

IMPACT OF TRAUMA INFORMED TRAINING

Examining the Impact of Sustained Trauma-Informed Care Training with Educators Who
Service Students with Exceptionalities and Challenging Behaviors

Miyokia D. Carter

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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Abstract

The number of trauma-exposed children is on the rise, and it poses a significant public health issue. Trauma-exposed children especially those with exceptionalities and behavioral problems require support across various aspects of their lives, including their school environment. One way to properly support students is adopting a trauma-informed approach as it diminishes presumptions regarding misbehaviors, increases understanding, genuinely helps students with traumatic symptoms, and restores relationships in the classroom. However, the transition to new approaches such as this can affect the perceptions and attitudes of those encouraged to implement the framework.

This qualitative case study aimed to comprehend how staff participation in sustained trauma-informed care training impacted their efficacy and motivation towards utilizing trauma-informed pedagogies when supporting students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges in a non-traditional school setting in the East Baton Rouge School System. The theory guiding this study was the Socio-ecological theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The trauma-informed framework was utilized to educate participants on different systems that can affect students and emphasized how the school system can use a trauma-informed approach to impact students' lives beyond academics. However, schools had to be trained and confident in implementing trauma-informed interventions. Further exploration of educators' attitudes and beliefs occurred after training and implementation of the trauma-informed framework to determine if the practices benefit students with behavioral challenges and exceptionalities in non-traditional settings.

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Keywords: trauma, trauma-informed care, behavioral challenges, special education, childhood trauma, exceptionalities, non-traditional settings (alternative)

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List of Abbreviations

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA)

Trauma Informed Care (TIC)

Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

Education serves as a pathway to connections and resources that allow an individual to thrive in their environment. While there are many factors that contribute significantly to education, there is a huge need for educators' professional development to prioritize attending to students' emotional needs and having an environment that is supportive to students who have been affected by trauma. Now more than ever, mental health factors contribute to successful education or lack thereof for students worldwide (National Alliance on Mental Health, 2021). One of the biggest concerns in education is trauma and the lack of awareness, training, and implementation of trauma-informed practices in classrooms that educate students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges. Many students suffer from some sort of trauma that may cause a stumbling block to their education. The Social Ecological Theory provides an explanation of how disruption in individual, relationship, community, and societal experiences can increase exposure to trauma, which in turn can impede a child's education (Lopez et al., 2021). The issue then becomes what the educational instructors do to assist these children. Assisting trauma-exposed students in the classroom setting should be a priority because these particular students have unique needs, and they must be addressed adequately so they can thrive in the classroom setting. However, while educators are trained to teach, in the 21st century, there is a need for better resources to help support their students who suffer from some form of trauma. This chapter discusses the background of the problem, the problem statement, and the purpose statement for this research study. The chapter also discusses the significance of the study and the introduction of the research questions.

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Background

Exposure to trauma, neglect, violence, and other experiences can have a negative impact on an individual's emotional well-being. As more people grow aware of trauma's impact, they realize the value of trauma-informed approaches (Menschner & Maul, 2016). However, educators are overlooked when examining the value of trauma-informed care, with a lack of attention to their knowledge, competencies, and confidence in this framework. However, the literature strongly emphasizes using new knowledge to employ empathetic responses to trauma-exposed students and avoid approaching students from a deficit perspective when they exhibit behavior that is considered problematic or disruptive (Thomas et al., 2019). Therefore, there must be a better understanding of trauma for educators to reach this point.

Historical Backdrop

The term trauma comes from the Greek language meaning a "wound" or "hurt" (Straussner & Calnan, 2014). Historically, many trauma-related consequences have been associated with war experiences. It was not until the 1980s that the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders recognized trauma as a mental health issue. The manual introduced Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and included traumatic events as part of the criteria (Freidman, 2014). With this criterion included, the body of research grew, and the term "trauma" gained more attention from researchers (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2014).

Since the 1980s, there have been changes to the criteria for PTSD. PTSD is now classified in a new category called Trauma-and Stressor Related Disorders (Pai et al. 2017). From a psychological perspective, "trauma" refers to an experience that is emotionally painful, distressful, or shocking and often has long-term mental and physical effects (Straussner & Calnan, 2014). Trauma and PTSD not only encompass catastrophic events such as wars, natural

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disasters, or human-made disasters, but trauma is direct exposure (repeated violence or abuse) and indirect exposure (witnessing or learning that someone close was exposed to a trauma; Pai et al., 2017).

In the 1990s, there were more discussions about children suffering from trauma or traumatic experiences. Felitti et al. (2019) conducted a study and coined the term "Adverse Childhood Experiences" (ACEs) to focus on childhood trauma. The study revealed that time does not heal some of the adverse experiences that are common in childhood. Although adults were the study participants, they reported issues and adversities from their childhood that affected their physical and mental health as they became older (Bartlett & Sacks, 2019). Eventually, a questionnaire was developed in response to this study, and it is still used today to assess childhood trauma. Because of this foundational study, there has been more research on childhood trauma, which has become more prevalent in empirical studies (Zarse et al., 2019).

In the 2000s, Congress began to examine the issue of trauma and found that not only adults needed support in trauma, but particularly children. Congress authorized the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, also known as NCTSN, to raise the standard of care and increase access to services for traumatized children and their families across the United States (SAMHSA, 2022). Since 2012, an approach called "trauma-informed practices" has become prevalent in organizations and schools, and there has been empirical work surrounding these practices, especially in the educational system. Many national advocacy groups and State Departments of Education have recommended further research, policy, and practice on school trauma-informed care. Some have even pushed the initiative to implement this practice in groups, agencies, and schools (Thomas et al., 2019).

Social Context

Trauma is a series of events that are emotionally disturbing or life-threatening. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014) explained several types of trauma. SAMHSA (2014) defines the types of trauma as: acute trauma, complex trauma, chronic trauma, and secondary or vicarious trauma. Acute trauma occurs when an individual experiences intense distress after a traumatic event, and chronic trauma occurs when harmful events are repeated excessively. Complex trauma occurs when individuals deal with multiple traumatic events, and there is no way to escape these situations. Secondary or vicarious trauma occurs when an individual has been exposed to another person's trauma or suffering (SAMHSA, 2014).

Trauma has no boundaries regarding age, gender, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation (SAMHSA, 2019). Although many individuals may only report one specific traumatic event, they may experience multiple events without realizing the complexity (SAMHSA, 2014). Trauma may have considerably long and lasting adverse effects on an individual physically and psychologically. These traumatic experiences undermine a person's sense of safety and make them feel they can no longer trust anyone (Fonagy et al., 2017). Therefore, those individuals living with traumatic stress are more vulnerable to reacting abnormally due to fear and lack of coping skills.

More than two-thirds of children reported at least one traumatic event by age 16. Some traumatic events include physical and sexual abuse, witnessing domestic violence, losing a loved one, neglect, serious accidents or life-threatening illnesses, and natural disasters (SAMHSA, 2023). At least one in seven children experienced neglect or child abuse within the past year of

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the reporting, and in 2019 data, 1,840 children died from neglect and abuse in the United States. More than 1,000 children are treated in the emergency room daily due to physical injuries, and about 1300 are treated in the emergency department for violence-related injuries (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023). These statistics show that children are not exempt from being exposed to trauma and often struggle and display their suffering in many ways.

Theoretical Background

Neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot first examined the relationships between trauma and mental illness (Ringel & Brandell, 2019). Over the years, the definition of trauma has evolved, and the internal and external symptoms that occur due to trauma have changed. Many contemporary researchers and theorists believe in a trauma-based paradigm and refrain from viewing survivors' poor functionality as resulting from sickness, weakness, or deficiencies in moral character (Goodman, 2017). The new framework also pivots from viewing survivors as psychologically and physically injured to seeing survivors as needing healing and help. The shift focuses on what has happened to an individual instead of what is wrong with the individual (Sweeney et al., 2018). Researchers and professionals take a biopsychosocial approach when identifying trauma in today's world. Incorporating the social-ecological theory to provide intervention to trauma-exposed individuals is essential (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (US), 2014).

The social ecological theory framework suggests that approaches to trauma interventions should be based on the understanding that environmental factors influence well-being. The idea posits that health is at least in part socially determined, and interventions must target individual,

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interpersonal, and community systems (Decandia & Guarino, 2015). Thus, the social-ecological perspective provides a relevant foundation for trauma and its supports and will be the framework that was utilized in this study. This model highlights different factors (individual, relational, communal, and societal) that significantly influence initial and sustained trauma responses. The social-ecological perspective promotes external protective resilience factors in the adjustment of children who have had traumatic experiences. This framework has been shown to positively affect outcomes of helping individuals, specifically children with adversities. Although there are several factors within the framework, significant factors such as extended social support, connectedness within the community, positive peer relationships, professionally administered psychosocial supports, and schools have been implicated in positive outcomes in populations that have been specifically exposed to adversity (Giorando et al., 2020).

Situation to Self

There is a critical need for teachers and staff to recognize trauma in their students and develop trauma-informed professional skills (Rahimi et al., 2021). Training allows trainees to explore trauma and childhood adversities and learn practical approaches and interventions to properly support all students with trauma. With adequately trained trauma-informed educators, students with traumatic stress have a greater chance of having a better learning experience in the classroom, an increase in their self-regulatory abilities, and an increase in their relational capacities (Brunzell et al., 2016). Therefore, it is imperative to ensure that educators and staff are knowledgeable, self-assured, and motivated to support students that have experienced trauma and adversities.

This study is important to me as the researcher because of my connection to the student support services department in the school system. I have been a part of the public education

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system for five years and have worked with many trauma-exposed students. From the ontological perspective, I know exceptional students with challenging behaviors that have suffered trauma and other adverse experiences. Their lack of emotional regulation and other behavioral issues impact their educational experience, their peer's learning experience, and their teacher's teaching experience. Therefore, it was imperative to train staff in relatable and relevant approaches to these behaviors so that the learning environment could be a positive atmosphere for all.

From an epistemological perspective, examining the experiences and perceptions of educators trained in trauma-informed care illuminated how vital it was to have sustained trauma-informed training to support all students effectively. I believe that with the adequate training and interactive coaching, most of the school staff viewed their experience with the trauma-informed framework as a successful experience. However, some of them did have challenges in the beginning and many of the staff predicted some challenges ahead with the implementation. Nevertheless, despite these challenges, the staff collectively viewed this framework as promising for their student population. It was my hope that staff moved away from punitive reactions and moved toward being more compassionate and supportive of their students. Researchers have already suggested that when teachers invest in warm and close relationships with their students, students can have better classroom engagement and an increase in effective coping and emotion regulation (Shields et al., 2001; Skinner et al., 2014.). Therefore, this scholarly inquiry confirms that moving towards a trauma-informed approach mirrors understanding and compassion and it can tremendously impact students in the classroom.

It was my goal to do further research on the experiences of educators participating in trauma-informed professional development and implementation. I wanted to introduce the trauma-informed care framework to alternative settings that support students with behavioral

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challenges and exceptionalities. I felt that understanding educators' experiences with trauma-informed training could bring attention to the importance of implementing the framework with students with behavioral challenges and exceptionalities. I also believed that understanding the experiences could also bring attention to what works within the framework and what additional support is needed to implement the framework effectively. Therefore, the study investigated how TIC training and implementation shaped educators' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences. It also shed light on additional recommendations that could strengthen the framework by leveraging the experiences of educators.

Problem Statement

While looking at educational studies, there was a noticeable lack of research in the field of education and trauma informed care. The problem was a lack of scholarly research on educator and staff experience with trauma-informed care, sustained professional development (Goodwin-Glick, 2017), coaching, and the implementation of the framework. Minimal research exists on educator and staff attitudes, knowledge, and perceptions of the trauma-informed care framework in non-traditional educational settings that educate students with exceptionalities and challenging behaviors. There was not enough information that discussed how the trauma-informed care framework supported these teachers and staff in their readiness (O'Toole & Dobutowitsch, 2022).

The study aimed to provide educators and staff an opportunity to experience professional development and experimental learning with the trauma-informed care pedagogy. Additionally, it sought to gain insight on staffs' efficacy, perception, and motivation towards the pedagogy in a non-traditional setting that educates students with behavioral challenges and exceptionalities. Previously, the small number of existing reviews and studies along with diverse aims and

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designs made it difficult to generalize outcome results (Cohen et al., 2021). There was also a lack of discussion in the scholarship about whether the teachers and staff are confident, competent, and motivated enough to consistently implement the practice in their classrooms. This current study examined school staff attitudes and perceptions of sustained trauma-informed care training in the nontraditional setting and drove more research to implicate that incorporating trauma-informed strategies into educators' pedagogy could change how they interacted and engaged their students with learning (Brunzell et al., 2022), as well as changed how they view the meaning of their occupation (Brunzell et al., 2018).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand how staff participation in sustained trauma-informed care training impacted their efficacy and motivation toward utilizing trauma-informed pedagogies when supporting students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges in non-traditional school settings in the East Baton Rouge School system. Exploring educators' attitudes and perceptions of the framework allowed me to see if these participants deemed sustained training and coaching as an effective tool to increase their knowledge and confidence in the trauma-informed care framework. Exploring educators' attitudes and perceptions of the trauma-informed care training and coaching also allowed me to see if participants had an increase in efficacy with student-teacher relationships.

The theory that guided this study was the Socio-ecological theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbreener, 1977). The socio-ecological approach posits that environmental factors influence well-being, and interventions must target individual, interpersonal, and community systems (DeCandia & Guarino, 2015). The theoretical framework was utilized as a

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significant part of the study to explain that learning about various systems of students' lives provided a holistic understanding (Swearer et al., 2010; Ayers et al., 2012) of students' behavior and responses to specific situations. The Social Ecological Model also emphasized that these systems can negatively or positively affect a child's life (Lopez et al., 2021). However, school staff learned that they have the opportunity to positively influence students' quality of life, and play a crucial role in fostering their health (Pulimemo et al., 2020) and contribute to a child's community system. For school staff to comprehend the significance of their role in a student's emotional well-being, there was sustained training to address interventions, approaches, and the importance of supporting all students regardless of difficulties or adversities.

Significance of the Study

This study described educators' experiences of their participation in sustained trauma-informed professional development, interactive coaching, and implementation. Previously, McIntyre et al. (2019) highlighted that few researchers had examined whether such training influences factors that promote performance success and staff knowledge of and perceptions of acceptability for the trauma-informed care framework. Therefore, examining if trauma-informed professional development can positively impact educators' attitudes and experiences with the framework was deemed essential.

The study revealed how sustained professional development and coaching impacted educators' awareness, motivation, and confidence. It also unveiled their opinions and perception about current and future implementation of the trauma-informed care framework in classrooms that support students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges. Anderson et al. (2021) pointed out that professional development on trauma-informed topics could shift an

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understanding in teachers. Their responsiveness and ability to relate to student changed when adequate training existed. Other scholarly research has concluded that professional development increased teachers' knowledge and acceptability of the trauma-informed framework. However, McIntyre et al. (2019) highlighted that future work should include results and implications of more diverse samples of evaluation of trauma-informed professional development as a tool for shifting educators' perceptions. Therefore, it was vital to examine if hands-on professional development could encourage teachers and staff to provide more compassion and understanding and have confidence in using the trauma-informed care framework while educating and supporting students with challenging behaviors and special education services.

Research Questions

Formulation of the research question is essential before starting any research. Creating one or two broad questions can be a fertile starting point for thinking through the specifics of the study (Agee, 2008). Having these questions is required and beneficial because it aims to explore an existing uncertainty in an area of concern and points to a need for deliberate investigation (Ratan et al., 2019). It is also pertinent for steering the research process (Hancock, Windridge, & Ockleford, 2009) and can be revised as the study is ongoing.

Literature showed limited research on the experiences of school staff participating in sustained training and implementing trauma-informed practices in school settings that only serve students with exceptionalities and challenging behaviors. Thus, the following research questions guided the exploration of this under-researched issue:

Research Question 1: How does staff participation in sustained trauma-informed care training impact their attitudes and beliefs towards the trauma-informed pedagogy in non-traditional school settings?

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Research Question 2: How does sustain trauma-informed professional development and implementation impact staff efficacy and motivation when supporting students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges?

The goal was to understand the experience of staff members after they have participated in sustained trauma training and coaching. The goal was also to understand their attitudes, knowledge, and perceptions on learning and implementing trauma-informed care practices with students with exceptionalities and challenging behaviors. Ultimately, exploring the experiences of this staff population implementing trauma-informed care practices was beneficial because it conceptualized the advantages, disadvantages, and limitations of utilizing the approach in unique school settings.

Definitions

1. *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)* - Experiences that include physical and emotional abuse, neglect, caregiver mental illness, and household violence (Harvard University, 2019).
2. *Non-Traditional Setting: Alternative Education* - A school site that serves students who are labeled “at risk” of educational failure. These students are disruptive, truant, involved in juvenile justice, academic failure. (Farrelly & Daniels, 2014).
3. *Trauma* - Is an emotional response to events such as natural disaster, rape, accident, and abuse. Short-term reactions include denial and shock after the event occurs; long-term effects include flashbacks, strained relationships, physical symptoms such as nausea and headaches, and most of all unpredictable emotions (American Psychological Association 2022).

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4. *Trauma Informed Care (TIC)*- Is an approach that recognizes and acknowledges the need to understand an individuals' life experiences; the approach has the potential to improve positive engagement, better relationships, and personal success (Menschner & Maul, 2016).
5. *Special Education* - A specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability in a school setting (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2017)
6. *Social Emotional Learning (SEL)* - A process that takes place when all individuals acquire and apply knowledge and skills in order to manage emotions, have healthy identities, and achieve personal goals. Social Emotional Learning also promotes healthy relationships and helps solve problems effectively (Cristovao et al., 2017).
7. *Exceptionalities* - A more inclusive term that reflects all students who might benefit from individualized instruction in special education, instructional accommodations (Epler & Ross, 2019).

Summary

Many students suffer from exposure to trauma or have had adverse childhood experiences. These students need support from all environments, including their schools. Schools can establish a safe and compassionate environment (Sweetman, 2022), and build supportive relationships with students suffering from trauma by adopting a trauma-informed care approach. Research has found that trauma-informed care approach is essential in education systems and the approach recognizes that all students can benefit from these practices (Craig, 2016), including students with challenging behaviors and special education services.

However while thinking about my current study, I realized it was important to understand staff's opinions and motivation towards the TIC framework. Assessing staff opinions and

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motivations toward the TIC framework allowed for a deeper understanding of their abilities, confidence, potential barriers, concerns, and areas for improvement. This information in the study gave insight on if educators felt equipped and empowered to effectively implement trauma-informed practices in their classrooms and school community. Overall, their attitudes and perceptions provided valuable insight into how to proceed with training future school professionals in utilizing the TIC framework with students who have behavioral challenges and exceptionalities.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Overview

Exposure to trauma significantly impacts individuals, especially children. Traumatic events such as abuse, discrimination, violence, neglect, and other adverse experiences disrupt an individual's brain function, as well as their social and emotional development. These disruptions impact a student's academic and personal success in the school setting. Although trauma can impact any child, there is a great concern for special school settings that educate students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges. These types of settings often have a lack of resources and limited understanding of how to support their students' emotional well-being better. Anyone can overcome their traumatic experiences and not allow these experiences to define them; however, overcoming the trauma can be an exhaustive process that takes time. If younger individuals can get the necessary help and support in environments where they spend most of their time (school), then the likelihood of traumatic symptoms can be reduced, or the duration of symptoms can become shorter. Chapter Two discusses the theoretical framework considered while conducting this study and current literature that supports why there should be further research on how to adequately support educators who work with trauma-exposed students with

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exceptionalities and behavioral challenges. The chapter also discusses limitations and gaps in current trauma-informed studies in educational settings. Finally, this chapter also offers suggestions for supporting all students, including students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges, in all classroom settings.

Theoretical Framework

The socio-ecological model was developed by Urie Bronfenbreener in the 1970s and revised in the 1980s (Bronfenbreener, 1977). Bronfenbreener developed this theory to understand human development. The model assumes that interactions between individuals and their environment are reciprocal, and it implies that an individual is influenced by their environment and the environment is influenced by the individual (Salihu et al., 2015). It is also assumed that the environment is comprised of several overlapping levels, and in modern terms, the model suggests that an individual's behavior is integrated into a dynamic network of intrapersonal characteristics, interpersonal processes, institutional factors, community features, and public policy (Salihu et al., 2015).

Although most current researchers view the model through a modern lens - intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, and public. Bronfenbreener saw individuals surrounded by various systems at different levels: microsystem, ecosystem, mesosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Bronfenbreener identified the microsystem as a system closest to the individual, containing the strongest influences, interactions, and relationships an individual has and their immediate surroundings (Kilanowski, 2017). The mesosystem allows the individual to have community interactions with others in settings such as work, school, church, and neighborhood. The ecosystem indirectly pushes external influences such as community and social networks to

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the individuals. This could be positive or negative interactions and influences. The macrosystem focuses on an individual's religious, cultural values, and societal influences. Lastly, the chronosystem considers historical and significant events that have influenced the individual's life (Kilanowski, 2017).

In summary, this model conveys that individuals display certain behaviors due to the influence of their inside and outside environments. Depending on the influence, this can impact an individual's life negatively or positively. Professionals who understand the crucial impact of an individual's environment should find ways to change their perspective of the individual's behavior. Professionals should also be aware that when they start having consistent interaction with an individual, they, too, are a part of their system. Understanding environmental factors and developing positive and safe relationships can shape an individual's life.

Socio-Ecological Method In Education

Researchers such as Shams et al. (2018), found that the socio-ecological theory can be used in educational settings. They concluded that this model helps understand the characteristics of students' negative behaviors. Using ecological approaches to concurrently examine various systems of students' lives can provide a holistic understanding of successful interventions for students dealing with negative interactions (Shams et al., 2018). While looking at the model from an educational perspective, three systems merit close examination: the microsystem, mesosystem, and macrosystem.

Microsystem

The microsystem focuses on the settings, such as schools, peers, and homes (Gil et al., 2020); however, Chen & Tomes (2005), describes the school as one of the most important microsystems of a child's life. In this system, relationships impact in two directions, and this is

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known as bi-directional (Panopoulos & Korea, 2020). This could mean that the relationship impacts away from and toward the student. In the school setting, the student participates directly; however, parental involvement can also impact the student indirectly. Children learning rules and expectations across different settings (Coleman, 2013) is one example of how the microsystem affects a child. A mother and father's approach to parenting and navigating as a family system is another example of how the microsystem affects the child. Overall, the microsystem's impact has the strongest influence on students because of the learning process and the relationships that students build in this environment.

Macrosystem

When social forces and structures such as school and state-wide policies influence students, this is considered the macrosystem. Culture, society, laws, and policy play a big role in this system (Newman & Newman, 2020), and although students may not be attentive to the government laws and policy, it still does impact their lives (Bennett et al., 2001). For example, students in inner-city schools may have a different learning experience than students in suburban school districts. Students from inner city school districts tend to have high poverty, predominantly minority neighborhoods, and disadvantaged schools. These students may need more educational resources and experienced teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2010). By contrast, suburban school districts may have diverse students from middle-high class families, are more likely to have quality teachers, and school leaders are more likely to have innovative learning experiences for students with the help of the local community (Gil et al., 2016). Thus, the macrosystem influences a student's development, shaping their learning experiences that will impact their lives for a lifetime.

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Mesosystem

The mesosystem occurs when individuals from different settings interrelate and actively collaborate to provide the student with the best support (Newman & Newman, 2020). This system consists of family and school experiences (Yeh, 2017), two microsystems that are salient to children's development (Leventhal & Brooks-Gun, 2000). These two subsystems interact with each other and greatly influence the creative potential of a person throughout his or her childhood and even into his or her adolescence. Collaboration is the key when utilizing this system. One example of collaboration is when teachers and parents consistently collaborate and communicate about the student's behavior and experiences that might affect their emotional well-being and academics. This system is valuable to students, and they could be truly supported if both sub-systems work simultaneously.

Social-Ecological Model In Education

This Social-Ecological Model helps school professionals to understand and explore the layers or systems that can affect students' sense of belonging in the school environment. While educators explore their students' systems, educators will not only find what systems influence students' behaviors but also that they play a significant role as educators, and that classrooms are part of a student's system. This means that the relationships between educators and their students become internalized to form a part of what a student knows and develops (Damsa et al., 2019).

The social-ecological framework emphasizes the importance of social relationships in educational settings and includes tangible environmental, physical, and ecological variables, such as classrooms and available resources (Allen et al., 2016). This framework improves structure in the classroom setting and a sense of connectedness with the school climate overall. The framework shapes student development, but it also shapes educational leaders. The model

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encourages the collaboration of academic leaders across academic disciplines, and it attempts to break down roadblocks in discipline that often pervade the school climate (Brown et al., 2014). With an understanding of this framework, interpersonal relationships can improve, and schools as a whole can better approach systemic problems such as bullying, fighting, disrespect, and other negative behaviors.

Socio-Ecological Theory and Trauma-Informed Care

Trauma-informed care represents an ecological approach to trauma interventions. When reviewed closely, trauma-informed care and the ecological approach have the same goals regarding helping others. The goal is to look at the experiences that people face and the different areas of their lives that could have potentially impacted some experiences. Professionals considering and utilizing these approaches explore how environmental factors impact an individual's functioning and recovery (DeCandia & Guarino, 2015). The combination of frameworks creates opportunities to direct interventions within multiple symptoms within which individuals exist and heal (Baca, 2019).

Both approaches provide an understanding of how environmental factors influence the well-being of others, and both approaches also utilize interventions that target each system at individual, interpersonal, and community levels. When professionals do not understand or lack awareness, misunderstandings, and mistreatment of individuals can result. This could also re-traumatize an individual in some ways, or can cause the person to become emotionally out of control.

The Trauma-Informed Care framework centers on principles intended to promote healing and reduce the risk of re-traumatization by providing empowerment, trustworthiness, and safety

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(Bowen & Murshid, 2016). With the help of the Social Ecological model, professionals will be able to utilize understanding, support, inclusion, connection, and growth (Srivastav et al., 2020). The support from the two frameworks provides a lens that will help professionals with a further understanding of traumatic experiences and helps these professionals implement interventions without re-traumatizing the individuals. Within the integration of both approaches, the paradigm shifts; instead of trying to find or fix the individual's problem, the perspective is more about how they can better support the individual and help them to develop into healthy and stable individuals despite the trauma.

Related Literature

Stress occurs in everyone's life and can be too complex in one's environment (social, personal, and ecological). Although all individuals experience stress in their lifetime, examining how stress impacts children is important. This is significant because children who are impacted by stress have problems regulating their feelings and their emotions (Dvir et al., 2014). When children are exposed to traumatic events and negative influences, they inadvertently become stressed out and often feel out of control. This impacts children's behavior significantly. Thompson (2014), explains that when children are born into a world of stressors such as violence when family resources are scarce, they have difficulty with their emotions, focusing, and forming healthy relationships. Therefore, it is important to realize that if children do not get support and the skills to cope with their stress, their ability to cope with stress will become overwhelmed, and it may be hard to build resilience while growing (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2011).

Early life experiences influence a child's behavioral, neural, and psychological development and can have long-lasting effects. Children with support and dependable interactions with adults tend to have healthy emotional and cognitive development, while chronic

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or extreme adversity can interrupt their normal brain development (Harvard University, 2015). In addition, when children are stressed, negative psychological responses are elicited, and the child perceives themselves as being under threat or challenged. They will then elicit a range of behavioral and psychological changes because of the perceived threat (Smith & Pollak, 2020), and involuntary negative responses may occur. For example, children who experience severe abuse, such as physical abuse, are more sensitive to body language, especially facial expressions. If such children see an individual with an angry facial expression, this may trigger stress, disengagement, and impair interactions. Smith and Pollak (2020), suggest that exposure to increased levels of potential threat alters children's perceptual processes, making them more likely to perceive threat in situations others may not find threatening. These two examples show that a child's cognitive processing and perceptions of others can sometimes be illogical when they are faced with stress in their young lives.

From an educational perspective, experiencing stress from a traumatic event can impact students' well-being and jeopardize their academic achievement and social-emotional health (Dods, 2015). Stress can sometimes impair memory retrieval, affecting students' test performance (Vogel & Schwabe, 2016). Some high school students may consider dropping out due to the lack of motivation to learn, or they may experience discouragement because their grades are below average. For younger and older students, behavioral problems such as aggression, defiance, and poor relationships with teachers may occur in the classroom (Nelson et al., 2020). This could impede a student's learning, resulting in students not working to the best of their ability and becoming successful academically. Fortunately, with the help of school-based interventions such as social-emotional learning, students can cope with stress while learning

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(Van Loon et al., 2020). This shows that children can move forward with their lives despite stress; however, this cannot occur without support, including in their school environment.

Overall, it is important to look at early life stress because it can alter children's emotional processing throughout a child's life. Stress affects children in major ways, and without proper support, stress can make children's lives difficult and potentially even prolong cognitive impairment. Therefore a child's environment (family, teachers, etc.) needs to understand that resilience does not come easy; stress and triggers can occur at any time in a child's life. Nevertheless, helping and early support can significantly impact and promote perseverance.

Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma

Adverse Childhood Experiences, also known as ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood before the age of 18 years. Many children who suffer from ACEs deal with various forms of physical abuse, emotional abuse, and household dysfunction, such as divorce, substance abuse, mental illness, and neglect (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Researchers have uncovered data on ACEs and how it impacts individuals before they become adults. According to Bethel et al. (2017), Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey indicated that 46.3% of all children and 55.7% of adolescents in the United States had experienced an ACE. Many experienced at least one abuse or neglect-related ACE, and unfortunately, the rate is higher in the minority population (Bethel et al., 2017). By 2018, the numbers increased, and the data on the national level indicated that there were 61 percent non-Hispanic Black children, 51 percent Hispanic children, and 40 percent non-Hispanic White children. By 2018, the percentage of children that experienced ACEs had slightly increased. However, statistics have shown that Black non-Hispanic children still had a higher percentage. These statistical facts show that early childhood trauma and adverse childhood experiences can

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have a lifelong impact on an individual, which is now considered a growing public health concern (Sarah & Lapin, 2017).

ACEs can have long-lasting effects. These experiences can carry into an individual's adult life and cause issues in handling specific experiences if they do not get the proper support to move past the ACEs. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019), found that nearly one in six adults reported they had experienced four or more types of ACEs before the age of 18. Adults with an ACEs history tend to have a co-occurring mental and somatic disorders such as PTSD, depression, borderline personality disorder, obesity, and diabetes (Herzog & Schmahl, 2018). Novais et al. (2021) studied the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences on adult health and concluded that the same co-occurring mental and somatic disorders exist. However, their results also included additional symptoms and illness, such as increased self-harm, victimization of aggression, or aggression towards others, especially intimate partners.

It is important to look at ACEs because such analysis helps one understand why individuals display certain behaviors. One thing that could be pointed out with ACEs is that some of the experiences are not evident until one sits down and examines the trauma behind the experiences. ACEs create some complexity because some individual experiences may appear normal due to perceptions of the excessiveness and risk involved. Some experiences may appear low or high risk. Nonetheless, these experiences impact an individual directly and indirectly, and these experiences often shape how they act and think.

Home and Socioeconomic Factors

When a huge population of individuals suffers from ACEs, there are significant community risk factors such as higher rates of violence and crime, easy access to drugs and alcohol, high unemployment rates, and fewer community resources. Most of these communities

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in the United States are low-income and impoverished populations. Living in impoverished contexts can exacerbate these impacts, partly due to diminished community internal and external resources (Giovanelli & Reynolds, 2021). This is concerning because more and more younger people who live in these communities may be subjected to ACEs due to environmental factors that can impact them significantly.

The U.S. has one of the highest poverty rates in the developed world despite its collective wealth and the burden falls disproportionately on communities of color (Beech et al., 2021). Some communities are low-income with poverty-stricken citizens, which can be linked to trauma (Johnson, 2019). It is traumatic that poverty is more than an income level; it is a socially constructed identity that leaves scars of psychological impoverishment (Hudson, 2015). Unfortunately, individuals in poverty-stricken communities suffer and grow frustrated because there is a lack of resources and funding, and many suffer from untreated mental illnesses. As a result, these barriers can create mistrust in the different systems, such as the mental health, social, and economic system (Hodgkinson et al., 2017). They can affect one of the most vulnerable populations: the children in the communities.

Poverty affects the whole family system and affects the parental role specifically due to the stressors of maintaining family stability with minimum resources. When life's stressors become unbearable for parents, the functioning of the family is in trouble, and then the children are affected by it. Collins et al. (2011) explained that it is critical to understand the effects of trauma and poverty because parental and family functioning affect the risk of developing emotional and behavioral problems in children. When family functioning declines due to a lack of resources, parenting impairment, and stability, the children may have limited food, clothing, shelter, and emotional support. This condition impacts how they view themselves and the world,

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and their situation may cause them to act out or worry excessively about their future stability (Krauss et al., 2020). From an educational standpoint, overwhelming life stressors can cause impairments in a child's executive functioning (poor attention skills) and prompt children to not perform well academically (Haft & Hoeft, 2017).

Socioeconomic status, such as poverty can impact an individual tremendously, and the negative impacts can affect the psychological well-being of any individual, especially children. Families in poverty deal with significant stress, a combination of lack of resources, financial stress, and family dysfunction, and these factors can cause so many unwanted ACEs. With these ACEs left untreated, executive functioning can decline and leave an individual making poor decisions academically, socially, and emotionally while trying to explore how to survive in the world.

For support systems to understand and help with the resilience of individuals who have dealt with trauma, looking at one's home environment may give a better understanding of why they display certain behaviors in different settings. It is evident that environments shape an individual consciously and subconsciously. Therefore, if one is in an environment for long periods, their behaviors tend to mirror what is in their environment.

Responsiveness to Trauma

Trauma can affect the consciousness of an individual. Avoidance and hypervigilance can be displayed and even become automatic rather than conscious. This can lead to dissociation and fragmented consciousness (Gregorowski & Seedat, 2013), and an individual could develop a dissociative disorder diagnosis. According to the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (2014), dissociative identity disorder is typically associated with severe childhood trauma and abuse. Other potential signs of dissociation include fixed or glazed eyes, sudden flattening of affect,

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long periods of silence, monotonous voice, stereotyped movements, and subconsciously excessive intellectualization.

When individuals experience dissociation, it is a defense against the anxiety associated with the trauma. Gregorowski and Seedat (2013), explained that traumatized children may adapt to dissociation in three ways: respond automatically without appropriate judgment, isolate painful effects and memories, and disconnect from awareness of feelings and the self. When this occurs, these behaviors prevent the integration of other memories and experiences, increase distortion, and eventually lead to a poor sense of self and others.

An individual's support systems (parents, educators, community, etc.) must become trauma informed. Sometimes it is not easy to identify the behaviors accompanying adversities and traumatic stress. With the help of being trauma-informed, support systems can become aware of the expected behaviors displayed after a traumatic event and how the brain voluntarily and involuntarily responds to the traumatic stress. When an individual's support system becomes knowledgeable about the responsiveness to trauma, it opens up a deeper level of empathy, compassion, and support.

Trauma-Informed Care

Consistent support and the collaboration of family, community, and social services resources, as well as clinical support, can increase a child's resilience to trauma. This system of care approach is also a cornerstone of Trauma Informed Care (Bartlett & Steber, 2019). A trauma-informed approach is defined as a program, organization, or system that realizes the impact of trauma, recognizes the symptoms of trauma, and responds by integrating knowledge about trauma policies and practices to reduce traumatization (Maynard et al., 2019). This model

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acknowledges the need to understand an individual's life or experience so that adequate interventions can be utilized to increase adaptability.

The principles of the trauma-informed approach include the following: safety, trustworthiness, transparency, collaboration, mutuality, empowerment and choice, and cultural issues (Purkey et al., 2018). Safety is an essential feature of trauma-informed practice, which includes physical and emotional safety. In utilizing this principle, individuals feel safe and secure in all areas, physically and emotionally (Knight, 2019). They feel safe enough to trust and be themselves in environments that ensure safety. The other main principle is trustworthiness and transparency. Trauma-informed individuals' goal is to ensure that all decisions are conducted with transparency, with a fundamental goal of maintaining the trust of the person who has experienced the trauma. Peer support and mutual self-help are also vital when promoting TIC. Peer support and mutual self-help deliver encouragement, and it helps each grow in any environment that implements the TIC method. Peer support enables individuals who have undergone similar experience to offer assistance to someone presently facing trauma. These individuals with various backgrounds, unified by shared experiences foster relationships to exchange strengths and aid each other's healing, recovery, and growth (Blanch, Wilson, & Penney, 2012). Another key principle is collaboration and mutuality. An effective, safe, and positive environment occurs when individuals decide to engage, collaborate and work together. This principle also suggests that everyone has an equal role in sharing power during the implementation of the trauma-informed approach. Lastly, empowerment is also important in the trauma-informed method (Knight, 2019). The staff builds confidence within themselves while implementing this approach and helps the individuals they serve to build confidence within themselves.

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Classrooms can benefit from a trauma-informed approach and promote and sustain resilience in vulnerable students who have experienced trauma. For this approach to be successful, educators need to become trauma-informed first. Educators need to understand trauma, triggers, symptoms, and manifestations of trauma, as well as the consequences of trauma. Trauma-informed approaches benefit from the adoption of the “4R’s”: realizing the impact of the trauma as well as the possibility of recovery, recognizing the signs and the symptoms of trauma, responding to the knowledge of trauma exposure by creating system change, and resisting the re-traumatization of students (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). When school staff are trained and adopt the TIC model, responses to behaviors are less punitive, staff can build rapport with their students, and the classroom becomes a safe learning environment for all. Overall, educators and staff implementing the approach will help students build the self-regulatory capacities of the body and emotions and support them in building their relational capacity (Stokes, 2022). A trauma-sensitive environment will also help them experience a sense of relatedness and belonging, and educators will be able to integrate well-being principles that nurture growth, identify strengths, and build students' psychological resources (Stokes, 2022).

Implementing TIC practices is a good pathway to helping individuals heal; however, it does take time to learn and implement the practices. Any helping professional can utilize the TIC approach, but it is critical for helping professionals, such as educators, to learn and implement this framework because they can actively use this in a student’s life. Schools need to have this model because it is effective in the classrooms, especially when the model is used when students begin early in their educational experience and continue throughout their experience with the K-12 school system (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2017). However, it is difficult for

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schools and educators to become confident utilizing the framework. With adequate professional development, educators' attitudes and beliefs about trauma and the framework can change and increase the desire for classroom implementation so that all students can succeed despite adversity.

Special Education

Special Education is a specially-designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability (IDEA, 2017). Special education has existed since the 1970s. In 1975, the All-Handicapped Children Act was enacted and later turned into the Individuals Disabilities Education Act in 1990. Special education continued to gain a great deal of national attention in the early 2000s and 2004. The United States established the IDEA Improvement Act (Benitez-Ojeda & Carungo, 2021) which focuses federal law more on IEP requirements that provided a more thorough and accountability-driven approach and focuses on people with disabilities, rather than contributing to negative perceptions of disability and ableist ideologies (McLaughlin, 2016). The law legislates that any individual three to 21 years old that has a disability is entitled to have an evaluation that is comprehensive, interprofessional, and, if eligible, they can receive an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). This plan monitors the students' needs and progress (Benitez-Ojeda & Carugno, 2021).

Although students with disabilities may receive special services to address their differences, the goal is to integrate them as much as possible in the regular educational environment with their peers (Benitez-Ojeda & Carugno, 2022). When these students lack progress in the mainstream setting, they may have to be placed in a different classroom setting to ensure they get the necessary support to thrive academically. This setting may include fewer

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students and more teachers. Nonetheless, the main focus is meeting the students' educational needs in the least restrictive environment (Benitez-Ojeda & Carugno, 2022).

Students with disabilities are considered a significant population. Although every student matters, the special education population needs additional attention due to their disabilities. This population is also not exempt from trauma; some have experienced trauma outside of the school environment. Wilcox (2011) explained that people with disabilities are more likely to be exposed to trauma, and exposure to trauma can more likely increase developmental delays. Trauma can modify a child's ability to access different levels of brain functioning, changes in their perception of time, cognitive style, affective tone, the ability to develop solutions to problems, and their ability to understand rules (Hayes et al., 2012). This population is vulnerable, and children are more vulnerable to trauma in the community because of their poor judgment, lack of self-protective skills, and limited mental health services. Although the classroom cannot fix the trauma, the classroom can provide the most support to these students.

Educators and Special Education Students

Teachers must provide an adequate and appropriate education. They have a huge responsibility to ensure that their students' needs are met and to advocate for them. Special Education students not only have learning or physical disabilities, but some even have emotional and mental disabilities, such as conduct disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and other behavioral problems that are considered emotionally disturbed behaviors (Aron & Loprest, 2012). Having students with these disabilities and emotionally disturbed behaviors changes how the classroom is structured, and teachers have to be open, innovative, and flexible so all students can have an effective learning environment. Sometimes this can be challenging, especially when educators serve special education students and students with behavioral problems.

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Amstad and Muller (2020), found that students with intellectual disabilities in special needs classes often exhibit problematic behaviors. In their study, they also found that teachers reported often experiencing stress due to problematic behaviors in the classroom. Students' problematic behaviors can deviate from their instructional goals, and teachers are challenged because the students' accommodations are not being fulfilled, and they cannot successfully provide a structured environment for these types of students. The problematic behaviors also cause teacher burnout and exhaustion, and teacher and student bonds become non-existent (Billingsley et al., 2004). Although educators can be the greatest asset to special education students in their academic career, there must be different approaches to connect with these students, especially if their negative behaviors and emotions are heightened due to traumatic experiences.

Educators and Challenging Behavior

Not all students with trauma-related behavioral or mental health issues are eligible for the special education program due to the extensive requirements for qualifying. Some may be placed with other services, such as 504 services, to ensure academic success. This means that students with a 504 plan get appropriate educational services designed to meet their individual needs in the regular education setting so they can perform well academically despite their diagnosis (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Other students may have trauma-related emotional disorders or a mental health diagnosis but perform on level academically. However, they may sometimes make irrational decisions or have poor interactions with others due to traumatic stress, which can disrupt the school environment. Other students who suffer from traumatic stress but have gone undiagnosed sometimes display challenging behaviors in the classroom setting. Educators and

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staff see each situation in the school environment daily, and it can be challenging to support these students.

Tanase (2019) found that teachers continue to struggle with challenging behaviors, and the most prominent challenging behaviors they often face are defiance and attention-seeking. Not only are defiance and attention-seeking frequently displayed, but some teachers have reported that the behaviors they see in students with emotional challenges are often displayed as noncompliance and aggressive (Lane et al., 2011). Markkanen et al., 2019, explain that other common challenging behavioral issues in the classrooms include insulting behaviors towards peers and adults and off-task behaviors that lead to frequent classroom disruption. Not all students display these behaviors out of spite or complete defiance, but there are times when students cannot control these behaviors because no one has addressed and supported important issues like trauma and adverse childhood experiences.

When trauma or childhood adversities occur, some students deal with emotional dysregulation (Dvir et al., 2014). Because trauma and adverse childhood adversities are complex, teachers may feel incompetent in supporting pupils' well-being (Rothi et al., 2008), or dealing with misbehaviors that come along with it (Grieve, 2009). This shows that teaching personnel need better knowledge about the factors affecting pupils' behaviors and good practices to apply to decrease challenging behaviors (Markkanen et al., 2019). Educators must shift how they approach and interact with students so students can feel supported. A TIC intervention such as social-emotional learning is a start. It is a mechanism through which trauma-informed learning environments can be created (Pawlo et al., 2019) to support students and help them regulate their emotions and feelings.

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Perceptions of Staff Attitudes, Beliefs, and Perceptions

Different studies have attempted to examine school staff's beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions towards trauma and various approaches that include trauma-informed practices. Many studies have found that school staff needs more education on these elements. For example, a study was conducted in Southeast Georgia to examine teacher awareness of school trauma-informed care practices (Rahimi et al., 2021). This study found that participants knew nothing related to the trauma-informed care framework or trauma-related topics such as complex trauma, ACEs, toxic stress, triggers, conscious discipline, and culturally relevant pedagogical strategies. Instead, the district emphasized a universal model called Behavior Intervention and Support. This evidence-based model is used nationwide to support students with behavior problems (Gage et al., 2018). However, this study found that the schools that use this model lack the most important thing - addressing trauma-related matters (Rahimi et al., 2021). The study revealed that educators had not been equipped to meet students' emotional needs and have often referred students to the counselor when they noticed they were emotionally struggling. However, school staff believed that there should be more training on trauma-informed care and pointed out that there needs to be a collaborative effort to implement trauma-sensitive strategies and supports to meet the emotional needs of children (Rahimi et al., 2021).

There is a dearth of literature that focuses on helping all students with the social-emotional component. Although some educators and staff may be aware of some of the difficult challenges students face, they are often still not equipped or educated enough to provide effective support. Baweja et al (2015) provided another example study that explained how educators with some awareness of trauma could not confidently provide a positive environment and implement a trauma-informed program. In this study, the educators reported that they had

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concerns and wanted more trauma-informed care professional development, and more direct communication with professionals who are experts in this framework (Baweja et al, 2015). The educators in the study also struggled with the balance of classroom priorities and finding the time to get consistent training in trauma-informed care (Baweja et al., 2015).

Although professional development on the trauma-informed care framework could benefit educators and their schools, supporting students who may struggle with the social-emotional piece can also be overwhelming. In the past, some teachers have reported that although they understand the importance of helping students with the social-emotional component, they also experienced a great deal of tension while engaging in the work, especially with trauma-exposed children. Without proper training, educators find it challenging to learn their role in situations when trauma-exposed students need help, and they also struggle with finding a balance in answering these students' conflicting needs (Alisic, 2012). They expressed the need for more professional development to fully understand how to work with students who have experienced trauma (Koslouski & Stark 2021). After all, it is understood that educators can facilitate children's recovery (Baum et al., 2009) by providing coping assistance, emotional processing, distraction, and the reinstating of familiar roles and routines (Prinstein et al., 1996).

Based on the literature, it is clear that many educators are unaware of how to help children who have been exposed effectively. Therefore it is vital to provide training and to emphasize that their role is very important to the students. Educators must be therapeutically informed to redress the specific capacities that trauma impacts and use a trauma-informed approach that will increase successful learning, self-regulatory abilities, and relational capacities (Brunzell et al., 2019). Nonetheless, it is suggested that coaching and experiential training could

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be the key to helping educators build their confidence in their ability to implement new strategies and their willingness to implement new skills to trauma-exposed students (Blanton et al., 2022).

Effectiveness and Limitation on Professional Development for Trauma-Informed Care

Training of teachers in trauma-informed care is fundamental in ensuring healing among traumatized students. This is fundamental because teachers interact with students daily, and students can begin to trust their teachers, which can be a big help to students who are trying to recover from trauma (Bell et al., 2013). With adequate training, teachers are able to better understand their students suffering from trauma and learn proactive strategies to position their classrooms as a predictable milieu for healing and growth (Stokes, 2022). These professional trainings also enable change commonly held misconceptions and attitudes about trauma and its consequences. That said, providing professional development to teachers and staff leads to better perceptions and understanding of how to support students academically and emotionally, as well as acceptability of the trauma-informed care framework (McIntyre et al., 2019). Learning never ends; therefore, school staff must expand their knowledge and skills to implement the best practices for students.

Schools aspiring to become trauma-informed environments for students should take keen interest in at least 2 days of trauma-informed training. This provides teachers with the required basic understanding of childhood brain development and function, the management of certain behaviors, resilience, self-care, and many more relevant skills (McIntyre et al., 2019). To ascertain the relevance of this argument, McIntyre et al. (2019), completed a study with teachers and provided a two-day professional development training on TIC. The results showed that there was significant knowledge growth after the training was completed. The teachers reported that they became more knowledgeable about trauma, and they had increased acceptance of trauma-

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informed approaches (McIntyre et al., 2019). This example shows that professional development positively shifts teacher perception of trauma and the framework. The scholarly example shows that professional development is important to maintain and increase competency in helping children emotionally.

Literature has also indicated that teachers in kindergarten through 8th-grade settings can also benefit from professional development. In one study, educators in a K- 8th Title I public school found that their knowledge had increased since participating in training that discussed TIC and the relation to student development, learning, and skill building (Anderson et al., 2021). That study concluded that teachers' most critical aspect of care and restoration is understanding how trauma impacts learning behaviors. Because of professional development, teachers can open a window into their students' lives, and teachers' understanding, responsiveness, and relatedness can change. With the help of trauma-informed education, they now view their students as children first and students second.

While certified educators and staff often participate in training to enhance their knowledge, it is also important to remember incoming educators and how professional development can help them before they enter the school environment. Foreman and Bates (2021) concluded that pre-service or student teachers could benefit from trauma-informed care training. Pre-service teachers who have the opportunity to participate early can have an improved understanding of students' behavioral challenges and learning difficulties related to a student's history and exposure to trauma (Foreman & Bates, 2021). With extensive training, pre-service teachers can be more aware of the importance of establishing relationships and responding with empathy. Trauma-informed training can change their perspective and willingness to be more flexible when responding to students' behaviors and become less rigid (Foreman & Bates, 2021).

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It is essential to have collaborative staff in every school environment. Educators and staff such as general education, special education, paraprofessionals, and counselors must work together to provide a safe and supportive environment for trauma-exposed students. The more staff collaboration, the more they will be able to mitigate the effects of trauma. Through exploration of surveys from collaborative school staff, Meyer (2015) found that there was an increased level of knowledge on trauma after they were trained. Further, the level of preparedness to work with students after training increased confidence; however, there was a slight increase in interest level after trauma training (Meyer, 2015). This research shows that training positively impacts knowledge and confidence levels, but it also shows a need for collaboration, sustained training, coaching, and adequate time to learn and practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). To increase staff motivation and understanding of the TIC framework, there should be a learning community for reflective practices, guided by a trauma-informed pedagogy and a collaborative structure to not only care for students, but also provide a structured environment that promotes compassion and understanding towards every staff member (Gaard & Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2022).

Along with the supportive environment, continuous professional development programs can strengthen trauma in care in the school system (Debrah et al., 2020). Scholarly literature on educators being trained on TIC shows that many TIC professional developments involve short-term training. However, the effectiveness of short-term training can be ambiguous. Although training or professional development can enhance staff knowledge, effective professional development is ongoing, includes training, practice and feedback, and provides adequate time and follow-up support (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2009).

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Through research, Whitaker et al. (2019) found that six-session professional development courses enhanced educators' awareness of trauma-informed care, and the ongoing training also increased the quality of the teacher and student relationship. The teachers reported that the training content did indeed help them reconceptualize trauma, and there was some improvement in teacher and student relational capacities such as empathy, emotion regulation, and dispositional mindfulness (Whitaker et al., 2019). Some educators feel that the learning component should have more than one layer. They prefer in-class teacher mentoring, coaching, frequent constructive feedback, and frequent and ongoing whole-of-school professional development sessions that are scaffolded to support learning and trauma integration across all staff and faculty (Collier et al., 2022). The current themes in the literature show that long-term professional development greatly impacts educators' knowledge and perceptions of trauma. While the literature talks about the significant impact, it also shows that the more educators learn, the more they can empower and strengthen their students in the classroom setting.

When trauma-informed practices are implemented correctly, students actively become participants as well. Properly trained educators that implement a trauma-sensitive approach motivate students. They may see a difference in how educators respond and interact with them. With this occurs students are often motivated to attend school and join the positive atmosphere. Dorando et al. (2016) conducted a study with three elementary schools that explained how students' behavior could change after implementing the trauma-informed care approach effectively. These schools implemented the program on a universal level. They implemented the program in a small group format and provided intensive support to certain students. The program was implemented for two to five years. The results from this study indicated that students were in the classroom more due to less behavioral disruptions, student body attendance increased,

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behaviors such as physical aggression decreased, and out-of-school suspensions decreased by 95% (Dorando et al., 2016). Mahmud (2022) conducted a contemporary study using a case study method to measure the effectiveness of trauma-informed training and interventions with remote learning teachers. After ten weeks of training, coaching, and implementation, the case study concluded that some participants improved their perceptions of implementing trauma-informed SEL interventions. Some participants felt satisfied with their classroom environment after implementing the interventions virtually. The results concluded that the SEL intervention sustained teacher–student relationships and helped the student outcomes remain stable rather than worsen (Mahmud, 2022).

Thus, existing scholarship shows positive outcomes when trauma-informed care is implemented individually and highlights the shift in attitudes and behaviors of staff and students. However, some limitations require more research for these approaches. For example, there must be further research on how effective trauma-informed interventions are used and implemented effectively in settings that serve special education students and students with challenging behaviors. Therefore, it is important to conduct a new research study to closely review the effectiveness of the trauma-informed approach and integrate trauma-sensitive interventions such as trauma-sensitive social-emotional learning to expand the effectiveness of trauma-informed care in settings that serve students with challenging behaviors and special education services.

A Closer Look at a Behavioral and Support Intervention:

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social-emotional learning has been identified since the 1800s. The practice began with Horace Mann, the “Father of American Education,” He believed a unified school system should provide public education with moral guidance (Baines, 2006).

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In 1830, with this purpose in mind, Mann established an educational institution called Mann's Common Schools, which was open to all children regardless of socioeconomic background (Bond, 2020). Researchers also credited John Dewey's concept of social responsibility in 1916 and Vygotsky's social-cultural theory in 1962 in the history of social-emotional learning (Bond, 2020). However, it was not until the 1960s when Dr. James Comer (known as the godfather of social-emotional learning) focused on student behavioral issues and found ways to eliminate school procedures that would increase problematic behavior. He founded the Comer School Development Program, and it was piloted in the 1960s. The program was founded on the idea that there are extreme values in children's relationships as they grow up, particularly bonds that are built with adults (Comer, 2013). The framework emphasized their belief that children needed positive interactions with adults to develop adequately. The program included members of the community, as well as teachers and administrators, to build these relationships and positive interactions (Comer & Ben-Avie, 1996).

Over the years, the social-emotional learning model has evolved. Between the late 1980s and early 1990s, psychology professor Roger Weissberg and educator Timothy Shriver created a program to help students develop positive self-concepts, self-monitoring skills, and respect for self and others (Effrem & Robbins, 2019). During the 1990s, an organization called Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning was established to research the social-emotional component and how it contributes to student success. The organization's goal was to make evidence-based social and emotional learning part of education from preschool to high school. Some of the professionals in the organization developed social-emotional skills that transferred into social-emotional learning standards. Eventually, specific goals and benchmarks for all grade levels were also developed. After extensive research, the organization looked at

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social-emotional learning in a different light. CASEL viewed and defined SEL as the process by which individuals develop their social and emotional competencies for success in school, including the skills necessary to recognize and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, form positive relationships, and make responsible decisions while successfully handling the demands of growing up in a complex society (CASEL, 2013).

Today, educators believe that schools now have to teach beyond basic skills, such as reading, writing, and counting, and enhance students' emotional competence (Greenberg et al., 2003) so their students can be successful. Research has even suggested that some schools have attempted to shift how they teach their students and incorporate SEL because it enhances students' intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive competence (Bond, 2020). When their personal competency is enhanced, there is an increase in academic achievement as well (Cristovao et al., 2017). However, it is also important to remember how to support trauma-exposed students when teaching because negative cognitions may impair emotion regulation and maintaining healthy social relationships after experiencing trauma or adversities (Sciaraffa et al., 2017). Therefore schools should focus on helping all students, including the vulnerable populations, and incorporating relatable SEL curriculums for all students.

Integrating SEL and TIC in Classrooms

Schools and classrooms that promote SEL provide a solid foundation for improved social, behavioral, and academic outcomes (CSAL, 2022). Programs focusing on social-emotional learning emphasize self-awareness, self-management, decision-making skills, and positive relationships (Hassani &Schawab, 2021). It would be beneficial for special education students and students that have challenging patterns of behavior to have the SEL component in their classrooms, especially because their exceptionalities and behaviors can sometimes prevent

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them from having self-regulation skills or prevent them from becoming aware of how they feel or what they need emotionally. Many of these students not only have difficulties and challenges due to their exceptionalism, but some challenges stem from traumatic experiences that have occurred in their lives. This transfers into the classroom daily and can manifest as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, reactive attachment, disinhibited social engagement, acute stress disorders (Brunzell et al., 2015), and emotional behavior disorders (Buxton, 2018). To address these difficulties, their teachers can provide a safe and supportive space and guide them through their emotional challenges by implementing a social-emotional curriculum.

Research has suggested that evidence-based social-emotional curriculums can assist teachers with providing necessary support and help children flourish despite their difficulties. Positive Action is a program and curriculum focusing on SEL and character development. The program includes a classroom-based curriculum for pre-k to eighth grade. It emphasizes building students' skills to make responsible decisions, solve problems effectively, recognize and manage their emotions, appreciate the perspectives of others, handle interpersonal situations effectively, and establish positive goals (Lewis et al., 2015). The program provides additional support to teachers by providing information on teacher training, counselor training, and school-wide climate development. Lewis et al. (2015) tested the effectiveness of the Positive Action Curriculum with middle school students in the urban community. The findings indicated that the curriculum was a well-designed program that impacted urban youth and could be implemented as a universal tool in the school setting. The study also found that the curriculum improved mental health and behavioral outcomes.

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Another SEL program called Spark (Speaking to the Potential, Ability, and Resilience inside every Kid) has been helpful to the high school population. The program is designed to reduce risk factors, enhance resiliency, promote emotional well-being, and facilitate school success in high school (Green et al., 2022). An interesting factor about this program is that it focuses on the idea that individuals are not passive recipients of adverse circumstances but are capable of being resilient (Green et al., 2022). A study that focused on this curriculum found that students who participated in the program demonstrated improvements in decision-making, problem-solving skills, and communication compared to the students who did not participate in the program (Green et al., 2022).

Lastly, Manners of the Heart is another curriculum used across the United States. This curriculum is listed on the CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) website as one of the promising programs for schools. The program aims to restore respect and civility in society and schools. The program also encourages students to unlock their hearts and open their minds and learn to esteem others and gain respect for themselves. The program suggests information on relationship building, positive classroom management, and SEL generalization. The lessons can be completed onsite in classrooms or virtually. Research has found that this curriculum is effective for kindergarten and fifth-grade students.

Research currently demonstrates the positive impact of SEL programs on social and emotional competencies and prosocial attitudes and behaviors (Dowling et al., 2019). Research has also shown that these programs are flexible and innovative to address all grade levels. However, limited research exists on how SEL impacts students in restricted environments due to special education exceptionalities and severely challenging behaviors. Educators in these two populations need additional support to help their children succeed. However, overall research

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provides limited information and understanding of the two populations and information on how to support these students who have been exposed to trauma.

Integrating SEL in Special Education

Schools are known for teaching academic or subject-related content, but educators and staff have seen the need to go beyond academics, and they recognize that non-academic competencies also play a significant role when preparing all students for their lives. Over the years, it has been acknowledged that students' social-emotional well-being is very important. There have been many research articles about the importance of students' well-being. One systematic review found that students with special educational needs have reduced well-being and a lack of social-emotional competencies compared to their regular educational peers (Hassani & Schwab, 2021). Cavioni et al. (2017) described the different experiences that special education students go through that affect their social-emotional well-being. Rejection, isolation, and peer pressure are some of the reasons why these students lack emotional wellness. Many students with learning disabilities are chosen or less accepted by their peers, and some have fewer opportunities to interact and build friendships (Mugnaini et al., 2009). At the same time, others with a disability may quickly join groups or friendships but conform to negative pressures and tend to engage and display negative behaviors just to be accepted (Cavioni et al., 2017). These students tend to have problems with conflict resolution. Sometimes they cannot understand social situations, misinterpret others' intentions, and cannot successfully recognize their feelings and emotions. This can cause them to have higher levels of behavioral problems. Many of these students get frustrated because they are misunderstood, and this can decrease the lack of motivation to participate in school. Experiences like this also decrease symptoms of anxiety and depression.

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Nevertheless, SEL programs can greatly benefit special education classrooms. Cavioni et al. (2017) pointed out that universal SEL programs in the classroom can benefit these students. The universal programs promote inclusive practices, social relationships, and a sense of belongingness among all students in the classroom. Teachers also play a significant role when implementing these practices. When teachers demonstrate and promote caring relationships, it signals acceptance, increasing students' self-esteem despite other negative experiences that may occur in their lives. Other research has pointed out that SEL is significant in smaller classroom settings with behavioral challenges and exceptionalities. Activities focused on communication and listening skills, social and emotional skills including self-regulation, and anger management would be the most effective activities for this population (Milligan et al., 2015). With the implementation of skills, individuals in the classroom can be influenced to make better decisions, perform better academically, and recognize and regulate emotions. Students in unique education settings need additional support to improve in this area. With SEL, it is possible to work with special education students to arrive at a more constructive way of expressing emotion, interacting with others, and performing better academically. With the lessons, modeling, prompts and cues, these students have the ability to understand and eventually implement these skills independently.

Integrating SEL in disciplinary and remediation-focused Settings

Not all students who experience behavioral issues are eligible for special education services. However, behavior-focused alternative schools provide placement for students who have been unsuccessful in other school settings due to the severity of their behaviors. Students in these non-traditional settings often have low academic achievement and significant behavior challenges (Wilkerson et al., 2016), and they are often placed there due to disciplinary actions

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(Kelchner et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the goal is to provide students with a second chance (Kim, 2006) in a smaller, more supportive environment that focuses on providing students with academic and behavioral skills (Kelchner et al., 2017).

Studies have proven that SEL in non-traditional school settings can show some success for students with challenging behaviors. Ohrt et al. (2020) performed a pilot study on SEL in an alternative high school. When the students were present for the SEL interventions, they were engaged and participated if incentives were provided. In addition, students were often more interested in sharing their life stories concerning the various social-emotional topics for that day but needed to be more engaged in practicing various coping skills (Ohrt et al., 2020). Nevertheless, alternative teachers reported that SEL can be a promising intervention that can be applied in schools. School staff that participated also felt that it would be best to implement SEL lessons as a group outside of the classroom instead of in the classroom setting. This study shows the positives and the negatives of implementing SEL in an alternative high school, and it also shows a limitation, such as not implementing a more relatable SEL curriculum to get students to engage more in the coping skills aspect.

Slaten et al. (2015) studied SEL in an urban alternative school setting. The researchers interviewed 15 high school staff that were predominantly African American and gathered information about their perspectives on social-emotional learning and what type of SEL would benefit their students in this setting. The results indicated that the staff preferred to utilize SEL in a unique way; staff preferred pedagogy of personalized learning, cultural relevance and African relevance, centeredness.

These two example studies show mixed reviews on the effects of SEL in non-traditional settings. This means that although SEL successfully impacts some students, there still needs to

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be strong evidence on effectively supporting all students in behavior-focused settings using SEL. These settings are tasked with meeting the needs of a diverse population of students with very limited resources (Greenberg et al., 2003). SEL can reach all students but must be the right curriculum. The two example studies show a need for SEL content to be relatable and relevant. In addition, educators must show understanding, and compassion and provide a safe space where students can be seen and heard while implementing a relevant and relatable SEL curriculum.

The Gap in Research on Trauma-Informed Care

Trauma is a popular topic today, especially in the behavioral health sector. Scholarly research about trauma-informed care in schools exists; however, empirical work that discusses trauma-informed teaching and education is less established. Not enough published research describes the perceptions and attitudes of educators in settings that support challenging behaviors and special education students. There is a lack of published research that describes educators' confidence level and motivation toward trauma-informed care interventions once they have had adequate training and coaching. Thomas et al. (2019) explained that while multiple disciplines conduct research using different methodologies examining trauma-informed practices in schools, educators' experiences are under-examined in this work.

There is also a need for more research on how educators and staff feel about implementing relevant trauma sensitive SEL curriculums in settings that service special education and students with challenging behaviors. Daley and McCarthy (2020) found that 19 studies explicitly mentioned including students with disabilities. Five studies included analyses of students with disabilities as a subgroup, with varying results. From 2008-2019, four empirical articles identified incorporating school-wide trauma-informed approaches by using SEL curricula (Avery et al., 2020), but did not emphasize settings that service special education

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students and students with challenging behaviors. Overall, the focus was on something other than the educators' motivation and confidence level during the implementation of the SEL curriculums.

The current literature also leaves questions about whether educators and staff in special education and non-traditional settings want to implement relatable trauma sensitive SEL curriculums after sustained training and coaching. While the premise of trauma-informed care is noble, it is unclear if educators and staff are grasping the content to continue implementing the trauma-informed approach and deliver the interventions appropriately and consistently (Maynard et al., 2019). The goal of this study was to help fill in the research gap. The goal was to delve deeper into educator's professional experiences with trauma informed practices and to conduct extensive and frequent professional development sessions. professional experience with these practices. These efforts were undertaken to gain valuable insight into staff attitudes and perceptions regarding awareness, confidence, and motivation. Overall, the gathered information served as a foundation for future professional development initiatives, and ultimately aimed to enhance the effectiveness of implementing the trauma informed care pedagogy with students that have behavioral challenges and exceptionalities.

Summary

Through research, I was able to see different studies and recurrent themes that explained the effectiveness of trauma-informed practices and the need to research the approach further. The different studies also showed that special education students and those with challenging behaviors who have or are experiencing trauma needed more support and resources in the classroom. However, the research lacked information on staff experiences with sustained trauma-

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informed training, coaching, and implementation. Educators first need to be able to identify the symptoms of trauma and then also understand the focus, practice, and effectiveness of TIC.

Educators also need to know how to rebuild relationships with students who lack trust in adults because of their experiences, how to identify symptoms, and how to provide appropriate support for the child first and their educational progress. Educators and staff need to understand that a student's emotional and mental health contributes to the overall well-being and progress of their education is important and knowing the students' triggers and behaviors aids the progress as well.

Also, through research, I noticed different studies and recurrent themes that explain the effectiveness of SEL and considered the lessons as a trauma-informed intervention. However, there was a need for further research to review if educators and staff have the ability, determination, and confidence to implement trauma sensitive SEL lessons if there is sustained training. Without further research, it was unclear how much professional development impacted educators and staff in non-traditional settings.

It was important to do further research because prior research found that the TIC approach is promising. Putting these practices in the classroom and learning about their effectiveness was imperative to mold and contribute to the growth of both the educator and the student. Therefore, the current study aimed to fill the gap in understanding exactly how educators' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions could shift if sustained training and coaching in TIC and trauma sensitive SEL intervention existed.

Chapter Three: Methods

Overview

The qualitative study documented teacher and staff experience of TIC after participating in sustained training. The interactive professional development introduced the trauma-informed framework to educators and staff in settings that serve special education students, students with other exceptionalities, and students with challenging behaviors. The study also aimed to see if the training experience changed how the staff managed their students and classroom. The main goal was to understand their views, experiences, and perceptions about the framework and the interventions. Understanding the staff's experiences identified the effectiveness and limitations of utilizing the framework in non-traditional school environments. This chapter discusses the methods of the study, including study design details, as well as the setting, participants, and the data collection process. Lastly, the chapter discusses the role of the researcher and the data analysis, the study's credibility and reliability, and the importance of ethical considerations.

Design

This research study sought insight into individuals' thoughts and feelings, and a qualitative method helped elicit insight into educators' perceptions and attitudes toward the trauma-informed care approach. Qualitative research studies the nature of phenomena, including the quality, different manifestations, the context in which they appear, or the perspectives from which they can be perceived (Cleland, 2017). Qualitative research involves understanding the subject matter in a natural versus an experimental setting to focus on participants' feelings toward a particular experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hoinville & Jowell., 1978; Pope & Mays, 1995). Qualitative research also includes a variety of methods of data collection: observations, document reviews, and in-depth interviews (Taherdoost, 2021).

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One of the most critical strengths of qualitative research is that researchers get a chance to explain processes and patterns of human behavior with the data collected (Foley & Timonen, 2015). This study examined the impact of sustained trauma-informed care training with educators and staff who serve students with exceptionalities and challenging behaviors. This study explored their attitudes, knowledge, and perceptions using open-ended questionnaires and recorded interviews.

The case study was the research design for this inquiry because it was a good way to explain, describe or explore phenomena (Crowe, 2011). A Case study provided insight into a complex issue's depth in its real-life context. Case studies provide questions allowing individuals to talk about their experiences and perceptions. The case study approach lends itself well to capturing information on more explanatory 'how,' 'what,' and 'why' questions, such as 'how' the intervention is being implemented and received (Yin., 2013). The case study approach can offer additional insights into the gaps in its delivery or why one implementation strategy might be chosen over another (Crowe et al., 2011). Overall, completing the case study for the qualitative design gave clear insight into how the trauma-informed framework could impact educators' experiences and perspectives in unique educational settings. Therefore, the objective was to gather insight through free writing in journals, individualized recorded interviews, post questionnaires, employing open-ended questions. Through these data collection techniques, I aimed to comprehend the experiences of school staff with trauma-informed professional development and their encounters in applying the framework.

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Research Questions

Research Question 1: How does staff participation in sustained trauma-informed care training impact their attitudes and beliefs towards trauma-informed pedagogy in non-traditional school settings?

Research Question 2: How does sustained trauma-informed professional development and implementation impact staff efficacy and motivation when supporting students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges?

Setting

The study took place at EBR Readiness High School, an alternative school site that support students with challenging behaviors, exceptionalities, and other special education needs in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The alternative site is a long-term reengagement schools that offer alternative placement for assigned students who have displayed behaviors resulting in a long-term suspension, expulsion, administrative transfer, or referral through the reenactment programs office. The school supports regular and special education students and exceptionalities, such as 504 students and other outside emotional disorders. The nontraditional sites aim to educate and target students' behavioral and social-emotional needs, equating them with replacement behaviors needed to transition back to the traditional smoothly.

The number of students varies from semester to semester because the goal is to allow students to return to the traditional setting after completing their long-term suspension. The site has a small staff and small classroom settings due to the nontraditional status of the school. According to the district's system (Jcampus) that provides information on school enrollment by ethnicity, the school mostly has African American students and staff members at each site. Although the number of students changes each semester, the ethnic makeup of the school does

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not change drastically. The goal of this study was to gather school staff from the alternative school site and conduct the study in classrooms and conference rooms of the school.

Participants

Participants were drawn from a purposive sample. A purposive sample is the deliberate choice of a participant based upon the qualities the participant possesses (Etikan et al., 2016).

Using this sampling method will allow more exploration of a specific phenomenon.

The participants were from a sample group at EBR Readiness High School during the fall semester 2023. The sample group included twelve staff members. The following participants were considered: special education and regular education teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff, such as school counselors and school mental health counselors. These participants had a direct role with students. Therefore, these staff members were the main focus to gain insight into whether the trauma-informed care training impacted their experience and changed their thinking, understanding of specific behaviors, classroom management, and, most importantly, teacher and staff relationships with students. These individuals participated in professional development and weekly coaching and implementation of a trauma sensitive SEL intervention that either shifted their perspective and attitudes towards TIC or maintained their thoughts and perceptions about the approach. Although the teachers and staff implemented trauma-informed interventions with students, students were not considered as participants in this study.

Procedures

Recruitment of participants in research studies is an essential part of the research process (Joseph et al., 2016). Upon the consent of administrators from the school site, the researcher met with all educators and staff to discuss the purpose of the study in the conference room. The

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researcher also emphasized that the study was voluntary. All individuals who decided to participate completed a questionnaire screening to determine if they fit the study criteria. The researcher emailed the questionnaire screener to potential participants, and the participants emailed the questionnaires back within 24 hours of the meeting. After collecting the questionnaires, the researcher reviewed them to see which individuals met the criteria for the study and notified the potential participants by email, and met with them face-to-face the next day in the school's conference room. In the face-to-face meeting, the participants had an outline of when the study began, the study's timeline, a formal consent to sign, and additional information about the study.

When the study began, participants attended a two-day professional development in the conference room at their schools (Appendix H, I, J). It was important to conduct professional development because professional development acquires or enhances the skills, knowledge, and attitudes for improved practice (Mitchell, 2013). Professional development has become crucial to education and educational leadership (Mulvey, 2013). Today, the important tool is frequently designed to promote change in teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions (Guskey, 2002) and assumes that such changes lead to specific changes in classroom behaviors and practice (Day & Sachs, 2004; Guskey, 2002; Mizelle, 2010). In the end, teachers view professional development as one of the most promising and readily available to increase their professional competencies and effectiveness in the classroom setting (Nguyen, 2019).

Day one included trauma-informed care topics (what is trauma, adverse childhood experiences, how to utilize the trauma-informed care framework, etc.). Day two consisted of hands-on activities to help understand the implementation of the trauma-sensitive social and

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emotional learning curriculum. Each professional development session lasted one hour. All training and SEL information were taken from curriculums that provide a toolkit with lessons: Rethink Ed, Transforming Education, and Supports for students exposed to trauma.

The purpose of implementing those TIC practices and curriculum was for active learning and training. High-quality professional development is sustained, intensive (Wood et al., 2016), collaborative, and, most importantly, active (Leko and Brownell, 2009). In this study, educators participated in experiential learning and implemented trauma-informed care practices and trauma-sensitive social and emotional learning lessons for four weeks. The coaching and implementation component began the week after the two-day professional development (Week 2). Support staff, such as inclusion teachers, counselors, and paraprofessionals, had the option to work alongside the primary educator to implement the practices and lessons. The participants implemented the lessons one time per week. Educators and staff met one day a week in the conference room (for one hour during their planning periods) with me (research facilitator) and discussed further information on implementing the practices and the trauma-sensitive curriculum. Participants were also asked to journal their experience after each training session and after each implemented lesson. The journal entries helped participants gather thoughts for the interview. This also provided additional information for credibility purposes.

After completing the four-week coaching, training, and implementation each participant was emailed a post-questionnaire to complete before the interview. The researcher also sent participants an email giving them a window of dates for individual interviews, and they were asked to send their availability in a separate email. Participants were scheduled to meet with the research facilitator in week six to conduct semi-structured individual interviews. Semi-structured

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interviews are preferred for this qualitative study because they allow the participants to explore the trauma-informed care experience from their perspective (Meadows, 2003). Participants were asked email their completed post-questionnaire before the interview. On the day of the interviews, I recorded the interviews using the “Irecord” App and I used the Microsoft Voice Recorder for backup. Recording the discussion was beneficial because I focused on listening, probing and following up, and maintaining eye contact with the interviewee (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p.69). In the interview, the participant and I discussed the participant's perceptions and attitudes toward the trauma-informed care framework after completing training and implementation. The individual interviews took up to one hour, and participants were allowed as many breaks as possible. I also asked the participants for permission to conduct a phone call with them after school if I needed additional information.

The Researcher's Role

I am an employee of the East Baton Rouge School System; however, I will follow all protocols and procedures before beginning the study. First, I applied for the Internal Review Board (IRB) approval. Following the IRB approval, I contacted the office of Alternative School and requested approval from the Executive Director. After securing department and school approval, I met with the administration at the school site and discussed a potential date to begin the study, potential participants, outline, and estimated research study timeline. During the preparation of the study, I met with school staff to discuss the study's purpose of the study. The staff also had a paper document explaining the potential research study, confidentiality, and the explanation of no known adverse consequences. At the bottom, the document had a consent section to screen those willing to participate.

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After screening and choosing the potential participants, I notified them by email and a face-to-face meeting. Potential participants were given formal consent during the face-to-face meeting by signing a consent form. The study began once the I got permission from the potential participants.

Bias can occur at any research phase: data collection, analysis, and interpretation. However, it is the responsibility of the researcher to adhere to basic principles like transparency and accuracy when conducting a study (Simundic, 2013). As an employee and researcher, I understood that biases could have occurred. To avoid biases, I took the time to write experiences or any additional information that could create biases on a separate document. I kept this information in mind and had the document nearby when conducting the study for reminder purposes. Self-awareness helped manage ethical dilemmas. I also consulted with another professional who has completed a doctoral study to discuss possible biases. In the end, throughout this study, I created a non-judgmental, unbiased environment and a learning space for all.

Data Collection

Data collection methods vary in qualitative research, including open-ended processes such as interviews (Gill et al., 2008; Yates & Leggett, 2016). These data collection methods are beneficial because they allow the participants to express their perspectives on specific topics and experiences fully. The interviews enabled the researcher to have conversations with participants to understand better the meaning of the participant's experience (Busetto et al., 2020). I provided the prescreen questionnaire to all potential participants to ensure the subject is appropriate for the study. The questionnaire was delivered to potential participants electronically via email. The

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questionnaire included necessary contact information and eight questions designed to ensure the participant met the study's requirements. I asked the participants to complete the prescreen questionnaire within a week.

Pre-Screen Questionnaire

The following is the template for the prescreen questionnaire:

Contact Information

1. Name:
2. Job Position:
3. Phone Number:
4. E-mail Address:

Screening Information

1. Are you over the age of 23?
2. Do you work strictly with students in non-traditional sites (alternative schools)
3. Have you worked with students who have experienced trauma or adversities?
4. Are you willing to participate in training?
5. Are you comfortable and willing to process trauma experiences with a student if they are asking for support from you privately?
6. Are you comfortable with journaling and submitting your experiences and having your interview recorded?

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7. Will you be willing to review and return your interview transcript to the researcher to ensure the information is accurate?

When I conducted the semi-structured interviews, the interviews were steered by using an interview protocol containing 13 questions. I asked open-ended questions to provide the participants the opportunity to express themselves freely. When the participants' responses required additional information, I had probing questions (Meadows, 2003).

Interview Questions

The following is the template of questions for the recorded interview:

1. How does the training and coaching impact how you feel and view students in your classroom? Do you think the trauma-informed care framework benefits your type of setting? Explain why?
2. What behaviors can you now identify in students that may reflect traumatic stress?
3. How do you feel about implementing trauma-informed intervention such as trauma sensitive social emotional lessons? Discuss your experience implementing the lessons provided for you.
4. List trauma-informed techniques/interventions you found effective when helping trauma-exposed students.
5. List the improvements you've seen in the classrooms since implementing the trauma-informed approach. Has there been an increase in infractions and referrals since the implementation?
6. Which trauma-informed practice or intervention do you use most effectively?
7. Since implementing the framework, how should the school environment function? Should rules, expectations, and practices remain the same or change? (Please explain your

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answer)

8. Describe any barriers that would cause you not to implement the trauma-informed care framework fully.
9. Describe how the trauma topics and lessons impacted your well-being. Did you experience vicarious trauma while learning about trauma and implementing trauma-related interventions?
10. Describe your confidence level now when working with trauma-exposed students. Does it impact how you manage your classroom/students?
11. Now that you have learned about a new approach to supporting students as part of their support system, what are you willing to do?
12. What other training do you need to become more trauma-informed (additional trauma topics).

There was also secondary data collected. Participants were asked to journal their experience after each training session and after each implemented lesson. The journal entries were designed to help participants gather thoughts for the interview. Journal entries in qualitative study helps participants refine ideas, beliefs, and their own responses to the research in progress (Janesick, 1999). This also provides additional information for credibility purposes.

Lastly, a qualitative post-questionnaire was collected from participants. This method of data collection was chosen because it studies the diversity in a population (Jansen, 2010). These questionnaires are open-ended questions, and it offers respondents an opportunity to provide a wide range of answers (Hymann & Sierra, 2016). After the completion of training and implementation, participants completed a qualitative questionnaire describing their experience implementing the TIC model and intervention. The questionnaire gave a diverse perspective on participants' experiences of implementing the model.

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Post Questionnaire

During implementation:

1. How did you work to foster an environment that supports relationship-building among students and between students and staff?
2. Besides SEL lessons, How did you provide varied opportunities for students to practice identifying and expressing their feelings (e.g., through dialogue, visual and performing arts, journaling) to increase a positive environment?
3. How did you offer positive support when students were having difficulties with self-regulation?
4. **How did you help students accurately assess their own capabilities and qualities despite dealing emotional struggles?**

Data Analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed during the data analysis, and pre-and post-questionnaires were reviewed. After receiving the data from each participant, it was coded. Coding was chosen because it is an essential tool in qualitative research, and it turns raw data into communicative and trustworthy data (Linneberg and Korsgaard, 2019). Coding was done manually and Nvivo was a software used to organized the data. Nvivo has features such as character-based coding, rich text capabilities, and multimedia functions crucial for qualitative data management (Zamawe, 2015). Nvivo is also compatible with thematic analysis (Zamawe, 2015), an open-ended method for investigating the participant's experience in a study (Walsh et al., 2019). Overall, the data drew common themes around educators/staff experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of trauma-informed care and the implementation of the framework.

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When analyzing the data, transcendence was also considered. Transcendence forces the researcher to set aside prejudgments as much as possible and use systematic data analysis procedures (Moerer-Urdahl, & Creswell, 2004). My personal beliefs, personal experiences, and assumptions about the experiences with trauma-informed professional development and implementation of the framework were journaled. By journaling my personal experiences, it suspended judgment that influenced how interview questions were asked and how I responded to participants' descriptions of their experiences.

Analysis of Documents

There was an analysis of documents generated by the school faculty. The documents were daily journal entries and responses from semi-structured interviews and qualitative questionnaires. These documents had entries and responses of staff attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of trauma-informed professional training and interventions. Examining the journal entries and responses helped me to understand and describe how school faculty feel about using trauma-informed care practices. Their documented experiences gave a more profound understanding than can be observed directly in the classroom (Yin, 2018).

Analysis of Transcripts

Recordings are transcribed into written form so that they can be studied in detail, linked with analytic notes and/or coded (Ten Have, 1999). I thoroughly listened to each recorded interview and transcribed each interview verbatim. I thoroughly examined the transcripts and allowed the participants to review their transcripts to ensure the information was accurate. Participants will also be able to elaborate if needed. For clarity, there were follow-up interviews (when needed) with participants. During the follow-up, the participants were able to review the transcript again before completing the final transcript.

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Outside Reader & Coding Assistance

I asked the participants for permission before the outside reader reviewed their transcript. An external reader ensured that the statements in the transcripts were related to the theme to ensure that the researcher will not overlook any statements and to limit researcher bias. The outside reader was another professional who received a doctoral degree and understands the process of analyzing a transcript. Utilizing colleagues for this purpose allowed other perspectives to ensure important data is documented and to limit researcher bias (Heppner et al., 2016).

Trustworthiness

It's important for a study to be trustworthy so that its finding can be relied upon. Researchers have a responsibility to be transparent about every aspect of their study, including how it was designed, how data was collected and analyzed, and how findings were reported (Patton, 2015). Components such as credibility, dependability, comfortability, and transferability determined the validity of trustworthiness (Elo et al., 2014).

Credibility

There must be credibility before producing adequate results. To accomplish credibility, there are several strategies: prolonged engagement and member checking (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Prolonged engagement involves becoming familiar with the participant or setting, building trust, and keeping the subject engaged throughout the interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sim & Sharp, 1998). In the current study, I became familiar with the participants and built trust through weekly training and coaching for five weeks. Another strategy called persistent involvement comprises identifying elements most relevant to the study for the researcher to focus on. I used this strategy by communicating with the participants and becoming actively involved through professional development, weekly coaching, and interviews.

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Data triangulation refers to using multiple data sources or various approaches to analyzing data to enhance the credibility of a research study (Hastings, 2022). Data triangulation allows the researcher to explore multiple perspectives, giving a more comprehensive understanding of the study of interest. Methods of triangulation, including member checking, also allow the data to be strengthened. Data triangulation in qualitative studies also involves examining data from different methods such as interviews, focus groups, or other sources. Participants in the current study will be asked to journal their experiences and perspectives after training and each implemented lesson. The journal entries were additional information, along with the semi-structured interviews. The journal entries also helped participants gather thoughts for the semi-structured interviews and ensured the credibility of the participants' experiences.

All the participants in the study had access to the information collected, and they also had the opportunity to make corrections or clarify the answers they have given if needed. The tools utilized caused minimal discrepancies because studies are bound to have minor issues. However, I emphasized to the participants the importance of honesty and confidentiality. I also emphasized that the information will be released outside the school to present the study results.

Dependability and Confirmability

It is important to confirm the essence of the translation of the participants' experiences, interpret the information accurately, and have limited influence from researcher bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Moustakas (1994), the researcher should avoid making inferences and analyze the transcripts verbatim to ensure confirmability. The information used in this study was directly obtained from the participants, interview transcripts, and data analysis. After completing the transcripts, the participants were asked to review their answers, provide corrections,

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clarification, or elaborate on anything they had expressed. Participants also ensured that the themes and essence of their individual experiences with the study had been presented accurately.

Transferability

It is essential to provide details of the participants and the study to determine if the findings are transferable in other settings (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). In this study, I sought to understand school staff experiences and perspectives toward training and implementing the trauma-informed care framework in settings with students who have exceptionalities and challenging behaviors. I presented how sustained training and new practices geared to students' emotional well-being could impact how educators support students with exceptionalities and challenging behaviors. Overall, I described the participants, settings, and research design in detail to ensure the data identified could be transferred to future research.

Ethical Considerations

Human subject use requires approval from the ethics committee (Meadows, 2003). The subjects will be school staff that support and educate students with exceptionalities (special education, 504, other emotional disorders) and challenging behaviors. I submitted a request for consent to Liberty University's Internal Review Board (IRB) for review and approval. Due to the nature of the study, I sent a request for formal consent to the East Baton Rouge School Board, director of alternative schools. I sent the request after receiving official approval from the Internal Review Board.

After obtaining permission from the school leaders, I then met with staff to explain the study. It is imperative that the researcher discloses the purpose of the study to potential participants and makes it clear that their participation is voluntary, not mandatory (Creswell &

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Poth, 2018). I explained that the study was conducted in fulfillment of my doctoral degree requirements, and that the results and outcome learned may be used to develop future programs in other school districts. I also explained that the study could potentially being published and cited for future research. I also emphasized to participants' that they had a right to leave the study without repercussion and described the process that I would follow towards protecting participants' privacy and data storage. Once the participants were identified, I met with them at the school and gave them an informed consent form. Each staff member and educator was instructed to sign and return their informed consent form to the researcher at the meeting.

Bracketing

Bracketing means refraining from judgment or staying away from the everyday, commonplace way of seeing things (Moustakas, 1994). Most scholars consider bracketing a necessary part of phenomenological studies (Creswell, 1998; Crotty, 1998; Vagle, 2014). Therefore it is important to take the time to revisit the data and to carefully choose the language used to present findings (Fischer, 2009). I bracketed personal experiences to help to ensure that personal bias had a limited influence while interpreting the current data. I consulted with another professional colleague and journaled my personal experiences with the study before conducting interviews. I kept notes about my personal experiences when conducting interviews and throughout the process so that I can look back at them to see if my personal experiences interfered with the interviewee's experiences and create biases. These strategies and ideas helped to bracket my personal perspectives.

Protection of Privacy

Privacy protection must be maintained for the study's integrity and the participants' safety (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once the participants were selected, I deleted all pre-screener

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questionnaires from the "Does Not Meet Criteria" file since these were not needed for the study. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participant's identity and privacy. Because they were providing a narrative, it was essential to protect the confidentiality of the participants, especially when the narrative of their experiences was integrated into common themes for the presentation of research findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I filed participants' interview transcripts and other additional data required for credibility (journal entries) in an individual electronic file folder labeled with their pseudonyms. Only I had access to the files because the files were stored on my computer with a password lock. To avoid the inclusion of identifiable information and to protect against data being identifiable through outside sources, I used pseudonyms to mask participants' names to ensure the information remains anonymous. An additional outside reader helped analyze the transcripts; however, I asked participants for permission before the outside reader analyzed their transcripts. When permission was granted for the additional reader to read, I blacked out all identifiable information before giving the transcript copies to the designated readers to review by hand. The outside reader reviewed these transcripts in my office. They were not allowed to take the transcripts out.

Summary

The qualitative study examined educators' attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of the trauma-informed care framework in settings with exceptionalities and challenging behaviors. There was a need to provide deeper investigation because of the limited studies and information about school staff experience with the TIC framework in non-traditional school settings that service students with exceptionalities and challenging behaviors. While conducting further

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research on this topic, semi-structured interviews were used to obtain information on the participants, attitudes, experiences, and perceptions after sustained training, direct coaching, and framework implementation.

Data collection had several components, such as ethics and trustworthiness. The participants' information was reviewed, and they had the opportunity to elaborate and clarify. I abided by all requirements to bring validity and reliability to the study, and the results were interpreted using the narrative method. It was my hope that this study brought to light the effectiveness and limitations of the trauma-informed framework in the classroom setting, particularly those catering to students with behavioral challenges and exceptionalities, from the perspective of educators.

Chapter Four: Findings

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe educators' experiences of their participation in sustained trauma-informed professional development, interactive coaching, and implementation of the trauma-informed approach and interventions in the non-traditional school setting. The case study results will describe participants' knowledge and efficacy regarding the trauma-informed framework. This chapter reviews descriptions of the participants, along with an introduction to individual participants, with care taken to protect their anonymity. The chapter will describe the three types of data that were collected and analyzed, themes that emerged from the data, and details of how the themes developed. Lastly there will be discussion about how those themes relate to and answer the research questions.

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Participants

The study was conducted at EBR Readiness High School. EBR Readiness High School is an alternative high school in the East Baton Rouge School system in Baton Rouge Louisiana. The school provides a student-centered alternative program that focuses on academics and rebuilding character for students who have been expelled from a traditional high school. The school's mission is to foster and promote college and career readiness and to ensure that students will become motivated, disciplined, and productive individuals in society.

The EBR Readiness High School population consists of students who have been expelled for drugs, weapons, gang fights, promiscuous behaviors on a school site, and safety threats to students and staff. These students often display behavioral problems, and some have exceptionalities and disabilities that interfere with learning and decision making.

The population of students varies throughout the year. The amount of time a student stays at the school depends on the expellable offense. In October 2023, there were 113 students expelled from a traditional high school and enrolled in EBR Readiness High School. Of these, there were thirty-six individuals with documented exceptionalities (with IEP's and 504's).

For this study, I endeavored to engage teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, school counselors, and other staff from the alternative school. Twelve such participants consented to and participated in the interviews. The participants were selected based on the predetermined criteria of being at least 23 years old, employed in the East Baton Rouge School System, working in a non-traditional setting (Alternative School), servicing students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges, and fitting in the category of teacher, administration,

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paraprofessional, school counselor, and other support staff (social worker, counselor, strategist).

All participants expressed their eagerness and willingness to participate in the study.

Table 1 provides a description of each participant (using pseudonyms) in the case study. Each description provides information about the background of the teachers and staff, the number of years each has worked at EBR Readiness High School, and the roles held at the school.

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Table 1*Participant Profiles*

Staff Participant (Pseudonym)	Years Taught	Position	Grade level
Aeisha	two years	School Mental Health Counselor	11 th -12 th
Anada	six years	Special Education School Mental Health Counselor	9 th -12 th
Verronica	three years	Study Skills Teacher	9 th -12 th
Louise	12 years	Teacher (Master Teacher)	9 th -12 th
Odell	12 years	School Mental Health Counselor	9 th -10 th
Ravon	three years	English Teacher	11 th -12 th
Hermesia	10 years	Math Teacher	9 th -12 th
Alexia	four months	Art Teacher	9 th -12 th
Alysa	four months	English Teacher	9 th -10 th
Sybrina	eight years	School Counselor	9 th -12 th
Sam	one year	Paraprofessional	9 th -12 th
Yolande	two years	Special Education Teacher	9 th -12 th

Aeisha

Aeisha is a school mental health counselor at EBR Readiness High School. She has been a counselor for the high school for two years. Aeisha's role is to counsel and provide therapeutic interventions to students and to assist students and their families in building and maintaining

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healthy relationships with their schools and communities, while recognizing and celebrating individual differences, accomplishments, and choices. She provides counseling services to regular education students in grades 11 and 12. During the study, Aeisha participated in each professional development training, as well as weekly training and coaching. Aeisha had an opportunity to conduct a small group session and implemented the Trauma Sensitive Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) lessons with an afternoon small group in her office setting (five students) where she implemented the trauma-informed care strategies and principles with students around the campus.

Anada

Anada is a special education counselor at EBR Readiness High School. She has been a counselor for six years at the alternative school. Anada provides counseling using evidence-based models and intervention to special education students who have counseling on their Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) and on their 504 plans. Anada provides services to grades nine through 12. During the study, Anada participated in each professional development training, weekly training and coaching, and implemented the Trauma Sensitive SEL with a small group in her office setting (six students with an Individualized Education Plan/IEP or 504 Plan). She implemented the principles and strategies throughout the day with all students and implemented the SEL with a group of students during 1st period.

Verronica

Verronica is a study skills teacher at EBR Readiness High School, specializing in the alternative setting for three years. She assists students in managing their time effectively, organizing their materials, taking comprehensive notes, preparing for exams, and enhancing their

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reading comprehension and critical thinking abilities. Verronica teaches students in grades nine through 12 and actively participates in all professional development training sessions, including weekly coaching. Given the smaller class sizes in her setting, Verronica selected a class of eight students to implement Trauma Sensitive SEL. She integrated the principles and strategies of Trauma Sensitive SEL throughout the day with all students and dedicated the first period specifically to Trauma Sensitive SEL implementation.

Louise

Louise is the Master Teacher for the EBR Readiness High School. He has been in this setting for 12 years. Louise shares leadership responsibilities and authority with the principal on the academic level. Louise helps with content, curriculum development, student learning, test analysis, mentoring and professional development. Louise services teachers and students grades nine through 12. This semester, Louise was required to conduct an academic group each day for the first period. Although there were additional tasks, he still participated in each professional development training, weekly training and coaching, and implemented the Trauma Sensitive SEL with his academic group (12 students) during first period.

Odell

Odell is a school mental health counselor at EBR Readiness High School. She has been a social worker at this school for 12 years. Odell's role is to also providing counseling services and to assist students and their families in building and maintaining healthy relationships with their schools and communities, while recognizing and celebrating individual differences, accomplishments, and choices. She provides counseling services to regular education students in grades nine and 10. During the study, Odell participated in each professional development

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training, weekly training, and coaching. She implemented the principles and strategies throughout the day with all students, and also had an opportunity to implement the Trauma Sensitive SEL with an afternoon small group (six students) in her office setting.

Ravon

Ravon is an English Teacher at EBR Readiness High School. She has been an English teacher for three years. Ravon teaches English III and English IV. She educates students who are in grades 11 and 12. During the study, Ravon participated in each professional development training, weekly training and coaching, and implemented the Trauma Sensitive SEL with her first period English IV class (16 students).

Hermesia

Hermesia is a Math Teacher at EBR Readiness High School. Hermesia has been teaching Math in this setting for 10 years. She teaches Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry. Hermesia educates students who are in grades nine through 12. During the study, Hermesia participated in each professional development training, weekly training and coaching, and implemented the Trauma Sensitive SEL with her first period Algebra I class (15 students).

Alexa

Alexa is the Art teacher at EBR Readiness High School. This is her first year teaching and she has been teaching for four months in the alternative setting. Alexa teaches Art I and Art II. She teaches students in grades nine through 12. Alexa participated in each professional development training, weekly training and coaching, and implemented the Trauma Sensitive SEL with her second period Art I class (14 students).

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Alysa

Alysa is an English Teacher at EBR Readiness High School. This is her first year teaching, and she has been teaching in the alternative setting for four months. Alysa teaches English I and English II. She teaches students in grades nine and 10. Alysa participated in each professional development training, weekly training and coaching, and implemented the Trauma Sensitive SEL with her first period English I (16 students).

Sybrina

Sybrina is the academic school counselor at EBR Readiness High School. She has been the school counselor for eight years. Sybrina promotes, facilitates, and implements a comprehensive school counseling plan through utilizing a multi-tiered system of support approach that ensures every student receives school counseling services universally with targeted and strategic interventions through small group and individual lessons if needed. Sybrina also ensures that students are on target to graduate. Sybrina provides services to students in grades nine through 12. Sybrina participated in each professional development training, weekly training and coaching, and implemented the Trauma Sensitive SEL with a small group in her office setting (5 students). She implemented the principles and strategies throughout the day with all students and implemented the Trauma Sensitive SEL during 1st period.

Sam

Sam is a paraprofessional at EBR Readiness High School, where he assists teachers with classroom and behavioral management as needed. Additionally, he serves as a Time Out Moderator, intervening when students' behavior escalates by taking them out of the classroom to reset and assisting them with assignments. Sam works with students in grades nine through 12

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and actively participates in professional development training, including weekly coaching sessions. He implemented strategies and interventions with students and also received permission from the principal to lead a small group of five students in implementing Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) lessons, focusing on Trauma Sensitive SEL during first period.

Yolande

Yolande is the special education teacher for EBR Readiness High School, and she has been in the alternative setting for two years. Yolande teaches students who have Individualized Educational Plans. These students have academic and behavioral needs. She provides inclusion services and supports special education students while they are in mainstream classes. Yolande provides services to students in grades nine through 12. Alysa participated in each professional development training, weekly training and coaching, and implemented the Trauma Sensitive SEL with her first period class (10 students with exceptionalities/504 plans).

Results

The data was collected and triangulated through three data collection methods that included journal entries, a qualitative questionnaire, and interviews. Participants completed journal entries after each training session and lesson. The participants completed the qualitative questionnaire after all the lessons and training were implemented. I conducted in-person interviews with each participant for up to 30 minutes after the completion of the training and lessons, and completion of the qualitative questionnaire. Interview questions (Appendix D) and the questions in questionnaire (Appendix E) were open-ended to allow participants to share all information they believed to be relevant to each question. The interview questions and

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questionnaire facilitated expression of participants' viewpoints and experiences of the trauma-informed training and implementation of the framework.

Data Analysis

During the analysis, I followed the steps of the thematic analysis method to ensure that I could identify, analyze, and interpret patterns or themes with the qualitative data. The following steps allowed me to complete the data analysis:

- **data familiarization;**
- **coding of data;**
- **searching for themes;**
- **naming and labelling themes;**
- **mapping out the interpretation of the themes;**
- **reporting the findings.**

During the analysis process, I reviewed all journal entries, qualitative questionnaires, and interviews. I asked follow-up questions in person when needed. I transcribed the interviews and sent back the transcribed interviews to the participants so they could check for accuracy. After the participants checked the interviews for accuracy, I then reread the data from each participant several times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content and I highlighted and marked significant statements.

While reviewing the data several times, I started to look at significant statements and patterns from each data collection method. I then chose different highlighter colors and highlighted specific phrases from each method. While looking for patterns, I kept the two

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research questions in mind and created small phrases (initial codes) and put them on a separate document.

During the review of the codes on the separate documents, I noticed that some of the codes could be redefined and grouped together due to similar patterns. To properly categorize the data, I uploaded the current data to the Nvivo 14 software. I incorporated the codes I developed and began organizing the data into categories that matched those codes.

While reviewing the data and codes with the research questions in mind, I identified overarching themes. After refining the themes multiple times, three distinct themes emerged: Staff Insight on the TIC Framework, Impact on Efficacy, and Assessment of Motivation. I also noted six subthemes within the data that support the three main themes: Benefits of Trauma-informed Care; Barriers and Restrictions; Efficient Staff and Student Relationships; Classroom and Office Climate; Motivation and Willingness; and Training Needs. Table 2 shows a summary of the themes and subthemes and how they relate to one another.

Table 2*An Overview of Themes and Subthemes*

Themes	Subthemes
1 Staff insight on the TIC framework	1a Benefits of trauma-informed care 1b Barriers and restrictions
2 Impact on Efficacy	2a Efficient staff and student relationships 2b Classroom and office climate
3 Assessment of motivation	3a Motivation and Willingness 3b Training needs

The Staff Insight of the TIC Framework theme delves into staff opinions of the overall approach after training and implementation. It discusses the advantages and disadvantages of implementation, and the barriers to success. The Impact on Efficacy theme reflects how staff felt about using the TIC framework. It includes their thoughts on how well they understood the training and framework, how confident they were in using the intervention strategies, and their views on the challenges they faced during implementation. Lastly, the Assessment of Motivation theme captures how motivated staff felt while using the pedagogy. This theme is important because the findings describe their motivation and willingness to implement the TIC framework. Lastly, all three themes are connected to the research questions that I wanted to explore further.

While reviewing the data, and the themes, I did find that there is a relationship between the three themes. The two themes: Staff Insight on the TIC Framework and Assessment of Motivation both provided a deeper understanding of how staff perceive the overall TIC pedagogy. Through the participants' experience, a light was shown on the potential benefits,

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positive influences and the challenges that may arise when supporting trauma-exposed students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges in the non-traditional setting.

Assessment of Motivation and Impact on Efficacy were two themes that were also relational. The motivation levels of the participants directly impact how they perceived self-efficacy while implanting the TIC framework. The participants' experiences provided a better understanding as to why their motivation was the way it was, and their experiences highlighted significant factors that either maintain and increase motivation or decrease motivation. Their feedback shone a light on how school staff can move forward with effectively helping their students in the non-traditional setting.

Theme Development

After I completed the steps of data analysis, I was able to focus on the themes that emerged in this case study. Utilizing the case study allowed me to report findings of participants' experiences by using their own words. Their experiences and their words provided better understanding as I listened carefully and allowed themes to emerge. The themes reveal how school professionals feel about learning and implementing the trauma-informed care approach in a non-traditional setting with students who have exceptionalities and behavioral challenges.

Theme 1: Staff's Insight on the TIC Framework

After participating in the study, the participants (Hermesia, Louise) emphasized their understanding that they play a significant role in students' lives. Through training sessions, hands-on experiences, and reflective discussion, they came to understand the profound impact they have on students' social emotional development and overall wellbeing. The awareness of the Trauma-Informed Care framework prompted participants to approach their interactions with

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their students with intentionality as well as to participate in self-examination to explore their own attitudes, beliefs and behaviors towards trauma and the Trauma-Informed Care framework.

Louise provided feedback after learning about the framework and stated:

This training was something that I needed because as a teacher, I come across students who deal with so much trauma. Most of these students come from neighborhoods where they are exposed to a lot. The training helped me to consider students from a different perspective. There are various issues that influence their behaviors, and it has helped me to be more patient with them.

Hermesia felt that the TIC framework called for more flexibility when working with students and the training prompted her to reconsider her approach in the classroom to better support her students' well-being. She reflected:

Sometimes, being a teacher, you must be very strict, and I think I'm now more open to other ways of teaching and other ways of understanding the students. I am okay with being a little more flexible in my classroom.

These examples provide insight on how significant TIC training is. The participants' experiences highlighted the increasing awareness and understanding among educators about the complex needs of trauma-exposed students. Through TIC training, participants not only learned practical strategies, but also gained a deeper appreciation for the underlying factors influencing student behavior.

Subtheme 1a: Benefits of Trauma Informed Care. Following their training in Trauma-Informed Care several participants (Yolande, Sam Hermesia, Aiesha, Verronica, Louise) reflected on the benefits of integrating this approach into their educational practices. Their insights shed light on the transformative impact of the TIC framework in supporting students

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with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges, fostering effective communication between staff and students, and addressing the diverse needs of learners in alternative educational settings.

Through their experiences, they underscore the vital role of trauma-informed practices in promoting holistic student development and creating supportive learning environments. Table 3 provides a snapshot of participants' insights on the benefits of the TIC framework using codes (TIC Benefits Generally; Experiential Learning Benefits) and representative responses to illustrate.

Table 3

Subtheme 1a: Benefits of TIC

Subtheme 1a Codes	Examples of participants' responses
TIC benefits generally	<p>“Within the framework, you tend to look at having a greater empathetic heart and you are willing to meet them where they are.”</p> <p>“The trauma-informed care framework is extremely helpful and insightful in how to navigate instruction as it relates to those students.”</p>
Experiential learning benefits	<p>“I now understand real life situations they face prior to coming into the school, and it helps me to effectively respond to the students with intervention. I can help students regulate their emotions when they are triggered.”</p> <p>“I was glad that I participated in the training. It has helped me manage the students' behaviors especially in a group setting. I will say, overall, it has increased my confidence in implementing the training.</p>

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After receiving training, Ananda, Yolande, and Sam felt that the Trauma-Informed Framework was beneficial for the students who have exceptionalities. Anada replied:

We have a lot of children that have behavioral challenges that are tied to an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan, and some also may have additional mental health diagnosis as well. The Trauma Informed Care framework helps us to consider the environmental factors, the social factors, and the precipitating factors of behavior. Utilizing the framework aids staff into finding the underlying issue that come from students' behaviors.

Hermesia, Aeisha, and Verronica felt that the framework helps with effective communication between staff and students. Hermesia said that after implementing SEL lessons, she recognized that this is an important tool to use in the classroom. She went on to explain that lessons help her navigate discussion. She replied, "I think SEL lessons is more of us communicating with the kids."

Verronica also noted that the TIC framework is beneficial and the framework pushes staff to understand how students communicate. Verronica said:

I think the framework benefits the alternative setting. When one actually understands the basis of how children communicate then they will understand that every action is a form of communication. With the framework, you tend to look at having a greater empathetic heart and you are willing to meet them where there are.

Louise's reflection on the benefits of the Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) framework underscores its importance in addressing the unique needs of students in alternative educational settings. By recognizing the impact of students' diverse backgrounds and experiences on their

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learning, Louise highlighted the significance of implementing trauma-informed practices to support their holistic development. He explained:

I absolutely believe that the trauma informed care framework can assist with what takes place in the alternative setting. We have a lot of students that come from various backgrounds, and with that, they come from various hardships and so when we are teaching them, there is a lot we also have to keep in mind. It may be a little challenging for some of our students to be able to comprehend the information and the instruction provided but that is due to whatever they come to school with. (The extra baggage that was taking place at home, what is going on between family members, etc). So the trauma informed care frame work is extremely helpful and insightful in how to navigate instruction as it relates to those students.

Participants noted that participating in experimental learning not only expanded their knowledge but also provided them with new insights into their students. Six of the participants provided significant feedback on how the TIC trainings increased and strengthened their knowledge and abilities when interacting with their students. Hermesia felt that the training and coaching was beneficial for her. She realized that her students go through different traumas, and most of them do not know how to deal with that trauma. The training and coaching helped her to “handle trauma exposed students and guide them with understanding their trauma and emotions.” Hermesia went on to explain that learning about triggers in the training has made her more aware of how to create an atmosphere in her classroom.

Yolande, who is a special education teacher, felt that the training and implementation of the SEL lessons increased her knowledge and has helped her and her students. Yolande

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explained that the training and coaching helped her to understand her students more. “I now understand real life situations they face prior to coming into the school and it helps me to effectively respond to the students with interventions.” Because of the coaching and the lessons, she is now able to create a space students regulate their emotions when they are triggered.

Alexa mentioned that the training boosted her understanding, revealing that working with her students isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. Alysya also noted that she learned how to empathize with her students' perspectives. Using this technique made it more personable for her and it increased her understanding of the behaviors that students often display due to traumatic stress. This in return changed her daily approach with her students. “I now view them as humans, not as students that I am over. They are individuals that have needs that need to be met. They deserve compassion, empathy, and grace just like we do.”

Other Support staff like Sam, and Aeisha, felt that the trauma informed trainings and coaching was a refresher for them, and the current trainings increased their knowledge. Aeisha pointed out that she had attended a previous trauma informed training, but this current training provided more information:

I have been to a trauma-informed training for my department before, but I decided to participate because I needed to learn more about the framework. I was glad that I participated in the training. I realized that as we went along with every lesson and intervention, it helped me manage the students' behaviors especially in a group setting where in the past I may have become overwhelmed with the behaviors. I am able to certain behaviors and manage them in a better way. I will say, overall, it has increased my confidence in implementing the framework.

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Sam's feelings towards the training were like Aeisha's:

The training sessions were very interesting for me. It allowed me to really unpack a little bit more in depth of what the framework looks like. It also helped me learn how to navigate through that journey and tap into the social and emotional side within students. It helped me to see that the trauma that they all experience is kind of like a reflection of their behavior while in the academic setting. So, it really allowed me build that rapport with the students, and have a better understanding of some of the things they may have endured.

Subtheme 1b: Barriers and Restrictions. While participants recognize the benefits of the Trauma-Informed Care framework, they also acknowledge the presence of barriers and restrictions that may hinder its effectiveness in implementation (Alysa, Alexa, Hermseia, Louise, Ravon, Verronica, Sybrina, Sam, Anada, Aiesha, Odell). Table 4 presents a summary of participants' beliefs regarding the barriers and restrictions of the framework, using codes (Lack of Support Staff; Lack of Student Participation; Frequent Absences and Transferring) and responses.

Table 4*Subtheme 1b: Barriers and Restrictions*

Subtheme 1b Codes	Examples of participants' responses
Lack of staff support	<p data-bbox="824 447 1409 552">“Although I may be practicing the framework with fidelity, the next person may not be willing to do that.”</p> <p data-bbox="824 594 1409 741">“The lack of staff participation and willingness causes a roadblock of individuals who want to implement the approach effectively.”</p>
Lack of student participation	<p data-bbox="824 814 1312 919">“Some of my students don't want to participate and they shut down during different topics.”</p> <p data-bbox="824 961 1417 1024">“A student can become irate, and it becomes a problem with safety for other students.”</p>
Frequent absences and transferring	<p data-bbox="824 1108 1369 1245">“Some of our students are absent a lot. We may do the SEL lesson one day with the student, and then they may not come to school or a week after that.”</p> <p data-bbox="824 1255 1377 1350">“Students may be at the school temporarily due to their offense, then go back to their regular schools.”</p>

One challenge unanimously identified by participants was the resistance to collaboration and the resistance to change. Hermesia pointed out:

I feel like for me, it was easy for me to kind of transition to this approach, but for others who have been in the system, I think it'll be harder for them to do it because they are not used to it and that's not how they were raised.

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Another participant talked about the lack of staff and lack of staff collaboration contributing to barriers of the framework. Aeisha stated that the staff shortage and turnover rate is an issue and could hinder the framework from working for the whole school. The lack of buy-in from other staff members who have participated in the study can also be a barrier. Aeisha explained that “Although I may be practicing the framework with fidelity, the next person may not be willing to do that.” Verronica also provided insight into how the lack of staff participation can interfere with efficiency or effectiveness. She mentioned that if adults do not want to deal with some of their traumatic experiences, they may be reluctant to engage. She observed, “They have compartmentalized some of the things, they may not want to speak on the SEL Lessons.” The lack of staff participation and willingness causes a roadblock of individuals who want to implement the approach. Alexa pointed out that it would be hard for the disciplinarian team to change their approach, noting “Some of the disciplinarian team would just go right into discipline without pulling them to the side first and seeing what is going on with the student.”

Three of the participants found that lack of resources and timing was a barrier. Anada mentioned the lack of resources that strengthen the implementation of the framework can be prohibitive. Overall, she noted, “the alternative setting has less resources than traditional setting.” Alysa agreed that the financial aspect is a barrier for her. As she put it, “I want to be able to bring in more materials (bean bags, chair,) for my peaceful corner, but the money to get the materials is not there.” Louise noted that timing is a barrier. Administration expects students to have a certain amount of instructional time. He remarked, “I may not have the time to go through a complete SEL lesson because of the instructional workload that I am expected to have for students.”

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The insights shared by Yolande, Odell, Ravon, and Alexa shed light on various barriers to student behavior and participation in implementing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) lessons. They emphasized challenges such as student disinterest, disruptive behavior, and class size, which can impede the effectiveness of SEL interventions. Yolande stated that one student can disrupt the whole lesson. “A student can become irate, and it becomes a problem with safety for other students. Odell and Ravon voiced the lack of interest from students. “They may not want to participate or may not want to open up,” said Ravon. Alexa also mentioned class size as a barrier for increased participation. She explained that during the implementation of the SEL lessons, the bigger the class size is, the less effective it can be due to the distractions that may occur. “If we do smaller groups or one on one, we may see more openness with the lessons in my opinion.”

On the other hand, Sybrina's unique and noteworthy viewpoint shed valuable light on the TIC framework, indicating that it might not be effective for some students based on the operational structure of their non-traditional site. As an academic school counselor, Sybrina reviews student attendance daily, and highlighted that many students are absent frequently. Sybrina pointed out that “students may be at the school temporarily due to their offense, then go back to their regular schools.” She believed that this could the effectiveness of the framework with some students. She felt that they may not get the full benefits from the interventions. She reported, “We may do the SEL lesson one day with the student, and then they may not come to school.”

Nonetheless, despite the apprehensiveness of this challenge, participants expressed that they were willing to continue the efforts of implementing the TIC approach. Their participation in this study showed that they are open to finding better ways to help their trauma-exposed

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students that have behavioral challenges and exceptionalities. As chapter four continues, a more in-depth discussion on the participants perspective on the framework will be presented.

Theme Two: Impact on Efficacy

The impact of training and coaching sessions on participants' efficacy and knowledge was a central focus of the discussions. Examining how participants perceived their effectiveness and understanding of the trauma-informed care (TIC) framework is essential for gauging the effectiveness of ongoing training, coaching, and the integration of new educational approaches. Additionally, it offers valuable insights into participants' self-assessment of their capabilities and effectiveness in grasping and implementing the TIC pedagogy.

Subtheme 2a: Efficient Staff and Student Relationships. Participants had the opportunity to discuss their relationships and interactions with students during the implementation of the TIC framework and the SEL intervention. Table 6 provides a condensed overview of the findings pertaining to this subtheme, showcasing the codes (Shifts in Discipline Procedures; Useful TIC Strategies), alongside illustrative example responses. z

Table 5*Subtheme 2a: Efficient Staff and Student Relationships*

Subtheme 2a codes	Examples of participants' responses
Shifts in discipline procedures	<p data-bbox="824 447 1417 625">“I tried to use different strategies and things that I have learned from training to help me day by day. I would picture if I was in their shoes, so I was able to work them a little more instead writing infractions and referrals.”</p> <p data-bbox="824 667 1417 772">“In the past, I was quick to write referrals, but the training has helped me to understand that some behaviors reflect traumatic stress.”</p>
Useful TIC strategies	<p data-bbox="824 846 1417 1035">“I feel that being present consistently and giving the students the opportunity to express what would make them comfortable in the school environment helps build that line of trust with them.”</p> <p data-bbox="824 1077 1417 1203">“Showing empathy helped the students to see me just as a human, and on the other side, it allowed me as the adult in the setting to really make them feel heard.”</p>

Many participants described their efficacy of the implementation of the framework through the reflection of their interactions and relationships with their students. With the help of the training, participants (Alexa, Louise, Ravon, Hermesia, Yolande) changed the way they utilized the discipline procedures. Instead of punitive consequences in the classroom when students misbehaved or showed unusual behaviors, restorative measures were implemented such as providing opportunities for students to express their feelings and reasons for showing certain behaviors collectively and individually, and refrained from writing referrals when certain issues could be resolved between staff and students. Some participants (Ravon, Yolande) explained that

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in the past they have been quick to write referrals, but because of the training, they have understood that some behaviors reflect traumatic stress. Therefore, during implementation, some participants (Alexa, Louise, Ravon, Hermesia, Yolande) did not focus on writing referrals and instead found ways to help students process their feelings and regulate them. Ravon and Alysa stated that changing their demeanor to calm and less punitive encouraged students to be open about their issues, thoughts, and feelings. Ravon conveyed the following:

I tried to use different strategies and things that I have learned from the training to help me day by day. I would picture if I was in their shoes, so I was able to work them a little more instead writing infractions and referrals.

Louise shared that the infractions decreased in his classroom as well. He expressed,

The SEL intervention allowed for deeper connectivity between me and the students, and they gave me a perspective of where they came from. Because I was a listening ear to them, it strengthened my rapport with the students which caused more positive behaviors in the classroom.

Aeisha, Sybrina and Sam used the check in/check out method as a strategy to manage behavior, provide structure, and help students regulate their behavior by supporting them through conversation and providing positive reinforcement. This also gave students an opportunity to check-in with a trusted adult instead of getting a referral. These participants conducted brief check-ins with students in the morning and afternoon, aiming to encourage them to express their feelings and share their life experiences. During these check-ins, they also reminded students of

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coping skills and utilized conversation and positive reinforcement techniques to help them manage their behaviors. Sybrina stated the following:

I have a list of students that I check-in with frequently. These students experience stress due to their environments, and so I do check-ins to see how they are doing. I help them solve their problems and empower them by giving them words of encouragement and positive reinforcement.

Out of all the Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) principles, participants felt that two of them were the most effective for their students: safety and trustworthiness or transparency. Eight of the participants (Aiesha, Anada, Sam, Ravon, Alysa, Louise, Hermesia, Yolande) emphasized the importance of focusing on building trust and a sense of safety. They believed that establishing a positive and trusting relationship with their students was essential for creating a safe and supportive environment. They found that utilizing this strategy resulted in meaningful relationships with their students. Aiesha stated that when interacting with her students, to build that safety and trust, she emphasized that she “can be their contact on campus, and her office is a safe space” to talk about anything. Anada believed that incorporating trust daily was most important for the high school age group. She offered, “I felt that being present consistently and giving the students the opportunity to express what would make them comfortable in the school environment helped build that line of trust with them.”

Sam, Louise, Ravon, and Alysa explained that building rapport with their students increased a trusting relationship and a safe environment for their students. After being trained, Ravon and Alysa set up their classroom environment so that students had a few minutes to take a break if they felt overwhelmed or stressed. Sam expressed that showing empathy increased a

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trusting relationship with his students. He noted, “Showing empathy allowed the students to see me as just a human, and on the other side, it allowed me as the adult in the setting to really make them feel heard.” Louise noticed that due to his empathetic actions, his relationships have gotten stronger and better even from the classroom management side. He reflected, “Now I can provide a simple directive to students, correct undesirable behaviors, de-escalate conflict and still provide a safe environment for my students.”

Hermesia and Yolande emphasized how establishing rapport with their students increased trusting relationships, but most importantly, that transparency was a big part of building that rapport. Hermesia expressed that her students were shocked when she became transparent, and they started to open more after that. She stated,

When we did the trauma checklist from the SEL Lesson as a group, I checked off some of my traumas, and when they realized I had trauma, they were shocked. I think students do not realize that we are human. They see us as their teacher, they don't see us as separate humans with the same feelings, so when I think they saw that connection, that was when we were able to communicate and build bigger and better relationships with each other.

Yolande emphasized the importance of sharing her own experiences with her students to foster trust and openness. By letting her students know that she had encountered similar challenges, she found that they were more willing to confide in her and view her as more than just a teacher. She expanded, “They look at me like, okay, she is not just a teacher.”

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Verronica took a proactive approach by beginning the first SEL lesson with complete transparency. Believing that honesty would enhance student engagement and participation, she shared openly with her students. She stated:

During our lesson on “Trauma Awareness” I told the students my story. I told them about the traumatic experiences that I dealt with from a young child until my 20’s. While telling my story, I noticed the students were shocked, they asked questions. That’s when I knew that I was starting to reach them.

Subtheme 2b: Classroom and office climate. The classroom and office climate was another sub-theme that emerged. This sub-theme was significant because it explained participants’ experience with creating a climate that had the integration of the Trauma-Informed Care framework in the classroom and office setting. Table 6 shows a summary of the results related to the subtheme, displaying the codes (Self-regulation Practices; Student-centered Activities to Increase Expression; Restorative Environment) and responses.

Table 6*Subtheme 2b: Classroom and Office Climate*

Subtheme 2b codes	Examples of participants' responses
Self-regulation practices	<p data-bbox="824 447 1398 625">“I focus on what was happening, instead of what was wrong, to help students implement self-regulating strategies such as deep breathing, journaling, art, and allow them to take breaks.”</p> <p data-bbox="824 667 1409 846">“I was able to introduce mindfulness and meditation practices. This allowed students to become more aware of their emotions and develop strategies to manage their stress and anxiety.”</p>
Student-centered activities to increase expression	<p data-bbox="824 924 1414 1066">“I provided the students with emotional wheels, mood scales, and mood meters to help them address their feelings and emotions toward traumatic experiences.”</p> <p data-bbox="824 1108 1414 1251">“I used bell ringers in the morning besides the SEL lessons. Some of the questions were personal based, and the main goal was to get students to open up and express their feeling.”</p>
Restorative environment	<p data-bbox="824 1281 1382 1430">“I told my students that we are a family. You're at school more than you're at home, so in our classroom it is about respect. So, watch what you say to others.”</p> <p data-bbox="824 1472 1393 1621">“I have a list of students that I check in with frequently. I help them solve their problems and empower them by giving them words of encouragement.”</p>

The participants talked about how they provided various opportunities for students to practice identifying and expressing their feelings. In Aiesha's office, she focused mindfulness practices and calming strategies when students felt dysregulated. As she shared, “I focus on what

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was happening, instead of what was wrong, to help students implement self-regulating strategies such as deep breathing, journaling, art, and allow them to take breaks.” Just like Aiesha, Samuel also pushed mindfulness practices in his office. “I was able to introduce mindfulness and mediation practices. This allowed students to become more aware of their emotions and develop strategies to manage their stress and anxiety.”

The teachers with a classroom set-up were able to create a safe and positive environment as well. Alysa developed a corner where students can be still and have mental breaks in her classroom. “I have small pillows where students can lay their heads down for a few minutes.” Ravon and Alexa provided a tranquil classroom environment. Alexa mentioned the following: “I play calm music during the whole class period, and used essential oils to calm students, boost their mood, and sharpen their mental focus.”

Anada set up an open and inviting tone in her office. She stated that students “appreciated this environment.” Anada explained that she created a student-centered environment. She provided person-centered tools such as activities and discussions and by doing this, “it placed a higher value on feeling connected” for her and the student. Besides implementing the trauma sensitive SEL lessons, Odell provided her own tools to identify emotions and feelings. “I provided the students with emotional wheels, mood scales, and mood meters to help them address their feelings and emotions towards traumatic experiences.” Odell also created a “peace corner” to help students self-regulate when needed. This corner consisted of a place for students to breathe and utilize positive self-talk and included little soft gadgets to keep calm. Ravon also included other opportunities for students to express their feelings. She shared, “I use bell ringers in the morning besides the SEL lessons. Some of the questions were

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personal based, and the main goal was to get students to open up and express their feelings.”

From a creative standpoint, Alexa was able to utilize art assignments like drawing and painting as a way to get students to express their feelings.

Ravon, Alexa, Yolande and Verronica pointed out that they were aware of their tone when speaking with students. These participants used calming tones even when students’ tones escalated. Regardless of the student’s immediate reaction to a situation, their goal was to shift exasperated conversations to calm conversations without using a tone that can be demeaning and humiliating. Yolande shared her experience,

Just this morning I had an experience with a student who was in rage. I talked calmly to him, I told him to use the breathing techniques, and I gave him the opportunity to talk about how he was feeling. After a minute or two, he realized that it was okay to talk about how he was feeling, and we were able to have a discussion.

Verronica agreed with Yolande and mentioned how the environment shifts into a positive environment and there is more collaboration between staff and students when utilizing this method. “I use a calm tone, and I take time to listen to students and not look at their behaviors. I want children to be spoken with instead of spoken at.” Alexa also agreed, “I try to talk without a lot of force, because I noticed that some of the students react differently when you are forceful, so I try to monitor the way I say anything even when I am giving instructions.”

Hermesia and Louis provided a restorative environment. The restorative approach guided them to utilize conflict resolution when needed, setting classroom agreements and norms, and creating a community where children can feel emotionally safe and forgiven. These participants

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wanted to focus on strengthening relationships and connections between individuals in their classrooms. Hermesia explained that she told her students, “We may not agree on certain perspectives, opinions, actions, but even disagreeing does not have to be anything that’s bad for our relationships. Disagreeing is not a negative thing, it’s just us learning different perspectives.” To promote safety and reduce traumatic triggers in her classroom, Hermesia fostered a sense of community in her classroom. She clarified, “I told my students that we are a family. You’re at school more than you’re at home, so in our classroom, it is about respect. So, watch what you say to others.” Louise also had a restorative approach in his classroom. He decided to have conversations with all his students to help them come up with solutions instead of punishing students with referrals.

Theme Three: Assessing Motivation in Implementation

In this study, participants were asked to share their thoughts and feelings about how motivated and willing they were to use the trauma-informed framework and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) lessons in their classroom and office settings. The goal was to understand their level of commitment and enthusiasm for integrating these approaches into their educational and therapeutic practices and understand how they perceived the potential impact on their interactions with students. This exploration aimed to uncover their readiness to adopt new methods for supporting students' emotional well-being, while also shedding light on barriers that might impact their motivation. Table 7 describes the codes for this subtheme (Impact of Collaboration; Uncertainty; Resistance Driving Motivation; Technology Driving Motivation), as well as examples of participants' detailed accounts.

Table 7*Subtheme 3a: Motivation and Willingness*

Subtheme 3a codes	Examples of participants' responses
Impact of collaboration	<p>“During a lesson the students were a little resistant and I was not sure how to move forward. I was able to get through the lessons with the help of my partner. Continuing the lessons made me nervous, but I am also motivated because I am open to using a new approach with these students.”</p>
Uncertainty	<p>“It was also difficult when some of the students were not taking to the practices and skills that are being implemented. Honestly, it made we want to stop at first.”</p> <p>“I did not have a problem understanding the information and I thought implementing the framework was easy, but keeping the students engaged in the lesson was a little difficult in the beginning.”</p>
Resistance driving motivation	<p>“If we stop, we won’t get anything, but if we keep going, we may be able to influence them to continue talking about the situation at a later time.”</p> <p>“My confidence at the beginning was little, weird, and shaky, but the way the program was set up, eventually it was very easy to implement. At first it was kind of hard to find out a way to make it easier for the students to be engaged and participate, but the flexibility of the framework allowed me to modify the lessons so we can be comfortable.”</p>
Technology driving motivation	<p>“I think incorporating a personal computer and chromebook has helped me as well as made me</p>

comfortable with facilitating whole class discussions.”

“In lesson 3 my students and I had great discussions, but I must admit, the computer and video helped as well. I loved that they were engaging with me, and this is something that I want to continue to do with my students.”

Collaboration among participants, such as Aeisha, Ravon, and Odell, played a crucial role in maintaining motivation. They decided to support each other during the implementation of the framework by sharing ideas. Ravon and Odell, for example, found that working together increased their comfort level with implementing the framework and lessons.

However, some participants described the beginning of the implementation of lessons as a little challenging at the start. Sam noted that at times, it was hard to implement the principles and the lessons because not every staff member was also on board with implementing. He explained:

We are already at a school with kids that have behavioral issues. There are kids that don't want to comply, they don't want to learn. It can be disheartening when staff members aren't really applying the same principles. It was also difficult when some students were not taking to the practices and skills that are being implemented. Honestly, it made me want to stop at first.

Alysa revealed that the framework as well as the SEL lessons were on an easier level to implement, however student's resistance caused uncertainty when implementing the lessons in the beginning:

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My confidence at the beginning was a little, weird and shaky, but the way the program was set up (training, strategies, curriculum), eventually it was very easy to implement. When implementing the SEL in the beginning, my kids were against doing the lessons. These students were not used to talking about these kinds of things in class and in school, and so when they were kind of just getting thrown into it all of a sudden, it was uncomfortable between the student and even with me. So, at first, it was kind of hard to figure out a way to make it easier for them.

Because Alysa had the freedom to be flexible, she felt more motivated to keep going. Eventually, she figured out how to meet her students' needs while also teaching them about social and emotional skills:

There was a lesson where the students had paper and they had to identify the different traumas. No one wanted to write anything down, but we still did the action of just throwing away the paper. In that moment, whatever traumas they thought about in their head, they released it. So, I had to change the lesson to help meet their needs.

Although Alysa's motivation was ongoing throughout the study, she did express her hesitancy with the continuation of implementing the framework on her own after the study. As she explained:

Moving forward, I will try to be more understanding, and try to have more patience. As far as additional support, I feel like my hands are tied with how much I can do in the class with stuff because of the way it is set up and structured. There is not a lot of time, there is not a lot of leeway. It is hard to say what you could do more differently other than my individual feelings. While giving the students grace, I have to give myself grace because I am a human too, and there is just some days that it is hard to do that.

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Nevertheless, participants like Sybrina, Verronica, Alexa, and Hermesia were inspired to continue utilizing the trauma-informed care framework regardless of student resistance during parts of the study. Sybrina expressed that the training, as well as the implementation of the SEL lessons helped her and increased her motivation to utilize the framework more even when there were some resistance to the approach. Sybrina stated that the “students’ reaction to implementation of the framework was not perfect, and there was some resistance from them students.” She elaborated:

I had to remind myself that helping these kids is a process. It wasn’t hard for me to discuss this topic, but it was hard to keep them engaged and participate. I honestly think that some of them were shy and didn’t want anyone to know their business (experiences).

Sybrina continued to reveal that despite student resistance she wants to keep going with the framework because it would be beneficial to the child. She offered, “If we stop, we won’t get anything, but if we keep going, we may be able to influence them to continue talking about the situation at a later time.”

Alexa also said that during two of the SEL lessons, some of the students were resistant and did not want to talk about the topics in class. She had similar views about student participation driving her motivation. She shared:

I am motivated to keep going regardless of some students’ resistance to the SEL lessons. I feel like out of a room of 30 students if I could get one or two students (even if they don’t volunteer out loud in front of the class) to pull me to the side and say “hey this is how that lesson made me feel,” then I feel like the goal is being reached because it is touching someone.

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Verronica and Ravon valued how the inclusion of technology in these lessons helped with the decrease in student resistance. This tool not only facilitated their delivery but also sparked engaging discussions, ultimately boosting their motivation. Ravon stated, “I think incorporating a personal computer and chromebook has helped me as well as made me comfortable with facilitating whole class discussions.” Verronica echoed the same feeling and expressed how she thought that integrating technology helped students participate more and it helped drive discussion which made her motivated. She stated “in lesson 3 my students and I had great discussions, but I must admit, the computer and video helped as well. I loved that they were engaging with me, and this is something that I want to continue to do with my students.”

Participants like Hermesia and Verronica continued to share their level of motivation and their perspectives on the significance of continuous implementation and adoption of the TIC framework within their educational settings. Veronica described her feelings towards continuous implementation:

I have to say that I am inspired. I am inspired to do more to ensure that my students can be resilient and become successful in life. I know if I can do it, then they could do it, but they need that extra push. I want to push them to greatness and help them to realize that their experience does not define them. I have always been motivated to help, but now I have the tools to move forward with the support.

Hermesia expressed her motivation towards continuing the TIC framework, but also emphasized how it would be better for the whole school to utilize the framework:

I would love to continue using this approach as well as the lessons. I would love for the rest of the staff to implement the approach and the framework because our school climate

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is currently declining. This is due to everyone being on different pages. If everyone gets on the same page, we can make a difference in the lives of our children.

Subtheme 3b: Training Needs. All participants reported their willingness to change how they approach all students in the school environment. However, to enhance motivation, willingness, and effectiveness, five out of 12 participants expressed their desire to learn more and receive training on various topics. This training would enable them to better support students who have experienced trauma and adversities. Table 8 provides codes (Trauma and Adversities; Therapeutic and Developmental Approaches to Trauma), and responses that describe participants' training needs.

Table 8*Subtheme 3b: Training Needs*

Subtheme 3b codes	Examples of participants' responses
Trauma and adversities	<p>“Many students have issues with parents abandoning them, and I want to know how to support them more.”</p> <p>“Something that I have been seeing a lot in the students that I work with is grief. So learning about the trauma-informed approach to grief would be helpful.”</p>
Therapeutic and developmental approaches to trauma	<p>“I want to learn about EMDR. I want to learn how to teach students to control the sensation behind the trauma using this therapeutic intervention.”</p> <p>“I think it would be helpful for me and teachers to learn about connective development. We tend to think that because a student is a certain age, they should think or act, but that is just a myth. I think it would help us understand certain behaviors so we can handle them better.”</p>

Alexa, Alysa Hermesia, and Aeisha wanted to learn more about supporting students that have suffered with grief due to traumatic experiences. Alexia also emphasized that she wanted to learn more about abandonment. As she stated, “Many students have issues with parents abandoning them, and I want to know how to support them more.” Hermesia wanted to know about an additional topic as well, and suggested “I want to understand more symptoms and signs of a child going through abuse.” Verronica wanted to learn about therapeutic interventions and models such as Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing. She stated, “I want to learn how to teach students to control the sensation behind the trauma using this therapeutic

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intervention.” Yolande wanted to gain more knowledge on the connected development of the students. She also believed that all staff members should participate in this training. She continued, “There are teachers that tend to think that because a student is a certain age, they should think or act, but that is just a myth.” Yolande felt that this particular topic would drive a better understanding of taking consideration of the cognitive development of trauma exposed children when providing support.

Research Questions

This section provides responses to research questions. Responses were obtained directly from the three data collection methods described: journal entries, qualitative questionnaires, and interviews. Responses to the two research questions address the purpose of this study, as well as how the findings shed light on the inquiry. Table 9 presents the alignment of themes and subthemes that emerged from the data, correlated to each of the research questions.

Table 9*Thematic Alignment of Research Questions*

Themes	Subtheme	Research Question
Theme 1: Staff insight on the TIC framework	1a Benefits of trauma-informed care	RQ1
	1b Barriers and restrictions	RQ1
Theme 2: Impact on efficacy	2a Efficient staff and student relationships	RQ2
	2b Classroom and office climate	RQ2
Theme 3: Assessment of implementation motivation	3a Motivation and Willingness	RQ2
	3b Training needs	RQ2

Research Question 1

The first research question was, “How does staff participation in sustained trauma-informed care training impact their attitudes and beliefs towards the trauma-informed pedagogy in non-traditional school settings?” Staff participation in sustained trauma-informed care training significantly influences their attitudes towards trauma-informed pedagogy in non-traditional school settings. In the study, participants understood the profound impact they have on students' social-emotional development and wellbeing, leading to intentional interactions and self-examination of attitudes towards trauma. The training enabled staff members to recognize trauma, factors that contribute to trauma and stress and the importance of utilizing trauma-informed care when addressing the needs of students, particularly those with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges. Many of the participants found the training refreshing and informative,

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leading to increased confidence in implementing the framework. One of the participants (Louise) made an interesting point about how supporting students' emotional well-being is equally important alongside academic instruction. He felt the trainings taught him “how to navigate instruction while supporting the emotional side of the students.” Every participant felt that the training courses helped them to realize that they needed to become more intentional when working with students. While being intentional, they found that the TIC trainings helped them to embrace flexibility in their teaching approach, the framework enhanced communication and rapport between staff and students, and staff were more intentional about being more patient and empathetic when working with students. Aiesha stated, “now that I have learned more about new approaches to support students, I am more intentional about building trust and providing safe space for them.”

While participants offered a great deal of positive feedback on the trauma-informed care training, they also identified potential challenges that could lead to inconsistencies in implementation. The barriers that the participant reported included resistance to change, lack of staff collaboration from non-participants, resource constraints, timing issues, lack of student participation, frequent student absences and frequent student transfer or reentry. Based on these common barriers experienced at this school, participants believed that these challenges may hinder the effectiveness of the framework.

Despite the challenges, participants express their willingness to continue efforts to implement the TIC approach. “I believe there will always be barriers, and the framework is still new to the school. I would say I believe in the framework, and I believe that as we continue to work the framework, there can be success,” reported Sam. The participants’ openness to

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continuing the framework shows a collective commitment to finding better ways to support the well-being of students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges.

Research Question 2

The second research question is, “How does sustain trauma-informed professional development and implementation impact staff efficacy and motivation when supporting students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges?” Participants reported feeling more confident and effective in their interactions with students, as they gained a deeper understanding on how to support trauma exposed students that have behavioral challenges and exceptionalities. Many of them noted the effectiveness of implementing the framework by observing changes in their interactions and relationships with students.

Participants reported effective skills that they utilized with their students. To ensure their safe spaces were created, they mentioned using effective techniques such as calm conversations, mindfulness practices, trust and transparency and independent activities to encourage expression. Most importantly throughout their study, they strived to build relationships with their students by providing a restorative environment and taking a more empathetic approach.

To address the second part of the research question regarding the impact of ongoing trauma-informed professional development and implementation on motivation when supporting students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges, all participants expressed their commitment and eagerness to continue implementing the trauma-informed care framework. They attributed their motivation to regular guidance and collaboration with colleagues, as well as their understanding of the framework's purpose. Louise described his motivation and credited the collaborative training sessions for keeping him motivated while participating in the study. He

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highlighted, “having guidance weekly made me stay on top of implementing the lessons and implementing them correctly.

However, participants also acknowledged encountering challenges that occasionally affected their motivation. Specifically, two participants (Sam and Alysa) noted barriers stemming from structural limitations in the classroom and the need for additional support from non-participating staff members. Sam stated, “It was task as times because not all staff members (non-participating) didn’t apply the approach.” These barriers highlight how classroom environments could be ineffective and inconsistent due to the lack of staff alignment in catering to the emotional well-being needs of students. This barrier motivated one participant (Hermesia) to continue implementing the framework and highlighted the importance of widespread framework adoption for improving school climate and supporting student success.

Other participants found that the most challenging part of implementing the SEL was student’s resistance to participating in conversation about trauma especially in the beginning stages of implementation. Yolande explained, “in the beginning was a little rough to get students to participate.” Nevertheless, these initial challenges, participants adapted the framework to suit the student’s comfort level and needs. Sybrina implemented a unique approach to meeting students where they are when implementing the SEL. She would have whole group discussions, but she would allow the students to express themselves when they were ready, even if it’s a one-one conversation. She stated: I tell them they can come and talk to me later when they feel more comfortable. I don’t completely just drop the topic, but I give them the opportunity to pick the topic back up at a later time.”

Nevertheless, several of the participants emphasized the importance of persistence and saw value in even small instances of student engagement. two of the participants (Verronica and

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Ravon) credited technology for facilitating interactive discussion as well as increasing student participation and boosting their own motivation. These insights underscore the ongoing effort and innovation necessary to effectively implement trauma-informed practice and maintain staff motivation.

Outlier

In the context of the study, an outlier emerged as Alexa and Anada openly acknowledged experiencing vicarious trauma. Unlike other participants who may not have explicitly mentioned such challenges, Alexa and Anada's candid admission of being affected by traumatic stories from students sets them apart. They vividly described the emotional residue and overwhelming impact of these experiences on their well-being, highlighting the complexities that educators face in navigating their roles. Alexa explained, "I had a student that was distraught over losing her sister due to a traumatic experience, and just going through those emotions, and thinking about my situation, it kind of pulled me back in to that cycle of emotions." Despite their commitment to supporting students, they recognized the limitations within their scope of practice and how working with students can impact their mental health. Their reflections on being pulled back into emotional cycles further underscored the unique challenge they once encountered. However, Alexa and Anada's resilience shines through as they actively seek ways to manage their well-being while fulfilling their responsibilities. Their emphasis on self-care and implementing techniques such as immersing in nature and playing calming music reflects their proactive approach to maintaining their emotional equilibrium. These insights from Alexa and Anada provide valuable perspectives on the intersection of educator well-being and trauma-informed practice, offering nuanced insights that enrich the broader understanding of the study.

Summary

This chapter presented a descriptive summary of the participants in the study and provided insight on the non-traditional school staff perspectives on the trauma-informed care framework. Each participant's narrative includes their thoughts on the trauma informed care pedagogy while supporting students with behavioral challenges, and exceptionalities in the non-traditional school setting. Three themes and six sub-themes emerged from data collected through a post qualitative questionnaire, journal entries, and semi-structured interviews. These themes included: Staff insight on TIC, Impact on Efficacy, and Assessment of Motivation in Implementation." The sub-themes included: Benefits of TIC, Barriers and Restrictions, Efficient Staff and Student Relationships, Classroom and Office Climate, Motivation and Willingness, and Training Needs. Finally, the two-research question were analyzed to better understand the findings that included participants' attitudes and beliefs as well as their motivation and efficacy towards the trauma-informed care framework after participating in training, coaching, and implementation.

In the final chapter of this study, I will provide a summary and discussion of the findings and discuss their implications in light of pertinent literature and the theories utilized in chapter five. I will also offer recommendations for future research, based on the outcomes of this study, but responsive to delimitations and limitations of the current study.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Overview

This qualitative study aimed to explore and describe the experiences of school staff who underwent sustained training and practical application of the trauma-informed care framework with students having exceptionalities and behavioral challenges in a non-traditional school setting. The study sought to provide insight into participants' experiences with the trauma-informed care (TIC) training over a four-week period and examine their attitudes, beliefs, motivation, and efficacy in utilizing the TIC approach and interventions during experiential learning with students. This chapter will include a summary of the findings, a discussion of the results, and implications of the study. Additionally, it will address the delimitations and limitations encountered in the study and provide recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

After the data was collected, all interviews were transcribed, and all qualitative questionnaires and journal entries were coded. The codes allowed the researcher to identify and group significant statements and categories into themes. Three themes emerged from the analysis of the collected data, (a) Staff's Insight on the TIC Framework, (b) Impact on Efficacy (c) Assessment of Motivation. Each of these themes directly relates to and addresses the research question of this study. Six subthemes also emerged from the analysis: Benefits of Trauma Informed Care, Barriers and Restriction, Efficient Staff and Students Relationships, Classroom and Office Climate, Motivation and Willingness, and Training Needs. These subthemes provided

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further depth and context to the main themes, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the research findings.

Theme One: Staff Insight on the TIC Framework

This theme explored the attitudes and beliefs of staff regarding the Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) framework. It revealed that the training and implementation not only enhanced participants' understanding of their students but also prompted introspection about their own attitudes and behaviors. After the training and implementation, Hermesia reflected, "I believe SEL is about understanding both students and ourselves. I feel like I understood myself a little better, I realized during one of the lessons that some of the things I was dealing with were actually considered traumatic." Thus, participants provided insight on how significant TIC training is. Their experiences highlighted the increasing awareness and understanding of the framework, and they realized that the utilization of flexibility and intentionality are two key components that will help students with complex needs.

Subtheme 1a: Benefits of Trauma Informed Care

Numerous participants shared overarching insights about the trauma-informed care framework, along with their perspectives following their engagement in experiential learning. Participants found the TIC framework helpful when working with students that have exceptionalities and behavioral challenges. Some participants felt that the framework helped them better understand various factors influencing student behavior. For example, Sam learned through training that "home and community adverse types of behaviors (neglect, abuse, community violence etc.) play a major role in who they are and how they express themselves." The participants' perspectives highlighted how the framework promotes awareness of trauma and

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enhances understanding of students' backgrounds, behaviors, and communication styles, ultimately creating more supportive and empathetic learning environments.

Subtheme 1b: Barriers and Restrictions

Participants also provided insight on the potential barriers of implementing the frame based on their observation and their knowledge about the school. They highlighted various challenges including lack of staff and student support, staff turnover rate, frequent absences, resistance to change, lack of resources and timing and structural limitations. Participants pointed out that the lack of staff cooperation and willingness could truly hinder the effectiveness of the framework. “This approach is new, and everybody doesn’t respond well to new,” said Sam. Some participants also pointed out specific challenges related to student behavior and participation in SEL lessons, such as disruptive behavior, student disinterest, and large class size. Alexa summed it up by saying that in large classes, “a lot of students are in attack mode, and they don’t want to open up and be sensitive in a room full of their peers.” In addition to those mentioned barriers, one of the participants that works with academics and scheduling highlighted an unavoidable barrier which is the structural limitations of their non-traditional site. Sybrina mentioned that the students are transient, meaning they stay at the school for only a limited time due to their behavior or offenses. However despite these challenges, participants expressed that they wanted to continue to try utilizing the TIC approach with students with behavioral challenges and exceptionalities.

Theme Two: Impact on Efficacy

In this theme, participants in the study reported an increase in knowledge that contributed to an increase in self-efficacy. Several participants emphasized that the training improved their

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abilities when interacting with students. Participants were able to recognize the importance of understanding trauma and emotions in their students, and they were able to respond effectively to students' real-life situations. Hermesia embraced the belief that "empathy is compassion and action" while working with her students. During the interview, she talked about keeping the TIC strategies and principles in mind while dealing with a student. During that interaction she shared her personal experience, along with combining an empathetic approach, and it allowed her to connect with a student who lacked maternal support, thus fostering a meaningful bond.

Subtheme 2a: Efficient Staff and Student Relationships

This subtheme was a continuation of examining participants perception on their self-efficacy. Some participants noted a decrease in disciplinary incidents and a stronger rapport with students. Strategies like the check-in/check-out method were also employed to provide support and structure while promoting open communication. Participants emphasized the importance of building trust and safety. Alysa found it easy to create a safe classroom environment by encouraging students to confide in her about their emotional issues. This strengthened her bond with students. She remarked, "I would let them know that I am not going to immediately call home or call an administrator, and so they started gradually coming to me and expressing their feelings." In addition, participants discovered that sharing personal experiences proved to be an effective strategy, fostering transparency and stronger connections with students, thereby enhancing engagement and cooperation.

Subtheme 2b: Classroom and Office Climate

Participants discussed implementing various strategies to create a trauma-sensitive environment. They emphasized mindfulness practices and calming corners to promote self-

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regulation. “I allowed my students to sit in the peace corner and I encouraged the use of strategies such as taking deep breaths, and positive self-talk, and mindfulness exercises said Odell.” Some participants used calming music and essential oils, along with calm tones when speaking, to reduce stress and anxiety levels and enhance focus. Others integrated trauma-sensitive activities with academics to promote emotional awareness and resilience. Lastly, two participants focused on adopting a restorative approach to foster an emotionally safe and forgiving classroom environment. By incorporating all of these approaches, educators strive to support students in managing stress, building trusting relationships, and ultimately enhancing their overall well-being within the classroom and office setting.

Theme Three: Assessing Motivation in Implementation

During this theme, participants were asked about their willingness and enthusiasm to integrate the trauma-informed framework and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) lessons into their teaching and counseling environments. Some participants highlighted how the weekly training sessions with the facilitator significantly increased their motivation to implement the Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) framework. Alexa, for example, shared how the training sessions not only enhanced her understanding of individual student needs but also inspired her to be more creative with her assignments while providing emotional support. She mentioned, “The training really motivated me as an art teacher. It helped me see how I could support my students emotionally while also encouraging their creativity.” Now, I include assignments that allow students to express themselves through poetry and drawing, helping them to write their feelings and paint.”

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Subtheme 3a: Motivation and Willingness

Participants elaborated on their motivation and willingness, both throughout the implementation phase and in its aftermath. The importance of effective collaboration among multiple participants emerged as a central theme in their accounts. They emphasized the significance of teamwork, highlighting how mutual support and idea-sharing played a crucial role in sustaining their motivation during the implementation of the framework. By working together, they found strength in unity, which not only fostered a sense of camaraderie but also enhanced their confidence in effectively executing the framework and delivering its associated lessons. This collaborative approach not only facilitated smoother implementation but also fostered a supportive environment where participants could navigate challenges and share insights, ultimately contributing to their collective success in implementing the framework.

However, initially implementing the SEL lessons posed challenges for some participants leading to initial doubt utilizing the framework with students who have exceptionalities and behavioral challenges. Initially, Sam struggled to get the students to take the lessons seriously, which made him doubt his ability and reduced his motivation. “There were times I felt like it was me, I kept thinking how I can get through to these kids?” He, along with another participant, expressed concern about the inconsistency in student support resulting from other colleagues that did not participate in this study. This presented a challenge at times, as it hindered the cohesive implementation of the approach. At times, maintaining motivation proved challenging for other participants due to the limited engagement from students. During the second SEL lesson Ravon documented, “It was hard to manage students’ attention. Some stated that they did not want to talk about the lesson.” Nevertheless, as the lessons progressed, participants demonstrated

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adaptability by adjusting the curriculum to better suit the students' needs, resulting in improved engagement. The integration of Chromebooks proved particularly beneficial, not only enhancing participation but also fostering meaningful discussions within the classroom.

Overall, participants continued to implement the lessons and the framework despite resistance. In the end, they believed that being persistent with the framework could ultimately benefit the students. This demonstrates the participants' perseverance and dedication to their students' well-being and development, and emphasizing their confidence that continuous efforts will bring positive results to their classrooms and office environments.

Subtheme 3b: Training Needs

Some participants expressed interest in learning more about how to support students dealing with traumatic experiences, including grief, abandonment, as well as learning more about recognizing unusual signs of abuse. “You never know what a child’s going through, so I feel like if I can help that child anyway, then I have done my part.” Two participants also expressed a desire for training focused students' cognitive development and cognitive processing, so they can understand how trauma affects students cognitive functioning, emotional regulation, and behavior as well as appropriate trauma informed interventions. Therefore, the expressed desire for specific trainings shows that some of the participants recognize that increased knowledge plays a role in how to be effective with trauma exposed students who have exceptionalities and behavioral challenges. This reflects their willingness to learn and improve their skills to provide holistic support for students.

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Research Questions Addressed

The first research question aimed to understand school staffs' attitudes and beliefs towards the trauma informed pedagogy after participating in sustained training for four weeks. The documented experiences, opinions, and interviews addressed this first question. It was revealed that staff engagement in ongoing trauma informed care training significantly shaped their perspectives on the TIC framework in settings that educate students with behavioral challenges and exceptionalities. These training sessions empowered participants to reconsider their approach in meeting the diverse needs of students.

Participants observed that the training heightened their awareness, and the framework motivated them to prioritize intentional interaction. However, participants also noted that based on their experience with the school and with the study, there are potential barriers that could interfere with continuous implementation of the framework such as, limited resources, mandatory instructional time, low student involvement, frequent student absences, and frequent student movement or reentry, employee retention rate and other colleagues who exhibit resistance to change.

Despite the potential challenges that may occur with continuous implementation, participants believed that the TIC framework is needed for their school environment. They observed that the framework not only raises awareness among staff, but it also fosters understanding, compassion, strengthens connections, and enhances students' sense of belonging.

With that being said, participants' attitudes and beliefs about the framework provided a balanced perspective on its advantages and challenges. However, they ultimately demonstrated a strong sense of optimism towards the pedagogy.

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The second research question sought to understand how the impact of continuous trauma-informed professional development and implementation on staff efficacy and motivation in supporting students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges. The sustained training and coaching sessions improved participants' knowledge and confidence in applying the Trauma-Informed Care framework. They expressed increased confidence and efficacy in their interactions with students, and developed a deeper understanding of their students' situations and triggers that are related to trauma.

Although the participants found the framework to be easy to understand and implement, they also encountered challenges, particularly in engaging students in conversations about trauma. These difficulties stemmed from students' reluctance to discuss sensitive topics and the complex nature of addressing trauma in educational settings. Participants showed flexibility by adjusting the framework to fit each student's needs and making them comfortable. They used different strategies to create a supportive atmosphere where students felt comfortable talking openly.

Regarding motivation, participants expressed commitment to continuing implementation, driven by regular guidance, collaboration with colleagues, and understanding of the framework's purpose. Participants also acknowledged challenges stemming from structural limitations in the classroom and the need for support from non-participating staff members, highlighting the importance of staff alignment in addressing students' emotional well-being need. Additionally, some participants expressed interest in further training to better support students dealing with traumatic experiences and to enhance their understanding of how trauma affects students' cognitive functioning, emotional regulation, and behavior. This shows that these participants

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were eager to learn and get better at helping students with exceptionalities and behavior issues in every way possible.

Discussion

The findings of this study either reinforced previous research or built upon it by expanding on existing findings. The study contributes valuable insights to the field of education, shedding light on staff perceptions regarding adopting a trauma-informed approach to better support students exposed to trauma who also have exceptionalities and behavioral challenges. In the following section, I will examine the study's implications, both theoretically and empirically, offering practical insights for school professionals working in non-traditional settings catering to students with behavioral challenges and exceptionalities.

Theoretical

Bronfenbrenner's Socio-Ecological model offers a theoretical framework for school professionals to understand the significant influence of external systems, such as schools, on children's development (Stanley & Kuo, 2022). Furthermore, this model illustrates how schools can effectively support students facing adversities and trauma, fostering a sense of belonging, connectedness, and safety in an environment where they spend a considerable amount of time. The findings of the present study align with Bronfenbrenner's model, which emphasizes the intricate interplay of social influences and environmental interactions in shaping individuals' development (University of Minnesota, 2015). According to this model, children engage with others within their immediate learning and developmental environment (Metala et al., 2014). Specifically, the model encompasses several key systems that represent different environments in

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a child's life: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Kilanowski, 2017).

Throughout the present study, participants gained insight into how various systems within the Socio-Ecological model impact a student's life. The training sessions illuminated the diverse traumatic experiences and adversities students often face within their immediate environment (microsystem). They also highlighted how everyday triggers from different environments can influence students' behavior and learning experiences (exosystem), and how sudden life events and adversities can alter student behavior (chronosystem). Additionally, participants recognized the school's role in supporting students to enhance resilience, safety, and connectedness (mesosystem). While participants acknowledged the positive impacts of implementing Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) principles and Trauma Sensitive Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), they also noted how stagnation and lack of effort within the mesosystem can adversely affect students.

Practical

This study found that sustained trauma-informed care training either enhanced school professionals' knowledge or served as a refresher on what they already knew about the framework. Additionally, it identified challenges in implementing the framework's interventions, particularly the trauma-sensitive Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) lessons, despite the increase in learning and knowledge. During their discussions, participants noted instances of students' reluctance and the lack of cohesion among staff, attributed to only 12 individuals participating in the study. Despite this, based on their experiences and observations, participants felt that the Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) framework is necessary and holds promise for their school. However, they also expressed concerns about future challenges, including limited

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resources, mandatory instructional time, low student involvement, frequent student absences, frequent student movement or reentry, and resistance to change from other colleagues. They believed that these potential challenges could impede the effectiveness of the framework and hinder the progress of staff and student connections in the future.

Moving forward, certain unavoidable challenges, including staff retention rates and frequent student movement or reentry, are recognized. However, participants still call for collaboration with the framework. Within the collaborative piece, a call for integration of all school staff is needed for successful implementation. Participants felt that there is a need to review the school wide schedule to incorporate reasonable times and adopt policies to provide weekly Trauma Sensitive lessons in all classrooms. Lastly, participants found that more financial resources are needed to buy materials in order to create a supportive and safe environment for students to become comfortable, motivated, emotionally education and resilient in their classrooms, despite their adversities.

Empirical

The empirical implications of this study are significant. It provides evidence that sustained Trauma-Informed Care training enhances school professionals' knowledge and keeps them updated on the latest information regarding the framework and interventions. Additionally, the study demonstrates that after experimental training (training and implementing of the pedagogy), the TIC framework and Trauma Sensitive Social and Emotional Learning interventions, school professionals are willing to incorporate these practices into their work. However, the study also uncovers various challenges that hinder effectiveness, such as time constraints, lack of support from colleagues and stakeholders, and low student motivation.

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Furthermore, this study aligns with previous research emphasizing the importance of comprehensive TIC training to equip school staff with the necessary skills and confidence to support trauma-exposed students effectively. The findings mirror those of Whitaker et al., (2016), who found that professional development courses on trauma-informed care improved educators' awareness and enhanced teacher-student relationships. Similarly, the study supports the notion that collaborative structures within schools contribute to staff motivation and effectiveness in implementing TIC practices, as indicated by Gaard & Ergüner-Tekinalp (2022). Furthermore, this study fills a gap in existing literature by shedding light on educators' experiences with TIC frameworks, particularly educators and staff who work with students with behavioral challenges and exceptionalities in the non-traditional school settings. Previous research, such as that by Thomas et al. (2019), has highlighted the lack of exploration into educators' experiences with TIC and the utilization of such frameworks in schools catering to students with challenging behaviors and exceptionalities. Therefore, this study contributes valuable empirical research on the impact of sustained trauma-informed care training among educators in a non-traditional setting that educates and supports students with behavioral challenges and exceptionalities.

Overall, the study emphasizes the need for collaboration among school staff, adjustments in academic schedules to accommodate trauma-sensitive lessons, and adequate financial resources to create safe and supportive environments for students. These empirical findings offer valuable insights for transitional programs, particularly non-traditional schools with behavioral challenges and exceptionalities, seeking to implement sustained trauma-informed care training and foster trauma-informed school environments.

Delimitations and Limitations

The purpose of the study was to explore the impact of sustained trauma-informed care training with educators who serve students with exceptionalities and challenging behaviors. Certain limitations and delimitation exist in any research study, including the present study. I made every effort to acknowledge and accommodate such considerations in the design and implementation of this research. I am confident that none of the limitations or delimitations significantly impact any of the findings, implications, or recommendations of this study.

Delimitations

Delimitations refer to those characteristics that limit the scope and define the conceptual boundaries of research (University of Southern California, 2024). The present study included delimitations due to several reasons. I chose a case study for this inquiry to gain a broader understanding of the experiences of school staff who participated in sustained TIC training and implementation with students who have behavioral challenges and exceptionalities in a non-traditional school setting. Several methods of data were collected: journal entries, qualitative questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. I opted out of doing prompted journal entries because I wanted the participants to be free to write their thoughts and perspectives regarding each training and implementation experience.

Another delimitation is the duration of the study. Due to the timeframe of my doctoral program, it was preferable to conduct four weeks of training and coaching sessions instead of a longer duration. This decision was important to me because I wanted to make some type of

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contribution to existing research in a timely manner, and by doing this I wanted to conduct a study that lasted a month, while keeping in mind that I had to provide sustained training to get adequate results. Other delimitations included criteria for participants: participants had to be 23 years or older and employed in the East Baton Rouge School System. Further, the study was only open to a teacher or support staff (school counselor, school mental health counselor), administrator, or paraprofessional.

Limitations

Study limitations represent weaknesses within a research design that may influence outcomes and conclusions of the research (Ross & Zaidi, 2019). The potential weaknesses of the study cannot be controlled. Two possible weaknesses of this study concern the participants. Although the study was open to any teacher and support staff worker, it became clear that members of administration were not willing to participate in the study. Another potential weakness of the study was not enough regular education teachers were willing to participate in the study. There are 12 regular education teachers at the school, but only four participated in the study. The other participating teachers had special roles (special education, master teacher). While the study included a balanced representation of participants, consisting of six teachers and six support staff, obtaining additional insights from regular education teachers would have been beneficial. This is particularly important because regular education classrooms typically accommodate diverse students, including those with exceptionalities, behavioral challenges, 504 plans, and students who are not labeled with a school exceptionality, who may also have other mental health diagnoses contributing to their behavioral challenges at school. This put limits on the research because the study did not capture essential staff members (administrators) as well as

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other regular education staff who play a significant part in creating a safe school environment. These limitations means that the results may not be generalizable to all school professionals in the non-traditional setting; instead, findings are limited to specific staff members in this setting.

Another limitation was the geographical location of this study. This study focused on a single alternative school in a single school district in East Baton Rouge, therefore the results may not apply to other areas of the United States or outside of the United States. This limitation means that the results from this study may not be generalizable to all areas because other areas may be different due to culture, as well as district procedures and policies for non-traditional school. A continuation of research is needed to validate these results.

Recommendations for Future Research

This section details recommendations for further research as a result of the findings, limits, and delimitations. The purpose of this study was to focus on school professionals' perceptions and attitudes towards learning and utilizing the trauma-informed care framework with high school students who have behavioral challenges and exceptionalities in a non-traditional setting. This section will suggest potential avenues that could possibly expand this present topic.

Administrators

Future studies should include further research on the impact of trauma-informed training with only administrators in the non-traditional school setting. The potential studies can highlight the experiences of administrators going through a two-day TIC professional development as well as observing their staff implementing the TIC practices and trauma sensitive SEL lessons. The reported experiences from the potential study can provide valuable insights into the feasibility of

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implementing the trauma-informed care framework for staff in transitional settings supporting students with behavioral challenges and exceptionalities, particularly from the perspective of administrators. These insights can also shed light on administrators' perspective on the effectiveness of integrating the frameworks interventions into academic classrooms. For example, the study could explore how administrators feel about making the framework mandatory to implement, and incorporating mandatory SEL lessons in the master schedule.

Depending on their assessment of the framework's feasibility, the administrators' reported experiences can offer valuable insights into how they can provide additional support to their staff when working with trauma-exposed students who have behavioral challenges and exceptionalities. This may involve implementing additional training sessions tailored to address specific needs identified during the implementation process. Furthermore, with this potential study, administrators can explore opportunities to enhance collaboration among staff members, facilitate ongoing professional development, and advocate for their schools to obtain allocation for resources to ensure the successful implementation of trauma-informed practices in the classrooms and office setting. By utilizing the insights gained from administrators' experiences, schools can develop comprehensive strategies to create a supportive and inclusive environment for all students.

Educators' Views on Trauma-Sensitive SEL

Educators' perspectives on Trauma-sensitive Social-Emotional Learning were explored in the current study, revealing challenges in implementing SEL lessons with students. Participants encountered initial difficulties with student participation due to the approach being new, and the content which led to student discomfort with the topic, including the word "trauma." Despite the intended goal of fostering trauma awareness and resilience skills, this

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initial challenge highlights the need for further research. Participants had an opportunity to modify the lessons when needed, however it was obvious that it took some time to plan to do this. Moving forward, it would be beneficial to find effective curricula that require minimum modification to increase educators' motivation of implementation. It is recommended that researchers continue to investigate educators' perspectives on experimental learning using pilot trauma-sensitive curricula in transitional settings catering to students with behavioral challenges and exceptionalities. This ongoing research will provide valuable insights for refining SEL lessons and schools finding the most effective curricula to better meet the needs of educators and diverse student population.

Extending the Duration of Sustained Training

To advance our comprehension of trauma-informed practices within educational settings, it is imperative that administrators and future researchers prioritize the implementation of comprehensive and sustained training programs in transitional settings specifically designed to cater to students with behavioral challenges and exceptionalities, spanning a minimum duration of one year. While the current study provides valuable insights into the perspectives and attitudes of school staff following their participation in various training initiatives and learning opportunities over a one-month period, the adoption of longer-term training endeavors has the potential to elicit more nuanced and extensive feedback from staff members. This extended engagement allows for a deeper exploration of the efficacy and impact of trauma-informed approaches, thus offering valuable insights to inform future research endeavors and administrative decisions. By soliciting input from participants over an extended timeframe, administrators and researchers can not only gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with trauma-informed practices but also uncover

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innovative ideas aimed at enhancing school climate and fostering greater staff engagement and support throughout the educational community.

Students

Finally, future researchers are encouraged to broaden this study by including students with behavioral challenges and exceptionalities to gain insight on their perceptions and attitudes toward their teachers implementing a trauma-informed approach. Although there are many studies that focus on the regular education staff members and students, and students who have exceptionalities in regular education schools, future research should focus on exploring students with behavioral challenges and exceptionalities in a non-traditional school setting, such as alternative schools, because this population is often excluded from education policies and research. This type of setting often serves students who have the highest need and are the most vulnerable (Kho and Rabovsky, 2022). This recommendation would not only advance future research but also provide administrators and faculty with valuable insights into students' perspectives through both their actions and words. As a result, this could also foster greater collaboration by prompting revisions to school policies regarding curriculum, advocating for a whole school approach, and boosting staff motivation to adopt a different approach to better support their students in their respective settings.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the impact of sustained trauma-informed care training with educators who educate students with exceptionalities and challenging behaviors. The theoretical model that guided this study was the Socio-Ecological Model. This study sought to describe educators' attitudes, experiences, and knowledge after

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learning and utilizing the trauma-informed care framework with their students in a non-traditional setting. This study also sought to understand their perceptions of implementing one of the TIC interventions (trauma sensitive SEL), the pros and the cons of utilizing the trauma informed pedagogy in their classrooms as well as participants recommendations for future implementation in the non-traditional setting.

There were three themes that emerged: (a) Staff's Insight on the TIC Framework, (b) Impact on Efficacy, and (c) Assessment of Motivation. Each of these themes, along with their subthemes, directly related to and addressed the research questions of this study. This study aligns with previous studies that focus on exploring educators' attitudes towards trauma-informed training in schools, however this study also addresses the gaps in the current studies that fail to understand the impact of sustained trauma-informed training with educators who educate students with behavioral challenges and exceptionalities in non-traditional schools. The understanding of these educators' experiences is essential because of the population that they serve and educate. To ensure that this setting is increasingly trauma-informed, examining educators' attitudes regarding the TIC framework is vital. Their feedback and perspectives help determine the appropriate path to take for future professional development on trauma. Thus, the present study contributes research that explores a framework that can potentially help school professionals support trauma-exposed students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges.

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Appendix A**Research Participants Needed!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

Title of the Project: EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF SUSTAINED TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE TRAINING WITH EDUCATORS WHO SERVICE STUDENTS WITH EXCEPTIONALITIES AND CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

Principal Investigator: Miyokia Carter, Doctoral Candidate, School of Behavioral Sciences Liberty University

Are You?

1. At least 23 years old or over
2. An Employee of the East Baton Rouge School System
3. Must work in a non-traditional setting (Alternative School)
4. Currently working with students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges
5. Must be a teacher, school counselor, administrator, or paraprofessional.

If yes, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

This study aims to understand how staff participation in sustained trauma-informed care training impacts their efficacy and motivation toward utilizing trauma-informed interventions. The goal is to explore staff attitudes and perceptions toward trauma-informed care when supporting students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges in a non-traditional school setting in the East Baton Rouge School system.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Complete a 7-question pre-screening tool (5-10 minutes)
2. Eligible participants will attend a 2-day professional development in the conference room at their schools.
3. After the training, participants will implement trauma-informed interventions, including a trauma-sensitive social-emotional learning curriculum (15-20 minute lessons) for four weeks (1-2 times a week). Additional training and coaching will be available one time a week during the implementation of the trauma-informed interventions.
4. In week six, participants will participate in a semi-structured interview and they will discuss their experiences with the training and implementation of trauma-informed interventions.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

This study is voluntary, and participants will not be compensated for participating in this study. The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study include that the proposed study may unveil how sustained professional development and coaching can increase educators' and staff's awareness, motivation, and confidence in implementing the trauma-informed care framework in classrooms that support students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges.

If you would like to participate:

If you would like to participate, please email or text/call Miyokia Carter at mcarter85@liberty.edu or 985-232-8449Appendix B

Appendix B**Consent**

Title of the Project: EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF SUSTAINED TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE TRAINING WITH EDUCATORS WHO SERVICE STUDENTS WITH EXCEPTIONALITIES AND CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

Principal Investigator: Miyokia Carter, Doctoral Candidate, School of Behavioral Sciences
Liberty University

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be:

6. At least 23 years old or over
7. An Employee of the East Baton Rouge School System
8. Must work in a non-traditional setting (Alternative School)
9. Currently working with students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges
10. Must be a teacher, school counselor, administrator, or paraprofessional

Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

This study aims to understand how staff participation in sustained trauma-informed care training impacts their efficacy and motivation toward utilizing trauma-informed interventions. The goal is to explore staff attitudes and perceptions toward trauma-informed care when supporting students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges in a non-traditional school setting in the East Baton Rouge School system.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

5. Complete a 7-question pre-screening tool (5-10 minutes)
6. If you are eligible (per the pre-screening tool), you will proceed with the rest of the study procedures. I will email potential participants to let them know if they are eligible. I will discard the information of individuals who do not qualify to participate in the study.
7. Eligible participants will attend a 2-day professional development in the conference room at their schools.
8. After the training, participants will implement trauma-informed interventions, including a trauma-sensitive social-emotional learning curriculum (15-20 minute lessons) for four weeks (1-2 times a week). Additional training and coaching will be available one time a week during the implementation of the trauma-informed interventions.
9. In week six, participants will participate in a semi-structured interview and they will discuss their experiences with the training and implementation of trauma-informed interventions. The interview will be recorded for clarity and understanding (The interview will be up to 1 hour).
10. The participant will review the transcription for accuracy (15-30 mins).
11. Participants will answer any follow-up questions or concerns that may need to be answered for clarification.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study include that the proposed study may unveil how sustained professional development and coaching can increase educators' and staff's awareness, motivation, and confidence in implementing the trauma-informed care framework in classrooms that support students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges.

Benefits to society include providing an existing body of research that may advance our understanding of how to support students that have been exposed to trauma in non-traditional settings.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study include mandatory reporting. The researcher, by law, is mandated to report any information related to child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others. Overall, the expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

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The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared. Participant responses will be kept confidential through pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. To maintain confidentiality, all information will be secured with pseudonyms usage, no focus groups will be used for this study to ensure confidentiality is maintained on behalf of the researcher.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Miyokia Carter. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor William Townsend by email:

[REDACTED]

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email me on irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) ensures that human subjects research will be conducted ethically as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

- The researcher has my permission to audio record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix C

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 19, 2023

Miyokia Carter
William Townsend

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-172 Examining the Impact of Sustained Trauma-Informed Care Training with Educators Who Service Students with Exceptionalities and Challenging Behaviors

Dear Miyokia Carter, William Townsend,

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).

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

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 irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

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Appendix D

Welcome!

Thank you for your participation in this prequalifying screening tool. Data will be collected and kept confidential. Your feedback is important and will be used to enhance professional learning opportunities. Participation in this prequalifying screening is voluntary, and participants may withdraw from this activity at any time without penalty for non-participation by clicking out of the tool. If you have any questions or need more information, you can contact me at mcarter85@liberty.edu

Contact Information:

1. Name:
2. Job Position:
3. Phone Number:
4. E-mail Address:

Screening Information:

1. Are you over the age of 18?
2. Do you work strictly with students in non-traditional sites (alternative schools)
3. Have you worked with students that have experienced trauma or adversities?
4. Are you willing to participate in training and interactive coaching?
5. Are you comfortable and willing to process trauma experiences with a student if they are asking for support from you privately?

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6. Are you comfortable with journaling and submitting your experiences and having your interview

recorded?

7. Will you be willing to review and return your interview transcript to the researcher to

ensure the information is accurate?

Appendix E

Questions for Semi-Structured Interview

The following is the questions for the recorded interview:

1. How does the training and coaching impact how you feel and view students in your classroom? Do you think the trauma-informed care framework benefits your type of setting? Explain why?
2. What behaviors can you now identify in students that may reflect traumatic stress?
3. How do you feel about implementing trauma-informed intervention such as trauma sensitive social emotional lessons? Discuss your experience implementing the lessons provided for you.
4. List trauma-informed techniques/interventions you found effective when helping trauma-exposed students.
5. List the improvements you've seen in the classrooms since implementing the trauma-informed approach. Has there been an increase in infractions and referrals since the implementation?
6. Which trauma-informed practice or intervention do you use most effectively?
7. Since implementing the framework, how should the school environment function? Should rules, expectations, and practices remain the same or change? (Please explain your answer.)
8. Describe any barriers that would cause you not to implement the trauma-informed care framework fully.
9. Describe how the trauma topics and lessons impacted your wellbeing. Did you experience vicarious trauma while learning about trauma and implementing trauma-related interventions?

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10. Describe your confidence level now when working with trauma-exposed students. Does it impact how you manage your classroom/students?
11. Now that you have learned about a new approach to supporting students as part of their support system, what are you willing to do?
12. What other training do you need to become more trauma-informed (additional trauma topics)

Appendix F

Implementation of the TIC Model Questionnaire

During implementation:

1. How did you work to foster an environment that supports relationship-building among students and between students and staff?
2. Besides SEL lessons, How did you provide varied opportunities for students to practice identifying and expressing their feelings (e.g., through dialogue, visual and performing arts, journaling) to increase a positive environment?
3. How did you offer positive support when students were having difficulties with self-regulation?
4. **How did you help students accurately assess their own capabilities and qualities despite dealing emotional struggles?**

Appendix G

Dear [REDACTED]

My name is Miyokia Carter. As a doctoral student in the School of Behavioral Sciences at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Community Care and Counseling with a concentration in Traumatology. The title of my research project is Examining the Impact of Sustained Trauma-Informed Care Training with Educators Who Serve Students with Exceptionalities and Challenging Behaviors. The purpose of my research is to understand how staff participation in sustained trauma-informed care training impacts their efficacy and motivation toward utilizing trauma-informed interventions. The goal is to explore staff attitudes and perceptions toward trauma-informed care when supporting students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges in a non-traditional school setting.

I am requesting your permission to conduct my research in East Baton Rouge School System in the alternative school setting. The data will be used to determine if sustained professional development and coaching can increase educators' and staff's awareness, motivation, and confidence in implementing the trauma-informed care framework in classrooms that support students with exceptionalities and behavioral challenges. Participants will participate in trauma-informed training and coaching and implement trauma-informed interventions with students with exceptionalities and behavioral difficulties for four weeks. A case study with the results of their experiences will be recorded and documented. Participants will be presented with informed consent information before participating. This study is voluntary, and participants can discontinue participation at any time.

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Thank you in advance for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval and send by email to

████████████████████

Sincerely,

Miyokia Carter, LPC, NCC

Doctoral Candidate

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Appendix H*Training Sessions/Coaching and SEL Topics**Trainer: Miyokia Carter, LPC, NCC (Doctoral Student)*

Date	Training/Coaching Topic	SEL Implementation Topic
October 2, 2023 Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand trauma in a broad and inclusive way. • Recognize the effects of trauma on students, families, school administrators and staff, and communities. • Understanding the Principles of Trauma Informed Care • Ways to utilize the Trauma Informed Principles with students. • Conclusion and Q&A 	
October 4, 2023 Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma Informed Intervention: Trauma Sensitive Emotional Learning • Fostering Trauma-Informed SEL in classrooms • Examples on how to implement the Trauma SEL Lessons 	
October 10, 2023		“What is Trauma”

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October 17, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education on Adverse Childhood Experiences • How to Implement the Coping Skills Lesson 	
October 18, 2023		“How can we cope.” Identifying Coping Skills to reduce Anxiety and Depression that stem from adversities.
October 24, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss how to implement SEL Lesson: “Self-Awareness” Using the Electronic Rethink ED Curriculum. Q&A/Feedback 	
October 25, 2023		Self-Awareness: Mindfulness “Being Mindful” (Reducing Stress)
October 31, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss and Demonstrate SEL Lesson: “Self-Care” Using the Electronic Rethink Ed Curriculum. • Q&A/Feedback Final Thoughts about TIC and SEL 	
November 1, 2023		Self-Care/Self-Management: “Stress Management/Self-Compassion”

Resources:

www.rethinked.com/core/

www.transformingeducation.org/resources/trauma-informed-sel-toolkit/

<https://www.rand.org/content/>

Appendix I

Trauma Informed Care Training Agenda:

Trauma- Informed Care Training

Session 1

EBR Readiness High School

Presenter: Miyokia Carter LPC, NCC (Doctoral Student)

October 2, 2023

- **Welcome**
- **Introduction**
- **Ice Breaker**
- **Understand trauma in a broad and inclusive way.**
- **Recognize the effects of trauma on students, families, school administrators and staff, and communities.**
- **Understanding the Principles of Trauma Informed Care**
- **Ways to utilize the Trauma Informed Principles with students.**
- **Conclusion and Q&A**

Appendix J

Trauma Informed Care Training Agenda:

Trauma- Informed Care Training (SEL)

Session 2

EBR Readiness High School

Presenter: Miyokia Carter LPC, NCC (Doctoral Student)

October 4, 2023

- **Welcome**
- **Introduction**
- **Mini Ice Breaker**
- **Trauma Informed Intervention: Trauma Sensitive Emotional Learning**
- **Fostering Trauma-Informed SEL in classrooms**
- **Examples on how to implement the Trauma SEL Lessons**
- **Conclusion and Q&A**

Appendix K

EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH SCHOOL SYSTEM



Date: 9/17/2023

From: [REDACTED] Executive Director for Alternative Education & Graduation Excellence

Regarding: Miyokia Carter

To Liberty University IRB:

Based on my review of the proposed research by Miyokia Carter, I give permission for her to conduct the study entitled "Examining the Impact of Sustained Trauma-

Informed Care Training with Educators who Service Students with Exceptionalities and Challenging Behaviors" at EBR Readiness High School. I also give her permission to conduct all proposed procedures pertaining to the study. I am excited to have her on our site and I am looking forward to our staff participating in this study.

If you need additional information or have any questions, feel free to contact me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]@ebrschools.org.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED] M.S., GC, M.S. EDL, SLE, 2L

Executive Director for Alternative Education & Graduation Excellence

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