

GROW THROUGH WHAT YOU GO THROUGH:
A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY ON TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION

by
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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
[Doctor of Philosophy]

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Abstract

The purpose of this multiple case study was to describe how employees in a large school district in the northeastern United States implement trauma-informed education practices. The insights illustrated how trauma-informed practices are utilized in the district. The theory guiding this study was Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which explains the process of reaching self-actualization. The methodology used in this research was the embedded multiple case study. Through the qualitative research displayed, twelve Northeastern school district employees discussed trauma-informed education practices. Individual interviews, focus groups, and journal prompts provided insight into trauma-informed education practices, which were analyzed by determining patterns and themes in the data. A comprehensive overview of the case can best be identified through three key themes: Collaborative relationships, cultivating connections, and establishing trust. The results of the study point to a dire need for mental health professionals to be integrated into individual schools, for clear and hands-on trauma-informed education workshops to be given periodically throughout each school year, and for school employees, and hopefully families, to engage in open communication to ensure youth get the support that is needed. These findings show the value of trauma-informed education practices within schools and open the door for suggestions to state and federal policy changes regarding the best ways to utilize trauma-informed education practices within various school districts.

Keywords: trauma-informed education, trauma, adverse childhood experiences, northeast

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my grandmother, Maxine, who always encourages me to spread sunshine, happiness, joy, and kindness wherever I go.

To my daughter, Danielle, may you continuously grow and shine with your knowledge and wisdom. Thank you for always bringing a smile to my face, joy to my heart, and for keeping me company for hours upon hours as my “research assistant.” You are my why.

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Michael, who supported me with his wisdom, various snacks, and insight into how to step into who I was destined to be. Thank you for listening to all my shenanigans.

To my mother, you know what you did! This research exists today because of your wisdom, support, insight, kindness, and the never-ending love you show me. Thank you for your persistent unconditional love.

To my teachers, professors, colleagues, and school leaders, both past and present, who helped me become the educational leader I am today.

Acknowledgments

“What would you do if you stopped making excuses?”

The question that changed everything.

I am eternally grateful for that afternoon with Maxine and Anera, as it lit a flame bright enough to re-ignite my entire world.

I wish to acknowledge Dr. Breck Perry and Dr. Katelynn Wheeler for continuously supporting the creation of this dissertation. Thank you for your kindness, insight, and unwavering support, especially when finding a beacon of light in rough seas was challenging.

I want to acknowledge the brave individuals who educate, protect, serve, and motivate our youth. May you always know you are cherished and valued.

I also want to acknowledge the wonderful librarians and staff at the Oceanside Library. Thank you for your unwavering care, support, compassion, and determination to help me find even the most obscure books I was searching for.

In addition, I wish to acknowledge my ancestors and angels who helped guide me toward this point. I am hopeful this research will help to remedy the world’s various traumas for many moments to come.

In the words of Elle Woods, “It is with passion, courage of conviction, and strong sense of self that we take our next steps into the world, remembering that first impressions are not always correct. You must always have faith in people. And most importantly, you must always have faith in yourself.”

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” -Proverbs 27:17

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Copyright Page.....	4
Dedication	5
Acknowledgments.....	6
List of Tables	12
List of Figures	13
List of Abbreviations	14
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	15
Overview.....	15
Background.....	16
Historical Context	17
Social Context.....	18
Theoretical Context.....	20
Problem Statement	21
Purpose Statement.....	23
Significance of the Study	23
Theoretical	24
Empirical.....	24
Practical.....	25
Research Questions	25
Central Research Question.....	26
Sub-Question One	26

Sub-Question Two	26
Sub-Question Three	26
Definitions.....	26
Summary	26
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	28
Overview	28
Theoretical Framework	28
Theory of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.....	29
Related Literature.....	32
Trauma	32
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).....	44
Effective Trauma-Informed Practices within Classroom Settings.....	49
COVID-19 and the World of Education	53
Trauma-Informed Practices Within the Community	55
Summary	59
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	61
Overview	61
Research Design.....	61
Research Questions	62
Central Research Question.....	62
Sub-Question One	63
Sub-Question Two	63
Sub-Question Three	63

Setting and Participants.....	63
Setting	63
Participants.....	64
Recruitment Plan.....	65
Researcher’s Positionality.....	66
Interpretive Framework	67
Philosophical Assumptions	67
Researcher’s Role	69
Procedures.....	70
Data Collection Plan	70
Individual Interviews	72
Focus Groups	75
Journal Prompts	77
Data Analysis	78
Trustworthiness.....	81
Credibility	81
Transferability.....	81
Dependability	82
Confirmability.....	82
Ethical Considerations	83
Summary	84
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	85
Overview.....	85

Participants.....	85
Anastasia	86
Barbara	87
Bobby	87
Charlotte.....	87
Daphna	87
Fredo	88
Harry	88
Katelyn.....	88
Kori	88
Kyle.....	89
Ryan	89
Teddy	89
Results.....	89
Collaborative Environment.....	90
Cultivating Connections.....	94
Establishing Trust	96
Outlier Data and Findings.....	100
Research Question Responses.....	102
Central Research Question.....	103
Sub-Question One	103
Sub-Question Two	104
Sub-Question Three	105

Summary	105
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	107
Overview.....	107
Discussion.....	107
Summary of Thematic Findings.....	108
Implications for Policy or Practice	111
Empirical and Theoretical Implications.....	113
Limitations and Delimitations.....	116
Recommendations for Future Research.....	117
Conclusion	118
References.....	120
Appendix A.....	153
Appendix B.....	154
Appendix C.....	159
Appendix D.....	160
Appendix E	168

List of Tables

Table 1. Open-Ended Interview Questions.....	73
Table 2. Open-Ended Focus Group Questions.....	76
Table 3. Journal Prompt Questions.....	77
Table 4. Participant Insights	86

List of Figures

Figure 1. Themes and Sub-Themes.....	90
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List of Abbreviations

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The foundations of trauma-informed education began as the concept of trauma-informed care within the field of medicine and psychotherapy (Brown et al., 2021; Salzberg et al., 2016). The concept of trauma was a common topic within the realm of caring for military veterans during the 1970s, as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was considered a reoccurring traumatic brain disease impacting soldiers who could never be healed (Braun et al., 2021; Christy et al., 2012; Kline, 2020). However, medical professionals noticed trauma-related symptoms manifesting in children dealing with various negative situations, adults dealing with different addictions, and individuals who were victims of violent crimes (Burke-Harris, 2020; Gatz et al., 2007; Kline, 2020). Various historical events, such as the terrorist attacks on New York City and in a few other places in the United States on September 11, 2001, resulted in long-term traumatic responses even though a vast number of individuals did not directly experience the collective trauma at hand (Abu-Ras et al., 2013; Poole, 2020; Seery et al., 2008). In 2019, when the COVID-19 pandemic began to negatively affect countries on a local and global scale, a new collective trauma was seeping into the lives of countless individuals (Dutton et al., 2020; Fisher et al., 2020). With the introduction of various collective traumas into the world, unprecedented traumatic experiences are becoming more commonplace. Especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, school staff must address many traumas that continuously manifest inside and outside the classroom (Duan, 2021; Mitchnik & Rivkind, 2022; Washburn et al., 2022). Trauma-informed education is a dire need within schools. Youth are at a pinnacle point in their respective brain growth and need to learn coping and emotional intelligence skills that will support their understanding of how to navigate the world, especially after the COVID-19

pandemic (Duan, 2021; Erikson, 1993; Kline, 2020; Mitchnik & Rivkind, 2022; Washburn et al., 2022). Trauma-informed education is empirically significant, as it can be examined through countless qualitative and quantitative studies. Trauma can influence every aspect of a person's life, from their physical well-being to their social and emotional abilities, and could hinder an individual's ability to survive and thrive after experiencing even one traumatic event (Brown et al., 2021; Burke-Harris, 2020; Duan, 2021; Salzberg et al., 2016; Van Der Kolk, 2014). The purpose of this multiple case study is to describe how employees in large school districts in the northeast are informed of, interpret, and implement trauma-informed education practices. The information gained in the study also discusses the impacts of trauma-informed education practices during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter one of this dissertation explains the foundational knowledge used to conduct this study. In addition, relevant historical, social, and theoretical contexts will be provided to build upon insight related to the central research question and sub-research questions.

Background

Trauma-informed care and education have been points of interest as collective traumas have manifested, especially over the past forty years. In 2022, the National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative (2022) reported that more than two-thirds of youth reported the occurrence of at least one traumatic event by the age of sixteen years old; some of the instances included acts of community violence, neglect, physical or sexual assault, or experiencing domestic violence. An estimated 1 in 7 children experience abuse or neglect within a year (National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative, 2022). In 2019, one in five high school students reported being bullied emotionally, physically, or both while on school property (Hansen et al., 2016; Khoury et al., 2010; National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative, 2022). Traumatic situations have been

prevalent within secondary schools and their respective communities for decades, and there is a dire need for trauma-informed education to be implemented in schools and their surrounding areas (Hansen et al., 2016; Khoury et al., 2010; Kline, 2020; Kuzma et al., 2022). This section of chapter one discusses findings of relevant historical, social, and theoretical underpinnings related to the integration of trauma-informed education within a large northeastern school district.

Historical Context

With the rise of research on survivors of war, feminist and domestic violence movements, and Vietnam veterans' exhibitions of various traumas in the 1970s, trauma-informed care became a common topic in the field of medicine (Blanch, 2012; Brown et al., 2021; Salzberg et al., 2016). In 1984, the United States Congress passed the Victims of Crime Act, which helped to solidify legal ramifications for perpetrators of crime and potential traumas that could result from various traumatic experiences; the 1980s also marked the start of PTSD diagnoses and ample treatment procedures for individuals who needed support with mental health needs (Blanch, 2012; National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2017). The 1990s ushered in a plethora of shifts in the realm of trauma studies and mental health initiatives, with the introduction of various conferences, laws, and studies being developed to discover models for trauma-informed services, illustrate the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and alleviate traumatic symptoms from women and individuals facing co-occurring mental health disorders (Blanch, 2012; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2022; Gatz et al., 2007; Kline, 2020). As the world welcomed the 21st century, the United States of America created the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA); the organization develops support for victims of child abuse, handling different disasters, and trauma-informed care, among other mental-health-related concerns (Blanch, 2012; National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative, 2022;

National Institute of Mental Health, 2020). In the past ten years, United States government officials and trauma-related advocates have been regularly developing programs, protocols, and insights that can support mental health professionals and educators with trauma resolution-focused needs (Blanch, 2012; Kuzma et al., 2022; Larson, 2019; National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative, 2022; National Institute of Mental Health, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact began to make global news headlines in December 2019; with the introduction of the pandemic to the global landscape, the United States of America began to enter a lockdown period that shuttered schools and businesses and wreaked havoc on the country's various systems (Omer et al., 2020; Walensky & del Rio, 2020). Aly et al. (2020) noted that the type of psychiatric care that patients required during the COVID-19 pandemic ranged from needing mental health support due to an increase of familial struggles at home, the sudden loss of loved ones, and a plethora of cases that related to major depressive episodes and a lack of social interaction. In the United States alone, over 98 million individuals fell ill due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and of those 98 million, it is estimated that over 1 million people passed away due to COVID-19 complications (Mathieu et al., 2021; New York Times Staff, 2022). Moreover, these statistics do not reflect the number of individuals directly and indirectly impacted by family and community members who contracted the disease (Mathieu et al., 2021; New York Times Staff, 2022). Also, these numbers do not highlight the traumatic experiences that an individual dealt with due to the COVID-19 pandemic; these traumatic experiences could include mental health challenges and the sudden loss of a loved one, among other situations.

Social Context

Initiatives, programs, and policies related to trauma-informed education have socially

influenced educators, school leaders, staff, and students within the United States of America. In the endemic stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, more studies are being developed that highlight the traumatic experiences that school staff, students, and their respective families dealt with as a result COVID-19 (Buda & Czékman, 2021; Dayal & Tiko, 2020; Engelman et al., 2021; Molnar, 2021; Sherwood et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021). School districts across the United States needed to switch to distance learning settings at almost a moment's notice and had to support students with diverse needs who may not have had access to technological devices; the financial, mental, social, and emotional burden placed on students, educators, school leaders, and their respective families during this era in education caused a variety of traumatic experiences (Buda & Czékman, 2021; Dayal & Tiko, 2020; Mathieu et al., 2021; Molnar, 2021; Sherwood et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021). A survey of educators and school leaders displayed the need for individual schools to look at the physical environment of youth, the health services available within the community, and mental health support to appropriately aid students in their transition from a physical school building to a distance learning environment, and then back to a collective physical school building after months and years of being apart from peers and educators (Pattison et al., 2021; Yang, 2020; Yang et al., 2021).

In addition to the schools that were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the traumatic experiences it created for countless individuals, the communities that schools and students are situated in are in dire need of trauma-informed care and trauma-informed education. Youth are mandated to attend educational school settings before formally entering adulthood. Schools have a distinct opportunity to help and support children during their formative years, and educational environments can help to prepare youth with trauma-informed coping methods and strategies (Erikson, 1993; Haines, 2019; Kline, 2020). Schools help develop youth who are well-

equipped to handle life's various challenges, and the teaching and utilization of trauma-informed education practices and protocols can create adults with the skills to address personal, professional, and communal issues.

Theoretical Context

Several different theories have supported the discussion around trauma-informed education throughout the years. Some studies have shown that trauma-informed education, practices, and protocols are incredibly beneficial to communities, schools, and students (Berger & Martin, 2021; Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; Kuhn et al., 2019). During the COVID-19 pandemic, various studies were conducted in Wuhan, China, and its surrounding areas to gauge the necessity of trauma-informed education within schools in the region; it was shown that the trauma-informed education process, practices, and protocols in place were beneficial to students, school staff, educators, and leaders (Liu et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022). Other studies within large cities, systems, or school districts such as Los Angeles, California, and Chicago, Illinois, have shown that educators and school leaders found trauma-informed education practices to be pivotal in reducing stress and violent incidents within school buildings and nearby communities (Ford-Paz et al., 2022; McKinsey et al., 2022; Sonsteng-Person & Loomis, 2021). Some of these studies called upon the findings of Porges' (1995) polyvagal theory, which insinuates that an individual's nervous system becomes dysregulated when introduced to traumatic experiences; as a result of this dysregulation, a person's vagus nerve could trigger a fear response in the brain. If a person's brain is wired to consistently be in a state of fear, panic, or dysregulation, that individual could respond negatively to any action, situation, or conversation that takes place (Porges, 1995). If the parasympathetic nervous system is in a state of dysregulation due to traumatic experiences, that individual can struggle with various emotional, physical, and spiritual

situations in their respective lifetime; this would cause the inability to potentially participate in healthy relationships or learning experiences (Berger & Martin, 2021; Ford-Paz et al., 2022; Mckinsey et al., 2022; Sonsteng-Person & Loomis, 2021). This theoretical framework provides some insight into the physical ailments that an individual is facing. However, it does not fully describe the long-term impacts on a person's personal, professional, academic, and social-emotional experiences, or the person's ability to reach his or her full potential due to traumatic experiences.

Problem Statement

The problem is that trauma-informed education is insubstantial in many large northeastern school districts (Brunzell et al., 2021; Forber-Pratt et al., 2021; Ford-Paz et al., 2022; Lawson et al., 2019; Mckinsey et al., 2022; Sonsteng-Person & Loomis, 2021). Collective traumas can occur at any point in a person's life and can take the form of bullying, the death of a loved one, socioeconomic struggles, violence, living within a war zone, and varying types of abuse (Berger & Martin, 2021; Briggs et al., 2021; Howard, 2019; Thompson et al., 2020). With the COVID-19 pandemic, traumatic experiences became exasperated by shifts from physical school settings to online learning platforms, among other personal issues that students, school staff, and their respective families needed to deal with. Many COVID-19-related issues impact youth, educators, and communities within the United States of America. At the root of many different behavioral and learning-related problems are the various traumas individuals and collective beings face (Kline, 2020; Mathieu et al., 2021; Molnar, 2021; Sherwood et al., 2021). Countless youth have faced diverse traumas during the COVID-19 pandemic era of education, resulting in students dropping out of school, putting themselves in compromising situations, and reaching existential extremes due to the nature of experiences that have impacted their overall

well-being (Buda & Czékman, 2021; Dayal & Tiko, 2020; Kline, 2020; Mathieu et al., 2021; Molnar, 2021; Sherwood et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021).

Various traumas do not exist in isolation from what youth experience daily within academic settings. Traumas that occur at home can influence an individual's experiences within school, and vice versa (Burke-Harris, 2020; Kline, 2020; Sherwood et al., 2021). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students and their respective families lost their homes, jobs, and loved ones, all while attempting to continue with somewhat traditional schooling experiences (Buda & Czékman, 2021; Dayal & Tiko, 2020; Molnar, 2021; Sherwood et al., 2021). The world is aflame with chaos and emotional damage from several COVID-19-related traumas, causing individuals to struggle with augmenting their educational experiences, building their understanding of self-actualization, and configuring their sense of resilience in relation to developing as human beings (Berger & Martin, 2021; Buda & Czékman, 2021; Dayal & Tiko, 2020; Kline, 2020; Mathieu et al., 2021; Molnar, 2021; Sherwood et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021). Though not all students are dealing with traumas such as the ones previously mentioned, students across the globe are most likely experiencing something. Jacobsen (2020) noted that at least one in three school-age youth are facing personal traumas; though one in three may seem like a minuscule number, it is essential to note that these were the students who were forthcoming with their traumas. Some youths are experiencing trauma and do not make it known to others. Countless children are struggling with several challenges that occurred as a result of almost two years of an unstable educational experience (Buda & Czékman, 2021; Dayal & Tiko, 2020; Molnar, 2021; Sherwood et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study is to describe how employees in a large northeastern school district implement trauma-informed education practices. The theory guiding this study is Maslow's hierarchy of needs as it explains reaching self-actualization through trauma-informed education. The methodology being used is the multiple embedded case study. Trauma-informed education is defined as a school-wide system that recognizes the prevalence of adverse and traumatic childhood experiences and provides school staff with appropriate knowledge to realize, recognize, and respond to trauma with strategies to support students who experience trauma (Colorado Department of Education, 2019; Kline, 2020).

A theory that guides this study is Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, especially the pinnacle of the hierarchy known as self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). If an individual is dealing with traumatic experiences and ACEs, the person may struggle to achieve self-actualization and live a fulfilling life. The COVID-19 pandemic is a collective trauma that greatly influenced the education system, providing youth with opportunities to learn about the world while forming appropriate social, emotional, personal, and professional skills (Colorado Department of Education, 2019). It is paramount that school staff know how to educate students in a trauma-informed manner that is conducive to students' overall well-being and growth.

Significance of the Study

This multiple case study contributes to the knowledge base of understanding trauma-informed practices as they relate to a large school district within the northeastern United States. Similar studies about trauma-informed education that were conducted in large American cities showed great promise regarding mediating school violence, coping with emotional situations, and helping individuals build the skill set necessary to handle post-secondary settings (Ford-Paz

et al., 2022; Mckinsey et al., 2022; Sonsteng-Person & Loomis, 2021). Individuals dealing with ACEs or traumatic experiences have the potential of growing physically, emotionally, and spiritually ill if nothing is being done to address the issues at hand (Cardoso, 2018; Haines, 2019; Henderson et al., 2019; Pickett, 2020; Van Der Kolk, 2014). The section examines the theoretical, empirical, and practical perspectives related to this research study.

Theoretical

The study created a broader understanding of how trauma-informed education can mitigate the impacts of traumatic experiences in the lives of youths; Porges (1995) also expressed the need for coping strategies to be taught to individuals at a young age, so that their respective parasympathetic nervous systems do not automatically revert to dysregulation in the event a traumatic experience occurs. In the existing research that is present, there is minimal insight into how trauma-informed education influences large school districts within the northeastern part of the United States. A present gap in the research literature needs to be filled with insights into how large school districts within the northeast utilize trauma-informed education holistically in order to support staff, students, and school leaders (Dorado et al., 2016; Ford-Paz et al., 2022; Mckinsey et al., 2022; Sonsteng-Person & Loomis, 2021).

Empirical

The case study provides insight into how trauma-informed education practices support youths, school staff, and school leaders in a large school district in the northeastern United States. If schools can instill trauma-informed education practices into curricula and regular activities, schools would be developing spaces for students to gain necessary skills to thrive in life (Dorado et al., 2016; Ford-Paz et al., 2022; Mckinsey et al., 2022; Sonsteng-Person & Loomis, 2021).

[REDACTED], as many of the district's neighborhood hospitals were struggling to support hundreds of thousands of COVID-19 patients throughout the pandemic (DiMaggio et al., 2020; Morcuende et al., 2020). With many students from the large northeastern school district being directly impacted by COVID-19 and the endless hospitalizations that took place, insights related to trauma-informed education must be integrated into empirical studies.

Practical

Trauma-informed education can provide schools, school staff, and students with the skills necessary to handle and overcome a variety of challenges in life (Haines, 2019; Kline, 2020). The practical significance of this study will support school staff who are working towards creating a more inclusive, engaging, and skill-based learning environment for secondary students (Kline, 2020; Sonsteng-Person & Loomis, 2021). In addition, the continuous inclusion of trauma-informed education, practices, and protocols within a school helps to provide students with the knowledge necessary to handle numerous emotional, social, professional, personal, and traumatic experiences they may encounter as they grow and mature (Burke-Harris, 2020; Haines, 2019; Kline, 2020). The northeastern school district serves a diverse population of students and their respective families, if the students of the largest school district in the United States of America can survive and thrive with the trauma-informed practices, other school districts should follow suit and integrate trauma-informed education in their schools (New York City Department of Education, 2022b).

Research Questions

The purpose of this case study is to describe how school staff in a large northeastern school district implement trauma-informed education practices. The theory guiding the study is

Maslow's hierarchy of needs as it explains reaching self-actualization through trauma-informed education.

Central Research Question

How do school staff implement trauma-informed education practices in a large northeastern school district?

Sub-Question One

How do school staff understand the concept of trauma-informed education?

Sub-Question Two

How are different trauma-informed education practices implemented in school settings to promote the fulfillment of students' (physiological, safety, love, esteem) needs?

Sub-Question Three

How do trauma-informed education practices contribute to the development of self-actualization?

Definitions

1. *Trauma-informed education* – a school-wide system that recognizes the prevalence of adverse and traumatic childhood experiences and provides school staff with appropriate knowledge to realize, recognize, and respond to trauma with strategies to support students who experience trauma (Colorado Department of Education, 2019; Kline, 2020).

Summary

The problem is that trauma-informed education is insubstantial or limited in many large northeastern school districts (Brunzell et al., 2021; Forber-Pratt et al., 2021; Ford-Paz et al., 2022; Lawson et al., 2019; Mckinsey et al., 2022; Sonsteng-Person & Loomis, 2021). Trauma can occur at any point in a person's life and can take the form of bullying, the death of a loved

one, socioeconomic struggles, violence, living within a war zone, and varying types of abuse (Berger & Martin, 2021; Briggs et al., 2021; Howard, 2019; Thompson et al., 2020). Within the COVID-19 pandemic, traumatic experiences became exasperated by shifts from physical school settings to online learning platforms, among other personal issues that students, school staff, and their respective families needed to deal with. The purpose of the multiple case study is to describe how school staff in a large school district in the northeastern United States implement trauma-informed education practices. The information gained in the study also discusses the influence of Maslow's (1943, 1994) hierarchy of needs and thoughts surrounding self-actualization. The case study features a total of five different chapters, with an introduction, literature review, methods, findings, and suggestions for future research. Chapter one gave an overview of the study, and chapter two shows a thorough review of current research related to the problem at hand.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Trauma-informed education is a broad concept that includes acknowledging the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on an individual. A systematic review of the literature is conducted to explore the problem of how school staff interpret and process various traumas and ACEs in academic and social-emotional contexts, including the practices surrounding trauma-informed education. The chapter presents a review of the current literature as it relates to the topic of study. First, the theories relevant to trauma-informed education are discussed, which follows a synthesis of recent literature about ACEs and how trauma-informed education has been addressed in previous years; then, insight and literature to illustrate the impact of collective traumas on individuals related to the education field. Finally, the need for the current study is addressed by identifying a gap in the literature regarding how educators and school-related staff are processing trauma-informed education in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and within large school districts. The information above is inclusive of the daily traumas occurring within numerous communities.

Theoretical Framework

According to Gall et al. (2007), all educational research needs to be substantiated by appropriate theories that legitimize the need for the specific research inquiry to be examined. Furthermore, qualitative research needs to be verified by a theory that highlights the purpose and practicality of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The theoretical framework for this study aligns with Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs; the hierarchy focuses on the concept that when an individual's basic needs are fulfilled, the person can develop a sense of self-actualization (Maslow, 1943, 1954, 1993, 1994). Trauma-informed education practices tend to focus on

augmenting the basic needs of an individual; therefore, Maslow's research is a natural fit that supports the expansion of the field of trauma-informed education. Through a synthesis of Maslow's research and information related to trauma-informed education, insight can be obtained regarding the need for trauma-informed care, education, policies, and practices to be introduced into school systems.

Theory of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow (1943) asserted that all human beings require specific basic needs to make other advancements in life. Moreover, people cannot feel fulfilled or pleased with their respective lives until basic needs, such as physiological needs and safety needs, are met; when an individual's fundamental needs are fulfilled, the person can make other advancements within life through needs related to belonging and conditions related to esteem (Maslow, 1954). Maslow contended that once all the needs mentioned earlier are attained, the utmost level of being can be acquired. The concept of self-actualization asserts that once an individual discovers the potential of their gifts and talents, that individual can contribute to the betterment of society (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016; Maslow, 1993, 1994). A person who has endured traumatic experiences may struggle to reach a state of self-actualization, for the individual could be facing a plethora of challenges that impede upon his or her acquisition of basic needs (Brown, 2021; D'Souza & Gurin, 2016; Maslow, 1993, 1994). The study provides insights into how schools can support youths by building the appropriate skills and resources to develop a sense of self-actualization. By grounding educational research within the realm of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the necessity for trauma-informed education becomes more apparent. The specific study will focus on how self-actualization can be acquired through the practices found in trauma-informed education. In relation to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Brown (2021) noted that how humans survive, thrive,

and respond to different experiences stems from emotional attachments to various situations; if trauma-related emotions exist in a human being's actions and reactions, the individual is more likely to engage in negative behaviors.

Without the foundation of basic needs, individuals can struggle to advance their respective lives in various ways (Burke-Harris, 2020; Guevara et al., 2021; Oransky et al., 2013; Thompson et al., 2020). Based on synthesizing Maslow's (1954) insights and current research within the realm of trauma-informed education, traumas, or perceived traumas, can impede an individual's ability to acquire basic needs (Cardoso, 2018; Heidbrink, 2018; Howard, 2019). Maslow (1954) explained that an individual's basic needs to survive include physiological needs such as air, shelter, food, and clean water. Other needs that human beings require include a sense of safety, feelings of love and belonging that include a sense of connection, and esteem-related needs that require respect and recognition (Maslow, 1943, 1954, 1993, 1994). The concept of trauma can best be defined as "an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster" (American Psychological Association, 2022b, p. 1). Traumas, and the various responses to traumas, could hinder an individual's ability to receive basic needs; therefore, the individual will not be able to acquire fundamental necessities and will struggle to attain a personal sense of self-actualization (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016; Gunning & Townsend, 2022; Oransky, 2013). Without basic needs and understanding that a sense of self-actualization is possible, individuals can further struggle with countless aspects of life and pursuits related to education. A lack of basic needs could hinder an individual's ability to develop a fulfilling life and create a series of healthy romantic, personal, professional, and familial relationships (Berthelot et al., 2022; Smith, R. L., et al., 2021).

The knowledge of, and attainment of, self-actualization is something that many individuals can struggle with if trauma impedes the person's ability to thrive (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016; Maslow, 1993). Alvarez (2017) noted that the effects and impacts of trauma could be long-lasting and manifest differently, ranging from emotional reactions to physical ailments; the behaviors that youth could exhibit within a classroom could be directly linked to trauma-related situations. Anderson et al. (2021) explained that students' reactions to trauma could manifest in behavioral issues within a school, which could cause an educator to misinterpret the student's actions and further create stressful or trauma-inducing situations. This study will contribute to the theoretical framework by developing insight into trauma-informed education practices within a large northeastern school district, that serves many students and their respective families.

School staff can support students by educating youth on ways to cope with traumas, which can, in turn, allow for youth to remedy stressors and trauma-induced reactions in their respective lives. The level of support provided to youth would enable students to work towards gaining basic needs in their respective lives, so individuals can yearn for a state of self-actualization to better themselves and society in general. In addition, by achieving Maslow's (1943) concept of self-actualization, youth can help create a progressive community that could see fewer traumas and challenging situations; youth would transform into adults who can mitigate challenges before potential traumas become severe (Burke-Harris, 2020; Szczygiel, 2018).

It is essential to note that this conceptual framework is paramount to the implementation of the entire study. The hierarchy of needs is the quintessential backbone of the research at hand; if a person's basic needs are not met, the individual will struggle to cope with and comprehend various life experiences (Maslow, 1993). The sub-research questions specifically examine how

the various basic needs of individuals are being met within schools, which is fundamental to mitigating traumatic experiences that may occur (Anderson et al., 2021; D'Souza & Gurin, 2016). The conceptual framework supports thematic elements being examined within the data analysis and findings interpretation process of the research.

Related Literature

There are many different aspects to trauma-informed care and education. This section highlights the progress being made regarding trauma-informed practices in classroom settings and how clarifying and expanding trauma-informed education in both classroom and community settings can have several positive implications. With proper training and insights being provided to educators and individuals who work with youth, advancements have been made in the lives of students and within the various schools. In addition, by clarifying and expanding trauma-informed education practices within the classroom and the community, societal advancements can be made to support the holistic well-being of countless individuals. Moreover, communities can significantly benefit from allowing trauma-informed care and education to transcend traditional classroom experiences; trauma-informed care and education should be made accessible to the community as well.

Trauma

Trauma itself can arise due to a variety of different life events. Instances of trauma could include bullying, the death of a loved one, dysfunctional occurrences within the household, socioeconomic-based challenges, violence, war, and varying types of abuse (Anda et al., 2006; Berger & Martin, 2021; Caceres et al., 2022; Howard, 2019; Thompson et al., 2020). Traumatic experiences could also occur as a result of being misaligned with cultural norms, disrespecting different generational figures due to present cultural differences, and other factors surrounding

cultural responsiveness (Caceres et al., 2021; Meléndez Guevara et al., 2022; Merchant, 2020; Petróñ et al., 2022). Though many different therapies and treatments could be administered to the individual dealing with trauma, there is no set treatment to remedy a war, violent events, abuse, or tragic instances due to the individualistic nature of every individual in this world; even identical twins may struggle to cope with understanding traumatic experiences when given similar healing opportunities were presented (Ades et al., 2019; Burke-Harris, 2020; Van Der Kolk, 2014).

Causes of traumas and actions that result from varying traumas must be remedied before they become incredibly obstructive in society; people process traumatic experiences in different ways, and will need to be given access to learning the skills and resources necessary to navigate any potential trauma at any time. Though instances such as death, natural disasters, and circumstances such as poverty may not always be prevented, trauma-informed care and education can support an individual's understanding of different events, traumas, and negative situations (Guevara et al., 2021; Van Der Kolk, 2014; Wang, 2020). Part of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and theory of self-actualization stem from an individual's ability to cope with challenges and struggles for that person to obtain basic physiological, safety, belonging, and esteem-related needs (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016; Szczygiel, 2018). Without the basic needs being addressed, an individual's highest potential may not be reached due to the person's experiences with trauma. Schools are ideal centers for learning how to cope with and manage various traumas that can impact youth, as the act of being educated and the ability to mitigate potential future traumas can be learned within the institutions that youth are enrolled in; all youth must engage in some educational experiences and schools can be utilized as places to educate youth from

academic, social-emotional, personal growth, professional, and trauma-informed perspectives (Asnaani et al., 2020; Guevara et al., 2021; Van Der Kolk, 2014).

Self-Actualization and Connections to Trauma

Individuals burdened by trauma, pain, and severe challenges may intermingle their respective identities with the adverse situations they have endured; traumatic experiences may become so ingrained within a person's identity, that it may be all the individual creates a connection to (Ades et al., 2019; D'Souza & Garin, 2016; Mitchell, 2018; Szczygiel, 2018). If an individual cannot break free from the physical, emotional, and spiritual constrictions acquired through the person's traumatic experience, reaching self-actualization becomes nearly impossible due to that person's inability to see past the trauma that was endured (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016; Jones, 2020; Maslow, 1965; Sawicka & Karlińska, 2021). Moreover, Jones (2020) and Sawicka and Karlińska (2021) noted that an individual can engage in professional work that is more fulfilling and emotionally uplifting if that person is not working in a job influenced by a fear of survival. If that individual takes part in professional work that is not influenced as a result of that person's traumas or experiences related to trauma, the individual's life can be entrenched in the theory of self-actualization. An individual's traumatic experiences may push them into feelings of shame or guilt when it comes to choosing a specific profession in life; if trauma is what dictates that person into pursuing a given profession, that individual may be preventing him or herself from doing something that he or she could truly enjoy in life (Kiles et al., 2021; Nault & Thau, 2022; Petion et al., 2023).

In connection with the idea mentioned earlier, individuals build an understanding of the professional work they wish to engage in through early education practices (Gunning & Townsend, 2022; Sawicka & Karlińska, 2021; Szczygiel, 2018; Wang, 2020). If a particular

trauma forces an individual to pursue a specific line of work, that person may not be able to reach a state of self-actualization due to their inability to break free from trauma-influenced behaviors (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016; Maslow, 1965; Sawicka & Karlińska, 2021). Traumatic instances that take place during the formative stages of an individual's growth can re-direct that person's passions, professional pursuits, emotional responses to specific situations, and attitude towards different circumstances that may have created different emotional reactions in the past (Guevara et al., 2021; Van Der Kolk, 2014). In connection with the concept, trauma-informed education, policies, and practices must be utilized within schools. If an individual's traumatic experience were not addressed, that person might struggle to do more than focus on surviving within life (Mitchell, 2018; Van Der Kolk, 2014).

Trauma in Elementary School

When traumatic experiences impact individuals at a relatively young age, those individuals are more prone to developmental delays, prolonged stress, and a plethora of potential mental illnesses that manifest over time (Stowkowy et al., 2020; van der Bij et al., 2020). In addition, Congio et al. (2022) and Pechtel and Pizzagalli (2011) explained that cognitive development impairments manifest as a result of experiencing solitary traumas and various traumas throughout a person's lifetime. Even when specific youth do not experience something traumatic, individuals can be indirectly traumatized by their classmates and second-hand experiences; some of these second-hand experiences include being exposed to a child who is acting upon being abused or being bullied (Ballin, 2022; Cole et al., 2013; Congio et al., 2022; King et al., 2021). Copeland et al. (2007) explain that psychiatric impairments may occur if a child is exposed to traumatic events, whether the events seem minuscule or massive in nature; concurrent with this idea, various studies have shown that more than 66% of youth expressed

that they experienced at least one traumatic event by the age of 16 (Congio et al., 2022; Oransky et al., 2013; van der Bij et al., 2020).

With these preliminary insights in mind, it is crucial to note that all schools must adhere to some trauma-informed protocols; traumatic experiences can come without warning, therefore schools should always be prepared. To adhere to research-based trauma-informed procedures, some have infused Social Emotional Learning practices within elementary school settings (Ballin et al., 2022; Blitz et al., 2016; Blitz et al., 2020; Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2021). There is a need for both Social Emotional Learning and trauma-informed education protocols to be infused in schools, as a fusion of these practices show countless benefits in terms of academic, professional, social, emotional, coping, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills (Greenberg et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2018; Steed et al., 2022). Many of the trauma-informed programs that have been implemented within elementary schools supported students in developing skills such as self-management, accepting responsibility, and community-inclusive behaviors; regardless of whether the students in those programs endured a traumatic experience, the insights the youth gained were highly beneficial to their overall growth and resiliency (Eklund et al., 2018; Rishel et al., 2019; Wall, 2021). When trauma-informed practices established in elementary schools are continued throughout a child's academic career, those individuals have shown to be more resilient to stress, more culturally cognizant, and more self-aware of their emotions (Blitz et al., 2016; Blitz et al., 2020; King et al., 2021; Rishel et al., 2019; Wall, 2021).

Trauma in Middle School

Even if trauma-informed programs are not introduced at the elementary school level, students of any age can significantly benefit from an introduction to the protocols and practices.

Some practical ways of implementing trauma-informed protocols within middle schools are like those seen at the elementary level, and might include students working closely with school counselors and specialized support groups (Howell et al., 2019; Von Dohlen et al., 2019). In conjunction with the aforementioned counseling-based supports, research has shown that middle school students who build quality relationships with counseling staff have excelled in academic, professional, and personal respects over the course of time; school counselors have received specific training to guide students with mental health support, and as such, counselors should be integrated into the trauma-informed programs within schools (American School Counselor Association, 2019; Howell et al., 2019; Sumi et al., 2021).

In cases where adults, especially those trained in mental health care and procedures, act as advocates for youth, individuals can gain more insight into healing from traumas (Congio et al., 2022; Howell et al., 2019; Silverman & Mee, 2019; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). In a well-functioning system of trauma-informed care, adults who act as advocates: understand the implications of trauma and healing, can identify the signs of traumatic experiences in individuals, and are cognizant of methodologies that do not further traumatize people due to their experiences (Congio et al., 2022; Howell et al., 2019; Silverman & Mee, 2019; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). In essence, the overall goal of trauma-informed programs is to support individuals in a holistic manner; schools need to ensure that all aspects of an individual's experience, from the academic content provided in school to the social and emotional protocols being provided, are inclusive of culturally sensitive trauma-informed care and resources.

Adult advocates and individuals who are cognizant of trauma-informed education are not just remedying temporary situations, as trauma can cause long-lasting impacts on an individual

(Caceres et al., 2022; Gunning & Townsend, 2022). Middle school youth who were impacted by traumatic experiences are impacted by immense deficits due to the trauma that they encountered; due to trauma, a middle schooler's frontal lobe, which impacts an individual's decision-making and is not fully matured at that point in the person's life, could show a hindrance of growth (Howell et al., 2019; Mann et al., 2014; Thompson & Farrell, 2019). Impairments to the frontal lobe could result in the individual having "unpredictable and impulsive behavior, forgetfulness, increased risk-taking, and questionable decision-making," which could lead to countless challenges over that person's lifetime (Howell et al., 2019, p. 27). Countless challenges could result in impediments to trauma-related brain growth, even if the individual was not physically abused; challenges include damage to the limbic system, which controls an individual's emotional responses and ability to have mature replies to diverse emotional situations (Blakemore, 2008; Howell et al., 2019; Mann et al., 2014; Porges, 1995).

Even after the traumatic experience occurs, the individual has the potential to be re-traumatized or negatively impacted by the situation, as trauma transcends an individual's ability to experience a physically, emotionally, and spiritually safe environment (Sumi et al., 2021; Thompson & Farrell, 2019; Von Dohlen et al., 2019). Trauma-informed education could support the coping skills and emotional resources that students would require in order to heal with regard to the physical, emotional, spiritual, physiological, and esteem needs of the individual; the healing would result in a better chance of the person reaching self-actualization through the eradication of negative responses towards potentially triggering situations (Maslow, 1943, 1954, 1965; Silverman & Mee, 2019; Sumi et al., 2021; Thompson & Farrell, 2019; Von Dohlen et al., 2019).

Trauma in High School

Individuals can still heal aspects of their traumatic experience, even if trauma-informed care was not produced at the time of their challenge, or during their elementary or middle school years (Brunzell et al., 2021; Rumsey & Milsom, 2019; Thompson & Farrell, 2019). Erikson's (1993) theory of psychosocial development noted that individuals between the ages of 12 and 19 are at the stage of development known as identity vs. role confusion; at this stage, individuals generally try to explore their independence, discover their sense of self, identify their uniqueness, and engage in social interactions to uncover who they are in an existential sense. If an individual is unable to determine where they fit within the realm of society, feel disappointment or rejection in relation to their identity, or struggles to define themselves, this can further cause challenges and traumatic experiences (Erikson, 1993; Forber-Pratt et al., 2021; Lind et al., 2020; Sezer et al., 2017). Moreover, Erikson (1993) noted that teenagers who engage in role confusion, meaning they do not know where they belong in the world, can struggle with commitment issues, diminished mental health and well-being, lack confidence, and have a weak understanding of their true self (Block, 2011; Erikson, 1959, 1968; Oransky et al., 2013). Youth are dealing with various challenges related to their respective identities; individuals who are impacted by diverse traumas could face greater challenges if other potential traumas that could influence them are not remedied or prevented (Erikson, 1993; Raemen et al., 2021; Terrell et al., 2021).

During the process of an individual's identity formation, there are countless instances that happen within high school that can create or replicate sensations of trauma (Lawson et al., 2019; Lind et al., 2020; Terrell et al., 2021). Gender-based harassment, instances of self-harm, and substance abuse are becoming more prevalent in high school settings, which has been inferred as a direct result of implicit biases, cultural views, depression, anxiety, and other mental health-

related tensions (Forber-Pratt et al., 2021; Lind et al., 2020; Raemen et al., 2021; Terrell et al., 2021). Verschueren (2020) noted that eating disorders are becoming increasingly more common in adolescent youth, which is brought about by a high schooler's keen interest in their own body and the bodies of others; images within the media are exasperating traumatic situations that youth are experiencing, hostile interactions between individuals, and youth receiving messages that body dissatisfaction, celebrity diets, and social pressures are more prevalent than self-acceptance (Presnell, 2004; Raemen et al., 2021; Van Der Kolk, 2014). In addition, the National Institute of Mental Health (2020) identified that 4.1 million youth in the United States, aged 12 to 17, experienced at least one major depressive episode, which is equivalent to 17% of 12 to 17-year-olds within the United States of America. Concurrently, about 21 million adults within the United States of America's population experienced one major depressive experience at minimum, which is equivalent to 8.4% of the United States' adult population (National Institute of Mental Health, 2020).

Moreover, these are just the statistics from individuals who were surveyed, and the information does not show the challenges and thoughts of all youth or adults within the United States. Numerous adolescents have experienced or witnessed acts of violence, including physical abuse, assault, or caregiver-to-caregiver abuse (Cho & Kim, 2021; Finkelhor et al., 2015). Interpersonal relationships that lack compassion, kindness, and an understanding of trauma-sensitivity are causing exponential traumatic experiences to occur, for individuals are deficient in mobilizing the skills necessary to create trauma-informed conversations and situations; being mindful of ways to engage with others through a compassionate, trauma-informed lens has the potential to limit traumatic experiences from occurring within the general school day (Lind et al., 2020; McDade et al., 2022; Rumsey & Milsom, 2019; Terrell et al., 2021). Therefore, high

schools must create trauma-informed programs that embody compassion, community, and creating connections between youth and others.

Successful methods to educate youth about trauma-informed care, practices, and protocols range from classroom-based to school-wide and community-wide programs that can benefit high school students beyond their respective academic careers (Herrenkohl et al., 2019; Lind et al., 2020; Rumsey & Milsom, 2019). Moreover, there are several different methods that have been used to implement trauma-informed programs within school systems. Similarly to the aforementioned connections that school counselors have made with middle school students, high school counselors have the potential to support youth with career and college information; high school students tend to deal with immense trauma and stress surrounding post-secondary planning, and counseling staff can remedy potential challenges that occur in relation to planning life experiences (American School Counselor Association, 2019; Herrenkohl et al., 2019; Sumi et al., 2021; Tang & Ng, 2019). Research has shown that high school students respond favorably to trauma-informed programs that reflected a social-ecological model, collaborate with students with social-emotional initiatives, are culturally responsive, and school staff and community members who recognize, appreciate, and adhere to trauma-informed practices (Arnold et al., 2020; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Herrenkohl et al., 2019; McDade et al., 2022). Trauma-informed programs within high schools have shown immense promise regarding reducing disciplinary incidents and increasing opportunities for students to take on leadership roles and embrace both self-acceptance and self-empowerment (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Herrenkohl et al., 2019; Lyons & Brasof, 2020; Mansfield et al., 2018). When themes of leadership and empowerment are fused with trauma-informed education practices, schools support the development of youth who can create traumatic experiences or perpetuating traumas; the developmental process is due to the

emotional intelligence and trauma-informed insights that are gained within school programs (DuPlessis, 2021; Herrenkohl et al., 2019; Lyons & Brasof, 2020; Mansfield et al., 2018; Souers & Hall, 2019).

Trauma in Diverse Student Populations

Communities with populations of lower socioeconomic individuals, marginalized cultures, and less access to funding and resources are in dire need of trauma-informed care and education. Ford et al. (2008) noted that at least 25% of adolescents have experienced a traumatic event, which results in youth dealing with depression, suicide-related thoughts, or attempting to cope with trauma through substance abuse (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014; Terrell et al., 2021). Youth within urban communities, from marginalized backgrounds, and migrant youth are particularly vulnerable to traumatic situations, due to a plethora of factors: moving to a new location for safety reasons, dealing with communal violence, and prevalent racism are a few challenges that influence traumas (Caceres et al., 2022; Cardoso, 2018; Heidbrink, 2018; Thompson & Farrell, 2019). In addition to dealing with understanding what Erikson (1959) denoted as identity versus role confusion, youth who are from marginalized cultures, neighborhoods where violence is prevalent, or regions where migration is a crucial option for a better quality of life are more prone to needing trauma-informed resources that support their overall development and well-being (Ades et al., 2019; Cardoso, 2018; Henderson et al., 2019; Pickett, 2020; Pozzulo & Bennell, 2018; Souers & Hall, 2019). Trauma-informed programs are necessary in urban communities and areas with diverse cultural populations.

Cardoso (2018) and Heidbrink (2018) highlighted the challenges migrant youth face due to their respective situations and media-fueled depictions of their experiences. Cardoso's (2018)

findings exemplified how youth originally from Honduras, Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala met a variety of criteria to be labeled as having post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depressive disorder, and suicidal ideation, poverty, family separation, trauma exposure, and community violence were cited as some of the countless traumas plaguing the specific population mentioned. This sort of trauma is widespread among migrant youth, with communities and systemic institutions providing little to no resources to support the individuals who are a part of this specific population (Caceres et al., 2022; Cardoso, 2018; Heidbrink, 2018; Pickett, 2020). Heidbrink (2018) noted that there is conflict when it comes to defining appropriate care for migrant youth; minors who are unaccompanied and who cannot always advocate for themselves are at a huge disadvantage, which can cause many children to be placed in inappropriate settings, detention centers, foster care situations, or institutions that are not fully equipped to support the specific population of youth. The U.S. Customs and Border Protection (2022) and Office of Field Operations reported that 115,580 unaccompanied minors from various South American countries entered the southwest land border between October 2021 and June 2022; this resulted in the Office of Field Operations reporting a 27.5% increase of unaccompanied minors entering through that area of the United States from the previous year. This insight, combined with research findings from both Cardoso (2018) and Heidbrink (2018), indicates the need for culturally responsive trauma-informed programs to be integrated into all schools within the United States; unaccompanied youth are entering public schools, most without advocates for their well-being, and need individuals who will support their development and learning experiences through trauma-informed programs (Pickett, 2020).

Culturally diverse individuals and migrant youth populations require trauma-informed programs to support their respective needs. Over the past fifteen years, there has been an increase

in the number of suicides and attempted suicides within populations of Black individuals; the various tragedies are a direct indicator that poor health services, inequitable access to mental health resources, and an uptick in race-related trauma are negatively impacting Black communities (Henderson et al., 2019; Pickett, 2020; Thompson & Farrell, 2019). Within about twenty years, the suicide rate for Black elementary school children went from 1.63 to 2.54 per 1 million students; research has shown there is a racial disparity between Black and white children committing suicide, which further shows how essential trauma-informed resources can be incredibly beneficial to diverse communities (Bridge et al., 2015; Henderson et al., 2015; Pickett, 2020). Pickett (2020) and Thompson and Farrell (2019) advocated the notion that trauma-informed care and education can reduce the number of violent incidents and racially charged incidents, which will, in turn, create a diminished suicide rate in Black communities; in addition, mental health resources and better access to support would create fewer aggressive situations. Pozzulo and Bennell (2018) expressed the need for trauma-informed practices to be implemented within schools, for they would address the cultural, religious, socioeconomic, and developmental challenges that individuals face within the world. Moreover, trauma-informed education practices would support the creation of empathy and understanding between cultural and socioeconomic diversities that exist within society.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Adverse Childhood Experiences, also known as ACEs, are “traumatic events that occur before a child reaches the age of 18. ACEs include all types of abuse and neglect, such as parental substance use, incarceration, and domestic violence” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2022, p. 1). In conjunction with this definition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016) discovered a connection between the number of ACEs that a child

experienced and bleak health and well-being outcomes that are a direct result of traumatic childhood experiences; youth who endured ACEs tend to grow into adults who engage in risky behaviors, substance abuse, poor physical and mental health situations, and develop abusive situations of their own (Ades et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2019; Monnat & Chandler, 2015; Pitkänen et al., 2020). To be classified as dealing with an ACE, a licensed, clinical medical professional must diagnose the individual; in communities where current information about ACEs is not prevalent, the identification of individuals who are struggling with ACEs can be rather challenging (Burke-Harris, 2020; Jones et al., 2019; Pitkänen et al., 2020). Moreover, individuals who do not have proper training in identifying, diagnosing, working with, and understanding individuals with ACEs may risk mistreating or misdiagnosing a person; the misunderstandings could result in that individual losing crucial time and resources to heal the traumas within them (Hubel et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2019; Pitkänen et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2020).

Calvano et al. (2022) considered that families began to exhibit collective issues surrounding ACEs due to the COVID-19 pandemic; preliminary evidence is surfacing that shows how youths developed ACEs due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which include struggles surrounding online educational experiences, parental stress, job losses, and the sudden deaths of family members and friends. Calvano et al. (2022) also made assumptions that the identification of ACEs will continue to rise in the coming years, for children are still beginning to exhibit signs of stressors related to traumatic experiences that the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, ACEs that result from the influence of a narcissistic parent, family member, or close family friend are manifesting within children, which has become more prevalent due to new and ongoing research surrounding narcissism, psychological duress, and parenting styles that create negative impacts

on children over the individual's lifetime (Calvano et al., 2022; Clemens et al., 2022; Pitkänen et al., 2020).

Child Behavior and Trauma-Informed Discipline

As a result of dealing with ACEs, those who experienced various traumas could be plagued with disciplinary challenges (Alvarez, 2017; Kline, 2020; Souers & Hall, 2019). Educators and school staff members who do not understand the implications of ACEs may misinterpret an individual's trauma-fueled response to a situation as a deliberate act of insubordination; as a result, the trauma-impacted individual in need of support tends to receive a negative disciplinary experience that can further traumatize the person (Alvarez, 2017; Chafouleas et al., 2021; Souers & Hall, 2019; Thompson et al., 2020). When school staff is advised on how to identify and manage potential situations that are trauma-informed, a school could support a student's healing process through a traumatic experience (Chafouleas et al., 2021; Hubel et al., 2020; Souers & Hall, 2019). If a school and its staff are more understanding of a student's situation, that student may inadvertently gain knowledge and insight about emotional intelligence and handling situations from a compassionate lens; if a student believes that a school and school staff members have their best interests in mind, that student might be more likely to respond favorably in different situations (Henderson et al., 2015; Hubel et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2019; Pickett, 2020). Once school staff is aware of restorative practices and trauma-informed protocols that can be used to manage potential discipline issues within a school appropriately, the number of incidences involving negative behaviors could decrease greatly; when schools are culturally sensitive and aware of how various traumas can manifest within a structured academic setting, youth may be more eager to engage in scholarly activities and

students will have an implicit understanding of educational and personal goals (Hammond, 2015; Henderson et al., 2015; Hubel et al., 2020; Lustick, 2021; Pitkänen et al., 2020).

Responding to ACEs in the Classroom and School Setting

Children who have experienced traumatic events may struggle to follow directions, adhere to school policies, and exhibit appropriate behavior within a school; the challenges are due to the ways traumatic experiences impact the individual child (Alvarez, 2017; Chafouleas et al., 2021; Hubel et al., 2020; Jacobsen, 2020). To ensure that all staff members within a school can understand the ramifications of and reactions based on traumatic experiences, it is crucial that schools provide appropriate training to staff within the realm of trauma-informed education. Cole et al. (2013) explained that a trauma-informed school is one “in which all students feel safe, welcomed, and supported and where addressing trauma’s impact on learning on a schoolwide basis is at the center of its educational mission” (p. 11). Schools should find it natural to create a safe, welcoming, and supportive learning environment where all youth can learn. Therefore, school staff should be cognizant of how to respond to different situations that can potentially be fueled by, or occur due to, the individual’s past traumatic experiences. Research-based initiatives have shown progress towards youth healing traumatic experiences through some of the following school-developed protocols: shifting school procedures to show respect for different cultures, creating spaces for staff and student self-care, creating high and equitable expectations for all youth, helping students set achievable goals, and developing strong and supportive relationships between compassionate staff and youth (Brunzell et al., 2016; Chafouleas et al., 2019; Chafouleas et al., 2021; Souers & Hall, 2019). If trauma-informed education protocols are utilized within schools, a place where youth should be spending most of their daily lives, students can learn skills to handle and heal from traumatic experiences.

Health and Safety-Related Challenges

If traumatic experiences are not addressed and remedied, the after-effects of an individual's traumas can cause a slew of medical issues (Testa et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2021). Health challenges due to traumatic experiences could result in early mortality rates in young adults, including the appearance of mental illnesses, instances of physical or emotional impairments, the inability to regulate emotions, and substance abuse issues (Bethell et al., 2014; Jacobsen, 2020; Testa et al., 2022). Felitti et al. (1998) noted that individuals who endured four or more traumatic experiences were twelve times more likely to abuse drugs, drink excessive amounts of alcohol in a day, and experience both depression and suicidal ideation; furthermore, individuals with increased exposure to traumas were more likely to have tumultuous relationships, engage in frequent smoking, have several sexual partners, and succumb to obesity.

Even one experience with a traumatic event could cause an individual to deal with prolonged social withdrawal, delays in mental development, and struggle with basic actions such as talking, walking, and comprehending social cues (Bethell et al., 2014; Jacobsen, 2020; Testa et al., 2022; Thompson et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2021). As a result of various behavioral, mental, and physical circumstances, there have been increased incidents where trauma-impacted youth encounter the juvenile justice system; research has also shown that individuals cited disciplinary actions emanating from negative behaviors in school were partially to blame for further instances of re-traumatization (Administrative Offices of the Court, 2014; Alvarez, 2017; Ford et al., 2012). The American Civil Liberties Union (2022) notes that about 60,000 youth under the age of eighteen years old are in a juvenile detention center or prison daily in the United States; incarceration and detaining youth potentially exposes them to trauma, violence, and tension, which can traumatize or re-traumatize individuals. Incarceration can, in turn, impede an

individual's development, mental health, and overall well-being (Administrative Offices of the Court, 2014; Alvarez, 2017; American Civil Liberties Union, 2022; Ford et al., 2012).

Challenging situations do not mean that individuals should not be held responsible for their actions; youth should be educated about consequences, equity, integrity, and other concepts related to trauma-informed care and practices so that traumas are not perpetuated within society.

Effective Trauma-Informed Practices within Classroom Settings

Schools are the ideal places for the prevention and early intervention of traumas, challenging situations, and instances where children need additional support to learn, survive, and thrive in life (Kline, 2020; Souers & Hall, 2019). Complex traumas and systemic challenges have been plaguing youth and their respective families for years, though educators began to gain more insight into trauma-informed practices within the early 2000s; schools began to integrate different trauma-informed resources and training within learning environments, which included easier access to mental health programs and research-based frameworks to address healthier learning environments for all youth (Dorado et al., 2016; Howard, 2019). Berger and Martin (2021) expressed how certain schools utilize the “four Rs” of trauma to mitigate potential issues that may occur. The four Rs that are recommended include the realization that traumas occur, recognition of an individual's traumas, responding appropriately to the trauma at hand, as school staff work to limit the potential re-traumatization of an individual (Berger & Martin, 2021; Howard, 2019; Kline, 2020).

Thomas et al. (2019) indicated that a school's ability to create a culture where communicating about traumas and emotional challenges, along with buy-in from administrators and all staff members, helped to develop progressive trauma-informed practices within school systems. Moreover, there are several simple ways to integrate emotion-focused and trauma-

informed practices within schools, which include providing students with different opportunities that align with students' authentic interests, supporting students to uncover coping and appropriate behavioral skills, and altering a school's disciplinary code to meet the cultural needs of the student population (Chafouleas et al., 2016; Dorado et al., 2016; Harris & Fallot, 2001). School staff members who uphold environments reflective of trauma-informed care have also experienced fewer disciplinary struggles and burnout-related emotional challenges (Chafouleas et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2019). Trauma-informed school environments have also provided staff with an increased understanding of their well-being and the development of support for their own personal and professional situations (Berger & Martin, 2021; Dorado et al., 2016).

When a school system establishes a trauma-informed education practice, youths, and the communities where they are a part of, benefit significantly; with more individuals engaged in learning opportunities and obtaining resources from schools, fewer youth have time to get involved in criminal activities within communities (Basford et al., 2021; Chafouleas et al., 2016). Thomas et al. (2019) expressed the need for communities and schools to adopt systemic protocols and understandings so that the information students receive in school transcends into the community and beyond. When students notice that trauma-informed practices are the status quo in their respective homes, schools, and communities, students would be more likely to maintain their respective emotional well-being and mental strength since all the settings they are a part of are promoting the same message regarding respect for trauma-informed care (Basford et al., 2021; Berger & Martin, 2021; Chafouleas et al., 2016; Howard, 2019). Therefore, schools and communities must adopt similar, systemic protocols to reduce instances that create traumas or trauma-related responses within youth.

Trauma-Informed Education in Classroom Settings

To ensure appropriate trauma-informed practices are utilized within classrooms, school systems and the community must understand the central concept of trauma-informed education (Berger & Martin, 2021; Howard, 2019). A wide variety of school staff do not appear to be cognizant of what it means to be trauma-informed and how trauma-informed practices can benefit youth and the community (Basford et al., 2021; Berger & Martin, 2021; Howard, 2019). Consequently, communities should not isolate their trauma-informed practices and protocols from other schools and communities. There needs to be a collaboration between schools, local governments, overarching federal entities, and local and state organizations to expand highly beneficial trauma-informed practices (Basford et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2019). Community organizations, school systems, and federal entities have partnered to develop trauma-informed programs and practices that can create optimal experiences for all individuals; one of these collaborations occurred within the state of Massachusetts and included Harvard University and the Massachusetts Advocates for Children group's federal implementation of trauma-informed policies within each school in the state (Howard, 2019; Massachusetts Advocates for Children, 2013). Collaboration efforts should be commonplace globally so that all educators and communities receive resources to combat any potential traumas that may arise in the community or the classroom.

Families and community members would greatly benefit from trainings that schools receive in trauma-informed care, so that a culture of compassion can be established for all individuals regardless of whether they are in a classroom setting (Dorado et al., 2016; Kline, 2020; Thomas et al., 2019). For some cultures and regions within the world, trauma-informed education practices may create rifts in understanding what is just and unjust within different

cultures; for example, some communities do not view trauma-informed education practices as beneficial, and see compassionate efforts within schools as unnecessary, unwarranted, and a violation of cultural norms (Berger & Martin, 2021; Howard, 2019). Moreover, trauma-informed care, education, practices, and protocols must be carefully phased into communities, while being mindful of the cultural backgrounds within community areas and regions. Above all, trauma-informed practices and protocols can be phased into schools and communities in stages, which can still greatly benefit the youth, their families, and community members who may be uneasy or unfamiliar with trauma-informed practices.

Staff Professional Development on Trauma-Informed Practices

In creating a trauma-informed school, staff and educators must undergo appropriate training to prevent re-traumatization or traumatization in general (Anderson et al., 2021; Souers & Hall, 2019). There are vital skills and topics that staff should be aware of within the realm of trauma-informed education; these include belongingness, dealing with uncertainty, responding to change, biological responses to trauma, stress, and key factors that contribute to traumatic experiences (Imad, 2022; Van Der Kolk, 2014). Since traumatic experiences are not a one-size-fits-all concept, it is crucial for staff to be educated on symptoms, signs, and strategies to handle potential actions related to trauma; though staff should be knowledgeable about trauma-informed situations, it is crucial that mental health staff still work closely with youth who are dealing with an emotional crisis (Howell et al., 2019; Imad, 2022; Kline, 2020; Von Dohlen et al., 2019). In several cases, research has shown that staff who are educated about the signs and symptoms of trauma were better able to direct resources toward students who experienced trauma; lesson plans and resources that directly touched upon trauma-related topics were able to support youth, and students were able to ascertain skills that addressed coping with certain traumas (Anderson

et al., 2021; Kline, 2020; Krishnamoorthy & Ayre, 2022). Purtle (2018) expressed the need for staff to receive quality trauma-informed training that focuses on skills related to trauma identification, as staff who gained experience with hands-on and practical trauma-related concepts were better able to support their students over time. In a world where anything could happen at any given moment, it is paramount that people obtain and maintain trauma-informed skills; this will allow individuals to better address situations that could potentially be negative and life-altering (Anderson et al., 2021; Gunning & Townsend, 2022; Imad, 2022; Kline, 2020; Krishnamoorthy & Ayre, 2022; Purtle, 2018).

COVID-19 and the World of Education

There is truth in the assertion that the COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented shift in the field of education; when school systems were forced to transfer to online learning platforms within days, equitable access to technology, food security, physical safety, and challenges with social interactions became just a few struggles that students, their respective families, and school systems faced (Buda & Czekman, 2021; Dayal & Tiko, 2020; Engelman et al., 2021; Molnar, 2021; Sherwood et al., 2021). When the COVID-19 pandemic consumed the world, educators and school leaders were forced into creating online educational opportunities with little time and preparation; even in Wuhan, China, a highly publicized and scrutinized location during the pandemic, school leaders were initially struggling to develop online education programs (Hitchcock et al., 2021; Krishnamoorthy & Ayre, 2022; Ma et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2020). Research has shown that trauma-impacted adolescents are less likely to contend with mental health issues if proper and culturally responsive resources and support are provided (Jacobs & Harville, 2015; Meléndez Guevara et al., 2022). The aforementioned concept is strengthened through individuals' access to resources related to building resiliency,

understanding the emotional impact of trauma, and the creation of space to process traumatic events; with such a collective trauma like the COVID-19 pandemic, many are still developing tools and resources to remedy the impact of social isolation, shifts in education, and loss on a variety of levels (Buda & Czekman, 2021; Sherwood et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020).

ACEs have also been more prevalent within the lives of school-age children who recently endured the COVID-19 pandemic (Calvano et al., 2022; Clemens et al., 2022; Pitkänen et al., 2020). Children have exhibited limited social skills, struggles to communicate verbally, and tend to be more receptive to learning with digital tools as opposed to physical classroom activities; though some of these concepts may seem to be a result of the introduction of technological devices within the classroom, challenges and struggles surrounding verbal social communication are running rampant within school classrooms (Calvano et al., 2022; Clemens et al., 2022). The traumatic experiences that youths have endured vary regarding the influence and impact of ACEs, and not all children are currently dealing with traumatic experiences or ACEs due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Calvano et al., 2022; Clemens et al., 2022).

Practices that supported resiliency, connectivity, and coping with the collective trauma formed by COVID-19 have included the development of multimedia presentations on online platforms and schools collaborating with other institutions to facilitate virtual field trips, conversations with diverse career-specific individuals, and exploring different concepts through countless Internet resources (Dayal & Tiko, 2020; Engelman et al., 2021; Molnar, 2021; Yang et al., 2020). Moreover, Hitchcock et al. (2021) and Sherwood et al. (2021) expressed the need for educators and school systems to integrate trauma-informed care, knowledge, and practices within

schools, so that students can develop the skillsets necessary to deal with unexpected situations in life.

Trauma-Informed Practices Within the Community

The path for an individual to continuously grow from trauma may be a long and tedious one, though with appropriate resources and support, it is possible to overcome or heal from a variety of situations (Haines, 2019; Morton, 2021; Van Der Kolk, 2014). Hanson and Lang (2016) and Williams (2022) explained the dire need to examine the implications of being trauma-informed across various aspects of society. There are various trauma-informed recommendations for different systemic entities, such as in education, healthcare, and the prison system, to adhere to in order to remedy and prevent trauma-related experiences; three different domains where trauma-informed programming could target further traumatic experiences were discovered: “workforce development (training, awareness, secondary traumatic stress); trauma-focused services (use of standardized screening measures and evidence-based practices); and organizational environment and practices (collaboration, service coordination, safe physical environment, written policies, defined leadership)” (Hanson & Lang, 2016, p. 96). Buysse et al. (2022) indicated that community participants who engaged in online trainings about trauma-informed care had gained knowledge and confidence about mitigating and preventing traumas and ACEs. In addition, research has shown that communities who partner with mental health professionals, hospitals, and institutions who provide mental health resources and support were better able to manage traumas that occurred unexpectedly; unexpected traumas included the death of a family member, natural disasters, and sudden shifts in employment (Clements et al., 2020; Gilmer et al., 2021; Giunta et al., 2021). Communities that openly develop trauma-informed care practices help to create successful and emotionally intelligent citizens (Buysse et

al., 2022; Clements et al., 2020; Gilmer et al., 2021; Giunta et al., 2021; Hanson & Lang, 2016; Harper & Neubauer, 2021; Levenson & Willis, 2019).

Diverse cultures respond differently to traumatic experiences, including how individuals heal and express ideas surrounding trauma-informed education, care, and insights (Smith, A. M., et al., 2021). Botelho et al. (2021) explained how trauma-informed care and education must be utilized with cultural responsiveness in mind. When individuals from different cultures are asked to discuss traumatic experiences or issues surrounding trauma, certain cultures and customs mandate that emotional intelligence be considered a taboo topic; for instance, many individuals from Latino cultures do not find it necessary to discuss a man's thoughts surrounding their emotional well-being, for in Latino cultures it is not considered masculine to cry (Caceres et al., 2021; Meléndez Guevara et al., 2022; Merchant, 2020; Petróon et al., 2022). Culturally sensitive ways of handling situations relating to traumatic experiences must be considered within school districts, so as not to upset or disrespect certain cultures all while ensuring that students and their respective families obtain the resources and skills necessary to thrive and survive in life (Caceres et al., 2021; Meléndez Guevara et al., 2022; Merchant, 2020; Petróon et al., 2022). Moreover, trauma-informed care can prevent health issues, support children and adults who will struggle unnecessarily with medical challenges, and create communities that care about the holistic success and well-being of individuals (Clements et al., 2020; Levenson & Willis, 2019; Souers & Hall, 2019). As such, communities must also be mindful of the cultures that are a part of a given school or region, and the methodologies or strategies that will help support respect and healing from trauma while being sensitive to cultural norms (Caceres et al., 2021; Kline, 2020; Meléndez Guevara et al., 2022; Merchant, 2020; Petróon et al., 2022).

Social Ecology and Trauma

As previously discussed, if traumas are not managed or remedied, this can cause a slew of health and well-being issues. Adults who have experienced four or more ACEs have an increased risk of cardiac disease, five times the risk of depression and mental health challenges, and ten times the risk of substance abuse as opposed to a person without ACEs (Bhusan et al., 2020; Buysse et al., 2022). Trauma-impacted individuals could live their lives in a constant state of duress, which impedes that person's quality of life and potential positive creations that could have been developed if trauma did not consume the individual; many adults who could not heal or gain support for various traumas committed suicide or died prematurely due to trauma-related health challenges (Felitti et al., 1998; Goenjian et al., 2021; Wheeler et al., 2020). Everything that an individual consumes can contribute to the person's traumatic experiences, for a person's social ecology dictates their well-being (Arnold et al., 2020; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Herrenkohl et al., 2019; McDade et al., 2022; Wheeler et al., 2020; Wheeler et al., 2022).

The multimedia outlets an individual interacts with should not trigger or influence traumatic experiences. Cruz (2020) noted that how people are impacted by things seen in the media is partly due to the Diathesis-Stress Model. Within the Diathesis-Stress Model, there is a certain level of mental or physical disorders that are manifested because of a person's biological predisposition or genetic makeup, which is triggered by stressful images, moments, or situations; therefore, a traumatic event could drastically and negatively shift an individual's health and well-being (American Psychological Association, 2022a; Cruz, 2020). If someone is constantly exposed to negative and violent images that are meant to fearmonger or shock an individual, that person could develop a series of mental health challenges that hinder a person's growth (Cruz, 2020; Messina & Schepps, 2021; Wheeler et al., 2022). Moreover, it was discovered that

information and resources that display a culture of safety, belongingness, and understanding are far more successful in mitigating trauma than any violent images that were utilized to create a fear-based response (Cruz, 2020; Haines, 2019; Messina & Schepps, 2021). Suppose a person's social ecology is always composed of fear, pain, and violence. In that case, an individual will not be able to gain a basic sense of safety and belonging, and will not be able to reach a state of self-actualization (Cruz, 2020; Felitti et al., 1998; Haines, 2019; Maslow, 1943, 1954, 1993; Messina & Schepps, 2021).

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Somatic Therapy in the Context of Trauma-Informed Care

Through profuse avenues of support, an individual can learn to live with the traumas experienced (Haines, 2019; Kline, 2020; Morton, 2021). Traumatic experiences do not need to dictate a person's life and well-being; resources and support can help an individual's healing process. In recent years, trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT) has been used to support individuals who have dealt with traumas and ACEs; this methodology of treatment has included psychoeducation, parent support classes, the development of coping techniques, family sessions, trauma narrative work, and processing change (Celano et al., 2018; Dittman & Jensen, 2014; Scheeringa et al., 2011). Somatic therapy practices, which require an individual to rewrite their body's understanding of traumatic experience through breathwork and redefining physical stress responses, have also shown promise in remedying traumas and ACEs (Haines, 2019; Levit, 2022; Morton, 2021; Norton et al., 2011). Morton (2021) and Norton et al. (2011) note that the way to heal from traumas and ACEs often lies within a person's ability to identify the trauma, comprehend what happened, work on self-acceptance, and cope with the emotional stress that occurred from the experience. When TF-CBT and somatic practices are naturally integrated as part of societal norms, individuals and communities will be better equipped to identify,

comprehend, and process trauma to help all people reach their highest potential in life; when individuals have the capability and capacity to reach their utmost possibilities, self-actualization is attainable and can cultivate a more progressive and advanced world (Haines, 2019; Harper, 2019; Kline, 2020; Levit, 2022; Maslow, 1943, 1954, 1965, 1993; Morton, 2021; Norton et al., 2011; Ruvolo Grasser et al., 2019).

Summary

Various traumas and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are continuously impacting youth. It is paramount that school systems become more informed about the practices and protocols that can best support youth through the traumas and adverse experiences that occur. Many large-scale school districts within the United States of America have integrated trauma-informed practices within their school culture, and have seen positive results in their students and staff. Information and research pertaining to trauma-informed education in a large school district need to be discussed to show how trauma-informed education impacts individuals on a large scale. Researchers have noted the implications of traumas and ACEs, including various health-related challenges impacting children throughout adulthood. Moreover, the theory of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs acts as a lens to comprehend the need for quality, data-driven, trauma-informed education practices within schools and communities in the United States of America. A gap in the literature points to trauma-informed practices in large northeastern school districts' educational landscape; students and school staff require trauma-informed education insights that will transcend educational experiences. From a theoretical standpoint, Maslow's self-actualization concept helps illustrate the need for trauma-informed practices and protocols within school systems. This study further develops reasons that support trauma-informed education practices in schools, which will equip youths with the skills to handle any traumatic

experiences they may encounter. Moreover, an authentic and pragmatic approach to trauma-informed practices, ACEs, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on education must be addressed to ensure that youth can handle and manage various challenges. Coping mechanisms and addressing challenges are not limited to youth and are necessary for community members to survive and thrive in a new “normal” society.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This qualitative study utilizes the embedded multiple case study method to describe trauma-informed education experiences of school staff from a large and urban northeastern school district. This case study describes large district school staff members' experiences with trauma-informed practices and protocols. The intended outcome of this research is a holistic understanding of the importance and use of trauma-informed education practices, especially in larger cities and school districts. This chapter discusses the study's research design, procedures, and data analysis plans. The contents of the chapter are organized as follows: research design, research questions, setting and participants, researcher positionality, procedures, data collection plan, and trustworthiness.

Research Design

A qualitative research method is appropriate for this study, as it allows for an insightful and in-depth description of trauma-informed education. Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed how the qualitative research method permits researchers to collect data from participants through listening to experiences, engaging in conversations, and analyzing patterns in what is collected. The qualitative data method is meant to help create a discussion that further develops an understanding of a given topic, concept, or notion so that it can be explored descriptively (Charli et al., 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The case study method is also ideal for this research, as it aligns with the purpose of my study. The methodology also agrees with this study's purpose, which is to describe how school staff in large school districts in the northeast implement trauma-informed education practices. According to Yin (2018), case studies involve gaining insight into a concept through

observations and interpretations and using the information to understand how and why something exists as it does. Since I interview participants across public school settings, I am most interested in a collective case study, where an issue is selected and described through an inquiry of multiple cases, a specific style of case study research (Yin, 2018). This type of case study helps illustrate the processes that schools utilize to create trauma-informed environments that can help students build the resources and skills necessary to thrive (Kline, 2020; Yin, 2018).

Yin (2018) remarked that multiple case studies cover an array of theoretical concepts and can discuss things in either an embedded or a holistic manner. For the study, I am utilizing the embedded multiple-case study method. I opted for this specific method because I am examining the context for each case in conjunction with the others, and how they relate to trauma-informed education practices (Yin, 2018). I use the reoccurring themes to discover possible ways to infuse trauma-informed education practices within large school districts. Understanding the essence of a school's trauma-informed education practices should help provide a basis for integrating similar concepts into other schools. I synthesize the different perspectives of school-related officials to determine best and effective practices in trauma-informed education. In large cities such as Los Angeles, California and Chicago, Illinois it has been shown that educators and school leaders qualitatively express how trauma-informed education practices helped to reduce stressful situations, which has also created quantitative data to exhibit the reduction in violent incidents in schools (Ford-Paz et al., 2022; McKinsey et al., 2022; Sonsteng-Person & Loomis, 2021).

Research Questions

The following questions are examined throughout the study.

Central Research Question

How do school staff implement trauma-informed education practices in a large northeastern school district?

Sub-Question One

How do school staff understand the concept of trauma-informed education?

Sub-Question Two

How are different trauma-informed education practices implemented in school settings to promote the fulfillment of students' (physiological, safety, love, esteem) needs?

Sub-Question Three

How do trauma-informed education practices contribute to the development of self-actualization?

Setting and Participants

Within the contents of this portion of the research, the setting and participants of the study will be discussed. The first part of this section highlights the setting of the study, while the second part describes the participants in the study. In addition, the qualifying criteria for individuals to participate in the study will be discussed.

Setting

The study settings include public schools within a school district in United States. More specifically, the schools are in urban communities within a large district of the northeastern United States of America. In general, the schools are composed of a minimum of 600 students who are in general education, integrated co-teaching (ICT), English Language Learner, or self-contained classroom settings. The leadership structure of each of the schools is composed of a principal, one to six assistant principals, and various deans and department chair people who support the administration and the school's overall ambitions [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. Within each setting, educators report to assistant principals in charge of specific academic and organizational departments; school principals oversee all aspects of their respective schools [REDACTED]

Each of the settings were assigned a pseudonym to respect the locations' confidentiality and privacy; schools were given different names to organize collected data and differentiate between school sites.

Schools within the given large district in the northeastern United States support urban communities that include low to middle-class socioeconomic students; many youths in the district come from single-parent or step-parent-influenced households [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. In addition, the leadership structure is composed of a series of multi-level leaders, ranging from the [REDACTED] who oversees all the schools to individual superintendents and deputy superintendents who directly observe schools within areas of the district [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Various urban schools were chosen as settings for this project due to the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the area and the large size of the district. Multiple regional hospitals became inundated with patients plagued by COVID-19 [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. A number of these hospitals are in the same communities as the school settings for this study [REDACTED]

Participants

The participants are school staff from schools located within the large northeastern school district; school staff include educators, school leaders, and other related employees. Participants in the study are at least 25 years of age. Participants of this study are teachers of various content areas with more than five years of experience as educators and school leaders who have at least

five years of experience within the field of education. Participants may also be counselors, paraprofessionals, secretaries, or other related staff who are at least 25 years of age, and have been engaged within their specific role for at least five years. The educators within the study are teachers of diverse content areas with more than five years of experience working within educational settings; since each of the teachers has experience working with students of diverse academic abilities, the teachers will be able to provide an overview of trauma within youth of varying gifts and abilities (Hitchcock et al., 2021; Petrón et al., 2022).

Recruitment Plan

Purposeful sampling is utilized to obtain participants in this specific study; therefore, the number of participants in this case study range from a variety of educators, school staff, and school leaders that will be interviewed (Yin, 2018). The ethnicity and gender of the participants in this study are diverse in nature, as individuals from different educational and cultural backgrounds can provide different insights into trauma-informed education based on their respective experiences (Kline, 2020; Yin, 2018). There are thousands of teachers within this specific large northeastern school district that engage in trauma-informed education practices, and it can seem overwhelming to determine just how large the sample size may truly be [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] However, I chose to target schools within the large northeastern school district that have publicly shared about their experiences with trauma-informed practices through various news outlets and the school district's public website. Since this research is aligned to the case study method, there was a minimal target of 10 participants to be interviewed, but no more than 15 individuals (Yin, 2018).

As previously stated, purposeful sampling is used during this study and a recruitment e-mail (see Appendix C) will be sent to at least 50 individuals who are linked to schools within the

large northeastern school district; a consent form (see Appendix D) will also be included within the recruitment e-mail. The required sample size for the actual research study will be between 10 and 15 participants, as per collective case study research requirements; this many will be interviewed to ensure the integrity of the study at hand (Marshall & Rossman, 2010; Yin, 2018). To ensure that data saturation does not take place, I acquire information from participants that address the same qualitative questions; I interview individuals that may not necessarily be experts on the concept of trauma-informed education (Fusch & Ness, 2015). For instance, I ask potential participants in the initial survey what their level of comfortability in explaining the impact of trauma-informed education in the context of their school (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Researcher's Positionality

As an educator from a long legacy of education-based professionals, I firmly believe that teachers, counselors, school leaders, and school-related staff play several pivotal roles in society. I am incredibly grateful for educational professionals, as they support individuals' respective developments toward various career-oriented goals. I knew I was destined to become an educator at the age of five, and I vowed to earn a doctorate upon graduating from elementary school.

During the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, I spent the previous days working while in labor at a public school in a large urban district in the northeastern United States. I gave birth one month prematurely to my daughter as the hospital I was in locked down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I opted to forgo my maternity leave, and to continue teaching while supporting hundreds of youths and caring for my newborn child. The educators and school professionals at the front lines of the global crisis had to pivot from years of in-person classroom experiences to remote learning instruction almost overnight, and I feel blessed to have been able

to support my students and school community during such a tumultuous time in our collective lives.

Interpretive Framework

The research paradigm that I utilized for the study is pragmatism. Known pragmatist John Dewey noted that humans interpret situations based on their personal experiences, which means reality will consistently change over time based on how individuals engage with new or existing ideas (Smith, 2020). I believe that as situations arise, humans will need to be reflective and collaborative to help resolve various problems that occur. Pragmatic researchers employ various data collection methods within their studies and tend to follow ethnographic or case study-focused research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Like many pragmatists, I believe education can be used to solve problems for individuals and within our society. I focused on research solutions that are practical and relatively easy to apply to diverse settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kitcher, 2015). Within the realm of education, it is crucial that professionals create support systems that educators and school leaders alike may use so that students can receive benefits from easily applicable and practical programs (Kline, 2020). As such, the pragmatic lens allows me to implement practical research questions and methods in the research study; pragmatism can result in more realistic solutions for schools in the future (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kitcher, 2015; Kline, 2020).

Philosophical Assumptions

A researcher's philosophy persuades an individual's insights, inquiries, and interpretations of a given concept (Yin, 2018). Therefore, a person's experiences and skillsets can drive the information that is obtained. Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that an individual's ontological, epistemological, and axiological views impact that person's research. The following

assumptions will align to the personal views I hold in relation to life and the philosophical notions that will support in guiding the research.

Ontological Assumption

From an ontological perspective, I believe diverse lived experiences can create different perspectives. Ontological perspectives deal with the philosophical depictions of social reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My experiences have shaped my beliefs, though I am aware that others may not fully understand me because they have not experienced the same situations. I am cognizant that others may not comprehend why I do what I do or why others do what they do; though, with educational experiences that provide diverse perspectives, individuals can grow and gain new experiences that will shape their thinking. There is a set reality that we exist within, and many may misinterpret or misunderstand various insights due to a lack of understanding of certain perspectives or concepts. Miscommunication or misunderstandings may cause individuals to challenge their own or others' thoughts, insights, and ways of living.

Epistemological Assumption

Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that an individual's epistemological assumptions focus on how a researcher interprets reality. I feel that when someone is motivated by something and passionate about a concept, the individual's possibilities related to that topic are limitless. If a researcher focuses on a problem related to their soul's innate sense of purpose, that researcher's investments within that concept can create positive changes. If a person is not motivated to engage with a topic, the individual may not create solutions related to that concept. I am more passionate about education than agriculture, so I would not pursue situations where I am solely focused on studying agriculture. However, individuals who are passionate about agriculture should pursue their interests, for if it is something they are excited about, they should follow

their respective paths. Different perspectives that exist within this realm are all considered knowledge, though how individuals choose to justify their respective thoughts can allow for certain claims to be more well-received than others. If a person makes a claim, that person should be able to substantiate that claim. This can be done through research, evidence, and a clear explanation that acknowledges one's own claim and other counterclaims that could exist. The information being researched in a study does not necessarily reflect that researcher, for that information would be construed as biased. However, the research presented should be a point of enthusiasm for the researcher, and the individual should examine a topic of interest. Since qualitative research is founded on subjective insights, those subjective experiences will be reflective of diverse individuals; the individuals associated with this research are not necessarily experts on each respective topic.

Axiological Assumption

Axiological assumptions deal with an individual's perception of values (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers must be cognizant of their personal values and how implicit biases may manifest within various pieces of information. A researcher must be authentic and honest, present the facts in each situation, and consistently be mindful of what their soul calls for them to do. Wisdom can be built from information an individual shares; if someone shares inauthentic insights, misinformation will hinder an individual. Researchers must consistently be mindful of the truth so that the individual's insights may positively impact society.

Researcher's Role

As the human instrument in the study, I do my utmost best to stay in a state of integrity and be an ethical researcher (Yin, 2018). I do not have an authoritative relationship with any of the participants in the study. I do not have an authoritative role over any of the participants in the

study. Since birth, I have been blessed to have lived in such a diverse and culturally rich region of the United States. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Individuals engaging in the study may be educators with whom I have crossed paths in a professional capacity, be it through professional development workshops or departments I have previously engaged with. Since the study relies on purposeful sampling, participants may be individuals who know of me but were never under my supervision. The embedded multiple case study method and pragmatic lens I utilize to develop the research study support uncovering solutions related to trauma-informed education. The data collection procedures and data analysis procedures will be processed with ethics and integrity in mind. In addition, participants are allowed to engage in member-checking to ensure all data that will be reported and analyzed will be fairly presented (Shenton, 2004).

Procedures

I have presented and defended my proposal to the appropriate individuals and to obtain IRB approval from both Liberty University and [REDACTED]. I referred to the SOE Doctoral Community page on Canvas to obtain the necessary documents, protocols, and procedures that supported my study's approval and forthcoming implementation. Upon receiving IRB approvals from both appropriate entities, I began to search for participants. These individuals are associated with schools within the large northeastern school district.

Data Collection Plan

The embedded multiple case study is designed with several steps. I contacted Liberty University to earn conditional approval from the institutional review board (IRB) through

Liberty University to conduct the study at hand; information regarding this can be seen in Appendix A. Once this was completed, I contacted the large northeastern school district's IRB to receive written consent and individual sites in the district to obtain verbal consent from school leadership and educators to collect appropriate data (see Appendix B). Upon receiving full IRB approval, I began the data collection phase of the study. Then, I contacted prospective participants through e-mail (see Appendix C) and provided them with information about the study, along with a consent form (see Appendix D). The purpose of the study, which is to describe how school staff in large school districts in the northeast implement trauma-informed education practices, and the role of the participant in the research study was provided to participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

To ensure I aligned my data collection and analysis methods with my study, I conducted interviews with participants on Zoom's videoconferencing platform; I recorded the interview on the computer and an additional device while taking notes. The interviews were transcribed by both myself and a transcription service, so I could ensure that the data is collected appropriately. Next, I conducted two different focus group sessions online with a minimum of four participants, which helps to discover more information about trauma-informed education practices in a group setting (Yin, 2018). These two focus groups allow for close-knit conversations that allow all participants to speak (Hyde et al., 2005). Next, a thank you e-mail is sent to participants with the journal prompts that are necessary to fill out. Participants are reminded of all three data sources that are required, and the expected length of the journal prompt responses. Data is analyzed and coded at the end of the individual interview process, upon completing the focus groups, and when journal prompts are received. Data is triangulated once all the information is gathered; it is coded for patterns that exist within the data, as well as themes and insights present within the

three sources of data (Yin, 2018).

Yin (2018) explained that there are many ways to approach data collection within a case study. In this specific study, I focus on collecting data through interviews, focus groups, and journal prompts; these three types of data collection align to both the central research question and the purpose statement of my study. Interviews are paramount within the realm of case study research, and allow for open-ended conversations surrounding the topic at hand (Yin, 2018). In addition, the focus group data collection method permits participants to converse with one another in a group setting to expand upon practices, policies, and occurrences within a given setting (Yin, 2018). Finally, the journal prompts allow the participants to explain concepts that they feel are pertinent to the study and to holistically understand the topic at hand (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2021; Yin, 2018).

Individual Interviews

The data collection strategy that will be utilized for the interview process will be semi-structured interviewing. The semi-structured interviewing process requires researchers to ask open-ended questions to participants, then ask follow-up questions to individuals accordingly (Galletta & Cross, 2013; Kallio et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). In other words, the collection strategy allows a researcher to develop questions, ask those specific questions, and create follow-up questions immediately during the interview process to clarify a particular point or perspective. The semi-structured data collection method is appropriate for this study because it allows a researcher to gain deeper insights from a participant while the individual discusses a specific topic; semi-structured data collection allows for an instant follow-up to a question, which can aid me in developing a more robust understanding of a concept immediately (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2021; Yin, 2018). Concerning logistics, data is collected from participants at a

scheduled time appropriate for the participant and me. The interviews take place at a location that is convenient for the interviewer and researcher, as it will occur on Zoom. The location has a quiet area for the interview so that the participant and I have an uninterrupted conversation. Data is collected through Zoom and a cellphone voice memo recording application or a laptop voice memo recorder and cellphone voice memo recording application. All research questions are answered using a combination of the data collection strategies.

The interview questions that utilized for the study have been generated from the central research question. The questions provided are open-ended interview questions, which help the participant illustrate various ideas related to the topic (Yin, 2018). The focus of the study aims to answer the question: How do school staff implement trauma-informed education practices in a large northeastern school district?

The interview questions focus on many topics related to trauma-informed education. Marshall and Rossman (2010) express the need for researchers to utilize a grand tour question at the beginning of the interview process to create a comforting environment for the participant. The interview process should take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour to complete.

Table 1

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your collegiate background, educational experiences, and career to this point. CRQ
2. What are some different traumas influencing students' experiences within your school? SQ1
3. How would you describe trauma-informed education practices within your school? SQ1

4. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your understanding of your school's trauma-informed education practices? SQ1
5. How does your school help support students in meeting their respective physiological needs (water, food, shelter, sleep, etc.)? SQ2
6. How does your school help support students in meeting their safety needs (resources, health, employment, etc.)? SQ2
7. How does your school help support students in meeting their needs related to love and belonging? SQ2
8. How does your school help support students in meeting their various esteem-related needs (self-esteem, respect, recognition, strength, etc.)? SQ2
9. How does your school help support adults, family members, and community members with various basic needs? SQ2
10. What else would you like to add to our discussion about supporting students with various needs? SQ2
11. Self-actualization is "the realization or fulfillment of a person's own gifts, talents, and potential," which Abraham Maslow (1943) notes is an important part of an individual's life. How have your students worked toward their own self-actualization through trauma-informed education practices? SQ3
12. What trauma-informed education practices utilized by your school do you see as potential opportunities to help youth in the community? SQ3
13. What type of trauma-informed education practices utilized by your school would you improve if you had the opportunity to do so? SQ3

14. What recommendations do you have to create trauma-informed education practices?

SQ3

15. How could trauma-informed education practices support students' respective lives as they transition into adulthood? SQ3

The first interview question provided is meant to act as a grand tour question, which encourages the participant to begin to build a trustworthy relationship between the participant and the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). The next four questions on the list will help to understand the participant's experiences with fundamental aspects of trauma-informed education. Questions two and three are meant to encourage the participant to discuss perspectives surrounding trauma-informed education within their respective schools. Question four is included to ensure the researcher can empower the participant to discuss any information that each respective individual finds pertinent to the topic. Questions five through 10 focus on how schools currently address the basic needs of students. Questions 11 through 15 empower participants to discuss trauma-informed practices in relation to the communities they serve, the world of education, and the future. These questions require participants to reflect upon their personal and professional experiences with trauma-informed education through the lens of self-actualization.

Focus Groups

Focus groups allow participants to engage with one another regarding a specific topic (Gall et al., 2007). Yin (2018) explained that a researcher will act as a moderator while participants engage with one another about the topic being studied. Krueger and Casey (2015) suggested about 4 to 12 participants should be present within focus groups. To gain a wide array of insights from participants, two different focus groups of a minimum of four participants will

be conducted. Participants will be able to provide respective information about trauma-informed practices within the classrooms through the focus groups that are developed (Gall et al., 2007; Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Table 2

Focus Group Questions

1. What is the biggest challenge regarding trauma in the classroom? CRQ
2. How are mental health and trauma-informed education prioritized at your school? SQ1
3. How do trauma-informed education practices promote student achievement? SQ3
4. Between students' physiological, safety, love and belonging, and esteem needs, which do you feel have been most impacted by trauma-informed education practices? SQ2
5. How have students' various basic needs been met through trauma-informed practices in your classroom? SQ2
6. How have trauma-informed practices influenced students' abilities to develop future-focused goals and plans? SQ3
7. What resources or support would help with trauma-informed practices within your classroom or school? SQ1
8. We have been talking a lot about trauma-informed education practices. What else would you like to add about this topic? CRQ

The first question is developed as an ice-breaker question to encourage a discussion about trauma-informed education in the classroom. Question two was designed to gather insight into the role trauma-informed education plays within participants' schools. Questions three through five will examine the various academic, personal, and social emotional needs that may be addressed through trauma-informed education practices. Questions six and seven will look at

how goal-oriented thinking for both students and the school culture participants engage with. Question eight will examine how participants may make recommendations for trauma-informed practices within the scope of the research study.

Journal Prompts

The journal prompts utilized within this study provide deeper insight into the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and more recent potential traumatic events on each respective participant. The participants are given about two weeks to complete the four journal prompts provided so that participants can craft a thoughtful response to the question being asked (Marshall & Rossman, 2010; Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2018). The journal prompts are collected as a Google Doc or Word Document, but if the participant needs to submit a handwritten response to the questions, it will be accepted.

Table 3

Journal Prompt Questions

1. In at least one paragraph, discuss how trauma-informed education practices in your school personally impact you in your professional role.
2. In at least one paragraph, discuss at least one trauma-informed practice you engage in on a regular basis as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. In at least one paragraph, how has the community responded to the trauma-informed education practices within the school (you may include your experiences with parents, guardians, etc.)
4. In at least one paragraph, discuss the following: How has the culture of your school remained the same or changed since the implementation of trauma-informed education practices in the endemic COVID-19 era?

Data Analysis

The semi-structured interviewing method requires careful analysis, as the questions formulated prior to the interview process and the questions developed during the interview can provide several in-depth insights into the topic of trauma-informed education (Galletta & Cross, 2013; Kallio et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). The rationale for the semi-structured interviewing process is that the questions and responses will help to shape a better understanding of the trauma-informed education practices within schools (Yin, 2018). Handwritten notes are taken during the interviews to support the information gathered from each interview's recording; these are kept in a journal to ensure that all notes are centralized in the same place (Yin, 2018). Korstjens and Moser (2018) noted that it is crucial for researchers to actively take notes during the interview process so that nonverbal cues and expressions can be integrated as part of the qualitative data collected; the information is analyzed through Saldaña's (2021) method of first and second order coding. Written notes and transcriptions of the recordings are reviewed meticulously, with a structural code identified for each information facet (Saldaña, 2021). In other words, contextual and descriptive words will be applied to the sentences rendered from the data; those words are then aligned to the research questions, and sub-questions developed to support the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Saldaña, 2021; Yin, 2018). It is pivotal that a researcher organizes, analyzes, and reviews data multiple times so that all the information pertaining to the study can be appropriately clarified, explained, and justified (Galletta & Cross, 2013; Yin, 2018). Using Saldaña's (2021) coding process, descriptive coding supports the creation of thematic elements from each of the interviews conducted. In vivo coding is also utilized in connection with thematic coding; the creation of sub-themes within the data build upon analysis and how descriptive coding and in vivo coding reveal in-depth findings about the patterns present within

the data (Saldaña, 2021). Atlas.ti is utilized to analyze the qualitative data within this study to keep the data stored, organized, and in a format that will support the appropriate presentation of data related to the study (Paulus & Lester, 2016; Smit & Scherman, 2021).

The data analysis plan for the insights gained within the focus groups aligns with the data collected during individual interviews (Gall et al., 2007; Yin, 2018). Words and phrases within the physical artifacts will help to expand upon the interviewee's experiences with trauma-informed education. Data synthesis is developed as a result of using Saldaña's (2021) coding procedures, as the focus group data is examined once for initial understanding and a second time for in vivo coding and developing themes and sub-themes pertaining to the research question. Edwards (2020) and Yin (2018) also discussed how extraneous data should be delineated and differentiated from the content and concepts that point towards insights related to trauma-informed education. Moreover, issue-relevant meanings will emerge from observing patterns between the data collected from individual interviews and focus group responses (Edwards, 2020; Yin, 2018).

As with the interview responses and focus groups, Saldaña's (2021) coding procedures will be followed. The first set of coding the responses will require descriptive coding, wherein I identify fundamental insights into the information provided (Saldaña, 2021). Then, in vivo coding is performed to assess the emotional responses related to the information; this allows for action-oriented insights on top of the nouns and phrases identified in connection with the data (Saldaña, 2021). As with the interview responses, Atlas.ti is used to analyze the qualitative data so the information is organized and streamlined in an appropriate, ethical, and structured manner (Paulus & Lester, 2016; Smit & Scherman, 2021). Memoing is done throughout the analysis of the journal prompt responses, to ensure that all the data provided is thoroughly examined and

analyzed in a manner that supports the research question. Bernard et al. (2016) noted that all data within a qualitative study should be examined for patterns and synthesized in a way that adequately responds to the research question.

The information collected from each respective individual interview, the focus groups, and the responses from the participants' journal prompts are synthesized and aligned to the central research question and other thematic elements of the study (Yin, 2018). The data provided within the study does not exist as independent entities, rather all the information correlates to explain the general research question. If research data is not analyzed and synthesized in an objective manner, the study could be seen as illegitimate and inappropriate; therefore, there are a variety of research-oriented ways that support synthesizing the data at hand (Marshall & Rossman, 2010; Paulus & Lester, 2016; Yin, 2018). From the transcription tools being used to the way that data is stored, researchers must be mindful of the procedures and protocols that they are following; it allows the study to be deemed as reputable, appropriate, and well-respected within the educational research community (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2014; Yin, 2018). I am utilizing Atlas.ti for data analysis and synthesis; the program aids in keeping the collected information organized, cohesive, and straightforward so that the insights can be appropriately examined (Paulus & Lester, 2016; Smit & Scherman, 2021). I am specifically synthesizing the information from the notes taken during the interviews, the memoing process with physical artifacts, and the memoing taken during the analysis of the journal prompts to see the differences and commonalities that exist (Yin, 2018). Using Atlas.ti helps to visually examine the themes and sub-themes present within the study, which could only be completed by looking at the amalgamation of data that has been assembled in the program (Paulus & Lester, 2016; Smit & Scherman, 2021). The synthesized data compiled through

Atlas.ti supports the research study's ability to remain ethical, clear, and appropriate (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Paulus & Lester, 2016; Smit & Scherman, 2021).

Trustworthiness

A research study could be seen as invalid if a certain level of trust is not maintained (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, Lincoln and Guba (1985) denoted the value of having certain elements addressed within any given research study; these elements, which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, help to situate a research study in a manner that exemplifies its overall trustworthiness (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Yin (2018) explained that trust and ethics are incredibly important within a study, for a lack of either could negatively impact how well the study is received by various professionals. As such, the information provided will help to express the level of trust that will be considered throughout the qualitative research study.

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that credibility determines how confident an individual can be in the information presented within a study. Shenton (2004) indicated that credibility can be created by triangulating the data from the individual interviews and other data sources collected; within the presented study, triangulating the data will require verifying the physical artifacts, responses to the journal prompts, and the information that interview participants provided while being asked specific questions. Member-checking will also take place regarding the data; information will be returned to the participants in a timely fashion, and they will review the data for accuracy and fairness (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the notion that the information gathered and analyzed within the

study will be applicable to the field of education and other diverse contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). The descriptions provided throughout the research study will support various other fields within society, for trauma-informed education and care are permeable topics in the world (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). The findings within this study have the potential to support other systems within society, for various systems can benefit from learning about leadership, trauma, and the impact that both have on individuals within the world (Bernard et al., 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2010). As the researcher of this study, I cannot guarantee that transferability within this research can occur within all aspects of society. However, I can confirm that this research is supportive of finding solution-oriented ways to address societal concerns such as trauma.

Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that dependability refers to findings that are consistent, and easily replicable with similar procedures being acted upon. The description of the procedures must be clear and concise, so that others can duplicate the study if need be (Marshall & Rossman, 2010; Shenton, 2004). An inquiry audit of this study and its corresponding data will be performed by the dissertation committee at Liberty University, which also includes a review from the Qualitative Research Director.

Confirmability

The research study needs to remain neutral, meaning the researcher's insights cannot taint the findings within the participants' responses and the collected data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). As the researcher, my personal thoughts, beliefs, passions, and insights will not obscure or obstruct the findings within the study. Shenton (2004) also discussed that the study should include an audit trail, which allows any given individual to trace the procedures and steps

taken to conduct this study. As mentioned, triangulation of the data will also occur to maintain clarity and consistency within the study; all the data collected will always be synthesized with other insights gathered from participants who engage in the research (Shenton, 2004; Yin, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed how trust, respect, and honor are crucial within a study. To ensure I aligned with their ethical insights, I was mindful of the participants that joined in the research study. I have been employed and associated with the large district that I conducted the study in; though since it is a large district, the participants of the study were from other school buildings that I have no known conflict of interest or power imbalance with.

Permissions

Prior to conducting this study, site and participant access will be acquired from the [REDACTED] and Liberty University's IRB. Site permission will also be needed from individual schools. Consent will be obtained from participants to make certain that the research is aligned to ethical practices. To ensure that the study will be implemented smoothly, conditional approval is obtained from the school district's IRB. Conditional approval will allow for the study to be conducted in a timely and an appropriate manner.

Other Participant Protections

To ensure that ethical considerations were upheld within the study, there are a variety of details that must be discussed. Before the study began, site and participant access were acquired from the Liberty University IRB and the northeastern school district's IRB. Consent was obtained from participants. Necessary informed consent was obtained from participants. Participants were told about their voluntary contributions to the study and were informed about

how they could withdraw from the research study at any given time without any negative repercussions. The confidentiality of various sites and participants are upheld through pseudonyms that will protect the participants' privacy (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Electronic data is kept secured on an encrypted hard drive and a password-protected cloud folder; physical data is kept in a locked, fire-proof safe at an undisclosed location. In the event the study needs to be extended for future insights, the data will not be destroyed after three years. Participants were made aware of the risks and benefits to being a part of this study, including possible risks manifesting from discussing traumas related to events such as COVID-19. Participants were given an opportunity to have certain aspects of their responses redacted if they felt the data was harmful to their character, their experiences, or due to other circumstances.

Summary

This case study research supports discussions related to trauma-informed education in the wake of COVID-19. The responses from participants will give further insight into how school systems can structure trauma-informed programs to benefit youth and school staff. The data collection methods are reflective of ethical, trustworthy, and moral notions, all of which are also seen through the data analysis strategies that were previously discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this multiple case study is to describe how employees in a large school district in the northeastern United States implement trauma-informed education practices. The problem is that trauma-informed education is insubstantial in many large northeastern school districts (Brunzell et al., 2021; Forber-Pratt et al., 2021; Ford-Paz et al., 2022; Lawson et al., 2019; McKinsey et al., 2022; Sonsteng-Person & Loomis, 2021). This chapter describes the findings of the study, and discusses participant descriptions, various narrative themes and subthemes that were ascertained from the data, outlier data that is revealed, and qualitative data that corresponds with research question responses. There is a summary at the end of the chapter, which reviews different aspects of the study and the data that was collected as part of the research.

Participants

Participants were given pseudonyms during this study to protect their respective identities and the school sites they are a part of; this ensures respect towards their confidentiality. The IRB presiding over the large northeastern school district and Liberty University's IRB approved the recruitment of participants as discussed within chapter three. Purposeful sampling was utilized to obtain participants in this specific study; therefore, the participants in this case study range from a variety of educators, school staff, and school leaders that were interviewed (Yin, 2018). The participants' diverse levels of responsibility, varying experiences, and location in several regions of the large northeastern school district supported the credibility of the insights in the study and permitted a wide description of the case at hand (Stake, 1995).

Table 4*Participants*

Participant	Years of Service	Degrees Earned	Role	Grade Level
Anastasia	20+	Bachelors, Masters	Educator	9th – 12th
Barbara	20+	Bachelors, Masters, EdD	School Leader	6th – 12th
Bobby	15+	Bachelors, Masters	Educator	9th – 12th
Charlotte	10+	Bachelors, Masters, EdD	Educator	K – 5th
Daphna	15+	Bachelors, Masters	Educator	6th – 8th
Fredo	20+	Bachelors, Masters	Educator	9th – 12th
Harry	20+	Bachelors, Masters	School Leader	K – 5th
Katelyn	20+	Bachelors, Masters	Educator	K – 5th
Kori	15+	Bachelors, Masters	Educator	9th – 12th
Kyle	10+	Bachelors, Masters, JD	Dean and Educator	9th – 12th
Ryan	15+	Bachelors, Masters	School Leader	9th – 12th
Teddy	15+	Bachelors, Masters	Educator	9th – 12th

Anastasia

Anastasia earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in education, and has been a dedicated educator in the large northeastern school district for about 22 years. Throughout her career, she has worked with general education students within various science classroom settings within Hogwarts Academy High School (9th - 12th).

Barbara

Barbara earned a bachelor's degree in English literature, then chose to pursue her master's degree in school administration. Though originally an educator and an assistant principal, Barbara earned her Ed.D. in the last decade. In addition, she became a school principal at Star Academy (Grades 6-12) within the past decade.

Bobby

Bobby works as a science teacher at Union High School, which supports 9th through 12th graders on their educational journey. He earned a bachelor's degree in business management prior to earning his master's degree and has been a part of the large northeastern school district for almost 20 years.

Charlotte

Charlotte pursued her bachelor's degree in communications and continued her pursuit of higher education with a master's degree in education. Charlotte has been teaching in the large northeastern school district for 13 years, within roles such as an academic intervention specialist and reading coach. She has taught at Sussex Elementary School (K-5th) throughout her career and earned her doctorate while focusing on research topics such as culturally responsive education and valuing the gifts and talents that individuals bring to the classroom.

Daphna

Daphna earned a bachelor's degree in education, then pursued her career in the state of Nevada. She returned to the northeast, earned her master's degree in education, and began working for the large northeastern school district. Her expertise ranges from supporting middle school to high school students who are a part of special needs populations; she currently works at King Middle School (Grades 6-8).

Fredo

Fredo has been a part of the large northeastern school district since 1999 and has taught a few different history-based courses. Prior to joining New High School (Grades 9-12), he earned his bachelor's degree in history. Once employed within the district, he earned a master's degree in history and a master's degree in educational administration.

Harry

Harry's educational experiences range from studying animal husbandry to working with dairy cows. He pursued a degree in applied linguistics with minors in education and adult literacy. He later earned his master's degree in school administration. His experiences as an educator and his global experiences led him to become a school leader at The Project School, and Harry has been a part of the large northeastern school district for over 20 years.

Katelyn

After earning her bachelor's and master's degrees in education, Katelyn has spent over 20 years working at Haven Elementary School (K-5). Though originally out of the classroom during the first few years of her career, she has been educating youth for well over a decade. She has experience as a reading specialist within Haven Elementary School.

Kori

As an educator within Bellows High School (Grade 9-12), Kori has supported English as a Second Language students for over 15 years within the large northeastern school district. She has earned her bachelor's and master's in various educational fields and has been working with several migrant families over the past few months.

Kyle

After earning his bachelor's and Juris Doctorate, Kyle returned to school to earn a master's degree in education. He has worked in several different industries, from corporate roles to small in-house legal roles. After his experiences with a charter school and other educational institutions, he joined Anytown High School (9-12), which is a part of the large northeastern school district.

Ryan

Ryan is currently a school leader at Crescent High School, a school that supports youth from grades 9 – 12. Between his teaching experience and his school leadership experience, he has been a part of the large northeastern school district for about 17 years. Though his current role has him supervising the safety and security of his school building, he previously spent many years working as a Foreign Language educator.

Teddy

After graduating college, Teddy worked in a variety of media-based roles. She is incredibly passionate about art, which led her to earn her master's degree in education and pursue a career working as an educator at Iced Latte High School (Grades 9 – 12). Though her initial years in education were at the elementary level, she has spent almost 10 years within her current high school.

Results

Insights developed from this study are represented in the themes presented below. The themes and subthemes shown were created through substantial data analysis, synthesis, and evaluation produced from individual interviews, focus groups, and writing prompts generated by participants. The data is displayed visually through the diagram presented in the next section, and

through a narrative depiction crafted throughout chapter four. Appendix E has information about the codes that were developed and organized upon aggregating the participant data.

Figure 1

Themes & Subthemes

Trauma-Informed Education		
Collaborative Environment	Cultivating Connections	Establishing Trust
Open Communication	Creating Spaces of Belonging	Respect for One Another
Awareness of Traumas	Acknowledging the Cultural and Ethnic Backgrounds Present	Building Skills for Success
Awareness of Communal Needs		Acknowledging Various Needs

Collaborative Environment

Through the individual interviews, focus groups, and journal prompts, several participants highlighted the importance of all staff and community members working together to develop trauma-informed solutions. Participants agreed that the support from mental health professionals, such as school counselors, social workers, or community-based psychologists and counselors helped to mitigate trauma-fueled situations. When parents, community members, and students' families discussed different situations with various school staff, solutions that supported the individual student's academic, social, and emotional abilities grew in a positive manner.

As a result of several tense situations, Ryan, fellow school staff, and the students' families worked to create a practical plan for the students' success. In the individual interview,

Ryan mentioned, “There was such a huge improvement that my interactions with the families were no longer about negative actions that happened, it was more about checking in with them and letting them know all of the positive things happening.” By working together with the families, school employees, and the student, various solutions were able to be established to benefit the different parties involved. In their individual interviews and their focus group, Harry and Daphna noted that when different school staff, such as paraprofessionals, secretaries, and educators work together to support students, youth can obtain necessary resources and emotional support.

Open Communication

Especially during the focus groups, participants noted that when school staff speak to one another about different situations that students are dealing with, educators are better able to support youth within their respective classrooms. In his individual interview, Bobby explained, “Having a strong network of adults who the students feel comfortable with it’s just the most important thing.” Many participants noted a school’s open-door policy that allows for students to speak with school staff about different things on their mind creates an effective trauma-informed environment. As seen in their individual interviews, focus groups, and journal prompt responses, Barbara, Ryan, and Teddy recalled specific situations where students and their families received much-needed support due to the open-door policies that school staff implemented.

When families were honest about the different struggles they were facing, different resources were able to be distributed to them. This further helped support families’ abilities to survive and thrive, and assisted their children secure the necessities to support academic, social, and emotional growth. In his individual interview, Kyle insisted schools utilize “Educators and all stakeholders in the community, whether that be community-based organizations, local police,

nurses, or counselors, to address and to understand what the underlying issues are that need to be addressed.” During their respective focus groups, Ryan and Kori expressed the need for schools to consistently perform outreach to community organizations and families within the neighborhood. In his journal prompt response, Harry noted that community organizations who are cognizant of the diverse needs of families can engage in best practices that help develop better access to social, emotional, professional, and health-related needs. These organizations can help provide resources and trauma-informed care to countless families.

Awareness of Traumas

When school staff were aware of the traumas that youth and their respective families were attempting to cope with, it was easier to work towards solutions that could be created for individual youth and the school community at large. Many participants explained how students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels are often taking care of younger siblings, parents, and family members before and after school. Harry, Ryan, and Fredo noted that some students even have their own children that they must attend to. During her individual interview, Katelyn said, “You can have eight-year-olds... providing meals and things like that for younger siblings, getting them dressed and to school. Food, bills, money, all of that, those kids are taking care of it.”

School administrators’ support and willingness to create an environment where staff can discuss the traumas that students are facing has helped staff to better understand what students are facing, and how to potentially handle what is happening. In their individual interviews, focus groups, and journal prompt responses, Barbara, Harry, Kyle, and Teddy expressed the importance of supportive staff and administration who are willing to gain insight and provide

trauma-informed support. All participants' schools utilize surveys and data-driven initiatives that can aid the distribution of trauma-informed resources.

Awareness of Communal Needs

Being involved in the community and understanding the needs of those who engage with the school at large are paramount to developing trauma-informed education practices. During the individual interview and focus group, Harry expressed the need for schools to regularly communicate with parents and families. He noted, "Many of them, [the teachers], have no understanding of trauma. They have no understanding of racism or poverty. Most of the teachers come from outside of the neighborhood." During both focus groups, the participants collectively indicated that the experiences of school staff may not always mirror the community they teach and work in. In their journal prompts and individual interviews, Katelyn, Charlotte, and Ryan explained that being communicative with families on a regular basis has benefitted students' academic, social, emotional, professional, and personal development; when families and school staff show an investment in students, those students were able to gain more support toward achieving their respective goals.

When staff had better knowledge of the events and circumstances that the community at large was facing, there was a better understanding of the targeted needs that would have to be addressed within the school setting. In her journal prompt response, Teddy said, "I think the best way to take the best way to spread trauma informed education and supports to outside of our school walls are to bring the adults in and really do workshops with the parent populations." Within Barbara and Bobby's respective schools, there are various surveys that students and families complete to determine various needs. Charlotte's school also provides school community members access to a food, supply, and clothing pantry made up of donations from

organizations in the region. In addition, when the school community, meaning school staff, were given the resources, training, and support needed, trauma-informed education practices could be more effectively implemented within schools.

Cultivating Connections

School staff attempt to establish connections between the school environment and themselves and the students and their respective families. In doing so, families and students are more willing to share what is happening at home, and how the school could potentially support youth. The participants collectively noted how recent traumas related to COVID-19, discrimination based on several factors, the deaths of family members and friends, and having to assume the role of full-time jobs to support their family have taken a toll on students and their respective schools. In his journal prompt response, Bobby noted, “We do a lot of parent outreach... especially [if] we see anything that might be negatively affecting the students in terms of their needs.” All these different traumas are occurring in the communities of the large northeastern school district, and the participants came to a consensus that these traumas influence the community in some form or way. These traumas also seep into the classroom during different instances.

Creating Spaces of Belonging

Through the development of after-school clubs, spaces where students can socialize without worrying about their safety, and classroom environments that allow for freedom of expression are crucial in establishing trauma-informed education practices. Some of the different clubs created within the participants’ schools include culture-based clubs, gender identity organizations, and student-interest groups. Teddy and Bobby explained how individual classroom environments can become spaces of belonging and kindness. In their focus groups,

Daphna, Charlotte, Teddy, and Kyle explained specific practices within the classroom that aid in the development of spaces of belonging. Teddy said, “They know that there is a safe space here where they can come to me and be upfront with their needs, their personal needs, and they’re not going to get reprimanded for it.”

Charlotte and Daphna also mentioned how they create spaces of belonging for students through the school’s clubs, activities hosted by student leaders during lunch periods, and resources that are provided to students who may need something. In her individual interview, Charlotte mentioned a specific incident where she went to the school’s supply closet, and retrieved books for several students who could not afford the materials for their respective classes. Katelyn and Barbara identified several restorative practices that take place within their schools, such as meetings that focus on how to encourage openness, sharing, kindness, and emotional intelligence in classrooms and other locations in school.

Acknowledging the Cultural and Ethnic Backgrounds Present

Being aware of the cultural and ethnic backgrounds and needs of an individual and a community are incredibly crucial. Diverse cultures and ethnicities interpret different scenarios in different ways. For example, an individual from a traditionally Hispanic culture may not be comfortable discussing mental health-related situations with school staff. In understanding how individuals from varied cultures and ethnicities interpret the role of an educator, this may also prove to be important in how school employees approach students, scenarios with families, and events within the community. Ryan said, “Ethnic backgrounds [are] serving as the basis for much of their trauma.” Kori, Anastasia, Fredo, and Kyle mentioned that there are several students who are new to the country and are influenced by their experiences; many noted the

survival tactics that students have had to rely on have furthered trauma-fueled reactions to different situations.

To support youth within the community, Anastasia also noted a rather important point during the focus group. Anastasia mentioned, “Hire more community organizations to help to support students and parents.” All participants also agreed with Anastasia’s point, with variations of comments including how community-based organizations are “on the ground” and involved with the neighborhoods surrounding different schools. Schools should consistently collaborate with community organizations who regularly engage in outreach in their neighborhood, so that various partnerships can be developed to create symbiotic relationships that will positively benefit all.

Establishing Trust

Creating and cultivating relationships built on trust can help support the implementation and further development of trauma-informed education. When a student trusts a school employee, that employee can support the student in advocating for additional resources in the school and in the community. If a student is struggling with a challenge at home, a school employee may direct the student towards an appropriate mental health professional, community organizations, or places where support can be acquired. If a person feels comfortable talking openly with someone, that person can receive help that may not have been obtained if a certain level of trust was not established. Fredo, Bobby, Ryan, and Harry explained different trauma-informed tactics that they engaged in during the COVID-19 pandemic. These included ensuring students and their families had enough food to eat, helping youth find accessible health care, and moving deadlines to ensure students can develop a balance between work, school, personal, and familial responsibilities. Fredo specifically noted in his journal prompt response how he “decided

to have food sent to [students'] houses through GrubHub.” Creative ways of connecting with students, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, helped to build conversations and trust.

Daphna expressed how she would speak to certain students and families based on their respective needs. Charlotte and Daphna conveyed the need for open communication to continue during the school year and after a student has moved forward to the next grade. In doing so, relationships can be built between families and families are more interested in sharing their challenges and needs with the school. When families and students work regularly with the same school-related individuals, participants noted that students seem to thrive in academic, social, emotional, personal, and professional settings.

Respect for One Another

Respect is paramount to developing trauma-informed education practices. When a student feels that there is a certain level of respect between themselves and a school employee, the student may feel more comfortable with expressing certain emotions, engaging in conversations about different topics, or potentially accepting help from professionals within the school or community. In their individual interviews and focus groups, Harry and Ryan explained that respect and trust come from a fundamental understanding of what traumas are permeating school communities. Other participants correlated understanding and communicating with youth in a manner that respects the student's background, community, and culture as pertinent to holistically implementing trauma-informed education practices. Through the individual interviews, focus groups, and journal prompt responses, the participants articulated the need for trauma-informed education practices to be tailored to the needs of youth from different cultures and backgrounds. By ensuring trauma-informed practices are supportive of the diverse cultures

in the school, participants noted that the students and their families will feel acknowledged, respected, and cared for.

When it comes to showing respect for students and their families, it is also important to be cognizant of the various needs that individuals require. During the focus group, Kori noted a time when her school was distributing baskets of food and other supplies to families; this was around a specific holiday. Most participants expressed the usefulness of creating food and supply baskets for families around the holidays to provide culturally responsive ways to spread kindness and compassion during traditionally cheerful points during the year. Communication and acknowledging the needs of all individuals within a school are important and symbiotic, as families should not be left without resources or support. When it comes to developing a sense of respect, or any of the aspects of trauma-informed education, all school staff must acknowledge the practices in place so that all may benefit.

Building Skills for Success

Classroom activities that focus on building the skills necessary to thrive and achieve what goals youth put forth can help construct a sense of self-actualization. When schools take time to address social or emotional traumas that an individual is dealing with, situations can become more effective and efficient to manage. In their individual interviews, Daphna and Katelyn's schools engage in life skill-based activities and classes, which aid in supporting students' abilities to build necessary skills to thrive as they move toward adulthood. Students can develop the skills necessary to handle various situations that occur within their lives. In addition, during their focus group, Anastasia, Kyle, and Barbara noted how self-confidence grows from participating in social and emotional activities in school. Harry, Fredo, and Kori also agreed during their journal prompt responses, adding a variety of insights that focused on the need to

prioritize skill-based learning within classes, to support students' development as they transition toward adulthood.

Acknowledging Various Needs

During the focus groups, the large school district employees agreed that although they are spread out across different areas in the district, ensuring the needs of their students and respective families are met is crucial to success. Many families can trust that their needs or the needs of their children can be met by the school or associated affiliates. No matter where in the district the employees are stationed, all believe that knowing what students need to thrive is important. In their individual interviews, Ryan and Kyle explained how the deans of the school collaborated with each other, staff, families, and students to ensure that safety and security were being upheld in the school. During their individual interviews, focus groups, and journal prompt responses, other participants conveyed how deans, counselors, and administrators spent time on the weekends and after school hours mitigating students' familial emergencies, cases of cyberbullying, and instances surrounding severe personal challenges. While many participants noted how school staff often go above and beyond typical school hours, they also articulated how community organizations' collaborative support helped families when school was not in session. These organizations work closely with schools to aid communities during the summer months; this also includes time when schools had to combine efforts to get necessary resources for students and their families. Various needs that students required support for have included finding childcare for the children of high school students, providing laundry services, and helping community members find employment opportunities.

Outlier Data and Findings

The large northeastern school district supports youth from several socioeconomic backgrounds, cultures, experiences, living situations, preferences, and language proficiencies. As such, participants from different regions of the district, varying grade levels, and several positions were interviewed. The participants' schools ranged from serving low socioeconomic status elementary school youth to middle-class high school youth. Through a comprehensive analysis of the data, outlier data emerged because of the varying differences between each of the participants, their respective roles, and the students that are supported within their schools.

Trauma-Informed Trainings are Different in Each School

Though many schools are utilizing several trauma-informed education practices within their respective buildings, some educators are not aware of the true definition of trauma, how to identify specific responses that are fueled by trauma, or would like to have mental health professionals specifically trained in trauma-informed education practices to support their school site. Many participants could articulately identify the definitions of both trauma and trauma-informed education. However, this was based on a general understanding of what traumas are and the notion that trauma can influence an individual in a negative way. Explicit trainings on trauma and trauma-informed education practices were not discussed in-depth in the individual schools that the participants are a part of, however the participants' own life experiences, their dedication towards expanding their professional wisdom, and their ability to show compassion and consideration toward their students and colleagues have helped to support the infusion of trauma-informed education practices within their schools.

Many referenced the need for uniformity in training throughout the district when it comes to sharing trauma-informed education practices; the participants did generally come to a

consensus that traumas appear differently based on the neighborhoods and communities that their schools are a part of. Multiple participants noted that although there can be several different trauma-informed practices mentioned within a given training, without proper protocols, follow-up, and support, these practices may have a minimal impact on students, a school, and a community.

Staff Must be Invested in Trauma-Informed Education Practices

Though there are many different trends in education that phase in and out of schools over the years, trauma and traumatic experiences are things that happen continuously over a person's lifetime. If school staff are not cognizant of this notion, or do not take the time to speak with students about social and emotional concerns that may arise in addition to academic situations, traumas can severely challenge an individual from their youth to adulthood. Charlotte mentioned, "You can't support students unless you're invested in your students, and you also can't support students if you don't like your job." She continues to note that teachers must be supported to ensure that a school's culture can thrive appropriately.

Various participants also mentioned that some individuals may not show compassion for a student's circumstances; some may not want to invest in emotional conversations in a classroom or school setting, and may be more inclined to have the student visit a mental health professional. However, some schools do not have immediate access to crisis counselors or mental health professionals. It is important that all staff have insight into trauma-informed practices and different ways to support youth who are facing a challenging situation. Without an investment in school culture and truly showing care and compassion for students and fellow staff members, traumas will continue to permeate both the school and the individual students' lives;

this would not be beneficial for anyone in the school or community, as traumatized people, and those without the skills to handle trauma, can cause more challenges.

Diversity Within the District May or May Not Result in Schoolwide Trauma Diversity

Though the large northeastern school district supports communities that range from families with a low socioeconomic status to those who come from a household with two well-employed and financially stable parents, the nature of each school in the district allows for youth from diverse socioeconomic statuses to be enrolled in schools that will need to support low, middle, and high socioeconomic status youth. The school district itself allows for youth from a plethora of backgrounds to attend just about any school within the region. The large northeastern school district is supported by a massive public transportation system, which has the potential to allow a student to commute from one area to another. This poses an issue when the school is not cognizant of the resources, cultural or ethnic background, or the support that the individual student may need. This can cause individual students to slip through the cracks, or not receive the targeted support that may be required. Bobby and Daphna explained that although their schools are in a middle-class area, they would like to see more support for traumas happening in those regions of the school district. They noted that circumstances such as drug abuse and financial crimes have afflicted students in their schools and resources to support the impacts of those traumas would be beneficial.

Research Question Responses

The large northeastern school district's participants displayed a vast understanding of how trauma-informed practices are implemented in several ways within their respective school buildings. Through interviewing individual participants, engaging in focus groups, and reading participants' written journal responses, it was revealed that open communication, trust building,

acknowledging cultural and ethnic experiences within the community, and providing appropriate trainings about trauma can support the implementation of trauma-informed education practices.

The central research questions and corresponding sub-questions were examined and answered.

Central Research Question

How do school staff implement trauma-informed education practices in a large northeastern school district? The participants' perspective involves the incorporation of trust, open communication, and building connections with youth and their respective families. Multiple participants cite the relationships that school staff create with students and their families as the key to developing effective learners and youth who grow into well-developed adults. Collaboration between staff within the school building and communication with families in the community help support the mitigation of trauma. Barbara explained how the systems and structures within a school are crucial to its success with trauma-informed education. Participants expressed their positive interactions with community organizations and mental health institutions, which have helped provide additional resources to schools and students in need of help. Communication, consistent collaboration, creating measures that promote safety, and integrating culturally responsive practices in schools have been supportive of trauma-informed education practices across the schools examined in this study.

Sub-Question One

How do school staff understand the concept of trauma-informed education? There are multiple layers to understanding trauma-informed education practices, and they are often focused around the supports that counselors and mental health professionals provide. The consensus from the participants is that trauma-informed education practices are occurring within schools, though more training on trauma-informed education should be provided. Katelyn and Fredo said that

trauma-informed practices have helped to build staff members' understandings of the impact of trauma and how it can appear in a school setting. Harry and Teddy hope to see more trauma-informed education training within schools, as some staff are still working toward trying to identify, remedy, and support the various traumas that students and their families are dealing with. Barbara and Ryan explained that trauma-informed education is often understood through the behaviors and stressors that are outwardly displayed by students; Daphna, Kyle, Kori, and Bobby said that it is important for schools to help staff identify the silent or positive-seeming reactions to traumas, such as joining multiple clubs to stay after-school each day, taking several advanced classes, and volunteering to help adults in the building to avoid spending time with other students their own age.

Sub-Question Two

How are different trauma-informed education practices implemented in school settings to promote the fulfillment of students' (physiological, safety, love, esteem) needs? Schools within the large northeastern district provide a variety of physiological needs that students require, such as free breakfast, lunch, and snacks that students could take home. Safety needs that are addressed within schools include utilizing restorative circles and behavioral practices that are not punitive in a disrespectful way. Love and belonging-related needs stem from after-school clubs that are offered to students, community-based organizations that collaborate with the schools, and trusting relationships that are built between school staff and students. Regarding esteem-related needs, schools provide students with a plethora of options for self-expression and self-discovery, which can be achieved through events offered in the schools, various clothing and food drives that occur throughout the year, and clubs that offer a safe haven for students. Teddy

and Fredo explained that their constant communication with students helped them better understand how to meet their students' needs.

Other participants expressed their appreciation for the events and collections their respective schools engage in throughout the holidays and during the school year. Ryan and Charlotte said there are many programs in place to help students get food, school supplies, and items for their respective homes. During holidays, companies in the surrounding communities help schools distribute resources to families to help remedy food insecurity and other challenges that students may be facing. Barbara and Harry mentioned after-school organizations that partner with schools, so that students can receive support with various needs when they are not currently in the school building.

Sub-Question Three

How do trauma-informed education practices contribute to the development of self-actualization? When students are in an environment that acknowledges the traumas and experiences that youth and their families have faced, and the environment provides support to address and remedy the traumas at hand, youth can obtain the necessary skills that will help them survive and thrive within adulthood. Ryan, Teddy, and Katelyn noted how trauma-informed practices have had a noticeable impact on their respective schools. School culture can be positively developed because of staff, students, and community members being exposed to trauma-informed practices and culturally responsive support. With trauma-informed education practices, participants noticed an increase in the number of students joining clubs, creating school events, and developing spaces where their fellow classmates could find supportive resources.

Summary

The themes presented within this section illustrate the need for trust, open communication, respect, acknowledging cultural and ethnic backgrounds of individuals and their communities, and the willingness to cultivate connections between school staff, students, and their respective families. If a school does not try to develop a collaborative environment between students, the school itself, and the surrounding community, it will be rather challenging to implement trauma-informed education practices. Above all, if school staff are not cognizant of the traumas and the potential challenges that youth are dealing with, it can be difficult to support a student's holistic growth into adulthood.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this multiple case study is to describe how employees in large school districts in the northeast are informed of, interpret, and implement trauma-informed education practices. The chapter will illuminate the findings of this study and how they connect to theoretical and empirical research currently present. The thematic and sub-thematic elements of this multiple case study will be cross-examined with the sources that also point to how trauma-informed education has been implemented and explained within various school districts. The policy propositions, practical aspects, theoretical elements, and methodological implications, along with limitations and delimitations will be discussed. Potential areas of growth for the realm of trauma-informed education will also be elaborated on toward the end of this chapter.

Discussion

Upon developing this study, the question “How do school staff implement trauma-informed education practices in a large northeastern school district?” was created through examining the current gap in the literature related to trauma-informed education. Abraham Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs underpinned the topic at hand, for the goal of self-actualization is challenging to obtain if traumatic experiences are preventing individuals from obtaining the physiological, safety, belonging, and esteem needs they so highly covet. The large northeastern school district selected for this study provided ample insight into trauma-informed education practices, as the methodologies surrounding the topic are being introduced in the region. The thematic and sub-thematic insights from this study are a result of the in-depth analysis and synthesis developed from the multiple case studies. The data analysis shows the interconnectedness of the various schools involved in the study. Policy implications are detailed

within the concluding elements of this chapter. The limitations and delimitations of the study, as well as recommendations for future research, will also be discussed with respect to trauma-informed education.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The information below describes a summary of the themes presented in the previous chapter. Through the process of data collection, analysis, synthesis, and thematic structuring, certain concepts became apparent. With my interpretation of the findings, there will also be forthcoming policy and practice suggestions presented. Connections to theoretical and empirical studies will be developed, which shows how trauma-informed education practices are implemented in a large northeastern school district. The findings show that there needs to be clear information about what traumas are and how these can manifest within youth.

Without open communication, trauma-informed practices cannot thrive.

The notion of trauma-informed education can often be muddled by the concepts of social emotional learning and a misunderstanding of an individual's neurodivergence (Anda et al., 2006; Buda & Czekman, 2021; Burke-Harris, 2020; Dayal & Tiko, 2020; van der Bij et al., 2020). There are a variety of programs, resources, and individuals who engage with a student; if information about the student is missing, unclear, or not communicated properly, this can negatively impact the individual. In addition, Kyle remarked, "When we know what is happening with a student, we can potentially help him or her." Few participants, such as Fredo and Kori, noticed that it can often be hard to pinpoint and define schoolwide trauma-informed education practices when all individuals in the school do not show universal acknowledgment of the practices at hand.

For trauma-informed practices to be used appropriately, school employees must work collaboratively to communicate situations involving students and their families, resources that are available in the community, the school employees that may be comfortable with a specific student or cultural background, and much more. If an organized line of communication is not present, ideas surrounding trauma-informed education practices may not be able to fully support students, their respective families, or school staff. This can result in resources that could help support a student and his or her family to be mismanaged, which can lead to the basic needs of an individual being disregarded; this can make it even more challenging for an individual to obtain a sense of self-actualization.

Trauma-informed knowledge must be provided clearly.

School staff should not just receive one training about trauma, and then be expected to consistently handle every situation that arises. One training that may take place over the course of an hour or two does not replace the expertise and support of mental health professionals. Educators, paraprofessionals, school secretaries, and other school employees may be able to gain a basic understanding of how to identify trauma, but because traumatic situations manifest so differently within individuals, it may be a challenge to ascertain the resources a child may need in a moment of duress. Training about traumas and trauma-informed education practices should be ongoing, and there should be more support within schools when it comes to consistently addressing trauma-informed initiatives.

Many participants noted that training within the large northeastern school district can happen quickly, and may not always include a follow-up conversation. In speaking about the trauma-informed education practices in his school, Kyle noted how one student asked the school why certain things were not being addressed. Bobby also explained that some trauma-informed

education practices seemed to be implemented after something negative happened at the school. Barbara and Daphna noted that trauma-informed education practices should be used as pre-emptive measures to handle challenges that may manifest in the future.

Trauma-informed education can help build necessary skills.

When explained appropriately to school staff, trauma-informed education practices can help youth build the skills necessary to thrive despite previous challenges (Brunzell et al., 2021; Kline, 2020; Rumsey & Milsom, 2019; Thompson & Farrell, 2019). Kyle said, “I would simply say that the trauma-informed education research is very important because we are not as a society meeting our students needs in the ways that we should.” Katelyn further added that trauma-informed education resources help provide, “skills on how to cope with a lot of things going on in life such as talking to an adult... [and] dealing with not getting what they want.” Participants also conveyed that life comes with many challenges; having the skills to cope with what may happen in the future will be beneficial to students as they grow and mature.

Mental health professionals should be accessible in all schools.

If a child is in crisis in a classroom setting, it is challenging for an educator to teach a room full of students and give the child who is in distress due attention. Katelyn, Charlotte, and Barbara mentioned how traumas can permeate a classroom environment at any given moment. With more mental health professionals being available within schools, and an actual plan to handle traumatic situations that may occur at a moment’s notice, instruction can continue in classes and the child in crisis can receive support. More research can be conducted on how many mental health professionals should be placed in each school, which could be determined by the school’s needs and the issues that youth and their respective families are facing. With mental health professionals who can educate students and staff about de-escalation tactics and culturally

appropriate ways to handle situations, social and emotional skills can be integrated into situations both inside and outside of the classroom.

Implications for Policy or Practice

Trauma-informed education implies that individuals are versed in understanding what traumas are, how traumas manifest in an individual's body, how trauma may be healed or remedied, and what can be done to prevent the traumatization or re-traumatization of individuals. In essence, trauma-informed education invites individuals to learn the skills necessary to become more compassionate, accepting of themselves and others, and empathetic of situations that they may not have lived through. Moreover, through a series of policy and practice adjustments, schools may be able to become more equipped to help support students' transition from youthhood to a realm of self-actualized adulthood.

Implications for Policy

There most certainly needs to be more uniformity and clarity when it comes to implementing trauma-informed education practices. Though many schools within this large northeastern school district cater to different communities, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds, it is imperative that skills-based resources, information about local mental health resources, and culture-specific support are equally made available to all sites in the district. Even if schools do not currently support a specific culture or ethnic group, there is potential for families and individuals to migrate to a given area. Therefore, the large school district must be mindful of the cultures, ethnicities, and needs of different individuals, and should help provide mental health professionals, clear trauma-informed education practice trainings, and practical resources to schools; this is incredibly important, especially in the wake of COVID-19.

Regarding the topic of mental health professionals, a federal regulation should be put in place to require a certain number of counselors, social workers, or community health workers in each individual school and district. Though a discussion of the ratio of students per mental health professional should be researched, it can also be inferred that all school staff should receive basic training on how to proactively identify traumas, know how to find proper resources to support students and families, and should be consistently be updated on methods and strategies to further prevent the traumatization or re-traumatization of youth and their respective families. It would also benefit all schools to receive lessons, curriculum, and support to implement a variety of skill-based lessons that help students develop strategies to cope with and remedy different traumas that may occur.

Implications for Practice

When it comes to trauma-informed education practices, there needs to be uniform language, skills-based support, and lessons that may be made available to all schools within a district. All school administrators should go through mandatory trauma-informed education practice training that provide hands-on learning and practical supports that can be implemented. Trauma-informed education should not be treated as a “fad” or “hot topic” in education that will fade away; trauma may not often fade away very quickly, especially if people are not equipped with the proper resources to handle things that have happened or could happen. If individuals are trained in trauma-informed education practices, we may create a more understanding, compassionate, kind, and accepting society.

Charlotte, Barbara, Harry, and Ryan talked about how trauma-informed practices can support individuals for countless generations. When youth learn the necessary skills to cope with, remedy, and heal from traumatic situations as they arise, these strategies can be shared with

others who may also struggle with issues during their respective lifetime. Trauma-informed practices will continue to grow and develop over time, and it is crucial that schools support the implementation of these methods. Schools can help empower countless individuals to heal from different challenges for years to come.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

This multiple case study is in alignment with many theoretical and empirical studies that currently exist. The research confirms that there are key aspects to implementing successful trauma-informed education practices, such as safety, collaboration, trust, empowerment, choice, and support (Dutton et al., 2020; Kline, 2020; National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative, 2022; National Institute of Mental Health, 2020). When schools aide in supporting the basic needs of youth, and oftentimes their respective families as well, it may be easier for them to reach a sense of self-actualization; when students are not worrying about how to obtain basic things such as food or clean water, and have a safe, loving environment to be a part of, students may focus on honing their gifts, talents, and highest potential (Buda & Czekman, 2021; Dayal & Tiko, 2020; Kline, 2020; Mathieu et al., 2021; Maslow, 1943, 1994; Molnar, 2021; Reis & Peters, 2021; Sherwood et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021).

All participants noted that there is a dire need for mental health professionals to be included within school systems. Barbara and Teddy explained how more counselors are needed within schools to help support the countless traumas youth and their families are dealing with. In addition, staff can greatly benefit from the wisdom provided by mental health professionals. Traumatic experiences are not one-size-fits-all, and traumas manifest themselves in different ways within different people. As such, it would benefit schools and school staff members if hands-on trauma-informed education training would be implemented within schools. The current

state of trauma-informed education practices in a large northeastern school district are moving in the right direction, however it is crucial that mental health professionals, wellness centers, and appropriate trainings are utilized within schools; this will allow for effectual trauma-informed practices to best support all stakeholders involved within a given district. Though it is important for educators, administrators, and other school employees to be aware of traumas and trauma-informed education practices, it is crucial for mental health professionals to be regularly accessible in each school building. This will allow for a constant flow of classroom instruction with potential minimal interruptions occurring; a teacher who needs to teach a room full of youth while de-escalating a child who is having a traumatic episode can be rather challenging.

Empirical Implications

In alignment with the information presented within the literature review, this study helps to elevate the need for implementing trauma-informed education practices within school districts. Within large districts, such as states like Massachusetts, Tennessee, or California, trauma-informed education practices have helped to improve school culture and develop open conversations with community members (Ford-Paz et al., 2022; Howard, 2019; Massachusetts Advocates for Children, 2013; McKinsey et al., 2022; Sonsteng-Person & Loomis, 2021). Large cities such as Los Angeles, California and Chicago, Illinois have seen a reduction in cases of students struggling with trauma-related issues, and school systems have noticed open communication happening between students and families, and school staff (Ford-Paz et al., 2022; McKinsey et al., 2022; Sonsteng-Person & Loomis, 2021). The participants in this specific large northeastern school district have noticed some improvements in communication because of the trauma-informed education practices being utilized within their schools; Fredo and Kyle mentioned that they realized how much insight they gained from learning about trauma-informed

education practices. With an increase in knowledge regarding traumas and how they influence youth, participants noted that staff have been able to better comprehend how to manage trauma-related situations as they arise.

Theoretical Implications

Maslow's hierarchy of needs distinctly aligns with the research presented in this study. In theory, if an individual does not have their physiological, safety, love and belonging, and esteem needs met, that individual will struggle to reach a sense of self-actualization (Maslow, 1943, 1954, 1993, 1994). As the fundamental needs of adolescents are met within their respective schools, this can help provide youth with the opportunity to shift their focus to aspects of their lives that can support their yearning towards their highest potential (Berthelot et al., 2022; Brown, 2021; D'Souza & Gurin, 2016; Smith, R. L., et al., 2021). As various stressors are eliminated from students' lives, the time students would have spent worrying about food, safety, belonging, and esteem concerns can be remedied by trauma-informed education practices; schools within this large northeastern district are offering several opportunities for students' diverse needs to be met, which allows for time to work towards a sense of self-actualization.

The participants noted that as schools help to ensure that basic needs are being met, youth can explore more aspects of their lives without worrying about how they would access essentials. Ryan, Teddy, and Barbara articulated the wonderful resources available to all students within their respective schools. Charlotte said that learning about and educating youth about coping strategies have helped to build school staff members' practices and abilities as they relate to working with students and families. Staff members have also become more communicative in certain environments.

Limitations and Delimitations

Trauma-informed education practices can be rather vast in nature, depending on the region in which schools are located and the resources that are readily available to staff. There are a handful of limitations within this study, which are elements of the research that were out of my control. Still, this study was developed to the best of my abilities as a doctoral researcher.

Delimitations within the study are elements that I specifically chose to exist, which are purposeful aspects that were omitted from the research process.

Limitations

There were two limitations that must be noted within the study. First and foremost, the participants in this study were predominantly educators and school administrators. During the period this study was conducted, many school counselors, social workers, school secretaries, and other vital school staff were unable to actively participate in this study. July and August were particularly busy months for many participants, as there were several educational conferences, mental health workshops, and other professional and personal situations that needed to be attended to. The second limitation was that since the large northeastern school district is quite massive, not all regions were examined equally. Though several communities were represented during this study, some were not included in this phase of trauma-informed research. Moving forward, if more time and resources were available, more areas of the large school district could engage in trauma-informed research.

Delimitations

A multiple case study was chosen for this study to gain a broader understanding of the lived experiences of education professionals who use trauma-informed education practices. In the large northeastern school district chosen, I opted to explain how trauma-informed education

practices are implemented and how different northeastern schools address the needs of students in their respective schools. In addition, this case study was developed to help explain how trauma-informed education practices could contribute to an individual's potential ability to reach a sense of self-actualization. This delimitation provides for a qualitative examination of trauma-informed practices across different regions and communities within the district. The large northeastern school district was chosen as a delimitation, because the district was impacted immensely by the COVID-19 pandemic. Surrounding districts did not have to cope with the massive number of students, families, and staff influenced by COVID-19, for this specific large northeastern school district is one of the larger ones located in the region. Being one of the larger districts in the northeast, it was important to research how trauma-informed practices are being implemented in such a broad area. In essence, if these varied trauma-informed practices could be utilized in large northeastern district, the practices could be adjusted to meet the needs of districts on a smaller scale.

Recommendations for Future Research

With respect to this multiple case study, there are several recommendations that can be made to further develop research related to trauma-informed education. A study based on phenomenology can be conducted to better understand the phenomenon that is trauma-informed education in an endemic COVID-19 world. This type of research can specifically examine the experience of trauma-informed education as it relates to students engaging in schools continuously recovering from the impacts of COVID-19. Another recommendation could be to examine these questions within other large northeastern school districts. Since this specific study examined one large school district, it may benefit other small and large regions of the United States and the world to research the implementation of trauma-informed education practices.

Quantitative studies may be developed to examine how attendance data, social emotional data, and academic data improve by implementing trauma-informed practices. A specific practice may be selected, a pre-test or pre-examination can be conducted, the practice can be introduced over a period, then research can be conducted on the impacts of the trauma-informed practice in a setting or district.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to describe how employees in a large school district in the northeastern United States implement trauma-informed education practices. Utilizing Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and current research in trauma-informed education as a foundational understanding of traumas and their potential impacts, I constructed a multiple case study that focused on how multiple schools in a singular large district implemented their trauma-informed practices. This case study provided insights into how trauma-informed practices were synthesized across regions of the district. Data were analyzed and synthesized in a manner that respects the efforts of school employees of this large northeastern school district. Three themes were presented, which outline successful practices of trauma-informed education as creating a collaborative environment, cultivating connections, and establishing trust. Further sub-themes were constructed to delineate the understandings of trauma-informed education.

In this very moment it may be a challenge to eradicate trauma at its core, however, may this research act as a beacon of hope that light exists within the darkness. There is hope that one day, trauma-informed education practices will be implemented appropriately in all schools across the world. May the children we educate gain the skills to handle any challenge or obstacle that presents itself over the course of their lifetime. Above all, may trauma-informed education act as a metaphorical lighthouse: The light guiding us to a better day that exists, to understanding how

to cope and heal from traumas, to prevent the traumatization of others, and support individuals who are looking to heal from things that may be hard to accept.

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Appendix A
LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 7, 2023

Allison Fahrbach | Breck Perry

Dear Allison Fahrbach, Breck Perry,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d): Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7). Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP

Administrative Chair

Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Approval [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Dear Allison Fahrbach

I am happy to inform you [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
has completed its review of this proposed research and approved your research proposal, “[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Please make
certain that all correspondence regarding this project references this number. The approval is for a period of one year:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Principal Investigator: Allison Fahrbach

Co-Investigator(s):

Coordinator(s):

Faculty Advisor:

Investigative Staff:

Research Staff:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

fingerprinting, once all required forms are completed and signed, follow the directions provided to schedule the fingerprinting appointment through

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Responsibilities of Principal Investigators: Please find below a list of responsibilities of Principal Investigators who have [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

- Approval by this office does not guarantee access to any particular school, individual or data. You are responsible for making appropriate contacts and getting the required permissions and consents before initiating the study.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

- You are responsible for ensuring that the research is conducted in accordance with your research proposal as approved by [REDACTED] and for the actions of all coinvestigators and research staff involved with the research.
- You are responsible for informing all participants (e.g., administrators, teachers, parents, and students) that their participation is strictly voluntary and that there are no consequences for non-participation or withdrawal at any time during the study.

- [REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- In the event that this research will involve non-English speaking subjects, you are required to translate all study materials to be used with this subject population and submit all translations [REDACTED]. All translations must be accompanied by attestations of translation accuracy from a qualified translator, or formal certificates of translation by a transcription service.
- [REDACTED]
- In the event that contracts, external approvals, or other documents are pending at the time of this approval, they must be submitted for [REDACTED] review by Amendment once obtained.

Mandatory Reporting to the IRB:

Amendments/Modifications: All amendments/modification to this protocol require prospective IRB approval, except those involving the prevention of immediate harm to a subject, which must be reported within 24 hours

Continuation of your research: It is your responsibility to insure that an application for Continuing Review is submitted 90 days before the expiration date noted above. If you do not receive approval to continue research before the expiration date, all study activities, including, but not limited to, analysis of collected data, must stop until said approval is obtained.

Research findings/Study Closures:**Data Request:**

If you have any questions,

Good luck with your research.

Appendix C

Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear Sir or Ma'am:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to

[REDACTED], and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 25 years of age or older, and be an educator of at least one class, a school leader (Assistant Principal, Principal, or Supervisor), school counseling staff, secretarial staff that regularly engage with students and/or their respective families, or are related-service providers (i.e., speech pathology, psychology, occupational therapy). [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] and engage in a trauma-informed education practice within the classroom or school community.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a virtual, one-on-one, audio- and video-recorded interview via Zoom (1 hour), participate in a virtual, audio- and video-recorded focus group via Zoom (1 hour), and write a response to four journal prompts (15-20 minutes). Names and other identifying information will be requested for this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please fill out the screening survey provided at this link:

[REDACTED]

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Appendix D

Consent Form

You have been invited to participate in a study to learn more about trauma-informed education practices in large school districts. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Participate in a virtual, one-on-one, audio-, and video-recorded interview via Zoom that will take no more than 1 hour.
2. Participate in a virtual, audio-, and video-recorded focus group via Zoom that will take no more than 1 hour.
3. Write a response to four journal prompts that should take no more than 15-20 minutes.

Participation in this study will involve spending no more than about two hours and twenty minutes. There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research beyond those of everyday life. You will not benefit from participating in this study, but your participation will contribute to our understanding of trauma-informed education practices within a large northeastern school district.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. Please read the rest of this consent form for more information about the study.



1. Title of research study and general information.

Study title: GROW THROUGH WHAT YOU GO THROUGH: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY ON TRAUMA-INFORMED EDUCATION

Study number: [REDACTED]

IRB of Record: [REDACTED]

Participation duration: Participants will engage in an individual interview (1-hour maximum), focus group (1-hour maximum), and respond to journal prompts (15-20 minutes). **Anticipated total number of research participants:** 10-15 adults

2. Researchers' contact information.

Principal Investigator: [REDACTED]

Phone Number: [REDACTED]

Email Address: [REDACTED]

Faculty Advisor For Student Research: [REDACTED]

Phone Number: [REDACTED]

Email Address: [REDACTED]

3. What information is on this form?

We are asking you to take part in a research study.

This form explains why we are doing this study and what you will be asked to do if you choose to be in this study. It also describes how we (Researchers) would like to use and share information about you.

Please take the time to read this form. We will talk to you about taking part in this research study. You should ask us any questions you have about this form and about this research study.

You do not have to participate if you do not want to.

4. Why is this study being done?

We are doing this research study to learn more about trauma-informed education practices in a large northeastern school district.

5. Who is being included?

You are being asked to participate in this study because we have determined that people who engage in a trauma-informed education practice within their role in a K-12 school setting will help us answer our research question(s). The following people will not be included because of their respective role(s): District employees and/or school staff who do not work with students or their respective families and/or school staff who do not utilize a trauma-informed practice.

6. What will I be asked to do if I choose to be in this study?

We will ask you to participate in one individual interview that will take place on Zoom for no more than one hour.

We will ask you to participate in one of the focus groups that will take place on Zoom for no more than one hour. We will ask you to answer questions about your experiences with trauma-informed education practices.

Recordings:

Audio/video recording or photography

We are asking for you to allow us to record audio of your responses as part of the research study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis and transcription by the researcher.

The recording(s) will include the subject's name, use of a trauma-informed practice, and worksite. Any identifying data will be redacted or replaced with a pseudonym.

The recording(s) will be stored in a password-protected database. Hardcopy data will be stored in a locked fire-proof safe. All data will be destroyed after three years from the conclusion of the study.

Recordings are required for participation. If you do not consent to the recordings described above, you cannot participate in this research.

Please sign here to confirm that you agree to all recordings described above:

Signature

Date

7. Are there any risks?

We do not think that the risks associated with participating in this study are greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.

Loss of confidentiality

A risk of taking part in this study is the possibility of a loss of confidentiality or privacy. Loss of privacy means having your personal information shared with someone who is not on the study team and was not supposed to see or know about your information. The researcher plans to protect your privacy. Plans for keeping your information private are described in section 9 of this consent form.

8. Are there any benefits?

You will not benefit from participating in this study, but your participation will contribute to our understanding of trauma-informed education practices within a large northeastern school district.

9. What about my privacy?

Every effort will be made to keep your personal information confidential. However, we cannot guarantee total privacy.

All collected research data will be immediately stripped of all identifiers and maintained in a deidentified format in a password-protected database. Only the Principal Investigator can see this file. If information from this study is published or presented at scientific or professional meetings, your name and other personal information about you will not be used. Your information from this study will not be used in future research studies.

The following people and/or agencies will be able to look at, copy, use, and share your research information:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

All participants of the focus group will be asked not to share the information discussed during the group discussion with anyone outside of the group. However, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

On the checklist below, please indicate if you would permit the researcher to store and/or share your responses masked by pseudonyms for future research.

_____ I agree to allow my responses to be stored for future research by the researchers of this study.

_____ I agree to allow my responses to be shared with other researchers for future research.

_____ I do not agree to allow my responses to be stored or shared for future research.

You may change your mind and revoke (take back) this consent at any time and for any reason. To revoke this consent, you must contact the Principal Investigator,

[REDACTED]

However, if you revoke your consent, you will not be allowed to continue taking part in the Research. Also, even if you revoke this consent, the Researchers may continue to use and disclose the information they have already collected.

10. Will I get paid or be given anything to take part in this study?

You will not receive any payment or other reward for participating in this study.

11. Will I incur costs if I take part in this study?

There will be no costs to you for being in this study.

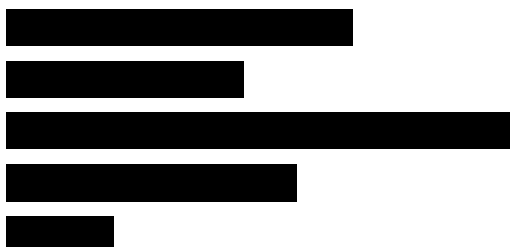
12. What are my rights if I take part in this study?

Taking part in this study is your choice. You can decide not to participate or stop being in the study at any time. If you decide not to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

13. Who can I call if I have questions?

You may call [REDACTED] at telephone [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED] if you have any questions or concerns about this research study.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, or if you have a concern about this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board listed below.



14. Statement of consent and signatures

Statement of consent

I have read this consent form. The research study has been explained to me. I agree to be in the research study described above.

A copy of this consent form will be provided to me after I sign it.

By signing this consent form, I have not given up any of the legal rights that I would have if I were not a participant in the study.

Signatures

Research Participant

Date

Print Name of Research Participant

Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Print Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Appendix E

Trauma-Informed Education	
Themes and Sub-Themes	Sample Codes
Collaborative Environment	“Teachers, deans, counselors, and administration meet”, “Discussion together”, “outreach”
Open Communication	“Open door policy”, “always talk to someone”
Awareness of Traumas	“COVID-19”, “loss”, “death”, “divorce”
Awareness of Communal Needs	“COVID-19 devastation”, “food scarcity”, “clothing needs”, “laundry machine”
Cultivating Connections	“Conversations”, “calling a meeting”, “parents”, “family needs”
Creating Spaces of Belonging	“Coffee machine in the back”, “community closet”, “quiet corner”, “restorative circle”
Acknowledging the Cultural and Ethnic Backgrounds Present	“Black”, “English Language Learner”, “different countries”, “upbringing”
Establishing Trust	“trust”, “between staff and students”, “trust is important”, “trust with families”
Respect for One Another	“compassion”, “safe space”, “culture”, “care about the community”
Building Skills for Success	“applying for college”, “laundry”, “job skills”,

	“special needs”
Acknowledging Various Needs	“traumatic experience”, “fight”, “job loss”, “loss of parent”, “COVID-19”