of here." So she went toward the door, I closed the door and got in front of it, and I'm like, "You're not leaving this room". She was screaming, throwing herself on the ground. You know, just anything you can imagine, just like "I need to see her! You're a liar and I need to tell her what a liar you are!" So yeah, for ten minutes maybe fifteen minutes I had full blown crazy on my hands.	Some disruptions are likely to bring all instruction to a halt due to the nature and extent of their disruption to the learning environment.	Teaching through disruption
24	They have to deal with me. And for the first couple of weeks, I do have to stop my instruction because I have to get them on this page with me.	Many teachers note that the beginning of the year is less about instruction and more about setting of boundaries and expectations.	Teaching through disruption
25	These children, they stop instruction. They bring it to a standstill and I'm a follower of Rudolf Driekur's mistaken goal theory where if the child doesn't feel they belong they feel a need to just trash everything in their path. Power and control is a biggie for that...My challenge is to tell them that working with me you win; you don't lose.	Teaching children who are struggling with trauma is about getting them to work with you - if not, instruction is nearly impossible.	Teaching through disruption
26	They have this concern about not being liked; they want to make sure you don't like them. They get really aggressive toward you, because then there's no chance that if I like you on Monday I'm going to be disappointed with you on Wednesday and I'm not going to like you anymore - they can't handle that.	Some children come from environments that are so toxic that they will seemingly act in a manner that purposefully sabotages their relationship with teachers.	Teaching through disruption
27	So don't stop me from teaching; because nothing is going to stop me from teaching.	The effort to push through disruption is often clearly tied to a passion for teaching.	Teaching through disruption
28	I've moved my entire classroom to the hallway - he can scream all by himself if he wants to and I'll teach the class in the hallway or whatever we were doing.	Students are often moved out of the classroom in order to eliminate an audience.	Unsafe/unusable classroom environment

29	I've been in classrooms where kids have throwing books. The whole class had to be removed from the classroom because it wasn't a safe environment.	Students are sometimes removed from the classroom for their safety.	Unsafe/unusable classroom environment
30	Sometimes the response to it is that we just remove the kids for safety reasons from the classroom and tried to call for somebody to come up and help. What happens is finally when we get somebody who can physically restrain the student which is something that as a teacher we're not allowed to do.	Removal of the remainder of the class is necessary because teachers are not able to physically intervene to control a disruptive student.	Unsafe/unusable classroom environment
31	Again, all of these behaviors have escalated over the last half of my teaching experience…where it's gotten to the point of where kids are needing to be physically removed from the classroom or whole classes are removed for the safety of the kids.	The need to physically remove students from the classroom - which involves the removal of the other students as well - is an issue escalating in this setting.	Unsafe/unusable classroom environment
32	You just do the best you can with whatever it is you have (when having to leave your room). It's obviously not the quality of the lesson that it was going to be. You end up sitting there and reading a book to them. And in some cases the lesson is totally dropped - we're in crisis and we're going for a walk around the building four of five times until somebody comes and can remove the child who's having the problem.	Having to remove the class from the classroom has an obvious and predictable detrimental effect upon instruction.	Unsafe/unusable classroom environment
33	(On how long it can take) Oh, I'd say it's usually about half an hour - by the time you have the child in crisis and then get a hold of someone to come down and they actually come down there - you have 10 or 15 minutes right there. By the time the person who comes down can actually get the child out or get the child removed and you then notify the classroom teacher - it's a good half hour.	The process of returning the remainder of the students to the classroom after crisis is often time consuming as well.	Unsafe/unusable classroom environment

34	The trick is that you kind of learn the ins and outs of the individual student on what works with them. Do they need a soft approach or did they need more of an approach where you needed to be a bit more firm? It's kind of a touch and feel situation with every kid.	Teachers seek to find a delicate management balance for each student.	Management by trial and error
35	I think I tend to be a little more untraditional than some teachers, I don't know. One way or another - people have their own style, I just think that for whatever reason people tend to shy away. Why is that kid sitting on a yoga ball? How is that fair to the rest of the kids? I don't know if that's fair? Why are his shoes off? Is that kid chewing gum? It's trial and error, not training. It's just what works: If I can get you to listen and focus and attend.	The effort to manage student behaviors through prescriptive means is often critiqued by other teachers.	Management by trial and error
36	I had a safe place in my room sheltered off that was his - he would take a drink or walk down the hallway, but other teachers either wouldn't allow that or it was very difficult.	When students switch classes for a module the techniques being employed in their regular classroom aren't always continued.	Management by trial and error
37	It was a lot of trial and error to just get through the day to find out what each kid needed and then how to fit it all in to get any kind of academic anything accomplished. In the past years it was just one or two and you kind of go along and the day seems like you can much more accomplished.	The delivery of instruction often takes a back seat to figuring out how to manage the needs of traumatized students.	Management by trial and error
38	It took me I think 3/4 of the year to figure it out and I think that was my biggest gripe. If you don't almost fish for information on why is this kid that way or why does this happen - how do you know? They don't just come up and tell you. How do you know how to teach them?	The process of managing these students is not supported by any mechanism within the school.	Management by trial and error

39	She would constantly come over and if I pressed on her back it would calm her down. Those were sensory ideas I got from the occupational therapist that I had no idea of. It's so hard - it was more like trial and error.	Although against policy, touch control is a technique utilized by students.	Management by trial and error
40	There are many teachers who will say "never touch a student" but if a student needs to touch your leg while you're teaching then by all means they need to have their hand on your leg while you're teaching - especially the younger kids. When they're a kindergartner and they're still doing the tactile learning they still need the smoothness of the pants I'm wearing to calm themselves down. And my shoelaces; I constantly feel them petting my shoelaces.	Again, touch control becomes employed in this example as well.	Management by trial and error
41	I have so many kids that I think are like a puzzle. Once I knew the pieces and I knew what they needed in order to fit, then our day ran smoother. As long as there was someone in there who could meet those needs then our day cold run smoothly and academics could get accomplished, as much as possible. But without those specific things - my day was set off and anything academic almost couldn't take place.	The delivery of instruction often takes a back seat to figuring out how to manage the needs of traumatized students.	Management by trial and error
42	But she would go across the hallway for 45 minutes and there was no gum chewing or yoga balls in that room, so certain strategies that I had found to work, she didn't want in her classroom and I had to respect that. But they would come back to me and it would take me a good 20 minutes before I started math to sort of desensitize the kids to get them back to "you're alright".	When students switch classes for a module the techniques being employed in their regular classroom aren't always continued. Trying to get them back on track is a further disruption to teaching.	Management by trial and error
43	I have to think about everything I'm going to say to them, every action I'm going to make; every part of my day has to be planned for them.	Management of children struggling with trauma plays a role in the development of lesson plans.	Planning to avoid triggers

44	I'm one of those teachers that I work really hard if I'm going to be out; I make sure that my students - especially my students who I know are going to have a tough time with that - know why I'm out. I always tell them. It's gone to the point that I've gone to their house the night before or called their house to say, "Listen, I'm not going to be here. I call their parent to let them know because I want them to come in and know exactly what the day is going to be like.	Working with traumatized children has an impact upon sub planning as well - with many teachers going to extraordinary lengths to support their students if they're going to be out, even for part of the day.	Planning to avoid triggers
46	My husband says, "You've been teaching this many years, can't you reuse the lesson plans?" I say, "No, I can't - and I can't because my classroom isn't the same year to year." I have students who have different needs and it changes the whole way I'm going to teach for that day.	Management of children struggling with trauma plays a role in the development of lesson plans.	Planning to avoid triggers
47	How do I get through the desk throwing and all this? I think a lot of this is preplanning - how is this gonna set this kid off?	Teachers account for potential triggers in their lesson plans and seek to mitigate potential impact.	Planning to avoid triggers
48	Sometimes I have to say, "Everyone put your heads down", not because they're misbehaving but because I need time to stop and think of a strategy to use next. I need to figure out how I'm going to deal with this.	The moment-to-moment disruption to the delivery of curriculum is sometimes overwhelming.	Planning to avoid triggers
49	I'll say to that kid, "We have to stop this before you get that frustrated with me, because I still have to do what I'm doing.	Some teachers will employ a direct appeal approach with students.	Planning to avoid triggers
50	There really was no place for a lot of these students to go. When I talked to the principal or the social worker at that point - everyone's hands are tied, no one knows what to tell you to do. I mean, there's really no clear answer at this point or that we're using as a district.	Teachers identify very little in the way of tools when seeking to find support for students struggling with trauma.	Struggling to access interventions

51	This one student I had in fourth grade - the same thing: throwing things and tossing things and screaming obscenities in the classroom. Again, none of these students I've talked about so far are labeled or receiving special ed or aid. When I go down to the office to express my concerns to the principal, there's ten or fifteen other kids that are in there or there's five other teachers waiting to see him with the same thing. It's just sometimes I feel like I watch the principal come in here and they have brown hair the year they start and by June, they're all grey.	Administrators are able to provide little in the way of support for teachers because they too are overwhelmed and ill equipped.	Struggling to access interventions
52	It was frustrating because I'm filling out the discipline forms and this child isn't yet receiving the counseling that he needs.	Existing mechanisms - counseling programs that are supposed to be triggered - are overwhelmed and underfunded.	Struggling to access interventions
53	I want the best expectations for that student. I'm not going to let this student say, "I had a bad night." I know you did but what are you going to do now? That's how it has to be.	Teachers seek to help students compartmentalize their issues so that instruction can begin/continue.	Encouraging compartmentalization
54	Maybe it's my style of teaching, but the kids come in and they know we're going to do math or social studies. That's what we're going to do today. You can't fix what's the problem at home. We'll get some things in place but…You can't fix it, but what you can do is control your own life and make it better.	Teachers seek to employ structure as a method to manage the needs of students struggling with trauma.	Encouraging compartmentalization
55	My whole month of September is rules in the classroom. If I can get September all rules - maybe not a lot of academics, but I spend all September on the rules: how we treat each other, and focusing on all of that - and dealing with our daily schedule.	Many teachers note that the beginning of the year is less about instruction and more about setting of boundaries and expectations.	Encouraging compartmentalization

56	A lot of times I'll say, "This is your job - school is your job and we're gonna focus on school at this time." At the primary grades it's easier to redirect them to the task that has to be done at school. In the higher grades, they don't care sometimes. If they're dealing with something traumatic, they don't care in kindergarten: they're still in the business of pleasing the teacher.	The effort to compartmentalize is more successful when working with younger students.	Encouraging compartmentalization
57	You try to refocus them to the task on hand so that they can still get the education.	This effort to compartmentalize has to be successful if instruction is going to be delivered.	Encouraging compartmentalization
58	When we found out what happened (sexual abuse) she became aggressive, she had an attitude, she became defiant toward me. I would talk endlessly with her mom - was it hormonal? We didn't know if it was a combination of both. I really don't know if it was that she finally felt safe and that was her way of releasing. I don't know. It's interesting; it's very interesting to me.	Sometimes a strong relationship can backfire, as a previously reserved student feels safe enough to express the anger resulting from her abuse.	Building Relationships
59	I sit back and say, a lot of it is just building a relationship.	Much of the effort to manage trauma and its impact upon instruction is found in the time required to build strong relationships.	Building Relationships
60	If you taught here you'd know that some of this is for your own survival - to make connections with these kids.	Many teachers add to their responsibilities by engaging in extracurricular activities - time they may not have, but have to make time for in order to build the relationships with the students necessary for instruction to be possible.	Building Relationships
61	You've got to look at the population of kids you have and the background they come from and really try to - I feel - like establish a relationship with those kids. Make them feel comfortable where they are and then build on that.	Relationship building is primary to the establishment of safety so that learning can occur.	Building Relationships

62	A lot of times if it's a change in behavior - if it's not usual behavior and then all of a sudden. Or it could be a beginning of the year behavior that's representing itself partway through the year again. You wonder what's going on at home that's causing this to come back up again.	The development of these relationships allows a teacher to recognize changes in behavior that might lead to a spike in disruption.	Building Relationships
63	I think the thing that helps with the full inclusion is that there are extra people for the child to build relationships with. I'm not the only person they feel comfortable talking to - they have the aid or another teacher they can talk to.	Bringing other teachers and paraprofessionals into the learning environment provides additional opportunities for relationship - which can help manage students who are struggling with trauma.	Building Relationships
64	As the year went by he was able to turn it around and he ended up being a stronger academic student, but you couldn't see that at the beginning of the year.	Building of relationships and supporting children is also important in order to see past their behaviors and mitigate the potential influence of labeling.	Building Relationships
65	"Yeah, so we're going to get close and we're going to get tight and then you're going to leave and I have to do this whole thing again."	The structure of schooling - in which students move from teacher to teacher with each progressive year, presents a significant weakness in our efforts to support students who already present difficulties in building relationships with their teachers.	Building Relationships
66	It's about connections: they need connections, but they're afraid to make them. They've been through trauma and they don't want to make the connections - they're afraid they're going to get hurt.	Many teachers are aware of the impact that trauma and its aftermath has upon students and their ability to connect.	Building Relationships
67	They can't like me and I guess what I do is I get them to like me and then I get them to love me and then they know I love them and they want to behave for me.	The depth of the relationship teachers are able to build with their students is something to consider when looking at the impact upon instruction.	Building Relationships

68	I know it's not about me: their father left; their mother is dissociated from drugs or whatever. They're unlovable. Everyone is going to not love them so they might as well be really crazy and make sure that people hat them.	Teachers need to be aware of the thinking errors that students have regarding the possibility of healthy relationships with other adults.	Building Relationships
69	If I say things have gotten worse since I've been here, it's the truth. I don't think it's because I'm worn out. I think that our families are having more and more trauma within their own homes.	This teacher identifies a worsening of family-related traumas in the lives of her students.	It's getting worse
70	All day - and that's what I think some of the teachers will say now. Kids aren't the same and they can't teach anymore. What wrong with these kids? You either work with it or resist it, but you're in trouble because you're not going to get anywhere.	The growing impact of trauma in the lives of students is making teaching markedly more difficult	It's getting worse
71	I look at some of the kids that I taught 20 years ago and that this kid has got the worst problems in the world - he's the worst kid I could ever deal with. Now, I look back and there's five or six in every classroom.	The growing impact of trauma is noticeable not only in the depth of behaviors but in the number of students struggling with its aftermath.	It's getting worse
72	Over time we've seen those behaviors get a lot worse and a lot more disruptive and violent.	Students struggling with trauma are seen as becoming more disruptive and violent within the classroom setting.	It's getting worse
73	What were behaviors we might categorize as "somewhat bullyish" in what they did with or to other kids is now striking out - kids who have to be physically removed from the classrooms. So, the behaviors have just really negatively escalated - from what I've seen.	There is a noticeable escalation in the way trauma informs student-to-student interactions as well, with an escalation noted here too.	It's getting worse
74	I think it's important for teachers to be knowledgeable about traumatic situations and how they present and what to do to know it's going to be coming - and make sure that they're communicating with the other colleagues in their building; the teachers that are also working at that grade level.	Teachers provide the primary support for each other - an awareness of trauma and its impact in the classroom must become part of this peer support structure.	Improved preparation and support

75	You can teach them as much as you want, but until they experience it - and I don't know how you get them into the field a bit more. They have to see teachers work with these students. They come into my classroom and I share with them what's going on - I give them my statistics. I give them all this and they come back to the classroom. Educators don't have the time, but I have the time to sit with them because it's important to me.	Aspiring teachers need more exposure to the way trauma is manifest in the classroom - and yet those are the classrooms are less likely to have time for these appearances.	Improved preparation and support
76	I think - and I might be wrong - I don't think that the training has changed a whole lot but the kids have changed a whole lot and the families have changed a lot. They do need to be aware that it's very different.	The preparation of teachers needs to begin reflecting the significant changes that we see trauma and its aftermath bring to the learning environment.	Improved preparation and support
77	I mean, the general public doesn't know. When they see advertisements on TV for schools - the kids are all sitting there, raising their hands, their mouths closed. It's not like that at all. It's not really fair to future teachers - these kids are going in under the impression that's what it's like.	Not informing aspiring teachers of the depth of this problem leaves them ill prepared to enter the classroom.	Improved preparation and support
78	And I suppose addressing how are you going to deal with that - real life situations, you may actually have a student that is so disruptive that they have to be removed. What are you going to do? I know it's very different from district to district on how they manage these things, but I think that there are a few givens in there that could maybe be incorporated into a few courses.	We need to standardize the manner in which we seek to manage our responses to children struggling with trauma and then make sure to equip teachers in these processes and procedures.	Improved preparation and support