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How can early childhood educators promote equitable outcomes through trauma-informed practice?

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Abstract

An abundance of research acknowledges the effects of trauma on children from an early age. Prolonged and severe trauma in early childhood can lead to adverse outcomes in important areas of development, such as one's physical, mental, and social-emotional well-being (Morsy and Rothstein, 2019). Children present school systems and educators with the task of addressing this important, but infrequently considered issue. Trauma has lasting effects regardless of age, but the impacts of trauma during childhood are especially profound during such formative years. Children require safe spaces to learn and flourish as individuals, therefore it is important that early childhood educators are knowledgeable in trauma-informed educational practices that are rooted in equity (Venet, 2021). Seeing trauma through an equity lens not only considers the student, but the problematic systems and structures that also perpetuate the issue. This paper examines research on traumatic student experiences and the link between those relationships and the existing achievement gap in education. The research findings indicate a need to shift from deficit perspectives to a greater collaborative process with students and the education system.

Keywords: trauma, trauma-informed practice, achievement gap, educational equity, safety

Chapter One: Introduction

Within schools and communities, children must live with the impacts of trauma daily. While it is ever-present, it can be tempting to view trauma through the narrow lens of catastrophe or happenstance, but it is the quiet, systemic perpetuation of trauma within communities and schools that may affect students the most over time. There is a clear relationship between trauma and the emotional, mental development, and physical well-being of early learners (Freize, 2015). Trauma can be found everywhere, and in a variety of settings, including schools – and as educators, there is a responsibility to learn about its affects in the classroom and work towards interventions that will allow children to flourish. In understanding child development, teachers recognize that youth do not relate to the world as adults, therefore the internalization and response to trauma from children will look different as well. Literature and ongoing research support educators and school systems providing trauma-informed and trauma sensitive educational experiences, allowing for understanding, healing, and growth (Venet, 2021).

Children are capable and resilient beings that are much more than a set of experiences. Through trauma-informed practice, educators can support students and families in being understanding and sensitive to their traumas, further helping to bring about the change that is needed in this area. Educators contribute by reflecting on work and carefully considering differing thoughts or ideas and any constructive criticisms. Noises, everyday busyness, and even the choice of classroom materials and activities could be enough to trigger a trauma response in some students. When addressing trauma, teachers may never have all the pieces of the information puzzle, therefore a kinder, more inclusive approach is most beneficial.

The Importance of Trauma-Informed Educators

Among educators and educational systems, trauma is commonly thought of as something that children carry and bring with them to the classroom. Schools and teachers may find themselves combating the consequences of trauma without exploring causes and environmental triggers. Trauma can be experienced individually and collectively. Whatever traumas are present in children are usually compounded by the oppressive systems that exist within schools and communities. Regarding trauma, professional development efforts usually inform teachers of strategies to support students through tragedy and duress, but rarely examine personal and systemic issues that are perpetuated in academic environments that result in trauma.

Khasnabis and Goldin (2020) acknowledged that trauma occurs everywhere. By only approaching the issue at an individual level, children and families can feel marginalized and blamed for situations beyond one's control. Schools are not relieved of the pain and trauma that occurs within its walls. A primary reason for this is because many schools are not equitable institutions, namely because the education system is inequitable. Inequity in education is systemic and it is traumatic. To be trauma-informed is to be equity-minded and recognizing that schools are not equitable to those most impacted by trauma (Khasnabis and Goldin, 2020).

Inequity in Education

There is a genuine need for schools to examine how schools traumatize or worsen the trauma in students. Being equity-minded acknowledges that each student has the capacity to learn, and each child should have access to a high-quality educational experience. Considering the impact of trauma on student learning, trauma-impacted students should not be perceived through a narrow lens of academic deficits. A student may have the capacity to learn but will struggle to thrive if needs are not met and a sense of safety is not adequately established. Teachers cause harm when

engaging in disciplinary practices and extending severe consequences towards students whose behaviors are appropriate responses to stress, fear, pain, or any other number of physical or mental reactions to trauma (Carello, 2015). It can be difficult to override a child's flight or fight response to stressful situations, but these children still have the capacity to learn and are deserving of meaningful, quality educational experiences. Child behaviors are attempts at communication and are often underserving of harsh discipline measures. Trauma-informed practices help both students and teachers. Educators cannot fix all issues caused by inequity (including trauma), but teachers can consider one's personal role in creating conditions that promote understanding and emotional safety so learning can occur (Carello, 2015).

Purpose of Research

The research presented in this paper explores how educators, schools, and educational systems can better promote equitable outcomes through trauma-informed practice. As teachers and school systems learn more about trauma and its affects on student learning and well-being, educators will be better positioned to advocate for the necessity of equity at all levels of the educational process to create sustainable change. If schools are to adequately support students, examining how on-going attitudes, practices, and policies help or fail students is essential (Venet, 2021).

Definition of Terms

Trauma can impact anyone of any age. In McInerney's Education Law Article (2014), *trauma* is explained to be a negative event or events that overwhelm a person's ability to cope. This has serious implications for early childhood learning as traumatic experiences are known to negatively affect brain development and behavior. Throughout most literature, *trauma-informed care* involves considering the connection between symptoms and behaviors, as well as anything

known about the child's past trauma history (Hodas, 2006). Comparing this to *trauma-informed practice* in schools that refer to the ways a service system is influenced by understanding trauma and how to be responsive to traumatic stress.

Positive relationships and a culture of safety is an important component of trauma-informed practice. In the context of educational and emotional support, *safety* is the foundation that students and teachers require (Oehlburg, 2008). Creating supportive relationships among students and staff plays an essential role in contributing to the safety felt by students. If students are to feel considered and respected, it must start with teachers and administration and acknowledging their traumas (Oehlberg, 2008). As trauma is acknowledged and safe spaces are cultivated, the academic achievement gap can become hard to ignore, especially considering its impact on trauma-affected students. An *achievement gap* refers to the discrepancy in academic performance among different groups of students. The differences can pertain to age, culture, socio-economic status, and other similar factors (Hanushek, E. A., Peterson, P. L. Talpey, M., and Woessmann, L., 2019). This could be a direct result of educational inequity. Educational equity is the assurance of just outcomes for each student, a process of academic fairness and inclusion that ensures students and educators have the resources and supports needed to succeed (Venet, 2021). Trauma is complex and the definitions of terms surrounding it will likely expand as more research and understanding is acquired.

Conclusion

To address trauma in early childhood, inequality is addressed in the classroom and systemically. Teachers cannot always determine what is or is not harmful for students, specifically without careful consideration and engagement in the classroom. Feelings of confusion and overwhelm among educators can quickly turn into moments of dismissiveness.

The future of early childhood education relies heavily upon ongoing training and continuing education efforts of teachers and education professionals, particularly as it relates to traumatic experiences (Khasnabis and Golden, 2020). Teachers can respond to behavior with authenticity and objectivity, not just reactively. Educators are not called to constantly identify traumas, but to focus on more ways to be supportive, allowing for greater partnerships with students and leaders, paving the way for better support for those most in need.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This chapter is an examination of literature that provides context on trauma in educational and community settings and its impact on achievement and equitable outcomes for students. The achievement gap persists largely due to surrounding influences and structures in a child's life. If educators are aware of the on-going persistence of childhood trauma and its adverse impact on achievement across domains, considerations of equity from an ecological standpoint are needed to adequately support students and advocate for holistic and trauma-informed places of learning (Osher, Pittman, Young, Hal, Moroney, and Irby 2020). Trauma and equity are integrated issues, not separate problems. In many cases, the inequities that children face trigger the traumatic experiences in their lives. The purpose of working with a trauma-informed approach lies in relationship building and avoiding retraumatization (Osher et al., 2020).

Childhood Trauma

While everyone experiences trauma and negative experiences at various times throughout life, children in early childhood tend to be most vulnerable to the impacts of trauma due to lacking necessary coping methods, and reliance on primary caregivers as advocates (Young, 2011). The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2012) describes trauma as the experience of an event that overwhelms a person's ability to cope. Events are considered traumatic when a person is faced with or has witnessed an immediate threat to self or others in the immediate surroundings. This is often followed by psychological impairment, emotional damage and/or physical harm. Many different experiences can result in childhood trauma. How children react to such experiences relies heavily on stage of development and the environment. Trauma has close ties with toxic stress, which the American Academy of Pediatrics (2018) describes as chronic

exposure and use of the body's response system to stress. The research asserts that prolonged exposure to stress negatively impacts the brain, thus influencing student learning and behavior.

The Trauma and Equity Connection

Educators may consider if inequity in schools exacerbates trauma for students. Schools can make efforts to be more equitable towards students facing forms of trauma. The idea behind equity in education is that all children have the capacity to learn and should benefit from a quality educational experience that has equity as its foundation (Venet, 2021). Inequity in schools exacerbates trauma in students and most schools are not equipped to equitably support those affected most by trauma. Trauma happens both outside and *within* school walls. Educators and various aspects of the educational system can and *do* harm students. According to Smith & Freyd (2014), schools fail students when school workers and school policies cause harm. School is unable to be a safe space for growth and learning, especially if student voices are ignored or belittled. A lack of awareness and knowledge of childhood trauma in education risks viewing children with deficits and applying labels, perceiving behaviors as defiant or disruptive instead of a natural, developmentally appropriate response to a negative situation or experience (Venet, 2021).

Trauma and The Achievement Gap in Education

An achievement gap exists between children from high income and low-income families. Schools are often regarded as sanctuaries of learning for youth that help all children rise above circumstances of birth to learn and be successful throughout life. Countless studies have investigated the mounting disparities among different socio-economic groups, examining everything from test scores to graduation rates. However, it is income inequality that appears to be the greatest hindrance to childhood academic achievement, the repercussions of which can be

seen as early as Kindergarten. According to Reardon (2013), this income achievement gap among early learners is vast, however the author argues that school quality may not necessarily be to blame. Key factors such as poverty and accessibility to resources widen the gap further. Living in a society that values test scores and academic success, not all families have the same understanding and beliefs surrounding formal education, whereas groups that do may be disadvantaged upon competing for the best academic resources.

Reardon (2013) begins his study by investigating whether achievement gaps related to income inequality have narrowed over time as no research has explored this on a systemic level. A study takes place in analyzing the income of families in academic achievement, and the relationship between the two. The paper begins by immediately delving into the major findings of the study. Reardan examines income levels and the correlation to academic achievement over the course of 50 years throughout the United States. Data, including student standardized test scores and family income levels in math and reading, are collected. Reardon states that the scores are standardized in what he calls an income achievement gap, expressed in standard deviation units (Reardon, 2013). Reardon's findings have uncovered a multitude of data, noting the growing income achievement gap over a period of three decades, gaps among standardized test scores, as well as mentioning that although a gap in academic achievement may be large in low-income families at the start of kindergarten, the gap does not always mean bad school quality as further research notes schools helping to narrow academic achievement gaps over time.

One drawback of this study is that it does not describe the demographics in sufficient detail, mostly relying on data and compelling information provided by other researchers. However, Reardon's level of contribution is questionable as the paper does not state his level of contribution to the studies and that of his colleagues. Reardon appears to be synthesizing data

that was collected prior with others, but the analysis is his own. The study across Reardon's findings is quasi-experimental, a fair bit of data is used and explored, with figures and tables presented throughout, but there is also plenty of descriptive language and relating to past events that take place that leads one to believe this paper lies somewhere in between being both quantitative and qualitative. Cause and effect issues of the economic achievement gap can be noted as Reardon explains education trends as compared to racial inequality over the decades (Reardon, 2013). While racial inequality is lower than it has been in previous decades, income inequality still exceeds that, with racial inequality being mentioned as it once affected nearly all areas of life, including access to education, particularly in the 1950s in 1960s.

An instrument used in collecting data is standardized test scores as previously mentioned. Reardon (2013) cites the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Cohort where 25,000 children were tested in math and literacy skills and their progress in these areas is tracked through eighth grade. When compared to other studies of middle and high schoolers examining the same dynamics, Reardon concluded that there is very little change in the achievement gap throughout a child's academic career from grades K-12 (Reardon, 2013). The target group of participants is never made clear as Reardon relied on various studies to form his conclusion of the topic. Knowing such information can be of significance when seeking to explore the nature of the achievement gap as it relates to academic achievement in more detail.

Trauma and Academic Achievement

Neuman (2006) breaks down what is described as the knowledge gap in a narrative tone throughout the study, highlighting the implications of economic inequality throughout the research. Neuman does not work alone, as research is listed citing her work in collaboration with others to build a body of research, however Neuman relates prior studies with her team to inform

small portions of field work. This research is deemed qualitative as most information presented is non-numerical in nature. Within the paper, Neuman recounts a trip to seven different low-income neighborhoods, with classes that are described as being meant for impoverished youth (Neuman, 2006). It is in these observations the lack of engagement staff had with the children is noted, as the classes are seen learning things purely by rote in a detached fashion. As Neuman brings up observation, what was seen to previous knowledge and to the research of others is communicated. Further evidence of Neuman's qualitative research studies is a table recounting a teacher's thematic study unit (Neuman, 2006). It is unclear if outside experts were used in the study, but it can be gathered that a convenience sample was used as the author was only able to observe seven low-income classrooms. However, Neuman (2006) goes into detail over what occurs in a content-rich literacy environment over the course of a single day, something that may be considered a major flaw. Demographics for the data presented by Neuman are simple; only the schedule, the teacher's approach to instruction, and the children's relationship with the academic content are shared in descriptive detail. There is no further mention of demographic information such as location or student teacher ratios.

This research will work to inform the professional practice of early childhood educators in a multitude of ways. It is through Neuman's observations and research that it can be concluded that most early knowledge deficits are due to lack of key resources and experiences that are the primary reason low-income children lag academically, but still have the same ability to learn. While the gap may never truly be closed, it can be reduced with better quality education that incorporates understanding and the ability to learn with skills (Neuman, 2006).

It is through Reardon's findings (2013), that educators can understand why the income achievement gap is growing. High income families have more money and resources to direct to

student learning. Reardon (2013) then mentions how standardized test scores have changed the landscape of what most consider to be academic success. Schools can help bridge the income inequality gap by offering support and resources to preschoolers and Kindergarteners as a means of early intervention, as well as working in communities to lesson residential segregation by income (Reardon, 2013). While everyone experiences trauma, trauma among children is more pervasive than what may be obvious. Socio-economic status correlates to certain traumatic experiences and stressors, with marginalized groups being at greater risk for experiencing traumatic stress. Schools will not be able to bridge the achievement gap alone but invested teachers and an intentional curriculum can help. This will require work and planning from the classroom, state, and even federal levels as it continues to be an on-going effort.

The following two articles consider the important role of the teacher in equitably changing the landscape of education for all students. Nadelson et al. (2019) produced a breadth of research that attempts to deconstruct the mindsets of teachers by identifying six important characteristics of what the authors describe as an "educational equity mindset" that is crucial to meet the needs of every student. The article mentions, as most research on the topic does, that education (specifically *public* school education) should be available across the country so each child may have the chance to learn and succeed. It is argued that classroom education should be differentiated to meet the needs of students, but more importantly, teachers should have a solid understanding of what educational equity is and how it impacts their classrooms and careers.

The research by Nadelson et al. (2019) assesses specific practices that are student-focused, inclusive, and culturally aware. The authors discovered what they believed to be a gap in current research as they were unable to find any research that proposed a way to measure teacher mindsets. Throughout the course of this study, 452 teachers across the southern United

States were surveyed. Of those surveyed, nearly 90% of participants were female and most had taught for an average of 15 years. Grade level taught by teachers in the surveys were nearly equal through grade levels elementary through high school. Data was collected online via email to teachers over a three-year period (Nadelson et al., 2019). An examination of both qualitative and quantitative data occurred, with the information from both later processed into a list of codes. The authors believe they achieved their goal of creating a way to measure an equity mindset for teachers that will allow for greater teacher preparedness and continuing education.

Next, Braun and Billups (2016) introduce readers to a mixed-methods study that investigates the extent to which educator beliefs and practices influenced intraschool achievement gaps. This study was an exercise in understanding leadership styles among educators and how they can be used to aid children within the classroom. Information for the study was collected over the course of two years among principals across five public school sites and were able to identify achievement gaps they were working on based on student data. Of the principals who participated, most were in their first years in the role. Coding of interviews and focus groups took place in this study as well. Certain themes emerged because of the data, among the most important being that of communication. As a teacher must know and understand its students, the same can be said for a principal and staff. Community and collaboration between teachers and school leaders proved to make an equitable difference across all schools involved (Braun and Billups, 2016).

Achievement Gaps in Public Education

The following two studies take a closer look at the relationship of race and income as it relates to the achievement gap within public schools. One study takes aim at the academic consequences of disciplinary measures taken against students of color, whereas the other study

focuses on the standard of quality found in public pre-k for low-income families of (mostly) minority students.

According to Pearman et al. (2019), exclusionary discipline practices have almost always been a factor in public education. Such disciplinary measures have far-reaching consequences, that could result in children falling behind because of missed instruction due to suspension, or higher dropout rates resulting from a lack of teacher awareness and support. It is only until recently that many researchers would assent to the correlation of race and achievement gaps. Data on the achievement gap already exists, and this research combines the data of the Stanford Education Act with disciplinary data from the Civil Rights Data Collection (Pearman et al., 2019). Racial disparities among achievement gaps were only analyzed among students in grades 3-8 for the study (as these being the only grades tested nationally by No Child Left Behind at the time).

A common misperception is the idea that having access to early childhood education, such as public pre-k, can help lower achievement gaps before children begin kindergarten. As iterated in some of the other studies, a child's experience is highly dependent on the quality of education received. Valentino (2018) also makes correlations between a child's academic progress and his or her race and socioeconomic situation. The concern is that achievement gaps will not narrow sufficiently if all children do not have access to high-quality education. The author presents a qualitative study that examines characteristics of such exceptional education standards. Classroom quality was measured through observation and teacher surveys. Throughout the study, 647 classrooms with 12,344 pre-k children of three to four years of age were analyzed. Among the author's findings is the necessity for high quality teachers to be placed where they are needed or for current teachers to receive ongoing professional

development (Valentino, 2018).

Goodman, Miller, and West-Olatunji (2012) also commented on the impacts on traumatic stress and socioeconomic status on young students in a study evaluating the academic achievement of primary students. The purpose of the author's study was to explore if socioeconomic factors and trauma resulted in predictable markers of achievement for students in fifth grade. Data for the study was gathered from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study that was a nation-wide representative, longitudinal study that monitor a child's developmental progress across domains. The sample size for the Goodman et al. (2012) study was 3,387,565 fifth-grade students consisting of 58.9% White students and African American, Latinx, and Asian students making up to 20% or less of the student population. The data uncovered students meeting the criteria for traumatic stress decreased as socioeconomic status increased. Students with a greater percentage of absences and over 23% of students with an IEP filed experienced traumatic stress. Results of the Goodman et al. (2012) study revealed that academic achievement scores were lower for low socioeconomic students (SES), with low SES students more like to be labeled with a behavioral problem or learning disability. The results suggest that low SES students are commonly exposed to more trauma without supports in place to mitigate its effects, which further research will show has impact on health and well-being.

Trauma, Health, and Well-being

Much like Valentino (2018), Hahn et al. (2016) note the importance of education and teacher quality in making the biggest impact in working towards bridging significant achievement gaps for students. The more children that have access to early childhood education programs, the greater the likelihood such students will receive substantial health and educational benefits. The study by the researchers explores whether early childhood education experiences

improve the overall educational preparedness of low income, minority students (Hahn et al., 2016). For the study, three to four-year-old students were examined throughout the course of three years, with a focus on collecting data that assessed cognitive abilities. Scores of students across socioeconomic backgrounds improved and the gap is lessened when school quality is factored in.

The studies presented in this section mention the significant impact of the teacher's role in diminishing the achievement gap and therefore reducing trauma in pursuit of educational equity. A teacher's belief system and ability to support children in learning are mentioned repeatedly. Classrooms are becoming more diverse each year. There is a demand for greater cultural awareness and the creation of safe academic spaces that support the varied experiences of the nation's young learners. According to Nadelson et al. (2019), a marked difference in student achievement will be recognized if student differences are acknowledged and respected within the classroom. However, this notion is somewhat challenged by Valentino's (2018) assertion that teachers can struggle with reaching each student in a meaningful way if dealing with disciplinary classroom issues that cut into classroom instruction and may consequently lower perceived educational quality. This relates to Pearman et al.'s study (2019) that mentions the racial incongruities present when looking at the achievement gap.

Barnett, Kia-Keating, and Garcia (2020) present a medical study that compares well with Hahn et al.'s findings. In a mixed-methods study, Barnett et al. (2020) analyze the data of wellness navigators (professionals who can reflect key patient characteristics to potentially improve care). 249 infants between the ages three months to eleven months, with more than over 80% identifying as Latinx.12 individuals were selected to participate in an adverse childhood experience (ACE) screening in interview form. Comparable to what may be seen in trauma-

informed practice, staff were trained and encouraged to reflect on their experiences to increase awareness and understanding of ACEs and how they function. A standard ACE questionnaire was given to caregivers. Qualitative results exposed the importance of a utilizing wellness navigators during the screening process. As teachers must be trauma-informed in the classroom, the importance of trauma-informed practitioners is emphasized as well. Families were more responsive to caregivers adopting a more holistic approach. It is worth mentioning that in this study, ACE screenings did not lead to an increase in referrals, although this is a common concern among medical practitioners and educators (Barnett et al., 2020). Limitations to this study include limited perspectives of staff as information was only collected from members of one clinic. The quality of service was not assessed, neither was a log maintained of those receiving care. As wellness navigators hoped to combat health disparities via ACEs, educators aim to promote equitable outcomes through trauma-informed work. When it comes to low-income, minority students, abundant research supports the notion that early childhood education programs promote equitable outcomes for students. Hahn et al. (2016) points to the success of public programs such as the Head Start program that significantly improves student retention through the high school years and improves a child's health outcomes.

All research comes with some limitations. As many themes are common throughout the literature presented here, an enduring threat to much of the research in the studies listed concerns timing and sustainability of the various programs and practices put into place. Student/teacher ratios are not always clearly outlined. Sample sizes and geographic location may also skew data. The research conducted by Nadelson's team (2019) only took place within a specific location that may not be representative of educators' experience throughout the United States. Most of the literature indicates the need for continuing research.

. **Trauma-Informed Practice**

According to Harris (2001), trauma informed practice seeks to provide an environment of inclusion, safety, togetherness, and learning. There is a distinction between addressing trauma and approaching things in a holistic manner that supports healing. In using a trauma-informed framework in the classroom, teachers provide safety, recognize trauma and its influence in relationship-building, the importance of collaboration with others and culturally sensitivity (Harris, 2001). In early childhood settings, it is common to form strong bonds with children and having high levels of involvement with students and families. In supporting students, educators also have a responsibility to prioritize one's own health and wellness. Upper-level support from leaders and administration is invaluable. Having support and access to professional development opportunities for educators and other resources to help families experiencing trauma can lessen the impacts of vicarious stress and decrease the likelihood of teacher burnout. Such support occurs in a system-wide manner, not just in the classroom. For educators and students to have adequate support, collaboration among policy makers, parents, health professionals, and community initiatives and more are needed.

Thomas, Crosby, and Vanderhaar (2019) acknowledge the need for more trauma-informed care that begins during the in-service and pre-service process. The authors present an interdisciplinary view of research synthesizing frameworks of schools practicing trauma-informed care and the repercussions of evolving teaching practice as more trauma-informed practices are implemented. Thomas et al. (2019) offers a plethora of trauma-informed resources for educators from guidebooks to free online files. Common themes cited among these resources include the understanding of the impacts of trauma on children and the developing mind, developing healthy school cultures, and encouraging appropriate methods of self-care for

educators. Teachers are called to reframe situations and the behaviors of students, avoiding labels, and recognizing that each person responds to trauma in varying ways. To create a culture of compassion, relationships among staff, staff among students, and students among each other is imperative.

According to Christian-Brandt, Santacrose, and Barnett (2020), Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) is acknowledged as a supportive measure for students, but little is mentioned on how implementing TIC impacts teacher well-being. In a study of over 163 teachers in a low-income, English-language learning Latinx community, the Professional Quality of Life Scale was completed to uncover areas of burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion satisfaction. In this anonymous online survey, 224 teachers from the Pacific Northwest region responded to questions evaluating TIC in their communities, quality of life, and intent to remain in the field of education (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020). Results of the study revealed that educators with higher rates of satisfaction had lower rates of burnout and believed TIC as an effective measure. If teachers are negatively impacted by the emotional toll of providing trauma-informed care, student behavior and outcomes will be affected also. Teachers that leave the field due to compassion fatigue and burnout will consequently mean students will lose an important supportive figure, resulting in a loss of stability and consistency that is important for young learners to feel safe and supported. This study had many limitations, including a lack of a control group, an over-reliance on a teacher's perceived effectiveness in implementing trauma-informed practices, and no examination of organizational impacts on TIC and teacher wellness (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020).

Plentiful discussion is given to the teacher's role in providing trauma-informed learning and care, but the role and experience of parents and caregivers should not be overlooked.

Williamson et al. (2017) conducted a study to explore the experiences of parents providing support for children following events resulting in high levels of post-traumatic stress. The qualitative study spotlights a parent's capacity for sensitivity and support in confronting trauma. Few studies exist on parents dealing with serious, clinical-level distress following a child's traumatic event. Both children and parents were allowed to participate in the study. Parents were asked to complete a qualitative phone interview, with children and parents being asked to complete a questionnaire afterwards, either via mail or online. Parents were ages thirty-four to fifty-five years old, with over 71% being mothers. Ages of children in the study ranged from eight to fifteen years, with over 71% being male. Results of the survey indicated that most parents were extremely concerned over a child's behavior following a severe traumatic event, especially comparing the child's behavior with that of peers, as well as considering patterns of behavior before and after a traumatic incident. This is yet another study with obvious strengths, but many weaknesses. Included in the study were a range of trauma types, and all traumas are not created equal. Information from the families was not required to be retrieved within a set time, allowing for changes in circumstances. Each family had access to mental health services. Egregious weaknesses cited include the lack of diversity among the sample (mostly mothers) and the small number of cases that allowed for greater analysis. Overall, this study highlights the important role parents can have in assisting children in processing trauma, providing necessary insight into strategies used in needed cases with more acute forms of trauma.

Exposure to acute trauma is a reality for many children and teens. Post-traumatic stress tends to follow acute trauma, which can have negative impacts on student development and welfare. Included in the discussion of more acute trauma is Kassam-Adams' (2014) study on the evaluation of early interventions for trauma-exposed children. This study presents a framework

for early intervention for children exposed to acute trauma, proposing methods for intervention. Kassan-Adams insists on three factors when creating frameworks for intervention. The framework should: have a firm theoretical grounding, be appropriate for use in pre and post trauma contexts, and prepared for evaluation (Kassan-Adams, 2014). Kassan-Adams acknowledges the lack of extensive studies in early interventions for children, but intense evaluations of the early interventions that exist must continue and use on-going findings to inform one's practice. As is commonly stated throughout much of the literature presented here, collaboration among learning systems is encouraged (Kassan-Adams, 2014).

An important feature of trauma-informed practice is cultural responsiveness and sensitivity. Systemic disparities among students exist regarding race and poverty, in addition to other forms of trauma. Systemic disparities are big factors in perpetuating trauma. The examination of practices and policies is key in mitigating the consequence of bias in education. Blitz, Anderson, and Saastamoinen (2016) argue for culturally responsive pedagogy to assist students in identifying and challenging systems of oppression internalizing experiences in ways that result in trauma. While educators my not be therapists, schools can still be places of healing.

For purpose of identity protection, some relevant information is omitted from the Blitz et al. (2016) study. An elementary school from an urban area in the Northeastern United States participated in this study. In a short amount of time, this predominantly white, middle class community suddenly saw a drastic increase of nearly 200% in racial diversity (Blitz et al., 2016). The school consisted of 425 students in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, with students of color disproportionately representing most of the disciplinary infractions and low academic performance on testing. A school-university partnership was created as an initiative to address schoolwide equity concerns and teachers struggling with student behavior. A mixed-

methods approach was utilized, and qualitative data was collected via interviews with school staff during scheduled breaks (Blitz et al., 2016). Data was collected three times throughout the school year by a principal investigator (PI) from the university. 36 teachers and 25 aides were present at the school. Among those, 26 teachers and 16 aides completed the questionnaire for the study. Quantitative data from the teachers and aides was studied separately to account for differences in perspectives. Findings from this study can inform culturally responsive practices that utilize the Sanctuary Model. The Sanctuary Model uses a common language to understand assets and fears to encourage health and resiliency (Blitz, 2016). Safety, emotions, losses, and future (SELF) are domains that can be used when applying this model but doing so may require significant shift in school culture towards a more inclusive, whole-school, trauma-informed approach.

Conclusion

In conclusion, teachers certainly have a plethora of avenues available to them to promote a more equitable learning experience for their students. Quality education in safe academic spaces with well-informed educators should be accessible to every child, but unfortunately, this may never be the case. Interdisciplinary knowledge in a variety of areas to best understand the impacts of trauma on a student's overall well-being and how it may present in behaviors can help educators (Thomas et al., 2019). There is a need for greater communication and collaboration among teachers, educational leaders, and even parents. There is also a need for educators to consider impact and presence in classroom spaces, moving away from deficit perceptions and towards asset-based viewpoints when dealing with students exhibiting behaviors that may indicate trauma (Thomas et al., 2019). Equity in education extends beyond the classroom, as teachers must adapt learning to what is relevant within the students' community and culture,

though not every teacher may feel equipped to handle special student populations, further highlighting the need for adequate teacher preparation and continuing education resources. When teachers are engaged, supported, and have ample opportunities to reflect on perceptions towards education, students have improved chances of a more equitable future.

Chapter 3: Discussion and Implications for Future Research

Teachers are being challenged to approach students with sensitivity and compassion, with a heart for relationship-building at the core of the work being done. Educators are encouraged to move beyond immediately seeing a child as problematic, instead working together with students to uncover the depth and unique nature of the many experiences at hand (Venet, 2021). Children can get caught in a "cycle of trauma" that can worsen if behaviors are met with punitive measures. Remembering that these behaviors stem from pain or some form emotional or psychological abuse, to punish a child would not be addressing the root problem – likely resulting in retraumatization and allowing the cycle to continue (Blitz et al., 2016). Legal systems and medical communities address trauma with proven evidence-based approaches, such as trauma-informed systems approaches and trauma specific treatment interventions. Such frameworks work well in educational spheres as well, as the research by Blitz et al. (2016) suggests.

Fostering an on-going awareness of how trauma effects children is a crucial component when it comes to tackling the many issues of inequity that exist in the realm of education. For children, behavior is often communication. If teachers are not trained in methods of trauma intervention in the classroom, one can resort to harsh disciplinary action and labels. While each negative experience may not result in trauma that is damaging, the unseen and ongoing daily sufferings could cause significant harm, particularly when compounded with the bias and inequities echoed throughout many school communities.

Harmful Narratives and Implicit Bias

The primary goal of trauma-informed care is to provide support and safety for students. Recognizing trauma and traumatic triggers prevents teachers from reacting to behaviors in

unsympathetic ways. Every 2 in 3 children are impacted by traumatic experiences that have serious effects on the growth and development of a student's ability to succeed in school (Venet, 2021). Current research recognizes classroom strategies and discipline techniques that can support students, inform teachers, and acknowledge acceptable discipline techniques to encourage relationship-building while avoiding retraumatization. There is a lack of direction concerning content related to trauma and how such content can be utilized in teacher preparation programs. However, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has abundant resources to support teachers in providing trauma-sensitive practices (SAMSHA, 2014). According to SAMSHA (2014), a trauma-informed approach includes accepting the widespread and systemic nature of trauma, preparing trauma-sensitive teachers to recognize symptoms of trauma in students and families, incorporating awareness of trauma into practice and policies, and preventing the unknowing perpetuation of harm.

Neitzel (2016) notes that implicit bias refers to the instinctive attitudes or unconscious judgements that affect our comprehension based on the social cues a person receives throughout life. Unconscious bias has been examined extensively in research regarding older students, but as further issues surface, the preschool environment is being evaluated more as well. As mentioned in a study by Gilliam (as cited in Neitzel, 2016), it was found that implicit bias contributes greatly to disciplinary practices in preschools. For example, the study uncovered behavioral expectations were lower for black students among white teachers, although black teachers in the study held those same students to a higher standard. However, those black teachers that work in low-income neighborhoods approached the behavior of black students in a more negative light.

Research indicates that implicit biases can lead to unfavorable outcomes in the

classroom. Teachers are urged to think in new ways, implementing strategies to give students a fair chance at success. As stated by Staats (2016), brains are flexible and create new pathways that allow people to change inherent thoughts to better align with authentic feelings. The Implicit Association Test (IAT) is one such way teachers can check for any unconscious biases. It is a free test online that measures the relative strength of associations between groups of ideas. Once a person is conscious of implicitly held beliefs, work can begin to limit the negative influence such thoughts can have in the classroom.

Staats (2016) also discusses intergroup contact and counter-stereotypical examples. With intergroup contact, all members in the group are expected to act in a cooperative fashion. Members with the group should differ than that of the teacher, whether it be in terms of religion, ethnicity, race, etc. This presents an opportunity for one to get to know people of different backgrounds and understandings on a new and more personal level that may turn negative associations into positive ones. Concerning counter-stereotypical standards, the text explains the importance of both teachers and students being exposed to others that defy common stereotypes. Examples of this could include exposure to females in a male-dominant industry, such as construction, a non-traditional student going to college for the first time, or a successful teenage parent -something that goes against expected societal norms and judgements could be used to challenge and potentially replace less desirable conscious and unconscious beliefs.

It is not only teachers that benefit from seeing positive counter-stereotypical models. Children in the classroom also benefit from exposure to examples of people and media that disprove commonly held stereotypes. There is much discussion in the current research about the importance of representation for today’s youth. In the classroom, having purposeful and meaningful examples that are personal and representative of the unique experiences of the group

represented in texts, displayed on classroom walls, and working in the school has proved helpful (Venet, 2021). Positive and meaningful representation disrupts harmful narratives, specifically those pertaining to trauma. Harm and trauma do not have to be sensationalized to create empathy (Venet, 2021). Classrooms do not always have to focus on a group's collective trauma or a generation's grief. When highlighting pain and inequities of the past and present throughout lessons, educators can responsibly feature stories of power, healing, and resilience. What is taught and how it is communicated affects students as well; trauma-affected children should not be inadvertently triggered into a stress response by what is or is not shared in classroom discussions or presented in the classroom environment or school at large (Osher et al., 2020). Children grow and develop surrounded by the inequities and existing privileges that result in bias, marginalization, and academic incongruities, leaving students as risk for further trauma. Current research recognizes the efforts and improvements made by educators and school systems in this area, but many experts in the field acknowledge that there is much that still needs to be done.

Limitations and Strengths for Future Studies

Structural inequality is a primary limitation impeding the progress of most schools towards a more trauma-informed learning experience for students. Authors of The Readiness Project commented on the unawareness or inability of schools and systems to attend to the emotional needs of students, noting limited access to needed services, such as mental health care or referrals for students documented as having behavioral disorders (Osher et al., 2020). The research presented in this paper reiterates the need for the continued learning and support of teachers to prevent traumatic outcomes for students. For student and families to thrive, a shift to more ecological thinking is needed (Osher et al., 2020). Relationship-building among students,

within classrooms, and across communities will promote equity and support the wellness of today's youth, but educational leaders and teachers are called to see the interconnectedness of the learning experience, focusing less on academic outcomes and more on relational factors. The studies presented here suggest more work needs to be done to uncover trauma variables that relate to factors such as income, race, and class. Shifting away from deficit thinking when addressing trauma in classrooms and professional development opportunities is also highly suggested across the literature. Venet (2021) reminds readers that thinking informs how we build relationships, and by viewing students with deficits teachers may be perceiving and projecting subjective stereotypes and biases instead of seeing a child's worth and innate potential. The literature commonly emphasizes that trauma does not define a child, but educators and school systems *do* define children with practices that categorize and unknowingly shame children because of an experience (Alvarez, 2020) see book cited. Venet (2021) posits the reminder that equity must be at the forefront of trauma-informed practices, especially when equity's ties to trauma are talked about infrequently, if at all.

A strength of the current research is the acknowledgement of the systemic nature of the issue of equity and trauma, with most authors stating that meaningful progress will occur on the matter when all components of the educational process recognize the problem and work collaboratively to make a difference. To combat bias and discrimination, future studies can focus more heavily on reflective supervision practices for educators and studies featuring data documenting student resiliency among other positive assets when trauma-affected students are placed in a trauma-informed environment.

Conclusion

When schools focus on trauma that is seen but neglect the inequitable situations that

schools can cause then trauma-informed practices fail. Research shows that schools are beginning to recognize the role educational spaces play in exacerbating trauma and disseminating oppression. Promoting equitable outcomes for trauma-affected students and for *all* students requires the recognition of the trauma, hurt, and marginalization many people may face each day. Trauma-informed practice allows for the humanity of teachers and students to be present as they show up in the face of struggle, surrounded by trauma but not identified by it, and working together to create places of safety, mutual understanding, and growth.

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Instructor Rubric				
Criteria (Total points)	**Exemplary** 420-403	**Proficient** 402-361	**Competent** 360-319	**Unsatisfactory** 0
Cover Page; TOC, Abstract, Chapter One (50 points)				

Cover Page; Table of Contents, Abstract, and Chapter One: **Possible Points: ____/50** **Instructor Feedback:** **2nd Reader Feedback:**	The writer has **consistently** utilized the capstone paper template and followed **all guidelines** for the development of the cover page, TOC and Abstract; the writer has developed **a well-organized, succinctly written** chapter one informing the reader of the following: the topic and scope of the research investigation; importance of the topic to the field of education; statement of interest to engage the reader; at least 3 sources cited with a clear connection to the research question; definition of terms; how the scope of the problem investigated will be organized in a logical sequence through the use of subtopics; the research question concludes the chapter connecting to the Essential Question; Chapter ends with a conclusion (chapter summary) paragraph that includes a transition to the following chapter. **48-50 points**	The writer has **usually** utilized the capstone paper template and followed **most of the guidelines** for the development of the cover page, TOC and Abstract; the writer has **mostly** developed chapter one informing the reader of the following: the topic and scope of the research investigation; importance of the topic to the field of education; statement of interest to engage the reader; at least 3 sources cited with a clear connection to the research question; definition of terms; how the scope of the problem investigated will be organized in a logical sequence through the use of subtopics; the research question concludes the chapter connecting to the Essential Question; Chapter ends with a conclusion paragraph that includes a transition to the following chapter. **43-47 points**	The writer has **sometimes** utilized the capstone paper template and followed **some of the guidelines** for the development of the cover page, TOC and Abstract; the writer has **partially** developed chapter one informing the reader of the following: the topic and scope of the research investigation; importance of the topic to the field of education; statement of interest to engage the reader; at least 3 sources cited with a clear connection to the research question; definition of terms; how the scope of the problem investigated will be organized in a logical sequence through the use of subtopics; the research question concludes the chapter connecting to the Essential Question; Chapter ends with a conclusion paragraph that includes a transition to the following chapter. **38-42 points**	The writer has **rarely** met the required components for the criteria in this category resulting in "0" points. **NOTE: Less than 319 points results in "0" for this assignment as it is a "pass or fail" paper representing the successful completion of the MAED program requirements competently.**
Chapter Two: Literature Review (210 points)				
Chapter Two: Literature Review **Possible Points: ____/210** **Instructor Feedback:** **2nd Reader Feedback:**	The writer has **consistently** provided a professionally written narrative which summarizes and synthesizes the information from the selected research studies in order to develop a response and answer to the research question proposed in Chapter One. The narrative **fully** answers the proposed research question. Includes a minimum of 15 scholarly, peer-reviewed qualitative/quantitative/mixed-method **original** research studies.	The writer has **usually** maintained a professionally written narrative which summarizes and synthesizes the information from the selected research studies in order to develop a response and answer to the research question proposed in Chapter One. The narrative **mostly** answers the proposed research question. Includes a minimum of 15 scholarly, peer-reviewed qualitative/quantitative/mixed-method **original** research studies.	The writer has **sometimes** maintained a professionally written narrative which summarizes and synthesizes the information from the selected research studies in order to develop a response and answer to the research question proposed in Chapter One. The narrative **partially** answers the proposed research question. Includes a minimum of 15 scholarly, peer-reviewed qualitative/quantitative/mixed-method **original** research studies.	The writer has **rarely** met the required components for the criteria in this category resulting in "0" points. **NOTE: Less than 319 points results in "0" for this assignment as it is a "pass or fail" paper representing the successful completion of the MAED program requirements competently.**

	Chapter ends with a research finding summaries and conclusions The writer has **consistently** provided a **succinct and precise** summary of findings includes a review of the proposed problem that was investigated; the importance of this topic; and a paraphrased summary of the main points or themes of the literature review; Chapter ends with a conclusion paragraph (chapter summary) that includes a transition to the following chapter. **202-210 points**	Chapter ends with a research finding summaries and conclusions The writer has **usually** provided **a mostly developed** summary of findings includes a review of the proposed problem that was investigated; the importance of this topic; and a paraphrased summary of the main points or themes of the literature review; Chapter ends with a conclusion paragraph (chapter summary) that includes a transition to the following chapter. **181-201 points**	The writer has **sometimes provided a partially developed** summary of findings includes a review of the proposed problem that was investigated; the importance of this topic; and a paraphrased summary of the main points or themes of the literature review; Chapter ends with a conclusion paragraph (chapter summary) that includes a transition to the following chapter. **160-180 points**	
Chapter Three: Discussion / Application / Future Studies (75 points)				
Chapter Three: Discussion/ Application/ Future Studies **Possible Points: ____/75** **Feedback:** **2nd Reader Feedback:**	The writer has **consistently** developed a **clear** summary of insights gained from the research that leads to improved instructional practice. The writer provided a **clear** description with examples of how the research is applied to instructional or educational practice; has provided a minimum of three suggestions for possible future studies; and the chapter ends with a powerful conclusion that acts as a conclusion for the entire paper. **72-75 points**	The writer has **usually** developed a **mostly clear** summary of insights gained from the research that leads to improved instructional practice. The writer provided a **mostly clear** description with examples of how the research is applied to instructional or educational practice; has provided a minimum of three suggestions for possible future studies; and the chapter ends with a powerful conclusion that acts as a conclusion for the entire paper. **65-71 points**	The writer has **sometimes** developed a **partially clear** summary of insights gained from the research that leads to improved instructional practice. The writer provided a **partially clear** description with examples of how the research is applied to instructional practice; has provided a minimum of three suggestions for possible future studies; and the chapter ends with a powerful conclusion that acts as a conclusion for the entire paper. **57-64 points**	The writer has **rarely** met the required components for the criteria in this category resulting in "0" points. **NOTE: Less than 319 points results in "0" for this assignment as it is a "pass or fail" paper representing the successful completion of the MAED program requirements competently.**
APA Format & Mechanics (85 points)				
APA format & Mechanics **Possible Points: ____/85** **Instructor Feedback:**	The writer has **consistently** met the criteria for the following requirements for this paper: APA formatted cover page; Table of Contents right/left justified;	The writer has **usually** met **most** of the criteria for the following requirements for this paper: APA formatted cover page; Table of Contents right/left justified;	The writer has **sometimes** met **some** of the criteria for the following requirements for this paper: APA formatted cover page; Table of Contents right/left justified;	The writer has **rarely** met the required components for the criteria in this category resulting in "0" points. **NOTE: Less than 319 points results in "0" for this assignment as it is a "pass or fail" paper representing the**

2nd Reader Feedback:	clear, half page Abstract – per APA formatting provided; in text citations per APA and included in References page; Reference page formatted per APA guidelines; Correct use of APA level headings; correct use of spelling, grammar, and punctuation; Higher level professional language; third person writing only; correct use of past tense. **82-85 points**	clear, half page Abstract – per APA formatting provided; in text citations per APA and included in References page; Reference page formatted per APA guidelines; Correct use of APA level headings; correct use of spelling, grammar, and punctuation; Higher level professional language; third person writing only; correct use of past tense. **73-81 points**	clear, half page Abstract – per APA formatting provided; in text citations per APA and included in References page; Reference page formatted per APA guidelines; Correct use of APA level headings; correct use of spelling, grammar, and punctuation; Higher level professional language; third person writing only; correct use of past tense. **65-72 points**	**successful completion of the MAED program requirements competently.**
Revised June 2020				**TOTAL POINTS _____/420** **Pass or Fail: 319 points are required to pass**