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## Trauma-Informed Practices in Early Childhood Education

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**Trauma-Informed Practices in Early Childhood Education**

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ED590: Conducting Research and Completing the Capstone

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### **Abstract**

Young children who have experienced trauma risk falling behind peers academically, and socially, and may have lifelong mental and physical impairments (Bartlett, 2021). Half of the young children in the United States have been victims of early childhood trauma (Bartlett, et al., 2017). Findings analyzed for this paper show that trauma-informed care (TIC) can increase children's chance of recovering and thriving, despite trauma (Bartlett, 2021). The following studies showed how early childhood teachers can best prepare themselves for students of trauma in their classrooms. Preparation included TIC that focused on strong social-emotional development (SED), helping build resilience, and preparing for kindergarten and beyond (Bartlett, 2021). Studies also noted the importance of building positive teacher-child relationships and the impact of culture and the current pandemic on SED. This paper summarized and analyzed fifteen research articles and has shown how early childhood teachers can use trauma-informed practices to help young children develop strong social-emotional skills.

*Keywords:* trauma, trauma-informed care, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), Early Childhood Education (ECE), social-emotional skills

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Importance of Topic**

Young children have experienced trauma at a higher rate than older peers. Jimenez et al. said that as much as 50% of four-year-old children have experienced traumatic events such as abuse, neglect, or witnessing domestic violence (2016). Research has shown that trauma negatively affects the whole child including brain development, cognitive development, academic learning, social-emotional development, physical health, and attachments (Bartlett, et al., 2017). With the prevalence of trauma in young children, early childhood teachers will be faced with the possibility of half of their students having experienced trauma. The following paper examined how early childhood teachers can best prepare and intervene in the lives of young children who are dealing with the effects of trauma.

### **Scope of Research**

Although research has proved young children experienced more trauma than older children, fewer interventions have been studied for young children (Bartlett, 2021; McConicco et al., 2016; Green, 2020; Loomis, 2018). Research has shown interventions are necessary for traumatized children, including individual therapy (Green, 2020). Loomis (2018) claimed that only two-and-a-half percent of preschool-aged children received individual therapy yearly. In comparison, The US Census Bureau (2016) has stated that 48% of United States children enroll in preschool annually making Early Childhood Education (ECE) classrooms ideal places for interventions for traumatized children (Bartlett, 2021). This paper includes the summary and analysis of fifteen research studies showing how early childhood teachers can be prepared to effectively use trauma-informed practices to help young children develop strong, social-emotional skills.

## **Definition of Terms**

Trauma for young children is different than typical stressful events that happen occasionally for most children. Bartlett et al. explained that young children experiencing trauma may have overwhelming feelings of terror, fear, and helplessness that is above the normal level of typical young children (2017). Traumatic experiences may have stemmed from substance abuse, separation from caregivers, abuse, and neglect and have caused risks to a child's well-being (Bartlett et al., 2017).

Research studies have often used the terms trauma-informed care and trauma-informed practices interchangeably as they have the same meaning. Trauma-informed care (TIC) and trauma-informed practices (TIP) are a broad range of practices and policies to support children and adults of all ages with the effects of trauma (Bartlett, 2021).

When early childhood trauma is not addressed, many children have become adults who have experienced a high number of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). ACEs are traumatic events such as abuse, neglect, separation, experiencing a caregiver with substance abuse or mental health issues, homelessness, or any situation which causes toxic stress for a child (Centers for Disease Control, 2019). The Centers for Disease Control (2019) stated that ACEs can result in toxic stress in adults, having changed brain development and how one's body manages such stress. One in six adults experienced four or more ACEs in childhood which are linked to mental illness, chronic health issues, and substance abuse in adulthood (Centers for Disease Control, 2019). One way to reduce the impact of ACEs is intervention in childhood, including trauma-informed practices in the early childhood classroom (Centers for Disease Control, 2019). Adult issues associated with ACEs can be prevented and reduced when early childhood trauma is dealt with (Centers for Disease Control, 2019).

Early Childhood Education (ECE) refers to the education of children from birth to age eight, which is the equivalent of third grade (NAEYC, 2020). The most common age of children in early childhood classrooms is three to six years old (NAEYC, 2020). Research on the benefits of quality ECE included teaching and modeling social-emotional development, buffering children from lifelong effects of poor mental and physical outcomes, and limiting the negative effects of early trauma through trauma-informed care (Green, 2020). Research in this paper focused on children from birth to age six.

Social-emotional skills are the skills of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Humphries et al., 2018). Social-emotional learning (SEL) and social-emotional development (SED) are the processes of developing such skills and are often used interchangeably. Social-emotional development affects children's overall learning and development (Ho & Funk, 2018). These skills are necessary for children's long-term well-being and health and are even more important for young children from disadvantaged environments, to set them on their way toward success in school and life (Gadaire et al., 2020).

### **Conclusion**

Trauma in early childhood is significant and needs to be addressed (Bartlett, 2021). This research aims paper aims to answer how early childhood teachers can use trauma-informed practices to help young children overcome the effects of trauma. In chapter 2, studies will be analyzed and summarized to show the importance of preparing early childhood teachers for work in the field of trauma, successful research-based trauma-informed interventions, the importance of social-emotional development, and the impact of culture and the COVID-19 pandemic on SED in the lives of young children with trauma.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Trauma has affected not only children but the teachers and staff working with them (Loomis & Felt, 2020). Loomis & Felt stated that teaching young children who have experienced trauma can be stressful without proper trauma-informed training (2020). Trauma-informed training for early childhood teachers can help them read and respond to the signs of an overstressed child which is often the result of experiencing trauma (Berardi & Morton, 2017). The following studies have shown the importance of preparing early childhood teachers, successful research-based trauma-informed interventions, the importance of social-emotional development in children, and the impact of culture and COVID-19 on social-emotional development in children with trauma. This research will help early childhood teachers use trauma-informed practices to help young children develop strong social-emotional skills and combat the effects of trauma.

### **Teacher Preparation**

A study by McClain (2021) has shown the importance of trauma-informed training for preservice teachers going into the field of early childhood education. This qualitative research study sought to find out if teacher candidates were prepared to address students who have experienced trauma (McClain, 2021). Participating candidates were in their last 250 hours of field service in a county with extreme poverty and trauma rates (McClain, 2021). McClain used surveys with fifteen teacher candidates before and after a trauma-informed training session to collect data (2021). Topics of the surveys included defining trauma, how relevant trauma was to their future classrooms, and how prepared they felt supporting children with trauma (McClain,

2021). Candidates then took the trauma-informed training and filled out a post-training survey. McClain used first- and second-cycle coding techniques to analyze data from surveys (2021).

Results have shown teacher candidates felt moderately prepared before trauma-informed training and 80% felt the training benefitted in helping them feel supported and prepared to support children with trauma (McClain, 2021). Although small, this study supported the importance of trauma-informed education for preservice teachers and supported further study on how best to prepare early childhood teachers who will work with children of trauma (McClain, 2021).

Alsic also performed a study to find out if teachers felt prepared to meet the needs of traumatized children in their care (2012). In this qualitative study, a purposeful varied sample of twenty-one teachers from thirteen schools participated (Alsic, 2012). Participants varied in age, race, gender, and length of teaching career. Alsic used semi-structured interviews to obtain data (2012). Participants answered interview questions about experience with children and trauma, school protocols, support from colleagues, and further needs of teachers (Alsic, 2012). The method of summative analysis transcribed answers into data (Alsic, 2012).

Alsic's results have shown most teachers struggled with their role in helping children after trauma and wanted further training (2012). Teachers also believed children needed more social-emotional development, struggled to balance meeting the academic and SE needs of students, and felt stressed over responsibility to their students (Alsic, 2012). Alsic has shown there is a need to better prepare early childhood teachers as they are faced with helping children who have experienced trauma (2012). Although McClain's (2021) and Alsic's (2012) studies were small, both have shown valid results that teacher preparation is important for early childhood teachers.

Loomis & Felt (2020) agreed with McClain (2021) and Alsic (2012) that early childhood teachers need preparation in meeting the needs of children with trauma. Loomis & Felt researched how trauma-informed interventions affected child and staff well-being within ECE settings (2020). Loomis & Felt (2020) used professional development to determine how trauma-informed training content, teacher attitudes, and stress were related. This qualitative study included 104 Head Start lead teachers, assistant teachers, and other early childhood staff (Loomis & Felt, 2020). Participants were 65% Caucasian, 19% Hispanic, and 16% other (Loomis & Felt, 2020). Loomis & Felt (2020) used the Attitudes Related to Trauma-Informed Care (ARCTIC), Single-Item Stress Question (SISQ), and Preschool Expulsion Risk Measure (PERM) to gather data. Results have shown that self-reflection about an educator's trauma would be an additional benefit to trauma-informed training and would help teachers and staff understand personal trauma and how one's attitudes affected working with traumatized children (Loomis & Felt, 2020). This study has shown how self-reflection can help early childhood teachers prepare to work in the field of ECE with students who have experienced trauma.

### **Research-Based Trauma-Informed Interventions**

#### ***Early Head Start***

Research-based trauma-informed interventions are another way to best prepare teachers, schools, and support staff in this field. Early Head Start (EHS) is a national early childhood education program for children from birth to age three. Green et al., (2020) conducted a research study through this program to find out if the effects of EHS led to a decrease in child maltreatment (trauma) over a child's lifetime. This mixed-methods study called Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project (EHSREP) was conducted using an experimental design in seventeen communities across the United States (Green et al., 2020). Three thousand one

primary caregivers and their children participated in this study. Green et al., assigned participants to either receive EHS services or to a control group where they received other community services (2020). Families were 35% Black, 23% Hispanic, 38% Caucasian, and 4% other. Researchers used assessments, interviews, and home observations to collect data. (Green et al., 2020). Child welfare agencies tracked the maltreatment reports of families over 15 years to note if rates of maltreatment were less for families who received EHS versus other services (Green et al., 2020).

Results have shown that EHS can effectively reduce child abuse and neglect after the end of the program but usually with short-term outcomes among families (Green et al., 2020). Children whose families learned about promoting healthy SE development in EHS had more supportive, engaged, responsive relationships with parents which decreased further maltreatment reports (Green et al., 2020). A limitation to this study was the proposed length of the study. Child welfare agencies were not able to track families accurately for 15 years. However, initial findings of short-term results were positive and supported interventions to increase SE development in families of young children birth-age 3 (Green et al., 2020). Future research is needed to study the long-term prevention of child maltreatment and trauma for young children.

### ***Roots of Resilience***

Another trauma-informed intervention shown to be successful at combatting early childhood trauma is Roots to Resilience. Lipscomb et al. (2019) conducted a study with seventeen early childhood teachers, in-home childcare providers, and assistants. Lipscomb et al., (2019) noted that 16 of the participants were female, and four identified as “non-white.” All participants spoke English as their primary language and had been working in the field for an average of four-and-a-half years (Lipscomb et al., 2019). The goal of the study was feasibility

and increasing teachers' learning and application of practices in alignment with trauma-informed practices (Lipscomb et al., 2019). Participants took an online course in six sections, each lasting one to three hours in length (Lipscomb et al., 2019). Researchers used quizzes, discussion board entries, workbook entries, coach ratings, and observations to collect data in this mixed-methods study (Lipscomb et al., 2019).

Findings have shown that Roots of Resilience is feasible and successfully addressed the need for professional development for ECE programs in schools and home settings (Lipscomb et al., 2019). Teachers overwhelmingly liked the online format and found the information relevant and applicable, positively affecting teachers' thought processes, child-teacher relationships, and children's behavior (Lipscomb et al., 2019). Although this study was small, the findings of Roots of Resilience were favorable and can help further research about the effects of trauma-informed practices on early childhood teachers and children of trauma.

### ***Head Start Trauma Smart***

In a larger study by Holmes et al., research has shown Head Start Trauma Smart (HSTS) to also be a successful trauma-informed intervention (2015). The goal of HSTS was to support children with their social-emotional development by having created a trauma-informed network and climate for children, families, and school staff who participated in the program (Holmes et al., 2015). Head Start Programs implemented this intervention in Missouri, Kansas, Michigan, Wisconsin, and New York. HSTS provided 2 years of trauma-informed training to all school personnel, family, and caregivers in this study (Holmes et al., 2015). Individual children received Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy while staff received training from Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants and participated in peer-based mentoring (Holmes et al., 2015). Families and caregivers also received trauma-informed training (Holmes et al., 2015). The

training consisted of four modules: training by therapists for all Head Start staff, including receptionists and bus drivers; Intensive Trauma-Focused interventions for individual children; classroom consultation to support teachers; and peer-based mentoring to support teacher-staff relationships (Holmes et al., 2015). One hundred fifty children participated in this study by Holmes et al. with half receiving individual interventions (2015). Holmes stated the average age of participants was four-and-a-quarter years old. Participants were 64% male, 39% were African American, 15% Caucasian, 8% Latino, 3% other, and 35% non-specified (Holmes et al., 2015). Questionnaires, the Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessment, and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System were measures used to collect data (Holmes et al., 2015).

Findings have shown the two-year intervention increased positive classroom climate, behavior management, productivity, teacher sensitivity, respect for student perspective, and decreased negative classroom climate (Holmes et al., 2015). Holmes et al. have shown the need for research-based trauma-informed interventions to help traumatized young children, staff, and families (2015). HSTS offers a way to meet the needs of the child and community of care with trauma-informed training, classroom consultation, individual intensive interventions, and peer mentoring for families and staff in an integrated model (Holmes et al., 2015). Research has shown how a variety of trauma-informed interventions can meet the needs of different ages children, in ECE or home care, and work with the varying needs of early childhood education teachers and staff (Green et al., 2020; Lipscomp et al., 2019; Holmes, et al., 2015).

### ***Early Years Toolbox***

Howard & Melhuish (2017) researched another research-based trauma-informed intervention called the Early Years Toolbox (EYT). In this qualitative study, teachers used iPad technology to measure the language, self-regulation, and social-emotional development of young

children (Howard & Melhuish, 2017). Participants were 1764 children ages two-and-a-half to five years old. The study took place in 80 preschool and kindergarten classrooms across four states in Australia (Howard & Melhuish, 2017). Participants were half male and half female with eight and a half percent identified as Indigenous. The iPad method used was free and easily accessible when users had access to Wi-Fi (Howard & Melhuish, 2017). Participants completed visual and auditory tasks over two fifteen-minute sessions to increase engagement and avoid inattentiveness (Howard & Melhuish, 2017). Howard & Melhuish (2017) collected and combined data to measure the reliability, validity, and establish preliminary norms.

Findings have shown that EYT can effectively inform early childhood educators about the SED of their students, helping them make decisions going forward to increase SED and decrease the effects of trauma in young children (Howard & Melhuish, 2017). One limitation of this study is that it was done in Australian classrooms only. Further research with children from the United States and other countries would be beneficial. However, this study has shown the EYT intervention to be inexpensive, feasible, and beneficial for early childhood teachers working with children of trauma (Howard & Melhuish, 2017).

### ***Supportive Trauma Interventions for Educators***

Another research-based trauma-informed intervention that has shown measurable success is Supportive Trauma Interventions for Educators (STRIVE). STRIVE is a resiliency-based intervention used to reach three different tiers: individual students, teachers, and overall school communities (McConnico et al., 2016). McConnico et al. stated that a child's sense of trust and safety in the world can be restored when they feel a sense of order and can heal and prosper (2016). STRIVE aimed to educate teachers through three core principles: attachment, resiliency, and reflective practice (McConnico et al., 2016). Healthy attachments help children restore their

sense of trust, safety, power, and control (McConnico et al., 2016). Resiliency is the ability to bounce back in the face of adversity when children feel safe, loved, and capable (NAEYC, 2020). Reflective practice helps teachers reflect on their trauma and how this may affect their interactions with children of trauma (Loomis & Felt, 2020). STRIVE also taught children to use skills they already possessed to build upon self-regulation skills, problem-solving skills, and emotional literacy so these children could achieve academic success (McConnico et al., 2016).

McConnico et al. conducted a qualitative study to discover the effectiveness of STRIVE consisting of twelve educators and 150 students (2016). Early childhood teachers received 10 hours of professional development training (McConnico et al., 2016). The training focused on providing educators with tools and strategies to manage and prevent challenging behaviors (McConnico et al., 2016). Classroom toolkits were used as the curriculum to deliver the training and included concrete, hands-on tools to help children identify and self-regulate their emotions (McConnico et al., 2016). McConnico et al. used pre-intervention and post-intervention evaluations to evaluate the effectiveness of this intervention on children's functioning in the classroom, teacher's feelings about their knowledge of the impacts of trauma, and teacher's perceived level of confidence in their ability to implement trauma-informed practices in their interactions with students (2016).

Results have shown an increase in the positive classroom climate, teacher sensitivity, respect for student perspective, behavior management, productivity, instructional learning formats, concept development, and language development (McConnico et al., 2016). Results have also shown a decrease in negative classroom climate (McConnico et al., 2016). McConnico stated that educators could use STRIVE with all students to contribute to positivity and awareness for all children (2016). This study by McConnico et al., (2016) agrees with the results



of studies by multiple researchers that trauma-informed interventions are important and necessary for early childhood teachers to effectively meet the needs of children of trauma in their care (Green et al., 2020; Lipscomp et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2015; Howard & Melhuish, 2017).

### **Importance of Social-Emotional Development**

Social-emotional development (SED) in ECE has been shown necessary for the lifelong health and well-being of children, particularly those who have experienced early trauma (Gadaire et al., 2021). Strong social-emotional skills in ECE, such as having learned classroom rituals and routines, having interacted with peers and teachers, and developing problem-solving skills have helped prepare children for kindergarten and future academic success (Gadaire et al., 2021).

Early childhood educators that have wished to promote social-emotional development must first have been knowledgeable about the issue. Teachers, administrators, and support staff must have known the developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) of young children and be trained to help identify the students in their classrooms with social-emotional deficits (Whitted, 2011). One way to do this has been through research-based interventions designed specifically to increase social-emotional development in young children who have experienced it (Gadaire et al., 2021). Haslip et al. recommended that early childhood teachers have opportunities to complete social-emotional courses that address the key principles included in core components of social-emotional learning (SEL), development of the teacher's social-emotional competence (SEC), SEL lesson plans, assessments, and provide SEL information to parents and caregivers (2020).

Since preschool was often a child's first exposure to a classroom setting, it has been a key place to learn to behave according to rules, build good relationships with teachers and friends, and learn problem-solving skills (Whitted, 2011). These social-emotional skills are vital to being prepared for kindergarten and beyond (Gadaire et al., 2021). Whitted (2011) claimed that

Kindergarten teachers' greatest challenge was how many children lack some, or all, of the necessary social-emotional skills needed for school success. Graves and Howes (2011) agreed, stating that Kindergarten teachers indicated their primary concern was children not having the social-emotional skills needed to be successful in kindergarten. The following interventions have shown evidence to support children with trauma develop strong social-emotional skills (Gadaire et al., 2021).

### **Interventions to Increase Social-Emotional Development**

Humphries et al., (2018) wanted to know how teacher perceptions of social-emotional interventions affected how they were implemented. Fifteen early childhood teachers in a diverse, urban, US city participated (Humphries et al., 2018). Most of the participant's students were three to eight-year-old children from low-income families, nine teachers identified as African American, and six were Caucasian Humphries et al., 2018). In this qualitative study, Humphries et al. collected data using semi-structured, open-ended questions while teachers participated in weekly discussion groups for three months. (2018). One researcher recorded all discussion sessions and used a qualitative data analysis technique to develop transcripts into thirty-two codes (Humphries et al., 2018). Humphries et al. examined these codes and found themes among the data (2018).

Teachers answered questions about their beliefs regarding SED, perspectives on SED interventions, what those interventions should look like, teacher responsibility in supporting SED, resources, and barriers to implementation (Humphries et al., 2018). Findings by Humphries et al. have shown that teachers overwhelmingly believed it was their professional responsibility to promote their students' social-emotional development (2018). Teachers also believed SED should come before academics and wanted quality training to effectively implement SED in

classrooms (Humphries et al., 2018). One limitation of this research was that it was only a snapshot of teachers' perspectives and does not represent all early childhood teachers. However, having known the perspective of fellow educators helped these teachers of young children in their journey to strong social-emotional development (Humphries et al., 2018). More research is necessary to study the perspectives of many early childhood teachers who work with children of trauma.

Gadaire et al., (2021) studied an intervention that used a data-based approach designed to increase children's social-emotional skills in Pre-K by providing teachers with feedback on the SE needs and strengths of their students. This mixed-methods research study by Gadaire et al. (2021) utilized a stratified randomization strategy in a large, public school system to evaluate if students' social-emotional skills improved because of the intervention. This intervention by Gadaire et al. involved 895 public Pre-K students, ages four to five years old, in 108 classrooms, identified as being at risk of starting kindergarten behind their peers (2021). Most of the children came from low-income households and were from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds (Gadaire et al., 2021). Gadaire et al. collected data using the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) in the fall and spring (2021).

After the first assessment, teachers received a summary of their class and a packet of strategies to use with their students over the rest of the year (Gadaire et al., 2021). Teachers and students in the control group did not receive data feedback or strategy packets (Gadaire et al., 2021). Results have shown that all students grew in their SE skills over the school year; however, those students of teachers who received summaries and strategies, grew the most (Gadaire et al., 2021). Gadaire et al. mentioned one limitation of this study was that teachers did not receive feedback until January (2021). Gadaire et al. believed more growth would have been found in

students if teachers had more time to implement strategies (2021). Regardless, children in these classrooms scored higher in social-emotional skills than did their control group peers (2021).

Studies by Humphries et al., (2018) and Gadaire et al., (2021) have shown the importance of trauma-informed interventions for early childhood teachers specifically designed to increase the SED in young children. The following study has shown that positive relationships have played a significant role in how children developed strong social-emotional skills (Haslip et al., 2020). Research by Gadaire et al. suggested that enhanced teacher-child relationships through a strong curriculum, ongoing support, and monitoring for teachers resulted in meaningful improvements in a child's learned social-emotional skills in the preschool classroom (2021). Graves and Howes agreed with Gadaire et al. and stated that teacher-child relationships that are high in closeness are associated with reduced problematic behaviors and increased prosocial behaviors (2011).

In this study conducted by Haslip et al. researchers examined whether increasing the social-emotional development of teachers would increase the quality of the relationship between teacher and student, thus increasing SED in students (2020). This mixed-methods research study by Haslip et al. examined the relationships of twenty-four preschool teachers with students in their classrooms (2020). Teachers were from a large, urban city with 64% identifying as African American and most students were diverse and from low-income families (Haslip et al., 2020). The study took place over a 12-week course where eighteen positive guidance principles were taught (Haslip et al., 2020). Researchers wondered if teachers would value and become more proficient with the principles after the training, thus enhancing their relationships with students, and becoming more emotionally supportive and affectionate, promoting the SED of students (Haslip et al., 2020).

Haslip et al., (2020) collected data three times from teachers using pre-and post-qualitative surveys while teachers completed Qualitative Guidance Principles Templates and Relationship Trackers. The study has shown that early childhood teachers who learned about and practiced positive guidance principles also grew in their relationships with students and were rated higher in warmth and affection (Haslip et al., 2020). Teachers who actively improved their relationships with students, modeled good social-emotional skills in their classrooms (Haslip et al., 2020). The results have shown that this intervention increased positive relationships between teachers and children, thus increasing SED in young children (Haslip et al., 2020). The following studies will discuss how culture affects teacher-child relationships and SED.

### ***Impact of Culture***

It is important to know at what grade level children of color fall behind peers in SED and academic skills (Graves & Howes, 2011) Data has shown differences in matched pairs of teacher-student pairs (Wright et al., 2017) The following studies worked to find out the influence of culture and race on early childhood teachers students relationships and SED (Graves & Howes, 2011; Wright, 2017).

Graves and Howes (2011) studied students' social-emotional development (SED) in the fall and spring of children in their prekindergarten year of early childhood education. Graves and Howes sought to discover if differences in SED depended on ethnic differences or similarities between teachers and students (2011). This qualitative study included preschool students and teachers of Caucasian, African American, and Latino descent (Graves & Howes, 2011). A limitation of this study is that other races, such as Native American and Asian, were not included because of difficulty finding teacher matches (Graves & Howes, 2011). Graves and Howes

matched 340 pairs of teachers and students by race (2011). All students were identified as at risk of starting kindergarten behind their peers (Graves & Howes, 2011).

Graves and Howes (2011) used two observational methods to collect data: The Early Childhood Education Rating System-Revised (ECERS-R) and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Teachers in the Graves and Howes (2011) study reported the quality of their relationships with students using the Student Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS). The data shown provided an additional piece to understanding the social-emotional development in preschool children (Graves & Howes, 2011). This study revealed that students whose race/ethnicity matched scored higher at the end of the year than their non-matched, teacher-child pairs in SED (Graves & Howes, 2011). Graves and Howes indicated that teachers evaluated their students differently depending on their race/ethnicity (2011). Results showed that teacher-student pairs of the same race had higher positive relationship scores and developed certain social-emotional skills faster than nonmatched pairs (Graves & Howes, 2011). This study also identified that there is a shortage of teachers of color in the United States. Caucasians comprise 84% of the teaching workforce in the US, whereas African Americans and Latinos make up 7% each (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009).

In a study by Wright et al., research suggested increased training for all educators to become more familiar with the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students (2017). The purpose of this study was to examine whether students of color have higher social-emotional ratings when they have a kindergarten teacher whose racial/ethnicity is the same as their own. This qualitative study collected data on 9,140 kindergarten children from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Class of 2010-2011 (ECLS-K:2011). Teachers and students were African American, Latino, and Caucasian. Again, a limitation of this study is that more

ances were not represented. Wright et al. (2017) collected student data in the fall and spring using surveys with parents, teachers, and administration. Results have shown that students with the same race/ethnically matched teacher were rated higher in SED than their non-matched teacher-student pairs (Wright et al., 2017).

Both studies concluded that more teachers of color are necessary and would benefit the social-emotional development of same race/ethnically matched students (Graves & Howes, 2011; Wright et al., 2017). With the limited teachers of color in the early childhood education field, Wright et al. suggested increased training for all teachers to become more knowledgeable about the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students (2017). Meeting the unique cultural needs of children with trauma will help those children develop strong social-emotional skills which are needed to combat the effects of trauma in their lives (Graves & Howes, 2011; Wright et al., 2017).

### ***Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic***

Since 2020, early childhood teachers and families have had to deal with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a study by Linnavalli and Kalland, the well-being of families who stayed at home with their three- to six-year-old children was researched. In this mixed-methods study, 82 families in Finland were sent questionnaires about the effects of the pandemic on the SED of their young children and the well-being of the family (2021). The families were chosen because their children's early childhood education programs were interrupted due to COVID-19 and these families were working from home and caring for their children simultaneously (Linnavalli & Kalland, 2021). Participants filled out three questionnaires that included: the Child Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), Kiddy KINDL questionnaire, and a Pandemic-Related Questionnaire. One limitation of this study is that only 21 families returned all three

questionnaires (Linavalli & Kalland, 2021). Linnavalli and Kalland compared data from questionnaires about social-emotional wellbeing and the quality of parent-child relationships before and during the pandemic (2021). Despite this small study being in only one country, initial results have shown that during the COVID-19 pandemic, families have experienced more stress and strain on parent-child relationships and young children experienced more loneliness and decreased social-emotional development (Linavalli & Kalland, 2021). The results by Linnavalli and Kalland have shown that early childhood teachers play an important role in supporting families and children with trauma by helping develop strong social-emotional skills (2021).

Another study done in Germany by Calvano et al. has shown that early childhood education improved parent-child relationships and the interruption of ECE during the COVID-19 pandemic increased strain on families working from home while caring for children (2021). In this mixed-methods study of 1024 parents and their young children, telephone interviews and web surveys were conducted to gather data (Calvano et al., 2021). Results have shown parental stress increased moderately and symptoms of depression and anxiety increased during the time of isolation during the pandemic (Calvano et al., 2021). Parents felt most stressed by having to social distance and by the closure of schools and childcare facilities (Calvano et al., 2021). Pandemic-related stress caused poorer parental outcomes and increased ACEs, specifically in children witnessing domestic violence and verbal abuse (Calvano et al., 2021). Parents being able to work while their children attend ECE programs may decrease ACEs and the effects of such trauma.

Although not performed in the United States, these COVID-19-related studies are a snapshot of what early childhood educators in the United States will be faced with in years to



come. Young children who are forced to stay home and miss quality early childhood education programs are faced with higher rates of parental stress are at risk of experiencing more ACEs, and suffer decreased SED during the COVID-19 pandemic (Linnavalli & Kalland, 2021 & Calvano et al., 2021). Early childhood educators need to be prepared through trauma-informed interventions to help children of trauma develop strong social-emotional skills so they can succeed in school and life.

### **Conclusion**

The research in this literature review has shown how important it is to address the needs of children with trauma to prevent issues caused by ACEs in adulthood (Centers for Disease Control, 2019). Early childhood teachers can make a lifelong impact on children who have experienced trauma by preparing themselves through self-reflection, research-based trauma-informed interventions, and supporting the development of strong social-emotional skills. There are numerous research-based trauma-informed interventions available to prepare and support individual teachers, support staff, schools, and administration. These interventions have shown how early childhood teachers can help children develop strong social-emotional skills and healthy teacher-child relationships. Early childhood teachers must also recognize the impact culture and the current COVID-19 pandemic has on the SED of young children. Chapter 3 will discuss applications and future studies of the findings from this literature review.

### **Chapter 3: Discussion, Application, and Future Studies**

This chapter will summarize key findings of the literature review, discuss the implications of research as it relates to future instructional practices in the field of Early Childhood Education, and suggest future research studies needed to help combat the effects of trauma in the lives of young children.

#### **Discussion**

Research has shown that preservice and current teachers need preparation to work with traumatized children in the field of Early Childhood Education (McClain, 2021). Self-reflection is beneficial in dealing with one's trauma (Alsic, 2012). Alsic stated that understanding one's trauma can positively impact a teacher's relationship with students (2012). All teachers need to know what trauma in young children is and understand the effects it has on the whole child (Bartlett, 2021). Research has also shown the importance of social-emotional development for the lifelong health and well-being of children, particularly those who have experienced early trauma (Gadaire et al., 2021). Teachers, administration, and support staff can learn about trauma, the effects of trauma, and how to increase SED through research-based trauma-informed interventions, specifically for children who have experienced trauma. These pieces of training should bring awareness to early childhood teachers about the importance of recognizing and appreciating the cultures of the students in their care, as culture also impacts SED in children (Wright, 2017).

Another trauma early childhood educators need to be made aware of are the effects of the current COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has caused interruptions to young children's early childhood education increasing family stress, ACE's and trauma (Linnavalli & Kalland, 2021).

As children return to the classroom, teachers will be faced with dealing with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and SED loss (Calvano et al., 2021).

Loomis & Felt (2020) strongly suggest that teachers be prepared for dealing with the effects of trauma through trauma-informed interventions. This literature review presented several trauma-informed interventions aimed at different age groups within early childhood and types of programming for teachers, administration, and support staff at schools and home care (Green et al., 2020; Lipscomp et al., 2019; Holmes, et al., 2015; Howard & Melhuish, 2017; McConnico, 2016).

### **Application**

The research discussed in this literature review revealed several insights for early childhood educators working with children of trauma to apply to their practice. First and foremost is the power of preparation and knowledge. Early childhood educators, and the administration and staff who support them, must take trauma-informed training to learn best practices for dealing with young children coping with the effects of trauma. Becoming trauma-informed can happen through participating in training from the school district, community services, websites, books, podcasts, online courses, local colleges, and more. With today's technology and resources, there are a plethora of ways to learn about trauma and the effects it has on young children in the classroom. If one cannot afford trauma-informed training, one must advocate their employer about their need for this training. Research has shown the benefits and necessity of preparing early childhood teachers for this important role.

Another training that has been shown to benefit all children, but especially children who have experienced trauma, is training about social-emotional skills and development in young

children. Research has shown how such training can improve the relationships between teachers and students. Improving relationships between teachers and students strengthens children's SED.

There are many practical ways to teach about SED in the early childhood classroom. Modeling for children how to identify emotions, regulate behavior, wait, take turns, share, problem, solve, and so much more can happen daily with intention. Teachers can model or use puppets, dolls, stuffed animals, or books to teach children about the Zones of Regulation, how to breathe deep to calm oneself, or role-play conversations. Students should be given a safe place and a choice of strategies when needing to self-regulate. Some things to include in this area may be a soft place to sit, books to read, stuffed animals for comfort, a breathing ball, sand or visual timer, paper and crayons for drawing, or play dough. Teaching strong social-emotional skills should be part of the everyday life of the classroom and does not require a lot of time or expensive resources.

### **Future Studies**

There were several limitations and gaps found in the research for this literature review. Many of the studies were small, took place in one country, or were not equally diverse. Further research is necessary to help early childhood teachers continue learning how to help young children cope with the effects of trauma.

Future studies could research what type of social-emotional strategies are best for children of color, including more diverse cultures. Specifically, there was a large gap in research about young Native American children and what their needs are versus non-native peers. Research is needed to identify how best to prepare non-native teachers (majority of early childhood teachers) to deal with the specific needs of Native American children and families who are dealing with compounded trauma, including intergenerational trauma. Teachers need to

know how native children learn best, the best way to communicate with families, respect the culture, the history of intergenerational trauma and the boarding era, negative feelings about the colonized education system, and so much more. Research about interventions for non-native teachers working with native children would benefit these children of trauma.

Studies of research to identify the reasons young people go into the field of early childhood education would benefit ECE. If research could identify these reasons, it is possible to learn how to promote persons of color in the field. The field of ECE is predominately Caucasian and female. Research has shown the benefits of children having teachers of the same race and culture. Children of color need teachers who look like them to identify with and model. Research on how to promote young people into the field would be beneficial for early childhood educators who serve children who have experienced trauma.

Research has shown that since the COVID-19 pandemic, young children and families have experienced more trauma from the loss of early childhood programming. The pandemic is not over yet and as children are returning to classrooms, teachers need to know how to best prepare themselves and young children for the loss of academics and SED. Research is needed to identify how early childhood teachers cope with these new traumas.

### **Conclusion**

There is still much to be done in the field of Early Childhood Education when it comes to children and trauma. More interventions need to be created, implemented, and studied to ensure success. Resources must be available to provide trauma-informed training for educators and support staff. Research needs to continue to further the study of the impact of culture on SED and the COVID-19 pandemic on young children. Half of the young children in the United States are experiencing trauma such as abuse, food scarcity, homelessness, a parent with addiction,

separation from parents, and more. These children are crying out for help. Trauma-informed social worker, Anna McCulloch, said “Behavior is a message and not always a choice.” (A. McCulloch, Personal communication, September 24, 2020). With appropriate preparation and trauma-informed training, early childhood teachers can help change the lives of students who have experienced trauma.

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