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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

Nannette W. Glenn, Ph.D.

Dr. Nannette Glenn, Dean of the
College of Graduate and Professional
Studies

Date: 10/26/2023

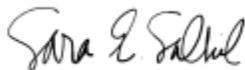
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Teacher Perceptions on the Sustainability of Trauma-Informed Practices in a Delaware School

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Joy Elaine Campbell

November 2023

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. This has been a challenging and difficult process, but they supported me every step of the way. My husband, Philip, was always there to wipe my tears when I did not have the strength to continue and to encourage me to “just keep swimming.” He was my anchor and rock throughout this entire process. My mother, Sue, helped out with meal preparations, chauffeuring the kids, and consistent reminders to follow my dream. To my siblings: thank you for believing in me, listening to me, and providing me with constant love and encouragement. To James, John, and Rosemary: although you might not know it, you have inspired me to do my best and to see this degree through to the finish. Words will never be able to express my love, appreciation, and respect for all of you as you have supported me through one of the most arduous tasks of my life.

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore teacher perceptions about the sustainability of trauma-informed practices implementation in a secondary, public comprehensive school. For the purpose of this study, the researcher examined perceptions of 10 staff members who have knowledge of and experience with implanting trauma-informed practices into their school routine. The findings from this study can be used by teachers, support staff, school leaders, and district leaders to help sustain an institutional application and implementation of trauma-informed care in schools. The implication from this study suggests resources for school staff to successfully sustain trauma-informed care.

Keywords: trauma-informed practices, teacher perceptions, sustainability, professional development, ongoing training needs, organizational change, mental health supports for teachers

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Students in the United States experience trauma at an alarming rate (Holmes et al., 2015; Jaycox et al., 2006; Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016). School personnel have the potential to positively impact students within their school setting (Barth, 2008; Oehlberg, 2008). Researchers have studied trauma for decades, however trauma-informed care (TIC) in a school setting is a relatively new concept that has a multitude of state educational systems evaluating their obligation to provide some degree of TIC in schools (Mikolajczyk, 2018). According to research (Taylor, 2021), implementing a trauma-informed care system is the best way to address the needs of those individuals who have experienced trauma. Research shows that when children perceive their environment as a dangerous place, they can become hypervigilant, experiencing everyone and everything as a potential threat to their safety (Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017). In the classroom, this perception potentially creates significant barriers for teachers who attempt to reach all students without a thorough understanding of their backgrounds, potential exposure to trauma, and impacted brain development based on the level of traumatic experience. Because staff members are in positions of caregivers, the developmental impact on interpersonal relationships with students can be profound (Harden et al., 2014).

According to Terrasi and de Galarce (2017), educators create more proactive learning environments, when they take the time to understand a child's trauma and its impacts. The gravity of this statement forced school systems to evaluate their programmatic capacity to implement various strategies to help grow the whole child, rather than simply teach isolated content and focus solely on test scores. In 2018, per a declaration from the governor, the State of Delaware became a "Trauma-Informed State," requiring schools to implement evidence-informed services as a way to respond to toxic stress and build resilience in children (Office of

the Governor, 2018). Although the state has attempted to mitigate the long-term effects of trauma, it is critically important that teachers feel supported in their classroom efforts and are provided opportunities to voice concerns, relating to the sustainability of trauma-informed care in their classrooms. This particular qualitative phenomenological research study allowed teachers in a Delaware school the opportunity to detail their perceptions of the sustainability of implementing trauma-informed practices (TIPs) in their classrooms, while also informing future research in the area of the sustainability of trauma-informed practices. This first chapter provides the reader with the background of the study. This is followed by the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions guiding the study. The chapter then closes with a definition of key terms and a summary.

Background

Because of rising awareness of childhood trauma, its impacts on brain development, and the need for trauma-informed care, school systems began evaluating programs relating to teaching practice, school climate, and the delivery of trauma-related in-service programs for school staff (Thomas et al., 2019). If teachers gain knowledge of students' potential trauma and trauma-informed routines into place, then students have more opportunity for success and growth, both on the academic and social-emotional levels (Paccione-Dyszlewski, 2016). By learning trauma-informed practices and implementing certain changes in classrooms, teachers can affect meaningful change in their students' lives. In schools, trauma-informed practices require a certain level of administrative buy-in, specific trauma-responsive classroom practices, both positive and restorative responses to student behavior, teacher and staff professional development, and policy and procedure changes (Oehlberg, 2008).

Policymakers nationwide recognize that childhood trauma has significant impacts and is often at the root of persistent social problems (National Council of State Education Associations, 2019). In February 2018, the United States Congress passed H.R. 443, to affirm the efficacy and value of trauma-informed programs and policies within the federal government and its agencies, including school systems (Washington: H. Res.443, 2018). This resolution helped to validate what some school systems had been doing for a few years: providing trauma-informed care to students, understanding students' situations, helping build resiliency, creating safe learning/working spaces for students and staff (National Council of State Education Associations, 2019; Souers & Hall, 2016). Souers and Hall (2016) further outlined that by shifting one's approach, an ability to see students as more than their story emerges.

Research on trauma-informed practices generally focuses on the success of a specific well-funded (or grant-funded) whole-school program (Dorado et al., 2016) or it focuses on how effective specific, targeted interventions are for students who were impacted by traumatic events in their lives (Brunzell et al., 2016). To date, few studies address the sustainability or feasibility of the continued implementation of trauma-informed practices in various school settings. Teachers' perceptions of this phenomenon are of utmost importance if they are the direct line to students. Research by Cain (2016) and Drill et al. (2013) suggested that teachers are more likely to attend to research when it has practical applications to their individual practice. Teachers must value what the research shows and that it will positively impact their practice (Coburn & Talbert, 2006). This particular research study investigated those perceptions and aimed to identify any sustainability barriers teachers noticed when implementing trauma-informed practices.

Statement of the Problem

Due to recent breakthroughs in the study of childhood trauma and an introductory understanding of brain development in traumatized children, Delaware educators increased their understanding of how trauma-impacted students present themselves in a school setting (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Perry, 2000). Exposing educators to trauma-informed programs and initiatives like Compassionate Schools, Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS), or Restorative Justice expands their understanding of how students who were exposed to violence, abuse, neglect, or poverty have been impacted (Anderson et al., 2015; Craig, 2016; Hertel et al., 2009; Jain et al., 2014; Maynard et al., 2017). These programs do not operate in isolation or as the sole programming in a school; however, they are conduits to providing teachers and students with additional support they may need to be successful. Furthermore, this knowledge increases staff members' awareness of their own emotional regulation to show compassion, understanding, and value for the student as a human being rather than a misbehaving entity.

Stevens (2012) indicated that although there are multiple frameworks for trauma-informed schools, studies have yet to identify factors that lead to sustainment, support, acceptability, and feasibility of trauma-informed approaches. Numerous qualitative studies focused on staff perceptions of the effectiveness of trauma-informed care in school settings and that the effect of such practices is overall positive (Greene & Ablon, 2005; McInerney & McKlinton, 2014). However, limited research examines the staff perceptions of the sustainability of trauma-informed schools in various school settings and what staff members perceive as potential barriers to long-term sustainability (Gomez-Lee & Pumpian, 2017;

Reinbergs & Fefer, 2018). It remains difficult to gauge how teachers feel about the sustainability of providing trauma-informed care, in addition to the multitude of daily tasks they must uphold.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study investigated the role of teacher perceptions of the sustainability of the implementation of trauma-informed practices in a 6–12 public school setting, where teachers have received extensive professional development on trauma-informed practices. To achieve that purpose, I utilized an interpretive phenomenological approach to explore the perceptions on sustainability. For the context of this study, the use of the term “sustainability” referred to the programmatic capacity of trauma-informed practices in the school setting to continue on a long-term basis. The study examined teacher perspectives in a 6th through 12th grade comprehensive public school in northern Delaware through semistructured virtual interviews.

Research Questions

To understand how teachers perceive the sustainability of trauma-informed practices, the following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in Northern Delaware perceive their preparedness to implement trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?

RQ2: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in Northern Delaware perceive their support in their ongoing implementation of trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?

RQ3: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in Northern Delaware perceive the longer-term sustainability of trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?

Definition of Key Terms

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). ACEs are potentially traumatic experiences that occurred in childhood from birth to 17 years of age and can include violence, various types of abuse, or parental/caregiver mental health issues (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019a; Felitti et al., 1998).

Emotional regulation. Emotional regulation refers to one's ability to balance an emotion or set of emotions and the conscious monitoring of the techniques used to produce a positive outcome when faced with emotionally charged situations (American Psychological Association [APA], n.d.a, para. 1).

Executive functioning. Executive functioning includes a set of mental skills such as organization, planning, emotional regulation, and perseverance (APA, n.d.a).

Implementation. The process of putting a program or practice in place is referred to as "implementation" (Forman et al., 2013). This occurs when either an individual or decision-making entity puts a new idea or concept into widespread use (Rogers, 2003).

Organizational change. Changes or shifts within an organization cause a significant impact on the organization as a whole (Hickman, 2010). The organizational change process prepares leaders and members for new, unknown ventures through utilizing human innovation, communication, strategy, and a clear delineation of the organization's mission/vision (Hickman, 2010). Hickman (2010) further indicates that this requires the organization to create certain structures that meet the needs and demands of the ever-changing environment.

Resilience. The American Psychological Association (n.d.a) defined this term in the following statement:

The process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands. Several factors contribute to how well people adapt to adversities, predominant among them (a) how individuals view and engage with the world, (b) the availability and quality of social resources, and (c) specific coping strategies. Psychological research demonstrates that the resources and skills associated with more positive adaptation (i.e., greater resilience) can be cultivated and practiced. (para. 1)

Restorative practice(s). These practices build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making that enable people to restore and build community (Pennell, 2006; Zehr, 2002).

Sustainability. Rogers (2003) detailed the concept of *sustainability* as the degree to which an innovation continues within a program after the initial diffusion of the idea ends. For the purpose of this study, “sustainability” will refer to the programmatic capacity of trauma-informed practices in the Delaware school setting to continue on a long-term basis.

Toxic stress. The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2014) defined this type of stress as “the result of experiencing frequent ongoing adverse events, particularly in the absence of protective behaviors such as a supportive adult.” This can lead to a decrease in the size and structure of the neurons in the brain (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2014).

Trauma. The American Psychiatric Association (2013) defines trauma as the following: Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence in one (or more) of the following ways: directly experiencing the traumatic event(s); witnessing, in person,

the traumatic event(s) as it occurred to others; learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend (in case of actual or threatened death of a family member or friend, the event(s) must have been violent or accidental); or experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s). (p. 271)

Trauma-informed practice(s), also referred to as *trauma-informed care, trauma-sensitive practices or trauma-responsive teaching*. SAMHSA (2014) identified four aspects of trauma-informed care: realize, recognize, respond, resist retraumatization. The four assumptions are detailed as follows:

A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization. (p. 9)

Summary

Given the prevalence of childhood and adolescent trauma, it remains critically important that school systems and individuals within the systems work in conjunction to implement trauma-informed practices. What this prevalence in trauma indicates is that students experience challenges due to the impact the trauma has had on their brain development. School systems adopt trauma-informed care as an approach to understanding the whole child and to deepening the interpersonal relationships between teachers and students. Research shows that TIPs are an impactful tool for educators as well as students (Brunzell et al., 2016; Craig, 2016; Souers & Hall, 2016; Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017). The research lacks information on how sustainable

teachers feel TIPs are. Through recommendations of two recent doctoral research studies (Choice-Hermosillo, 2020; Goodwin-Glick, 2017), this research study attempted to bridge this gap in information. The reader will find a thorough review of research supporting the need for this study in the following chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore teacher perceptions about the sustainability of trauma-informed practices in a secondary, public comprehensive school. To provide a complete background for this study, I examined existing research in the fields of trauma, trauma-informed care in schools, Delaware's standing as a "Trauma-Informed State," and implementation barriers within schools. This chapter begins with a summary of the conceptual framework that guided the study and then provides the reader with a review of scholarly literature related to implementing trauma-informed care in schools. There are 10 major sections in this chapter: trauma, trauma and brain development, and providing trauma-informed care in schools, Delaware's history as a trauma-informed state, prevalence of trauma in schools post COVID-19, educator well-being, implementation science, transformational learning, transformational learning in schools through professional development, and barriers to organizational change within schools.

Literature Search Methods

To provide an extensive analysis of the literature, I sought out previous and current research in the field of trauma-informed care in schools using databases from the Abilene Christian University (ACU) Brown Library, ResearchGate, ProQuest Digital Dissertation and Sage Publications. I used the following keywords and phrases during the search: *trauma*, *trauma-informed care in schools*, *trauma-informed practices*, *teacher perceptions of trauma*, *teacher buy-in for program sustainability*, *role of school leader in school reform*, *transformational learning*, *teacher perceptions on professional development*, *educator well-being*, *organizational change in schools*, and *implementation science*. To ensure recent publications and data, I limited scholarly, peer-reviewed journal articles beginning with 2015.

Initially, I hoped to gain a fuller picture of the history of trauma, its impact on brain development, and how this exposure to trauma potentially impedes learning. Therefore, I reviewed articles prior to the 2015 publication date. During the search process, common authors emerged, and I explored their work further. In addition to exploring work by these authors, I consulted the Delaware Department of Education website for specific information relating to the state and both its history and future with trauma-informed care.

Conceptual Framework Discussion

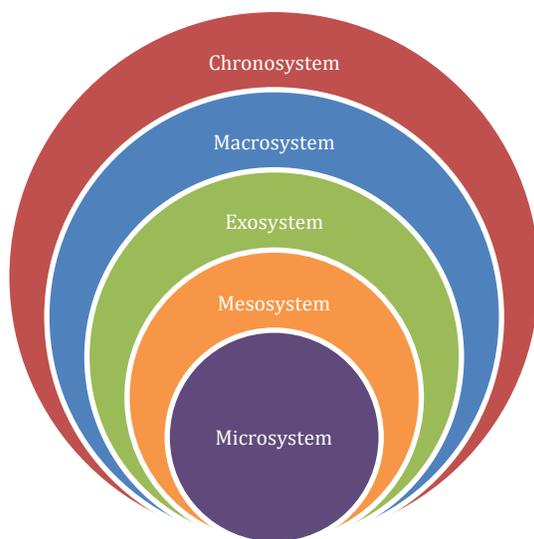
Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory influenced this research study. This theory specifies that human development and behavior are the product of multiple different interacting systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979). As individuals grow and mature during their lives, unique biological circumstances, as well as family systems, school structures, community, and the larger surrounding social systems influence their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner (1995) believed that development occurs through reciprocal interactions between systems. This theory views child development as an intricate balance of interrelated systems and suggests that researchers view the entire interaction a child has with her or her surrounding environment, rather than the immediate environment in which the child lives (Guy-Evans, 2020). A personal ecosystem based on these environmental factors has five separate levels: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner additionally suggested that researchers must place a purposeful focus on the individual, contextual, and developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000).

The interconnectedness of these systems is depicted in Figure 1. The microsystem includes everything in one's immediate environment. This includes parents or caregivers, siblings, teachers, and peers. Personal interactions occur regularly in this system and can be

critical for development. The mesosystem represents connections and is dependent on one's microsystem. An example of this includes interactions between a child's parents and teachers. Exosystem refers to one's indirect environment and includes things such as neighborhood, parents' friends, or media exposure. The macrosystem represents social and cultural values not previously determined by the parents but preexisting in society. Finally, the chronosystem consists of the many changes that occur in a lifetime that are influential to development (Guy-Evans, 2020).

Figure 1

Visual Representation of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems



Note: Figure adapted from *The Whole Child: Development in the Early Years* by D. Buckley & D. Budzyna, 2023, Rotel Project (<https://rotel.pressbooks.pub/whole-child/>), CC BY-SA 4.0.

When considering research on child development, it is not surprising that this theory influences research studies (Lerner, 2005). Young people experience a greater risk of developing difficulty with coping skills when elements of their ecosystems are compromised (Choice-Hermosillo, 2020). Students exposed to such trauma have difficulty with emotional regulation and often engage in behaviors against school policies (Crosby, 2015). School systems must not

ignore the impacts of trauma exposure in their efforts to meet the needs of all students (Oehlberg, 2008). Teachers should make every effort to connect with students' systems to improve the overall well-being of the student (Crosby, 2015). Given the importance of Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective, it is critical for school staff, particularly teachers, to work toward a trauma-informed approach. However, considering the state of our nation post-COVID-19, the economic challenges, civil unrest, and horrific events such as school shootings, it begs the question, "When does the trauma end?" (Abrams, 2022). Because these challenges relate to governmental policy and laws, they are part of the macrosystem in Bronfenbrenner's model (Bennett & Grimley, 2001) and are generally outside of educators' ability to directly change or impact. How do school systems equip and support educators through these challenges, while ensuring fair and equitable access for all students? I detailed how Bronfenbrenner's model applies to school staff during the analysis of data in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

Trauma

According to the American Psychological Association (APA, n.d.b), trauma is an emotional response to terrible occurrences such as catastrophe, physical assault, family or community violence, or death. Through traumatic experiences, the human body reacts via short-term processes such as shock or denial, while longer-term impacts can include flashbacks, erratic emotions, physical and biological strains, or relationship stress. Adams (2013) revealed that by the age of 16, approximately 25% of U.S. children attending schools experienced at least one traumatic event. By 2020, that percentage increased to nearly 67% (SAMHSA, 2020). Due to this exposure to trauma, students face challenges in the classroom that do not pertain to their curricular studies. Schools create safe havens for those in need in addition to teaching and preparing them for their futures. Stateman-Weil (2015) researched how traumatic experiences

impact brain development and concluded the following, “What matters most in helping young children process and cope with physical, emotional, and psychological trauma is having important adults whom children rely on to offer them unconditional love, support, and encouragement” (para. 26). Schools have a responsibility to teach children, keep them safe, and prepare them for the next phase of life. Through an exploration of childhood exposure to trauma, individual schools and larger school systems emphasize trauma-informed practices. Craig (2016) specified, “Trauma-sensitive schools emphasize safety, empowerment, and collaborative partnerships between children and adults” (p. 5). These collaborative partnerships are critical in increasing students’ emotional-regulatory ability, self-sufficiency, and trust of adults in authoritative positions.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines trauma as the response to an event or series of events that cause intense physical and psychological stress reactions (SAMHSA, 2014). Trauma results from a short-term or single, severe event (an acute stressor), or recurrent incidents (chronic stressor) that trigger an ongoing response in the brain, resulting in feelings of being overwhelmed or out-of-control (Blaustein, 2013). The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (n.d.) utilizes the phrase acute traumatic event to describe short-term or single-incident traumas (e.g., gang violence, school shootings, severe accidents, physical or sexual assault); or chronic traumatic situations to describe repeated events over a long period of time (e.g., on-going physical or sexual abuse, or domestic violence). Oftentimes, trauma leaves its victims with feelings of helplessness, fear, panic, disgust, or shame (Blaustein, 2013). It is important to note that trauma, in these instances, is the perception and response to an event, rather than the event itself (Hertel & Johnson, 2013; Souers & Hall, 2016).

Researchers first studied the relationship between exposure to trauma and an individual's health from 1995–1997 on a large scale of more than 17,000 participants at Kaiser Permanente's San Diego Health Appraisal Clinic (Felitti & Anda, 2010). This study was one of the first of its kind and it investigated the lifelong impacts of traumatic events or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on health outcomes throughout an individual's lifespan (Felitti et al., 1998). The study examined forms of trauma such as emotional, physical, or sexual abuse and neglect, and household dysfunctions (e.g., imprisoned family member(s), mental illness, suicide, alcohol or drug users, deceased parents, divorced or separated parents, or witnessing domestic violence; (Felitti & Anda, 2010). The researchers in this study concluded that ACEs were, in fact, more common than originally thought and they were present across all socio-economic groups, within both genders, and present in all races (Felitti et al., 1998). This study further discovered that the higher a person's ACE score, the stronger correlation for later-in-life negative health outcomes or premature death (Felitti et al., 1998). For example, the research showed that a person with four or more ACEs was twice as likely to develop heart disease and cancer and three and a half times as likely to develop chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) as a person with zero ACEs (Felitti & Anda, 2010). This groundbreaking study connected negative, traumatic childhood experiences with adult health issues. Furthermore, it acted as a catalyst for understanding how a child's brain development is impacted due to the prolonged exposure to trauma or traumatic events. Dr. Robert Block, former president of the American Academy of Pediatrics, stated in a testimony to the U.S. Senate, "Based on this study [ACEs], childhood trauma, including abuse and neglect, may be the leading cause of poor health among adults in the United States" (2011).

Children with exposure to trauma, especially during their formative, vulnerable developmental years, experience certain neurobiological changes in their brain (Terrasi & de

Galarce, 2017), which may carry over to the school setting. When a child experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity, a toxic stress response can occur (van der Kolk, 2014). Overexposure to things such as physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, or community violence can disrupt the development of the brain and impact its architecture, impairing cognitive development well into adulthood (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016). Prolonged exposure to poverty, loss, abuse, and violence creates a neurophysiological stress response in the brain that can potentially impede a child's ability to regulate their emotions and behavior (Anderson et al., 2015). Although there is a variance in type of traumatic event, such as, physical abuse, neglect, witnessing violence, prevalence estimates of trauma experienced in childhood or adolescence can range between 4% and 71% (Finkelhor et al., 2015; McLaughlin et al., 2013; Saunders & Adams, 2014). Trauma is present in all socioeconomic and demographic groups, not purely in poverty-stricken environments (Blaustein, 2013).

Trauma and Brain Development

Trauma impacts the brain in a significant manner. It adversely impacts the amygdala, which is the body's first response to danger (Morton & Berardi, 2018; Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017). The prefrontal cortex regulates the body's stress response system and helps to make things seem less scary than they are (Purnomo, 2020). Exposure to trauma impacts the prefrontal cortex in a way that underactivates it, resulting in difficulties with concentration, attention, and learning. In other words, a trauma-impacted brain may send messages to the body indicating that it is always in danger, therefore affecting one's ability to concentrate or focus (Purnomo, 2020). Additionally, there are impacts to the cerebellar vermis, which receives information about senses of hearing, touch, vision, balance, and proprioception (Carone, 2019). Furthermore, trauma

impacts the brain in executive functioning, which can weaken children's language processing, concentration, decision-making, and memory (Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017).

Neuroscience demonstrates that the brain is capable of changing its structure into adulthood, as a result of experiences (Zhang & Lu, 2009). While the number of neurons formed in the brain at birth is determined by genetics, the child's environment plays a significant role in the final structure of the brain and the strength of those neural connections (Bloom & Farragher, 2013). Researchers know that trauma has a profound impact on the normal structure and functioning of the brain (Bloom & Farragher, 2013; Evans & Coccoma, 2014; Perry, 2001). Hertel and Johnson (2013) found that the traumatized brain is smaller in volume and that there is an impairment in areas responsible for learning and behavior. The impact on brain development is dependent on such things as forms of abuse, environmental factors, the nature or pattern of trauma, and duration of trauma (Perry, 2001).

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2008) detailed that one in four children attending school has been exposed to a traumatic event that can impact their learning and/or behavior. Chronic exposure to traumatic events can adversely affect memory, attention, and cognition; reduce a child's ability to focus, organize, and process information; interfere with effective problem-solving skills; and result in overwhelming feelings of anxiety, frustration, and/or depression (NCTSN, 2008). Furthermore, students with trauma exposure are more likely to have lower grade point averages (GPAs), a higher rate of absenteeism, increased dropout rates, and more suspensions (Ridgard et al., 2015).

Imaging studies have identified differences in the brains of complex trauma victims (Gabowitz et al., 2008). These differences include smaller total brain volume, smaller prefrontal cortexes, and larger brain stem functioning, which is associated with the fight, flight, or freeze

response (Gabowitz et al., 2008). Traumatized students may more frequently exhibit impulsive behaviors, demonstrate either hypo- or hypervigilance, or experience sleep issues (Sitler, 2009). Traumatized individuals are frequently unaware of the motivations behind their behaviors and therefore do not purposely or consciously choose to exhibit these behaviors (Bloom & Farragher, 2013). Because these things occur inside of the brain, school-level personnel experience difficulty identifying the inner-workings and reasons for someone's misbehavior. Students may receive disciplinary consequences unfairly because their brains are not equipped to handle the day-to-day interactions within a school setting,

Providing Trauma-Informed Care in Schools

In response to the prevalence of childhood trauma, researchers and school systems developed and instituted “trauma-informed” approaches to create supportive environments (Shalka, 2022). School systems must have a solid understanding of the various types of traumas and how they present themselves in students for trauma-informed care to succeed. The trauma-informed approach is not an intervention, but a way of providing services to students (and families) that facilitates an improved functioning after experiencing trauma (Keesler, 2016; SAMHSA, 2014). SAMHSA (2014) identified four aspects of trauma-informed care: realize, recognize, respond, resist retraumatization. The four assumptions are detailed as follows:

A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization. (p. 9)

Since students in the United States experience trauma at an alarming rate (Holmes et al., 2015; Jaycox et al., 2006; Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016), school personnel have the potential to positively impact students within their school setting (Barth, 2008; Oehlberg, 2008).

Implementing trauma-informed practices within a school setting can assist with students feeling safe, successful, and welcomed into an environment (Cole et al., 2005; Wolpow et al., 2009), while also building their capacity to regulate emotions and navigate relationships. A widely cited resource developed by Western Washington University and Washington Superintendent of Public Instructions provides six principles for reaching trauma-exposed students: (a) always empower, never disempower; (b) provide unconditional positive regard; (c) maintain high expectations; (d) check assumptions, observe, and question; (e) be a relationship coach; and (f) provide guided opportunities for helpful participation (Wolpow et al., 2009). This resource provides a mindset shift for educators such that rather than viewing students' undesirable behaviors as inherently bad or oppositional, they view each student as having been affected in some way by their experiences (Thomas et al., 2019). Because staff members are in the positions of caregivers, there is a profound developmental impact on the interpersonal relationships with students (Harden et al., 2014). Educators who utilize trauma-informed care recognize and respond to the unique needs of students with traumatic history.

Unfortunately, due to outdated discipline policies, trauma-exposed students are often punished in school because their behaviors are misunderstood as defiant, demanding, or manipulative (Blaustein, 2013). In trauma-informed schools, these punitive discipline policies are not widely practiced, rather individuals build a basic understanding of trauma and how it impacts student learning and behavior in the school environment (Cole et al., 2013; SAMHSA, 2014). This understanding can help to foster a sense of belonging, understanding, and respect.

There are a variety of programs and practices that focus on providing trauma-informed care in the school setting. While the specifics of these programs differ, six key domains are consistent amongst all of them: (a) staff development; (b) creating a safe and secure environment; (c) assessing need and providing appropriate supports; (d) building strong social and emotional skills; (e) voice, choice, and collaboration; and (f) policies and procedures (Fallot & Harris, 2009; Guarino & Chagnon, 2018).

Historically, the customary response to student misbehaviors was to berate the students, remove them from the learning environment, and/or impose exclusionary disciplinary consequences (Stevens, 2012). In a trauma-informed setting, Souers and Hall (2016) challenged school personnel to consider the motives behind the behavior, rather than the behavior itself, and to help students seek alternate ways to manage their stress. A trauma-informed lens is a paradigm shift from *What is wrong with you?* to *What has happened to you? What do you need? or How can I help?* (Bloom & Farragher, 2013; SAMHSA, 2015; Vicario & Gentile, 2015). A collective understanding of trauma is vital to a successful implementation of trauma-informed practices (Baweja et al., 2016). Educators receive the tools and training to reflect on the student as a holistic individual, rather than to simply address the misbehavior (Oehlberg, 2008).

Delaware's History as a Trauma-Informed State

In 2013, a steering group of community stakeholders in the state of Delaware began their work on programs to organize the state's trauma landscape (Family Services Cabinet Council, 2019). As awareness of ACEs grew, interested stakeholders across the state started researching the impacts of trauma on the nearby local communities and organized efforts to promote the adoption of trauma-informed care in Delaware (Family Services Cabinet Council, 2019). At that same time, there was a national trend in education to begin infusing trauma-informed practices

into their work. Based on an overview model of the Missouri Model Continuum of Trauma-Informed Care, on October 17, 2018, Delaware's governor declared the state an official "Trauma-Informed State" (Office of the Governor, 2018). This declaration launched a formal campaign for various systems, including schools, to adopt a collective approach to trauma-informed care.

In a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 2012, findings indicated that over one fourth of children in the state's largest city (Wilmington) had experienced two or more ACEs (Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative, 2019). Considering what medical experts have uncovered in terms of long-term health complications from trauma exposure, this percentage is alarming. The state recognized that systems and communities needed to join to ensure that children have meaningful, supportive, appropriate environments to learn, grow, and thrive (Family Services Cabinet Council, 2019). Based on the 2019–2020 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH), 22.8% of Delaware children (ages 0–17) presented with one ACE, while 19.1% presented with two or more (Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative, 2019).

To become fully "trauma-informed," the state developed a framework, outlining knowledge of principles and the paradigm shift for systems to undertake (Family Services Cabinet Council, 2019). This framework asked school systems to evaluate where they were on the continuum and then provided them with actionable steps to move forward along that continuum. The state detailed the purpose of trauma-informed care as follows:

- To create an environment where people are respectful, competent, sensitive, and culturally aware;
- To implement evidence-based trauma-informed principles and approaches that

address the effects associated with trauma;

- To develop a common language and framework for dialogue and discussion to enhance communication and progress;
- To assess the implementation of basic principles of trauma-informed approaches in various settings;
- To increase the effectiveness of all services and assistance; and
- To ensure that the education community does no harm (Family Services Cabinet Council, 2019).

Stakeholder recommendations included that a transformational shift should happen gradually over time, rather than as an instant response to the identified issues (Family Services Cabinet Council, 2019). School systems started to partner with the state to facilitate their journey along the continuum as they worked to raise their own awareness of students' exposure to trauma, their ability to help students overcome that trauma, and the connections with others to aid in this process.

As an initial response to the declaration in 2018, the Governor created a new position within the Department of Education called the "Education Associate of Trauma-Informed Practices and Social and Emotional Learning" (Buckner, 2021). The efforts of this associate helped build a strong foundation for whole-child support in the state of Delaware (Buckner, 2021). As a result of these efforts, local universities have hosted both trauma-informed care and culturally responsive training, as well as have launched certificates at the undergraduate and graduate level in trauma-informed approaches (Family Services Cabinet Council, 2019). Each department within the state created an action plan on how they planned to become more trauma-informed (Family Services Cabinet Council, 2019). Finally, policymakers in the state revised the

state's Education Code to include social and emotional learning as a universal approach in Delaware's educational framework (Buckner, 2021).

Prevalence of Trauma in Schools Post COVID-19

The COVID-19 global pandemic sparked an unprecedented amount of trauma and loss across the globe (Giboney Wall, 2022). Worldwide, students and their families were shut out of schools, forcing to pivot to an online school system or no school system at all. As a collective unit, we experienced loss, grief, economic hardship, civil and social unrest, and social isolation (Schwartz et al., 2021; Taylor, 2021). Mental health professionals examined the impacts of COVID-19 on children and youth and were uncertain as to how the pandemic truly affected individuals, on a longitudinal level (Bartlett et al., 2021; Pisano et al., 2020). Trauma presents itself in various forms and for a variety of reasons. The collective experience shared during the pandemic is an example of a shared traumatic experience. The aftermath of this pandemic is still ever present in the educational setting with things like learning loss, student homelessness, unemployment of parents, or educator personal trauma (Schwartz et al., 2021).

Following years of collective trauma from COVID-19, schools had the opportunity to reimagine how they could be more responsive, inclusive, sensitive, and purposeful in meeting the needs of their students, staff, and families (Giboney Wall, 2022). School systems placed a heavy emphasis on continuing to deliver academic instruction and did not place enough weight on how to support students' behavioral or mental health (Phelps & Sperry, 2020). Through providing a trauma-informed approach consisting of the following four components, schools can support their students' needs: school-wide relationships, structure and stability, shared control and self-regulation, and social-emotional learning (Giboney Wall, 2022). To assist students in building their resilience, implementing a trauma-informed approach, particularly post COVID-19, is

critical. The impacts of the global pandemic could potentially remain unclear for an extended period of time, but what is clear is that with structured frameworks of support, school systems have the opportunity to care for their students (Phelps & Sperry, 2020).

Educator Well-Being

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, teaching had been identified as one of the most stressful jobs in the United States (Kraft et al., 2021; Kyriacou, 2001; Ryan et al., 2017). An alarming rate of 40 to 50% of teachers left the profession within the first 5 years (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ingersoll, 2001). Harding et al. (2019) discussed that teacher mental well-being was associated with student mental well-being and that there is a correlation between how teachers feel and student depressive symptoms (Kidger et al., 2016). These statistics indicate that it is critical to care for educators, not only by fully preparing them for their pedagogical and curricular skills, but also providing them with ongoing supports for their overall well-being. Human service jobs, such as teaching, have been categorized as “burnout” careers because they are characterized by the employee’s emotional exhaustion due to caring for others as part of the job (Johnson et al., 2005).

Teacher stress in the workplace is compounded by working with students who have experienced significant trauma in their lives (Ormiston et al., 2022). Educators sometimes internalize the trauma of their students, causing mental anguish and exhaustion on their part. This was coined “compassion fatigue” by Figley (2002) and further supports that educators need their own supports when working with students (Ormiston et al., 2022). With the percentage of adolescent trauma on the rise in the United States (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2019b), it is critical to develop and strengthen programs that support and promote educator well-being. Teacher well-being has been studied and linked to student well-being (Harding et al.,

2019). If teachers are feeling healthy, supported, and well, then they can fully attend to the various student needs presented during their day. Without structures for support in place, teacher well-being declines, as does student performance (Kidger et al., 2016).

Furthermore, it is critical to continue monitoring and supporting teachers who have experienced trauma themselves (Ormiston et al., 2022). It is very possible that educators have experienced some trauma during their lifetime and may have an ACEs score, interfering with their ability to fully regulate emotions, make sound decisions, or engage professionally with others (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019a). Because educators carry their own life experiences as well as the hardships of their students, the need for mental health support is strong (Ormiston et al., 2022). They reportedly detail a higher degree of work-related stress and an inability to find a work-life balance (Education Support Partnership [ESP], 2020). Doan et al. (2023) suggested that only slightly more than 50% of teachers feel that the mental health support provided by their districts were adequate. This suggests that school systems could benefit from examining current practices and supports and determine strategies for implementing sustainable support for educators.

Implementation Science

Because teachers are the largest group of stakeholders in a school setting, their support for Trauma-Informed Practices (TIPs) is critical (Baweja et al., 2016). Duffy (2014) outlined that each student deserves learning experiences tailored to their learning needs, interests, and abilities. Implementing TIPs takes into consideration each student, their individual history, and sets a trajectory for how to help them succeed. When implementing any new program, an organization must begin with a paradigm or mindset shift. Within some organizations, this is easier than in others. Literature on systemic change indicates that transformational learning

involves a root change in how individuals view themselves and the surrounding world (Merriam et al., 2007). Johnson-Laird (1983) detailed that people construct cognitive representations of what they learn, as well as what they think they know. These mental models impact and prevent educators from change (Choice-Hermosillo, 2020). Teachers are the most significant factor in schools influencing educational outcomes for students (Hattie, 2012). Providing teachers with an appropriate mind frame and relating it to what they do will impact how a program is implemented (Hattie, 2012).

Implementation involves the process of putting a program or practice in place (Forman et al., 2013). Implementation science has historically explored issues including strategies for improving implementation, implementation measurement methods and research design, as well as the various influences on the professional behaviors of practitioners (Eccles & Mittman, 2006). With an understanding of implementation science, school leaders can implement effective professional development opportunities. There are four categories of variables to consider when promoting implementation success in schools: (a) external environmental factors (legislative mandates, district policies); (b) implementation and sustainability infrastructure (technical assistance, training support); (c) perceptions of the intervention; and (d) organizational and participant characteristics (Feldstein & Glasgow, 2008).

Transformational Learning

The basic components of transformational learning require real experiences and reflection (De León & Peña, 2010). During this experience, for adults to truly learn the material, the learning must be transformed into a meaningful experience (Mezirow, 1978). King (2002) detailed this experience as:

Originally explicated by Mezirow's (1978) research, transformational learning theory conceptualizes and describes learning as a process of critical reflection and self-examination of one's worldview in light of new knowledge and a fundamental reorganization of one's perspective or frame of reference (Taylor, 1998). This theory can greatly assist in framing our understanding of the changes educators experience in their perspective and practice of teaching as a result of their learning. (p. 284)

Learners face challenges when confronted with new material because there is a degree of stress or compulsion to quickly and effortlessly learn the concept. Cognitive psychologists call this stress *cognitive dissonance* (De León & Peña, 2010) and express that it is a natural byproduct of the learning process.

Transformational learning differs from the process of learning information through a text. The individual must critically examine personal assumptions within him/herself, assign meaning to those assumptions, and prompt a new investigation and meaning of the original assumptions (Mezirow, 1978). This new meaning includes "dimensions of thought, feeling and will" (Mezirow, 1978, p. 105), and helps individuals determine their roles and relationships with others. In addition to Mezirow's views, Boyd approached transformational learning with an emotional and spiritual lens (Merriam et al., 2007). Using these lenses enables individuals to understand the spiritual and affective nature of adult learning, while advancing themselves into a transformational state.

Transformational Learning in a School Through Professional Development

In the school setting, educators engage in regular professional development both by personal choice and by school, district, or state mandates. An overarching goal of many professional development sessions relates to student success. Professional development is a

regularly used strategy for impacting teacher change in education (Guskey, 2002) and allows teachers opportunities to transform their knowledge into practice for student improvement (Avalos, 2011). High quality professional development is active, collaborative, and ongoing (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009), and is successful when participants feel safe, supported, and empowered in their learning endeavors (Cranton, 2002). Traditionally, professional development for teachers includes short-term workshops or presentations and no long-term plan for sustainability of acquired material (Sariyildiz, 2017).

With respect to the reality of traumas faced by students, when engaged in professional development on TIPs, school personnel must evaluate their previous perceptions towards traumatized students and adjust their personal affect when interacting with traumatized students (Goodwin-Glick, 2017). The goal (or transformation) of professional development sessions on trauma and TIPs requires teachers to understand students in a new light and to consciously accept the impact on students' brains from exposure to prolonged trauma. Cranton (2002) indicated that transformational learning occurs in a balanced environment where participants feel safe, supported, and empowered.

Similar to how teachers view students in a new light, school leaders must recognize that educators are also vastly unique and have myriad of experiences in their personal histories (Goodwin-Glick, 2017). This attitude along with a deep-rooted personal belief in the effectiveness of trauma-informed practices benefits school personnel during their professional development (Harris, 2020). School leaders must ensure that teachers feel valued and supported during the transformational learning process. According to Hattie (2012), "It matters what teachers do-but what matters *most* is having an appropriate mind frame relating to the impact of what they do. An appropriate mind frame combined with appropriate actions work together to

achieve a positive learning effect” (p. 15). Teachers must believe that there is value in transforming. When they do and when they are supported and consulted by school leaders, the possibilities for student success increase (Hattie, 2012).

Employee satisfaction is based on how well school leaders make decisions, communicate, and support educators over time (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Preacher, 2018). This includes the type of professional development school leaders select for their staff. When school leaders are clear in their expectations and build capacity for leadership among teachers, teachers reach their learning potential (Petty et al., 2012). Professional development for educators is a way for them to engage with new material or previously learned material in a new way. True development programs have an ongoing, longer-term sustainability component to them, further encouraging and allowing teachers to transform their practice (Avalos, 2011).

Barriers to Organizational Change Within Schools

Regardless of the opportunities to engage in relevant, meaningful experiences within the workplace, the largest downfall of quality educator training programs is the lack of time to sufficiently implement before something “new” comes along (Usher, 2004). Organizational barriers often center on leadership, climate, and resources (Durlack & DuPre, 2008; Kam et al., 2003; Stith et al., 2006). Within leadership, effective communication practices are of extreme importance (Durlack & DuPre, 2008). Researchers who studied educational systems and implementation science found that there are several factors influencing the success of a program: alignment of new initiative to the school vision; involvement of teachers in the decision-making process; communication with the school community as a whole; and planned evaluation of the program for effectiveness (Domitrovich et al., 2008). Teachers have indicated that strong

administrative support for program implementation should also be followed by consistent assessment and accountability (Domitrovich et al., 2008).

Educator perception is a key variable to implementation (Fogarty International Center, National Institutes of Health, 2010). Research shows that an implementer's lack of buy-in or support can be a significant barrier to the success of a program (Kincaid et al., 2007). If the implementer is enthusiastic about the program or initiative and shows willingness to learn about the support, the implementation of the program succeeds (Forman et al., 2009). Furthermore, it is critical for teachers to have background knowledge or prior experience with the subject matter. For example, teachers found more success in completing program components of an evidence-based curricular program when they had previously engaged with the content (Dusenbury et al., 2005).

An individual's self-efficacy, or their confidence in being able to implement the program, also decides whether successful implementation will occur (Forman et al., 2009; Graham et al., 2001; Henderson et al., 2006). The higher the degree or level of self-efficacy, the stronger the implementation will be (Forman et al., 2009). Bandura's (1997) early research on a learner's ability to succeed suggested that there are four contributing sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and social influences, and physiological and affective states. Equipping teachers with the background knowledge of trauma, its impact on brain development, and the importance of and need for TIPs not only increases their self-efficacy, but also has greater benefits for the students they serve.

Summary

Given the prevalence of childhood and adolescent trauma, it is critically important that schools systems and individuals within the systems work in conjunction to implement trauma-

informed practices. The prevalence in trauma indicates that students experience challenges due to the impact the trauma has had on their brain development. School systems adopt trauma-informed care as an approach to understanding the whole child and to deepen the interpersonal relationships between teachers and students. Research shows that TIPs are an impactful tool for educators as well as students (Brunzell et al., 2016; Craig, 2016; Souers & Hall, 2016; Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017). The research lacks information on how sustainable teachers feel TIPs are. Through recommendations of two recent doctoral research studies (Choice-Hermosillo, 2020; Goodwin-Glick, 2017), this research study attempts to bridge this gap in information. I utilized teacher input, given through semistructured interviews, and considered implementation science to identify any potential barriers to the sustainability of TIPs as a way to support students who have experienced prolonged exposure to trauma or traumatic events.

Chapter 3 includes a detailed explanation of the research methodology and design for this study. I depended upon interpretive phenomenological analysis to investigate teachers' perceptions of the sustainability of trauma-informed practices in their northern Delaware secondary public-school setting. This next chapter includes a description of the research methodology, intended qualitative samples, instruments, and ethical considerations for the study.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study explored teachers' perceptions of the sustainability of implementing trauma-informed practices in their classrooms at a public, 6-12 secondary school in northern Delaware. The research design relied on interpretive phenomenology to collect qualitative data from the participants through semistructured interviews (Smith et al., 2009). The organization of this chapter is as follows: (a) research design and methodology, (b) population, (c) sample, (d) data collection and analysis procedures, (e) researcher's role, (f) ethical considerations, (g) assumptions, (h) limitations, (i) delimitations, and (j) summary.

Research Design and Methodology

Answering the overarching research question for this study depended upon an interpretive phenomenological methodology. Smith et al. (2009) described Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a qualitative research method aimed to examine how people make sense of their common lived experiences. The authors further posited that IPA allows participants in similar contexts the opportunity to meaningfully explain their shared experiences without distortions (Smith et al., 2009). This methodology supports this research study because I hoped to gather shared, lived experiences from participants and how they perceived the sustainability of implementing TIPs.

Phenomenology

Phenomenological research involves “a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants” (Creswell, 2014, p. 14). As a qualitative research method, phenomenology is well-known and well-used (Alase, 2017) and aims to interpret the

shared essence of a common characteristic (Watson, 2018). In the context of this research study, the shared essence focuses on teachers' perceptions. The common characteristic involves the implementation of TIPs. Phenomenology uses two distinct inquiry methods with differing data collection and analysis methods: descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology and interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenology. Descriptive phenomenology asks the researcher to transcend one's consciousness in an effort to provide an unbiased perspective of the phenomenon being studied (Vagle, 2018). This experience is referred to as bracketing (Vagle, 2018). In contrast, interpretive phenomenology allows the researcher to be a part of the research and account for his/her own previous understandings and knowledge (Tuohy et al., 2013). This study utilized an interpretive phenomenological approach because I experienced the phenomenon myself and was not able to transcend to a place of full, unbiased perspective.

Interpretive Phenomenology

Hermeneutics is the study or practice of the art of interpretation (Noon, 2018). In principle, hermeneutic phenomenology requires researchers to interpret the essence of participants' life experiences and to attach meaning to those experiences. The researcher is then a cocreator of the participants' meaning making (Love et al., 2020) and does so through an analytical process known as IPA. In IPA, the researcher is unable to step outside of the world of the participants and has already engaged, to some level, in their world (Charlick et al., 2016). As the researcher in this study, I experienced professional development in TIPs and implemented them on a schoolwide basis. This participation created a degree of research bias. I will address this in a subsequent section. Because I had this experience, an IPA was appropriate for this study. This approach favors a smaller, homogeneous sample of individuals with similar experiences to help explain the phenomenon (Love et al., 2020).

The school was chosen out of convenience for me because I was previously employed as an assistant principal in the building. I was part of the initial team of individuals who brought in TIPs training for the entire staff. For the purpose of this study, “comprehensive public secondary school” shall mean there are no admissions requirements or restrictions in place for a student to attend the school. The full attendance zone of the school is simply based on predetermined areas by the school district and if a student resides within those identified zones, he or she may attend the school. The following overarching research question frames the focus for this entire study: How do instructional staff perceive the sustainability of the implementation of trauma-informed practices in their school setting?

RQ1: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in Northern Delaware perceive their preparedness to implement trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?

RQ2: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in Northern Delaware perceive their support in their ongoing implementation of trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?

RQ3: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in Northern Delaware perceive the longer-term sustainability of trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?

Population

The population for this interpretive phenomenological study consisted of licensed educators who have participated in trauma-informed practices training at ABC School, located in northern Delaware. ABC School historically served grades 9–12, but during the 2015–2016 school year, the programming expanded to include grades 6–8. The school added a middle

school component to its high school *International Baccalaureate* programming. In 2021, ABC School employed 75.5 total educators, out of whom 60.5 are classroom teachers (Delaware Department of Education, 2021). In the state of Delaware, the total number of state-funded staff members is based on annual enrollment at the end of September. Fractions of a staffing unit may occur if the school has a particular percentage of special education students or English-language learners. The formula is a complex one, based on the specific needs in each building (Delaware Administrative Code, Title 14, §1703 Unit of Pupils, 2019). Additionally, ABC School served approximately 970 students from an array of socioeconomic and racial backgrounds (Delaware Department of Education, 2021). I selected this population because the staff received extensive training in TIPs, and I worked at the school during the onset of the professional development in TIPs.

Sample

During IPA research, the researcher seeks to identify a purposive, relatively small homogeneous group who have experienced the phenomenon investigated in the study (Creswell, 2014; Noon, 2018). Purposive sampling allows researchers to select their sample with purpose, rather than probability and can offer a great deal of insight into the research topic (Creswell, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). Although smaller sample sizes are often seen as limitations of qualitative research, Smith et al. (2009) found that smaller samples enabled researchers to have a deeper engagement in the analysis of data. At the onset, I hoped for between 10 and 12 participants for the semistructured interviews. Eleven participants agreed to partake in the interview process. Out of the 11 total participants, there were eight classroom teachers, two support staff members (school counselor and instructional coach), and one school administrator. This aligned with guidance suggested by Smith et al. (2009) on smaller sample sizes ranging for

IPA studies. In an effort to support triangulation, I interviewed a school administrator who had witnessed the implementation of TIPs in the school. This is explained in more detail in the section related to “trustworthiness.” While the overarching goal of this research study explored teachers’ perceptions, interviewing staff in noninstructional roles also supported merit. Their input provided me with valuable information in terms of how the entire school community views sustainability of TIPs and strengthened my conclusions throughout the data analysis process.

In this study, I used purposive criterion sampling to identify participants. Although the selection criteria varied slightly for each educator group, some elements remained constant (see Table 1): educators must hold a current teaching license in the state of DE; they must work at ABC School and must have some degree of knowledge of TIPs professional development and implementation. If more than the total number of individuals volunteered for the interviews, I would have engaged in a judgment call regarding who will be included and who will be excluded. If less than the desired number of individuals had not volunteered for the interviews, I planned to utilize a snowball strategy. However, neither of these strategies was necessary to employ.

Table 1

Selection Criteria for Purposive Sampling

Instructional staff	Noninstructional staff	School administrators
Must hold a current teaching license in the state of DE Must work at ABC School	Must hold a current license in the state of DE Must work at ABC School	Must hold a current license in the state of DE Must work at ABC School
Participation in the TIPs professional development	Participation in or knowledge of TIPs professional development	Participation in or knowledge of TIPs professional development
Implemented TIPs into teaching practice		Supervise teachers who have implemented TIPs into their teaching practice

Data Collection Procedures

Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the study, I obtained approval from the school district to conduct research among its staff members. Following that approval, I sent an email to the staff of ABC School (see Appendix A), asking for participants in the study. Staff members who expressed interest received the Consent Form for Participation and utilized DocuSign to provide electronic signatures. Upon receipt of the Consent Forms, I contacted each participant and scheduled the interview sessions.

Interviews

Before the semistructured interviews began, I asked participants to complete the Consent Form for Participation (see Appendix B) so that they understood the full scope of the study, could identify any risks or benefits to participation, and knew whom to contact with questions or concerns about the study. Once I collected the Consent Forms from all participants, I scheduled the semistructured interviews via Zoom, based on the participants' availability. I utilized Zoom due to suggested district guidelines and out of convenience. The interview sessions were scheduled for a 60-minute block of time. Participants were informed that the Zoom sessions would be recorded and stored in a password-protected file. Recording the sessions allowed me the opportunity to engage in the interview more fully, rather than frantically attempting to capture every word the participant stated. Recordings of interviews also gave me the benefit of having the original data, rather than a memory constructed in my own mind (Seidman, 2019). This added to the validity of research because the data were first-hand.

Interviews allowed me to not only make sense of one's lived experience but to use language as the mechanism for sense-making (Seidman, 2019). Saldaña and Omasta (2018) outlined how interviews grant the researcher the opportunity to obtain a deeper dive into the data

by structuring interview questions in such a manner to permit the participant to fully describe their experience. By providing a forum for a conversation, rather than a strict question- and answer-based session, semistructured interviews allow a natural flow of follow-up questions, as needed (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018; Stake, 1995; Turner, 2010). This natural flow assisted me in gaining the trust of participants by demonstrating that she was actively listening, and not simply waiting to ask the next question in sequence.

For this study, I asked certain questions of all participants (see Appendix C) that aligned with the three research questions in the study. I used follow-up questions on an as-needed basis. Participants each received a written copy of the questions about one week prior to their scheduled interview. This process allowed for a heightened level of preparedness, further lending the opportunity for follow-up questions to naturally surface. Depending on the participant's role in the school whether as classroom teacher or non-classroom teacher, the questions were slightly different (see Appendix C). This process helped me to firmly develop a well-rounded perspective of the school community. I did not anticipate the need for a second interview but reserved that right if information needed to be clarified and initially explained to participants.

Because IPA is best suited as a data collection method which allows participants the chance to provide their first-person account of a lived experience (Smith et al., 2009), I utilized semistructured interviews. Through questioning, listening, and responding to participants, I gathered a full spectrum of their experiences. With such a rich spectrum of information, I then analyzed the data for essential themes and drew conclusions to the stated research questions.

Transcription

Smith et al. (2009) reminded researchers that transcribing interviews as they are occurring interferes with the essence of phenomenological research and could result in the

omission of essential, pertinent details. As previously stated, I recorded the Zoom sessions from this research study. After I completed the thematic analysis of the data, I destroyed the video files but kept the audio files on a password-protected external hard drive. Within 1 week of each interview, I transcribed the audio files using an online transcription service provided by Transcribe by Wreally. This is a web-based platform that turns stored audio files into transcribed text files. It is in accordance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), ensuring that personal and private health or medical information is kept confidential. When the text files were ready, I reviewed them for accuracy before beginning the process of thematic analysis and coding.

Data Analysis Procedures

Charlick et al. (2016) outlined seven steps in the IPA data analysis process as based on Smith et al. (2009): reading and rereading, initial noting, developing emergent themes, searching for connections across emergent themes, moving to the next case, looking for patterns across cases, and taking interpretations to deeper levels. I utilized this process to ensure that data were thoroughly and accurately analyzed, communicated, and extrapolated to future research concerns.

Reading and Rereading

During this step, I immersed myself in the original data by reviewing the transcriptions and comparing them to the recorded audio files. In addition, I planned to engage in member checking during this process. Member checking allowed for participants to see and review the transcription of their responses (Birt et al., 2016) as well as strengthened the validity and trustworthiness of the data (Yin, 2014). I asked the participants to review the transcription for accuracy and will allow for correction or edits, if participants deemed it necessary.

Initial Noting

During this step, I made any initial notes of interest directly on the transcripts of the audio files. This exercise served as brainstorming and allowed me to explore meanings or associations among transcriptions (Birt et al., 2016). This was not a deep dive into themes or associations, but merely a shallow skimming of noteworthy takeaways.

Developing Emergent Themes

The third step in this process focused on identifying chunks of information and making a first pass at coding themes from the data. Theme coding involves reviewing the transcriptions for similar phrases and patterns of concepts as stated by participants (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). I employed a code-recode procedure, which suggested that after the initial theme coding concludes, I wait for a period of 2 weeks before recoding the same data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Searching for Connections Across Emergent Themes

After identifying emergent themes, I then examined the transcription for any obvious connections among themes, including any that appear clustered together or interconnected. This stage is also referred to as in vivo coding and explores data for connectivity among words or themes (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

Moving to the Next Case

Upon completion of the fourth step, I then moved on to each subsequent transcription file and engaged in the above-stated process for each individual transcription. During this step, I worked diligently to keep an open-mind and allowed for the individuality of participants, rather than assume similarity without fully engaging in the transcriptions (Charlick et al., 2016).

Looking for Patterns Across Cases

Once I completed the steps for the transcriptions and identified themes within each transcription, I then examined the data for existing shared patterns. This required multiple analyses of each transcription and hoped to identify connections among themes. I prioritized patterns, based on the richness of the data and not necessarily the frequency of occurrences (Smith, 2005).

Taking Interpretations to Deeper Levels

The final step in this process allowed me to relate the shared patterns to additional theories. This structure provided me with a process by which she strategically and systematically reviewed each transcript, identified themes, pinpointed commonalities, and utilized theories to help make sense of the themes.

Methods of Establishing Trustworthiness

In addition to adhering to high ethical standards, I also ensured that processes remained in place to establish and ensure trustworthiness. Doing so confirmed that the research process and its findings are credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018; Shenton, 2004). This research study followed guidelines as suggested by previous practitioners (Alase, 2017; Charlick et al., 2016; Noon, 2018; Smith et al., 2009) to ensure these four criteria.

To ensure the credibility and dependability of results of this study, I employed triangulation and member checks. Triangulation involves cross-checking of data using multiple sources to ensure the validity of themes (Candela, 2018) and is an essential component of ensuring the reliability of qualitative research. Researchers can achieve triangulation in a number of ways (Patton, 2002). This particular study utilized analyst triangulation (Denzin, 1978) which

serves to understand the data from multiple perspectives, rather than seek for a consensus. The information collected from different stakeholder groups allowed me to achieve triangulation and further strengthened the credibility of this research. By immersing myself in the context and purpose of the study, I demonstrated the credibility of the study to its participants.

Member checking is a strategy to build credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the data (Birt et al., 2016). This allowed me to collect data during the study and then share it with the participants to provide them the opportunity to ensure accuracy (Birt et al., 2016). I finalized the audio transcripts and sent them to each participant. Participants had the opportunity to submit additional comments, questions, or concerns to me. I had a plan in terms of how to move forward if there were participant edits, but no edits were necessary.

Dependability of a study refers to the stability of data over time and different conditions (Connelly, 2016). To further strengthen the dependability of the study, I ensured that the entire research process was clearly detailed for participants. Furthermore, I informed participants of any foreseen third-party intrusion on the data, given that I used various online platforms throughout the research study (Birt et al., 2016). A clear description of the research process is also helpful for any future researchers who would wish to recreate this study in part or in whole. More broadly, I intended to explain how other researchers could replicate the study in their respective contexts.

Researcher's Role

The role of the researcher in interpretive phenomenological studies is to explore the lived experiences of participants, by providing them the opportunity to explain their first-hand accounts of the phenomenon. A major component of interpretive phenomenology suggests the researcher remains inseparable from any assumptions and preconceptions relating to the research

(Tuohy et al., 2013). Vagle (2018) described how critical it is for researchers to be reflexive and determine how their position to the research has shaped how they view the phenomena. I worked in ABC School as an assistant principal from 2012–2020. During that tenure, I helped to formulate the professional development plan to include TIPs. While I no longer work at ABC School, I am still employed as an assistant principal at another school within the district and have maintained some close contacts with several staff members at ABC School. This positionality may have impacted my ability to remain neutral during the participant selection process, but all efforts were made to select the participants fairly. Specifically, I upheld all ethical standards, confidentiality, and engaged with participants in a professional, friendly manner. Because there was a preexisting relationship with some of the staff members at ABC School, I did not anticipate issues of trustworthiness. I left the school on good terms and was held in positive regard by the staff members there.

Ethical Considerations

At any point in the research process, ethical challenges may occur (Seidman, 2019). In this study, I attended carefully to the ethical care of the participants. To ensure that the research was compliant with all ethical regulations, I first requested approval from ACU's IRB. In obtaining such approval, this required me to abide by principles outlined in the Belmont Report; namely respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). In addition to obtaining IRB approval, I needed approval from the school district. This further solidified that I complied with all ethical considerations and regulations.

To retain anonymity for the school, I changed certain identifying details regarding the school. The identities of the school district, the specified school, and the participants remained

confidential at all times. Participants were each given a pseudonym during the data collection and analysis. Data were stored in a password-protected external hard drive (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018) and locked in a drawer, in my home office. After an acceptable amount of time passes, I will destroy the data. I will follow ACU's guidelines in terms of the length of time to keep data. Throughout the course of the study, I reminded participants that they can withdraw at any time and that no penalty or harm will come their way, should they decide to withdraw their participation. The Consent Form for Participation (see Appendix B) further addressed this issue for participants.

I was prepared to describe the rationale, purpose, and design of phenomenological research studies, as the concept may be unknown to participants. To begin the interviews, I detailed the overarching purpose, research question, and procedure for the study. This process helped to build the social relationship of interviewing that is nurtured and sustained (Seidman, 2019). Because I had a preexisting relationship with some of the staff members at ABC School, all efforts were made not to persuade or coerce participation in the study. Seidman (2019) indicated that participation in an interview study must be on a volunteer basis, rather than a forced situation.

Assumptions

According to Roberts (2010), factors which researchers take for granted are known as assumptions. For this study, I assumed that participants answered questions honestly and from their own personal and professional experience. I also assumed that participants followed the trauma-informed strategies, as presented in the professional development training sessions. An additional assumption is that the sample size was large enough to reach data saturation. Finally, I

assumed that data were collected and stored accurately and appropriately for the scope of this study.

Limitations

As indicated by Roberts (2010), limitations exist in research studies because there are internal and external influences beyond the researcher's control that affect the outcome of the study. This study was limited due to the participant size and its focus on one single school within the school district in northern Delaware. The small number of participants leads to concerns with generalizability. Of particular concern is the range in grade levels. Trauma-informed strategies look different between sixth and 12th grades. Another limiting factor was the degree to which participants implement TIPs in their classroom. The participants themselves were in control of that aspect.

Delimitations

Researchers control delimitations of studies and outline what will be included or excluded from their research (Roberts, 2010). I established the following criteria for inclusion in this research study: teachers must currently hold a valid teaching license in DE; must work at ABC school; and must have participated in TIPs training. Because of these factors, this research study had a very limited pool of candidates from which to select participants. This caused a potential lack of generalization of data analysis to a larger population.

Summary

To explore teachers' perceptions on the sustainability of trauma-informed practices, I engaged in a qualitative, interpretative phenomenological study. This chapter detailed how I planned to execute the research study to answer the overarching research question. The use of semistructured interviews of multiple stakeholder groups, along with member checking provided

valuable information for school systems implementing trauma-informed care into their schools. Continuing this research study, the reader will find a presentation of the results of the study, as well as conclusions and recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 4: Results

To address the rise of childhood trauma in our nation, several school systems utilize a trauma-informed approach as a strategy to create supportive, understanding environments (Shalka, 2022). These approaches are not an intervention, but a way to improve a child's functioning after exposure to trauma (Keesler, 2016; SAMHSA, 2014). The state of Delaware responded to this by declaring the entire state a "trauma-informed state" in 2018 (Office of the Governor, 2018). This declaration launched a formal campaign for various state systems, including schools, to adopt a collective approach to trauma-informed care. Educators received training in brain science, trauma's impact on brain and behavior, and pragmatic strategies to use in their classrooms or school settings. Educators are in the positions of caregivers and this positionality affects the developmental impact on interpersonal relationships with students (Harden et al., 2014).

Research indicates that trauma-informed practices (TIPs) are an impactful tool for educators as well as students (Brunzell et al., 2016; Craig, 2016; Souers & Hall, 2016; Terrasi & de Galarce, 2017). However, current research lacks information on how sustainable teachers feel TIPs are. Therefore, it is challenging to gauge how Delaware educators perceive the sustainability of providing trauma-informed care in their school setting, in addition to the various other tasks they must complete. This qualitative study explored the role of teacher perceptions of the sustainability of the implementation of trauma-informed practices in a 6–12 public school setting, where teachers have received extensive professional development on trauma-informed practices. To achieve that purpose, I utilized an interpretive phenomenological approach to explore the perceptions on sustainability and conducted semistructured interviews on Zoom. A phenomenological study focuses on how individuals experience a phenomenon and what their

perception is based on that experience (Ary et al., 2014). This chapter reviews the findings of the data collected through Zoom interviews with teachers, support staff, and administration representing ABC School. To guide the understanding of this phenomenon, the study addressed three research questions:

RQ1: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in Northern Delaware perceive their preparedness to implement trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?

RQ2: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in Northern Delaware perceive their support in their ongoing implementation of trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?

RQ3: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in Northern Delaware perceive the longer-term sustainability of trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?

This chapter contains a brief overview of the data collection and analysis, followed by a description of the participants; then addresses the development of themes, and the findings for the research questions.

Data Analysis Procedure and Method

Data collection and analysis protocols presented in the previous chapter were followed, as approved by IRB (see Appendix D). I conducted 11 interviews on Zoom, ranging in length from 18–46 minutes. Prior to the Zoom sessions, all participants received, signed, and submitted a consent form. At the conclusion of each interview, I separated the audio and video files from the Zoom recording, deleted the video files, and then utilized the online platform Transcribe by Wreally to transcribe the text from the interviews. To organize data while coding, I used

Dedoose, a computer-assisted software tool designed for organization of large quantities of textual data for qualitative research purposes and then formatted categories and themes onto a Google Sheet to assist with the organization of the coding process. A summary of the data analysis process as suggested by Charlick et al. (2016) is detailed in Table 2.

Table 2

Seven Step Data Analysis Process

Step name	Summary
Reading and Rereading	I reviewed the transcriptions and compared them to the recorded audio files. The participants received their transcriptions and engaged in member checking. All participants responded and there were no edits necessary.
Initial Noting	I made notes of interest directly onto the text transcripts. This step was a brainstorming activity and allowed me to skim for noteworthy takeaways.
Developing Emergent Themes	I identified chunks of information and did a first pass of coding themes from the data. Additionally, I utilized a code-recode procedure and waited two weeks in between recoding the same data set. I coded pertinent data on the Dedoose platform. From the data, 137 excerpts were selected to represent emerging themes.
Searching for Connections Across Emergent Themes Moving to the Next Case	During this step, I examined the transcriptions once again for connections. These were noted in Dedoose and then color coded on the Google Sheet. This step resulted in eight emergent categories. The above step was replicated for each transcription. I remained open-minded and made every effort to allow for individuality of the participants, rather than assume similarity.
Looking for Patterns Across Cases	I conducted multiple analyses of each transcription and identified connections among themes. This allowed me to prioritize patterns.
Taking Interpretations to a Deeper Level	The final step provided me the opportunity to synthesize the information in a strategic and systematic way. I identified themes and pinpointed commonalities.

As indicated in the table above, in order to determine how evidence crossed over addressing multiple themes, I utilized Dedoose and then created a Google sheet for organization. Table 3 provides a sample of the process and how text excerpts in Dedoose were coded. Within the example provided, school leadership was the common thread. This was examined from multiple representations such as buy-in, communication, and accountability. During the entire

coding process, I analyzed these overlapping concepts (such as school leadership) and determined how they aligned with the narrative of the participants' experiences.

Table 3

Interview Analysis Process

Evidence example	Codes	Theme
<p>“Yeah, it really will be dependent on that. I know. Like you know, when I had spoken with CD about whether or not to remain on BLT (building leadership team) because the frustration that I felt that, so the strategies that I was providing in the faculty meetings, there wasn't any accountability then on the admin side.”</p>	<p>Feelings of frustration, lack of accountability from the admin</p>	<p>Administrative accountability</p>
<p>“So, like I got to the point where I had said look like I've been doing this now for 3 years and if you're not going to at least make like one type of focus or hold people accountable, I feel like I'm wasting my breath. So, I'll be honest with you, at the end of this year, I was just kind of, like, well, I kind of felt done. So, I don't know. We'll see what happens with the new principal.”</p>	<p>Need a new perspective from the new school leader; lack of focus or streamlined vision</p>	<p>Clear vision and focus</p>
<p>“I think it depends on who becomes our leader. Becomes our new principal. If it's somebody who is, you know, from, I don't know if it's some, if anybody within the district, I don't know who's applying or not applying but you know, somebody internal that's aware or familiar with this versus an outsider or somebody who's already knows this.”</p>	<p>Questions the new school leadership and if he/she has knowledge of these practices</p>	<p>School leadership knowledge</p>
<p>“You know, this is your leadership... Many of, you know, it doesn't matter whether it's school or sports or your business, you know, you're the person. The people who are at the top, they set the direction again, you know, I feel like the last couple years we've kind of fallen off.”</p>	<p>Leaders set the tone and direction</p>	<p>Vision and direction</p>
<p>“I guess I would say the admin through the different, you know, over the years that ever since we started talking about this, they were pretty open to the idea of self-care and I think that the administrators were always really good about understanding that sometimes teachers just need a break.”</p>	<p>Helpful when the school admin understands and supports</p>	<p>Admin support and knowledge</p>

Evidence example	Codes	Theme
<p>“You go to professional development, you say, alright, this is done in a vacuum. This is in isolation. I don't care about this, I'll be respectful because I care about the presenter, but the reality is it's in one ear out, the other and let me move forward here. I suppose the best way to do that to get that buy-in or again, maybe in great, maybe accountability with the, with, with the leadership, maybe that's maybe when I say accountability, it isn't with the teachers is more, but the leadership which includes teachers, of course too.”</p>	<p>Teacher buy-in comes from admin accountability</p>	<p>Admin accountability</p>
<p>“Personally, I would like to see administrator accountability and I mean that as a teacher for myself, but just have, I mean, I'm trying to find a nice way to say this, like we all know that there are people who don't do things, if they don't think anyone's going to check up on them. And while I say that knowing that I do feel like I'm an expert in my field and I want to be taken seriously and trusted as a professional. I still think if you say that this is part of our strategies, this is my vision for the school, then there needs to be in reinforcements. There needs to be a pop-in that says hey, what do you do that's trauma-informed.”</p>	<p>Need for admin accountability with check-ins for teachers' implementation of TIPs</p>	<p>Admin accountability and follow through; clear vision</p>

With the assistance of Dedoose, I identified 137 excerpts from which eight categories emerged. These categories were: Category 1: professional development (both past and future needs); Category 2: confidence in implementation of strategies; Category 3: awareness of personal trauma; Category 4: school leadership; Category 5: allocation of resources; Category 6: district support and mental health needs; Category 7: ongoing training (and new teacher onboarding); and Category 8: communication needs. To conclude the analysis of the categories, I searched for common responses or phrases across all transcriptions. A discussion of the theme categories as they relate to the research questions follows the description of the participants.

Description of the Participants

Eleven educators agreed to participate in the study, including eight classroom teachers, two support staff members, and one school administrator. Although the research study explored teachers' perceptions, there was value in engaging support staff and administrators. Their collective experiences and opinions provided valuable insight into the phenomenon studied. Participant demographics were not collected during this research study as they were not an integral part of the lived experiences of the educators. Strategically, I did not collect demographics so that the essence of participants' experiences would be the most valuable piece of data. At the time of the interviews, each educator held a valid teaching license in the state of Delaware, worked at ABC school, and had experience with both professional development and implementation of TIPs in their classrooms (or school settings). Each participant was provided with a pseudonym (i.e., Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.) for confidentiality.

Findings for the Research Questions

Three research questions guided this study. The findings for each question are discussed and summarized below. Overarching findings emerged in the data as part of the coding process, and these are presented following the research questions' findings.

Research Question 1 Finding

The first research question addressed teachers' perception on their preparedness to implement TIPs in their classrooms. The perspectives of teachers, support staff, and a school administrator aligned within three categories: professional development, confidence and awareness of strategies, and awareness of personal trauma. The participants indicated that they had all received training but found a varying degree of value in the practical application of the

training. Furthermore, the participants agreed that TIPs are an effective way to engage with students and would appreciate more ongoing training in terms of sustainability.

Professional Development. Overwhelmingly, the participants stated that there was value in learning about the impacts of trauma on brain development and how those impacts manifest into certain behaviors. There was value in the training because it provided participants' explanations as to why certain students behaved in a particular way. Learning about this gave educators essential knowledge about their students and reframed the way many of them interacted with students in their classrooms. Participant 4 stated the following:

If people are aware of understanding and have the knowledge base around trauma-informed practices, why we do that, why they're important—again like some of the brain science, even if it's a little bit of surface level and we are able to establish that mind shift for people to help them, you know, kind of shift and put on that trauma lens that we always talk about look through this different lens. So, you know, even if you can't completely understand, you can be aware and you can have empathy. And I think that the practices can honestly be life-changing for a lot of people to help build that resiliency and those relationships for students and adults.

Participant 3 valued the professional development as a tool for understanding students, “It gives you a deeper understanding of where they're coming from, and it can help you deescalate situations which I think is critical in the environment I'm in specifically because there are visual cues and verbal cues.” Additionally, participant 9 indicated that learning about TIPs changed her outlook on kids' behavior, “When we started trauma informed, I remember it being eye-opening. It was like light bulbs were lit up. It made so much sense, why kids make certain choices and why we respond the way we do.”

Participant 11 detailed how the program was brought to ABC School:

When we started, I remember I was on a special group because I was very interested in it. So, I became involved with the group there. An outside consultant came in and we had an Advanced Practice Group who shared out that information with the rest of the faculty. So, we would have faculty meetings where we would present information and share with the faculty.

Participant 11 also indicated “they (TIPs) just make sense, right? I don’t see any other way to get kids to really buy into what you’re doing in your classroom.” Participant 6 stated, “I think there’s a lot of benefit to learning these. I’ve seen it with many of my students. We’re going to lay this foundation to make sure these kids have a safe place to learn.”

While participants valued the learning experience, there were indications of a lack of ongoing professional development and one participant who did not believe in TIPs as a way to explain behavior. Participant 2 acknowledged that the training was consistently regular for approximately 6 years, but has been sporadic at best more recently, “Our professional development is sadly declining. The district started doing a mandated faculty meeting per month and this took away from building-specific PD needs.” Participants 3 and 7 also referenced the lack of ongoing professional development during the past 3 years and indicated that the district has taken over one faculty meeting per month for their initiatives. Participant 7 was the only participant to indicate there was no value in learning about TIPs:

But as far as looking at it, even with trauma for these kids it's almost to me like it's giving them an excuse for why they act the way they act instead of trying to get him to overcome what kind of trauma has been in their life, and how to deal with it? It just says,

“Oh, you've had trauma. So, you're allowed to act a certain way,” and I just, I don't buy into how they're dealing with it.

Confidence in Implementation of Strategies. The next theme that presented itself during the coding analysis was teachers' confidence level in implementing TIPs. Because of the extensive training, staff members were confident in their ability to both identify strategies as trauma-informed and utilize them in the classroom. Participants indicated that through their professional development, they have been able to incorporate strategies into their daily practice that would not have occurred otherwise. Because there were training and support opportunities, teachers felt comfortable utilizing TIPs.

Participant 3 appreciated how his confidence has grown in relationship building, “I feel like it has helped with engagement. I think that I am approaching students differently. I think being more intentional with like developing relationships as like the foundation of everything that I do has helped.” Participants 3–6, and 8–11 also expressed the importance of relationship building as the foundation for what they do in their classrooms. They credit TIPs as a catalyst for making efforts in this area. In addition to relationship building, Participant 7 outlined how learning these practices gave her confidence outside of the classroom as well, in particular as a parent and as a spouse, “Yeah, I totally feel like I'm a different teacher. Not only did that like change me as an educator, it really changed me even like, personally, in how I engage with my son.”

Participants also compared prior professional development opportunities to that of the TIPs sessions and again, praised how beneficial they were in raising their ability to effectively implement the strategies. Participant 5 stated, “I mean, I've had a lot of professional development background, but learning about trauma and its impacts has shifted my actions in the

classroom.” Furthermore, the participants who are not classroom teachers indicated that they have directly witnessed teachers engaging with students differently than before the professional development on TIPs. Participant 10 detailed how one teacher has completely shifted his personal affect toward students and is now acting by listening rather than reacting, as well as having a willingness to have a discussion with students. Previously, this teacher chose to shut down all student commentary because he felt that he was the authority in the classroom. Based on the TIPs training and according to Participant 10, this teacher’s knowledge of and confidence in delivering TIPs have increased and he has made deeper connections to his students.

Awareness of Personal Trauma. As participants detailed their experience with TIPs, it became evident that staff members utilized the training as a way to understand their own past experiences and make connections to why they reacted in a certain way in situations. This self-awareness is commendable and not fully discussed or outwardly addressed in training sessions. Numerous participants (seven to be exact) felt that they needed more support to process their own personal trauma and the vicarious trauma of working with disadvantaged youth. Participant 4 shared:

Right. I experienced a significant setback during Covid. I had essentially a mental breakdown. I was able to utilize some of the trauma strategies to depersonalize, deescalate, and self-manage. These are tools we have on hand to teach our kids, but they came in handy for me. I’m happy to have had them and can now use this experience when building relationships with kids. Even though this trauma was short-lived, I still acknowledge it as a dark, difficult time in my life. It has helped me to sort of check my own personal affect at times. Like, everyone is going through something. We just don’t always know what it is.

Participant 8 also acknowledged the value of understanding her own trauma as it relates to her interactions with students, “My calming down was understanding me more. Understanding how my trauma affects me. Realizing what my triggers are and then how to respond from there.” Participant 10 suggested a way for staff members to support and encourage one another, rather than expecting folks to work in silos, “But there’s no outreach to that teacher to make sure they can become regulated again; because in turn, if no learning happens when the student is dysregulated, then no teaching happens when a teacher is, right?”

Research Question 2 Finding

The second research question addressed how teachers perceive their support in their ongoing implementation of TIPs in their classrooms. Participants’ perceptions aligned with three themes: school leadership, allocation of resources, and district support. While participants found value in professional development and shared ideas among one another, there was an overwhelming need to have school leaders more engaged with the process. For teachers to be further supported, they identified additional resources as well as clear and regular district support for their initiatives as a need.

School Leadership. Participants indicated that their support of TIPs needs to come from strong and passionate leaders who believe in the value of them. There has been leadership turnover at ABC School and the teachers feel that this inconsistency has had an impact on the support they receive from the administration. Participant 2 indicated, “Whatever system you’re trying to put into place in a school won’t be functional if your leader isn’t passionate about it. The passion behind the theory and practice has to come from the top down.” Participant 6 shared that he feels support needs to come in the form of structure and expectations, “I feel if there’s a strong administrator in the building that can do what they need to do to run the building by

starting off strong in August, things will settle down within a month or two.” Additionally, participants 8, 9, and 10 also shared that their perceptions on support are based on school leadership not prioritizing and following through with TIPs implementation.

While having a strong leader who is knowledgeable, passionate, and understanding of TIPs was an important factor for teachers, they also indicated that support needs to come in the form of accountability. They overwhelmingly indicated that they are not held accountable to utilizing TIPs. They have received professional development, had regular conversations with colleagues, some redesigned their classroom structures and protocols, but they are not held accountable for doing that work. Consequently, they are unsure how viral within the school implementation truly is. There does not appear to be a clearly communicated vision from school leaders in terms of how they should be using TIPs, nor does time exist at faculty meetings or leadership team meetings for discussion of implementation. These sentiments are organized in Table 4.

Table 4*Participants' Statements on Leadership Accountability*

Participant number	Statement provided
2	So, we need to give that support but still have them understand that there is accountability for it as well. So, and I think that's what the staff needs to feel. And if there was something concrete, and I know this sounds silly, but this is the kind of person I would be, I would like a booklet that says, here's our trauma-informed SEL practices, you know, within your own classroom. Here's what it looks like. Here's what it's like to really solidify it in one place and then throughout the year, as we all know, good PD should do cycle through.
5	So, I'd like to see that and that I also like to see some sort of, I'm going to use this word loosely accountability, if you will, for the teachers and the accountability, it's this is probably a little bit more difficult to implement. It's not like you can do a teacher walk-through and then see trauma-informed being implemented at least, not as smoothly as you could like, AVID, for example. But some level of accountability. I don't know how that would look with trauma-informed, but something it's got to be more than take a quiz. Do you remember what you were doing? But you know something that says you are actually implementing this.
7	There because there's no accountability. There's some teachers that do the things and then there's some teachers that don't. I know, it's always difficult to ask people to do one more thing. But when you think about the demographics within ABC School in comparison to the other schools, the other high schools in the, in our district. They just need it the most and so it would be nice if there was some sort of accountability to ensure that there were certain practices, not everything, because we all can't do everything.
9	Personally, I would like to see accountability and I mean that as a teacher for myself, but just have, I mean, I'm trying and find a nice way to say this, like we all know that there are people who don't do things, if they don't think anyone's going to check up on them. And while I say that knowing that I do feel like I'm an expert in my field and I want to be taken seriously and trusted as a professional. I still think if you say that this is part of our strategies, this is my vision for the school, then there needs to be in reinforcements. There needs to be a pop-in that says hey, what do you do that's trauma-informed. And there needs to be check in with PLCs to see what we're doing. It doesn't have to be a long drawn-out plan, but it needs to be, we're going to consistently check in with our students.
11	If the school leadership would add TIPs to their walkthrough tool, just think of the quantifiable data that would provide the leadership team. Then, they could have very meaningful discussions rather than what seems to be thrown together at the last minute. The follow through needs to be regular and leaders should work with teachers to find ways to hold them accountable. In an acceptable and appropriate manner.

Due to the perceived lack of support from school leaders, teachers are left wondering about their individual performance with TIPs. The participants indicated that there are regular administrative walkthroughs to check in on their teaching practice, curricular pace, and student engagement, but wondered how supported they could feel if TIPs surfaced as an essential component to that walkthrough tool. Overall, there is support from leadership in that the professional development on TIPs was permitted, but staff need to know that there is an ongoing commitment to their utilization of these practices.

Allocation of Resources. Further analysis of RQ2 elicited two main resources as supports for teachers: time and human resources. In reference to time, the eight teachers all indicated that they have spent time, formally and informally, discussing trauma-informed strategies with their colleagues. Additionally, they indicated that they have asked for assistance with a student during these meetings. Their perception of support in this case comes from having time to meet, discuss, and process with one another. In terms of how the entire faculty engages with TIPs and their implementation, the time during faculty meetings has diminished. Five participants indicated that in the previous 6 school years there had been regular time allotted at each meeting (at least once per month). However, in the past 2 years the district has taken over one meeting per month and the building leadership team had not made TIPs a regular part of their monthly meetings. This has given these teachers the sense that their trauma work is not important and left them wondering where they go from here. Participant 11 shared:

We were in the middle of it, and when we try to give advice on what to do or to try to help it, it didn't seem to ever get listened to, you know, when we had our PLCs or whatever and something would come up, it's like, "Okay I'm trying this, I'm trying that." And when it didn't work, we try to go further and it just never went anywhere.

Participant 6 stated that while he and two other colleagues in his hallway discuss strategies informally, there is no current mechanism in place for the whole staff to engage with one another.

Together with time as a resource, six participants suggested that additional human resources (e.g., counselors, social workers, etc.) in the building helped with their perception of support, but they could use additional staff to carry the load. Two of those six participants recommended a new position whose responsibilities would include: assisting staff members with implementation of things such as TIPS, SEL, and other school wide MTSS (multitiered system of supports) efforts. They suggested this new role be an instructional coach, but not necessarily content-specific; rather they would be the go-to person for non-curricular strategies. Optimally, this role would also have time to be present during faculty meetings and building leadership team meetings. Participant 8 stated,

Ideally this person could sit in our PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) and talk with us because I don't know if having conversations in the big setting is really getting it done. It would be nice if someone were our trauma person.

Participants 3, 8, and 11 indicated that the addition of school social workers has created the ability for them to case manage students and to share pertinent information with teachers, as needed. The teachers felt this supports school counselors in their efforts and essentially shares the load, freeing them up to assist other students more regularly. Participant 3 detailed an incident where the school counselor had a line of students outside of her office and was incapable of servicing all of their needs within the time necessary. If there were additional support staff members and a clear delineation of which staff member handles certain situations, participant 3 perceives this as helpful for the counseling staff.

District Support and Mental Health Needs. Aligning with the support from the building leadership, teachers perceive the district support as necessary for them to feel supported in this endeavor. The district support could be the allocation of time or human resources, as detailed above. Additionally, the participants are united in that they need additional support for their own mental health and well-being. Participant 4 detailed a visit from the human resources director during a TIPs faculty meeting. She recalled the following:

The HR director passed out little pieces of paper. And just asked them [the staff] to write yes or no on it and put it in a box. And said if we could get somebody, a mental health professional, to come to the school to provide some mental health support, you know, like would you be interested? Yes or no. And it was sixty percent of the staff that said yes. But then they couldn't find anybody that would come in. So, like, I feel like that's kind of like the typical cycle. So, it's like it's there, we talk about it, we want to support each other, self-care, and mental health and then it just gets bogged down.

Participant 1 indicated that he has seen more teachers taking a day off for mental health, both as an impulsive absence and a planned one. He stated, “You refocus and clear your head or just need to get away from this element for a day. Improvements need to be made in how we can better serve our staff and their well-being.” Five participants indicated that they experience a degree of vicarious trauma, whereby they take on some of the stress of their students, and this has had an impact on their personal well-being. This further strengthens the need, according to them, for staff mental health support.

In addition to support for their own mental health, participant responses elicited the need for the district to take an active role in streamlining their efforts and communicating their vision to schools. Teachers feel overextended and are pressured to stay on pace with their curriculum

guides, but also are expected to deliver lessons that teach school-wide expectations, are trauma-informed, and are attuned to the social and emotional needs of the learners. Participant 3 stated, “The district wants to do 10 different things well and that is unsustainable for us teachers. If we’re going to do trauma-informed, let’s just be supported with that initiative.” Participant 8 strengthened this sentiment by stating, “It’d be nice if we took it more seriously. I feel like at district office, we have our hands in too many pots and the focus just isn’t there. Trauma of our students is real. We need help.” When asked about the type of support needed to effectively implement TIPs, participant 7 stated, “So I guess it’s appropriate professional development. But it honestly, like it really should be an overarching theme from the district and not just the building.”

Research Question 3 Finding

The third and final research question in this study addressed the perception of the longer-term sustainability of TIPs. This question allowed participants the opportunity to suggest their needs for further sustaining or integrating TIPs into their classroom environments. Two final themes surfaced during the analysis of the responses: ongoing training and communication. Participants indicated that training efforts need to be streamlined and potentially include students and families and that communication from all aspects needs to be clear.

Ongoing Training. All of the participants revealed that training is a necessity for them to sustain TIPs implementation for the long haul. The teacher participants all felt that the training they received was practical, but needed things to be leveled up, to better support their needs. Five of the teachers felt that the professional development sessions had not included new information in the past 3 years; two teachers shared that they have not learned anything new; and two teachers stated that they are not sure how many staff are continuing to implement TIPs. The

support staff members and the school administrator also indicated how crucial ongoing training and support is. Participant 1 stated, “This is a serious priority that we need to make sure it’s implemented. And for us at the school level, it has to be more consistent than once a month.”

Participant 10 shared:

Like when you’re talking about new curriculum in regular meetings, why aren’t you talking about trauma practices? Why doesn’t the district infuse that in these meetings? I’m not sure right now what the district’s “guiding light” is and teachers can feel that lack of vision and direction.

All participants mentioned that ongoing, meaningful, and intentional professional development is needed for them to sustain implementation of TIPs. All but one of the teacher participants stated they would like to take their implementation to the next level but feel like that have reached a stagnant place due to lack of training.

While there is benefit in ongoing training for existing staff members, seven participants identified the need for new teachers to receive this training as part of their district onboarding process with human resources. Three of the teachers suggested that the training align with the district’s vision and then be supported at the school level by their efforts. Their feelings were that if new teachers see the action plan in place and learn from their first days within the district what is expected of them, they may be more knowledgeable in the long run. Participant 4 stated,

And then I think another big part of it is really like onboarding when districts, when you get new teachers at the district level or the building level, I think there needs to be like continual ongoing training for people who are coming in.

One participant even posited that colleges and universities should redesign their teacher preparation programs to include things like TIPs in their required course load.

Finally, in addition to ongoing training for staff members, two participants suggested that students and families receive education and support on the impacts of trauma on brain development and behavior. They recognize this is a delicate situation because parents/guardians could feel attacked as if something were their fault; but the participants do feel that some sort of community education or outreach could help to correct that perception. They expressed the potential for this to help with longer-term sustainability if everyone knew the same language and how to support when students exhibited certain behaviors. Participant 11 stated, “Some kind of community support, like clear identified community supports for families. And I think that’s an important piece that we kind of miss sometimes.” Participant 10 indicated, “I think there needs to be more instruction with the kids. We know about the brain science, but I’m not sure we’re imparting that knowledge to the kids; like the specific knowledge.”

Communication. This theme is similar to the “District Support” discussed above. Six participants indicated that in addition to the district having a clearly communicated vision, there also needs to be clear and constant communication from the state to districts and schools. Five participants were not even aware that the state of Delaware is “trauma-informed” as declared by the Governor in 2018. They were not aware of the ongoing work to infuse TIPs into schools. For those who did know about the state-level workgroups, they hope for regular, ongoing communication in terms of how their curricular area can best be supported by TIPs’ implementation. Essentially, those participants suggested that the state continue work in this field and infuse pedagogical strategies with support strategies in a way to naturally marry the two. Their perceptions are that they have too many inputs coming at them and have a challenging time sifting through them all in a meaningful way. They feel that a more natural integration of support strategies is needed, rather than a reactive approach when a student appears to be going through a

challenging time. Three participants indicated that if something is not done to mitigate the numerous inputs for teachers, then things will fall to the wayside and wonder what kind of impact this will have on students.

In alignment with the previously mentioned notion of school leadership, four participants referenced the need for a clearly articulated school vision that supports the district's strategic plan. These participants felt that if the district did not make things a priority and expressly state them as such, then there will in turn be little support provided to schools who wish to pursue something outside of the district's plan. Participant 9 stated:

The district can't be afraid of spending some money. And that's I think from like a global perspective. Just thinking bigger than just ABC School, right. There has to be a commitment to alright, well we're actually going to invest funds in making this happen because, you know, you can say "This is great," but then just, "good luck. Just do it." Yeah. And sometimes you need people who are experts or just more people who can listen.

Participant 5 also indicated that district support is needed in terms of a clear vision and an articulated action plan, "So first and foremost, you're going to need the district leadership, involvement, and support, and then, secondly, you'll need to have some sort of very organized plan, professional development plan to implement this." Five participants agreed that if the district had an action plan for a way to interweave support strategies, they could see the strategies lasting for longer than 3 to 5 years. Otherwise, these participants feel that support strategies, although necessary, will be a thing of the past.

Overarching Findings

The two most recurrent themes throughout the interviews were school leadership and the need for a training plan (both for new and returning teachers). Each of the 11 participants indicated at some point during their interview sessions that school leadership must have a clearly articulated vision for the school and must be willing to support teachers in their endeavors to deliver TIPs. Teachers in this study perceive TIPs as valuable and have noticed an improvement in their ability to build relationships with students, but do not always perceive that they have support from administration. There is a perceived lack of accountability and teachers do not know if what they are doing is “correct” or “what is expected.” If TIPs are expected to be sustained for the longer-term, teachers in this study indicate that they need more constructive, actionable feedback from their school leaders. Otherwise, they feel like they are doing additional work, without acknowledgement of its benefits or suggestions for improvement. Moreover, according to the participants, school leaders need to place value on a minimalistic approach to things and encourage school districts to compress the ancillary things, outside of teachers’ curriculum to teach.

In addition to school leadership, the participants in this study suggested that in order to sustain TIPs for the long-term, teacher training is the key to having the knowledge, confidence, and support to continue implementing TIPs. They were appreciative of the training they had previously received but were concerned about the staff turnover rate because new staff members were not provided with an opportunity to learn about TIPs. There was a feeling that when new teachers are on-boarded at the district, they should engage in sessions on TIPs. Then at the school level, teacher groups can utilize scheduled time to model, discuss, and strategize with one

another. The participants perceived this as a critically missing piece in the long-term sustainability.

Summary

Chapter 4 explored the data findings and began with an overview of the collection and analysis procedures. After describing the participants, I detailed the emergent themes as they related to each of the research questions. The eight major themes were: professional development, confidence of strategy implementation, awareness of personal trauma, school leadership, allocation of resources, district support, ongoing training (and ongoing professional development), and communication needs.

The first research question revealed that participants felt their time in professional development sessions for TIPs was valuable and that their confidence level increased in utilizing the strategies within their classroom settings. Additionally, participants indicated that although there were numerous training courses at the onset of the program adoption, ongoing training has been sparse in the past 3 years. Participants also accredited this training as helping them unpack personal trauma they have experienced but suggested that more support may need to be given. The second research question elicited that school leadership plays a significant role in their perception of feeling supported. Leaders should have a clear vision of the programmatic implementation, as well as a structure to hold teachers accountable. The participants overwhelmingly felt that while school leaders supported their work, they did not support the sustainability of TIPs. Furthermore, this question suggested that in order for teachers to feel more supported, there needs to be a clear allocation of resources (both time and human), and that the district needs to be supportive of those allocations at building levels. Finally, the third research question suggested that for longer-term sustainability, the needs are: ongoing training,

communication among state, district, and school officials, and a possible consideration to educate students and families around trauma and its impact on brain and behavior. Chapter 5 presents an in-depth discussion of these findings, relates them to literature, and suggests topics for future research studies.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

The governor of the state of Delaware (2018) declared the state an official “Trauma Informed State.” This declaration added new programming for schools, a new position at the state department of education, and multiple small workgroups state-wide. These groups were tasked with creating a crosswalk for the various curricular areas and grade band configurations the state serves so that instructional practices and school supports would include a trauma-informed approach (Office of the Governor, 2018). Since the declaration, school districts have implemented programming and engaged in professional development in their efforts to understand the impact trauma has on brain development, emotional regulation, and readiness to learn. I worked in one of the school districts engaging in this work. At the onset, it became clear that there were numerous benefits to suggest the positive outcomes for students while using TIPs, but limited knowledge indicated how sustainable TIPs were and which supports teachers needed in their ongoing implementation of these practices. I utilized my personal experiences with TIPs and engaged in the present research study to determine teacher perceptions at this Delaware school on the sustainability of the implementation of TIPs.

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore teachers’ perceptions on the sustainability of trauma-informed practices in their school in northern Delaware. Through 11 semistructured interviews, during which each participant answered the same open-ended questions, participants’ lived experiences helped describe both how teachers feel about the longer-term sustainability and the need for that sustainability. Three research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in Northern Delaware perceive their preparedness to implement trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?

RQ2: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in Northern Delaware perceive their support in their ongoing implementation of trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?

RQ3: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in Northern Delaware perceive the longer-term sustainability of trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?

Chapter 4 presented the results of the study and evidenced how the themes were linked to each research question. Those themes are professional development; confidence in implementation of strategies; awareness of personal trauma; school leadership; allocation of resources; district support and mental health needs; ongoing training; and communication needs. Chapter 5 concludes this dissertation and contains a discussion of each theme relative to previous literature. Additionally, there is a brief discussion on the findings of the study relative to the guiding conceptual framework of this study. Following this discussion, the reader will find this study's limitations. To conclude this chapter, I discuss implications and recommendations for future research studies and make recommendations for pragmatic applications.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Past Literature

As previously stated, TIPs are an effective way to engage with students and have benefits for the school community. Teachers in this study suggested how to improve upon this practice and discussed a variety of thematic strategies in an effort to sustain the longer-term

implementation of TIPs in their northern Delaware school. Findings from this study were consistent with findings in relation to past literature.

Professional Development and Ongoing Training

For discussion purposes and relevancy to existing research, I combined the themes of professional development and ongoing training. There is a clear overlap among these themes. For the sake of the following discussion, professional development will refer to training sessions or modules in which teachers participate to learn about or improve a particular educational area; ongoing training will refer to the intentional plan for sustaining teachers' professional development needs.

Professional development of teachers refers to teachers learning and transforming their knowledge into practice for student growth or improvement (Avalos, 2011). Professional development provides teachers and school staff with an opportunity to continually improve their practice. Oftentimes, professional development time is embedded into school district's yearly calendars, demonstrating the importance districts place on the growth of their employees. Professional development is the most used technique for impacting teacher change in education (Guskey, 2002). The higher the quality of the professional development, the better teaching practices become (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Furthermore, the more active, collaborative, and ongoing professional development is, the higher the engagement from teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Existing research indicates that high-quality professional development opportunities are ongoing, encourage collaboration among staff, and are job-embedded (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Cranton (2002) suggested that professional learning occurs best in a balanced environment where participants feel safe, supported, and empowered. The findings of this study

align with existing research. Participants found value in learning about trauma, its impact on brain and behavior, and how exposure to trauma manifests in the school setting. Additionally, participants valued the job-embedded practical knowledge this professional development afforded them. They felt a greater sense of understanding about their students and learned how to adjust their personal interactions with students in a way that was more supportive and proactive, rather than reactive.

The teachers in this study appreciated the time the district gave them to work on these strategies but stated that their opportunities have decreased over the past few years. Participants stated that there is a need for an ongoing training in reference to continuing TIPs implementation and that the school and district need to shift the way their professional development is delivered. Existing research indicates that optimal professional development should include (a) a connection between the professional development and what the teachers are being asked to do; (b) a continuous cycle of interacting with multiple complex factors; (c) allow staff members to work in communities to further reflect, discuss, and engage with others; and (d) cater to what the teachers need in specific buildings (Looi et al., 2018).

Teacher professional development generally focuses on short-term workshops or presentations and has little regard to long-term practical applications (Sariyildiz, 2017). Additionally, criticisms of professional development indicate that teachers' experiences and opinions are not considered, and the sessions are often conducted by individuals outside of the school context (Aminudin, 2012). The findings of the present research study align with this research. Participants agreed that there does not seem to be a longer-term plan for their continued professional development and growth in TIPs, nor does there seem to be a framework in place for how new teachers will learn these essential strategies. Furthermore, teachers in the study

suggested appreciation for learning from one another and would like more opportunities to engage in staff-to-staff sessions.

Williams (2023) posited that school districts planning to implement trauma-informed care should conduct professional development for all staff members, have a plan for new staff members, and continually revisit the ongoing needs within their buildings. This was confirmed by the participants in the present research study. Their perceptions of the sustainability of TIPs indicated that a clearly articulated plan for the continuation of their growth, as well as new staff member's knowledge and growth in TIPs is a necessary facet. The teachers perceived that all staff members should be trained, including secretarial staff, cafeteria and custodial workers, and bus drivers. All adults who have interactions with children can benefit from learning TIPs, according to the participants of this study. The teachers suggested that as things change either educationally or nationally/globally, they need to be able to support their students. Teachers mentioned how challenging it was for the post COVID-19 pandemic and they needed to have more training on how to support students as they returned into the building. Responses to trauma must be understood and addressed in context, changing and growing as situations occur in the world (SAMHSA, 2014). Giboney Wall (2022) indicated that post COVID-19, schools need school-wide professional learning and skill building in providing trauma-informed care to students.

Confidence in Implementation of Strategies

Teacher confidence, awareness, and self-efficacy are important factors for schools to consider as a lack of these things has been associated with teacher burnout (Pas et al., 2012; Zee & Koomen, 2016). Graham et al. (2001) defined self-efficacy as "teachers' confidence that they can perform actions that lead to student learning" (p. 178). Teachers' lived experiences play a

role in how confident they are in the tasks they are asked to perform (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Experiences that can increase a teacher's confidence and self-efficacy are essential to the educational landscape.

Bandura (1997) suggested that there are four sources contributing to a learner's ability to succeed: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and social influences, and physiological and affective states. Bradley et al. (2017) indicated that these four sources are a valuable appraisal of how the learner will either ultimately pursue or avoid the task. These sources are viable for all ages of the learner (Bandura, 1997). The findings of this research study align with and support the four sources in Bandura's (1997) research. Participants indicated that because of their participation in the training, their knowledge base increased, providing them opportunities to have these mastery experiences. While none of the participants deemed him- or herself as an expert, they all iterated that their confidence level increased because they knew how and when to utilize certain strategies.

Participants additionally indicated that the ability to interact with one another to discuss and reflect was valuable. This vicarious experience of living it with and through another person confirmed their belief in the value of TIPs utilization. This interaction with other staff members also provided Bandura's (1997) third source of verbal persuasion and social influences. Teachers indicated that learning from each other also gave new context to relationship building and aided in their efforts to engage with students, with whom they would have had challenges otherwise. By participating in the professional development sessions, teachers also indicated that they learned more about themselves and how their past experiences play a role in their overall affective state with students. Through learning the science behind the strategies and learning about themselves, teachers in this study have chosen to pursue the task of TIPs implementation.

Turnbull (2002) suggested that the more teachers believe in the value of a change initiative, the more motivated they are to commit to sustaining the initiative. Yoon (2016) concluded that this type of teacher “buy in” for school initiatives is a critical component for student success. The findings of this study indicated that because teachers saw value in implementing TIPs, they were committed to continuing their learning. However, due to the lack of direction or full support from school and district leaders, their perceptions suggested that TIPs would not be sustainable.

Awareness of Personal Trauma and Need for Mental Health Supports

After reviewing relevant literature and for the sake of discussion purposes, I combined two themes: awareness of personal trauma and the need for mental health supports. Teaching has long been known as a “helping profession,” yet is regularly ranked as one of the most stressful jobs (Johnson et al., 2005). Adding to that stress level is the fact that childhood and adolescent trauma is on the rise, with approximately 50-60% of children having experienced some sort of adverse or traumatic childhood experience in their first 18 years of life (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2019b). The educational impact of trauma to children is evident. Knowing how significant a role childhood trauma plays in the behavioral, socioemotional, and academic realms, it is also equally important to understand how an adult’s lived trauma impacts their daily interactions.

Ormiston et al. (2022) posited that it is critical to continue monitoring and supporting teachers who have experienced trauma themselves. Participants in this present research study indicated that through the acquisition of knowledge about trauma, their personal life experiences began to play a role in their professional life. They expressed value in learning that some of their past behaviors were due to what had happened to them and not necessarily as a knee-jerk

reaction to something at that precise moment. Participants described both the impact their experiences have had on the behaviors they exhibit and how taking on the trauma or stresses of their students has impacted them. This vicarious stress has been coined “compassion fatigue” by Figley (2002). Figley (2002) concluded that individuals in a service industry tend to internalize the trauma of their clients, therefore creating a sense of exhaustion (fatigue) among practitioners.

Because teachers carry both personal and vicarious trauma, the need for mental health support for educators is strong (Ormiston et al., 2022). Teachers are reportedly detailing a higher degree of work-related stress and an inability to find a work-life balance (Education Support Partnership [ESP], 2020). It is understandable how a high degree of stress could lead to teacher burnout and ultimately a teacher shortage. The teacher and support staff participants in this particular research study overwhelmingly found that there needs to be some sort of regular support provided by the school for them. Doan et al. (2023) suggested that slightly more than 50% of teachers feel that the mental health support provided by their districts were adequate. According to the participants in the present research study, this is not in the form of health insurance or copays, but intentional care provided to them by the individuals with whom they interact on a regular basis. Providing the right type of support would help the teachers in this study to feel seen, heard, and valued. Those feelings could ultimately impact their teaching practice in a positive way. As one of the participants indicated, students cannot learn from a dysregulated teacher. Harding et al. (2019) suggested that teacher mental well-being has a relationship with student mental well-being. Additionally, poor mental well-being and depressive symptoms are associated with teachers’ underperformance at work (Kidger et al., 2016).

School Leadership

School leaders set the tone of their entire school community. Their passion and commitment to students, teachers, and community stakeholders are vital components to achieving success. They are critical gatekeepers to employee satisfaction (Hobfoll et al., 2018) and their actions in the realm of decision-making, leadership style, and communication shape how employees perform over time (Preacher, 2018). Effective school leaders engage in the following behaviors: leading vision and culture, defining high expectations, rewarding high academics and behaviors, supporting protective relationships, and building the capacity for leadership among employees (Petty et al., 2012). Hallinger (2018) posited that true principal leadership results from how the principal interacts with the institution and community to impact school climate and student learning. The research is clear on the impact a school leader has on his or her school.

The present research study implied that school leaders needed to engage more in the work with the teachers. The teachers perceived their training valuable but were unsure how the administration felt they were implementing the strategies. There appeared to be no sort of accountability check by school leaders. There was time allotted during faculty meetings, but no intentional fidelity checks to ensure teachers were utilizing certain strategies. If the school leaders had a sense of clear vision and commitment to TIPs, as suggested by Petty et al. (2012), the participants agree that their level of engagement with TIPs would increase. Without this accountability, teachers in this study perceive that TIPs will not be sustainable.

Among the many responsibilities school leaders have, they also need to gather and analyze data for two purposes: to determine specific needs within their schools and to determine the value of existing programs (Stronge & Xu, 2021). School principals' positions are vital to

serving as the catalyst for change in areas of sustained school improvement (González-Falcón et al., 2020). The participants in the present research study supported these claims by indicating their desire for a data collection tool that would measure how well they are implementing TIPs. Without this knowledge, the teachers perceive what they are doing as “good enough” or “correct.” The participants claimed their school administration supported their initiatives to begin TIPs training, but that there has been a recent decline in the frequency of ongoing training. They indicated that this is in part due to the principal turnover they have experienced, and they hope for a forward-thinking new school leader who will know how to clearly share his or her vision and operationalize that plan. Forward-thinking school leaders recognize how significant it is to build a shared vision and create high-performing expectations (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Kearney & Herrington, 2010).

Allocation of Resources and District Support

Once more, I combined two themes for the sake of discussion purposes. After reviewing relevant literature, it became evident that there is a clear relationship between the two themes. Lynch (2012) identified three categories of concern for school leaders and district policymakers: money, human capital, and time. These categories are interconnected, and each affects the other (Lynch, 2012). The findings of this study align with Lynch’s work. Participants indicated the need for both additional personnel to assist with the fidelity of implementation and the time to continue doing the work in a meaningful, productive way. Again, the participants in this study expressed value in TIPs, but also indicated there is support needed from the district level in their efforts to sustain the implementation.

An additional finding of this study revealed that the school district’s decision makers and school leadership needed to align their resource allocation to better serve the needs and

population of the school. Teachers expressed concern that schools are not treated fairly and because their school has a greater need than others in the district, their perception is that the district needs to align their support accordingly. School districts need to carefully examine whether their resources match any existing strategic plan or academic priorities (Roza et al., 2008). There are multiple studies suggesting a connection between lack of appropriate resource allocation and a higher degree of teacher attrition (Boyd et al., 2011; Clotfelter et al., 2004; Hanushek et al., 2004; Johnson et al., 2012; Ladd, 2012). Teachers in this particular research study expressed their concern with teacher turnover, although did not correlate it directly to the structure of resource allocation. However, it was an important component to their perception of the long-term sustainability of TIPs. Sustainable change must be supported by policymakers, otherwise the efforts can be thwarted by other factors (Lewis, 2023).

Communication

Regardless of district or school size, it is crucial to develop a communications plan and to revisit the plan on an ongoing basis (Hanover Research, 2018). Oftentimes, the success of an organization depends on how information is exchanged and coordinated, exposing the need for a clear communication plan (Downs & Adrian, 2004). Findings from this research study support the research in that participants expressed their frustration with a lack of clear communication from their school district. The participants would like to see regular communication from the district in support of their efforts with TIPs as well as an increase in communication from the state to the district. With the suggested lack of communication between these entities, participants were left feeling unsupported and unaware of their next steps. They expressed frustration that the state of Delaware is relatively small, yet they did not know of the statewide initiatives in the trauma-informed care realm.

Schools represent an interesting paradox in that they are expected to be both institutions of stability for staff and students, but also ones where continuous growth and improvement occur (Lewis, 2023). This continuous growth is necessary, but without communication of clearly identified needs for improvement, action plans for improvement, and efforts for sustained organizational change, educators are unsure of their role in those efforts. The participants in this study understand the value of TIPs, but have not received any indication from their school, district, or state leaders in terms of the future of trauma-informed care in Delaware. Until a clearly articulated plan is in place, they indicate they will continue to wonder about the longer-term sustainability of TIPs implementation. Understanding the working relationships among all educational stakeholders is critical for successful communication of policy, procedures, and expectations (Myende, 2018). Educators in the present study agree that these interconnected relationships need to be explored, so they feel supported in their efforts to provide proactive strategies with their students.

Findings Relative to Conceptual Framework

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory influenced this study. This theory specifies that all human development and behavior are products of multiple interacting systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979). The findings in this study aligned with the theory, validating the research and providing a variety of additional reinforcements to the premises of the theory. Bronfenbrenner (1979) believed that as one goes through the human development cycle, there are reciprocal interactions between five systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. These systems are interconnected, and the theory relies on an intricate balance of the interrelated systems. While Bronfenbrenner's theory aims at helping understand the relationship of the many systems during one's development, it also connects the various systems

with which educators interact. The following discussion details this relationship and connects it to the context of this study. As it relates to the context of this study, I applied the premises of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory to the educators in this study to detail how their movement through and continual interactions with the systems impacted their perceptions on the sustainability of TIPS. Table 5 summarizes each level, provides both general and specific examples, and aligns each system to the themes in the research.

Table 5

Summary of Ecological Influences Aligned to This Research Study

Level of ecological system	Meaning/General example	Specific examples in the context of this research study	Alignment to themes
Microsystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Everything that exists within the educator's immediate environment including peer relationships and personal working space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness of self Interaction of staff with one another in terms of how they support and learn from one another, and incorporate TIPS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confidence and knowledge of strategy implementation Awareness of personal trauma
Mesosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expectations [of self and others] Knowledge base in a skillset 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Application of the TIPS as learned in professional development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional development Ongoing training
Exosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutional policy Larger forces that influence individuals to engage in professional requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School-based training Funding allocation on the building level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School leadership Ongoing training
Macrosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources embedded into other systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What type of patterns, if any, exists between school leaders, district support, and allocation of resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School leadership Allocation of resources District support
Chronosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes over the progression of one's educational career Things that happen circuitously outside of the teacher's control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State decisions to adopt certain educational practices How those practices become embedded at the school level How that evolves over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocation of resources Communication Ongoing training

When considering the three research questions and their relationship to this theory, research question one focused on how teachers perceived their preparedness to implement TIPs. This sense of preparedness falls into a balance between the micro- and mesosystem. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the microsystem contains all of the events and interactive associations experienced by a person and the mesosystem encompasses these various associations. The educator's classrooms, personal content area, and experience are their microsystems during their time at school and how they decide to implement TIPs is within their control. The mesosystem encompasses their numerous interactions with students and other staff members, as well as the knowledge they received during the professional development sessions.

Research question two asked how teachers were supported in their implementation. This question strikes the balance between the meso- and exosystem because they are processing the information that the school has required of them and interacting with numerous stakeholders in the school community. How deeply they choose to implement the strategies is completely up to the teacher since there is no sense of accountability from the school leadership team. Numerous research participants discussed this concern during the interviews. School leadership and the suggested need for accountability is impacted by the exosystem. This system provides the linkage between two or more systems/settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and does not directly include the educator, but could have indirect impacts to the educator. It includes the school leadership, their vision, and how that aligns with the larger vision of the school district. All of these elements have an indirect effect on teachers and their micro- and mesosystems. Participants agreed that school leadership and district leadership should have a clearly articulated vision and then help school teams to align their individual needs to the overall goals of the district.

Finally, research question three questioned how teachers felt about the longer-term sustainability of TIPs. This sustainability is balanced between the macro- and chronosystem. Both of these systems are grounded in outside forces such as state or national education policy and political or economic factors. Bronfenbrenner (1979) indicated that this chronosystem will change throughout one's life. In this context, the progression of how sustainable TIPs are will change depending on external factors such as district/state/national support and how those entities choose to communicate this support to teachers. Again, the indirect impact to teachers is dependent upon these external forces coming together to clearly articulate how things will progress or change.

Limitations

There were a few limitations present in this study. The first limitation was the participant size and narrow focus on one school. As such, it is difficult to generalize the transferability of results to other school settings. The 11 participants in this study may not necessarily represent the perceptions and experiences of other Delaware educators or educators across the nation. A second limitation was the degree to which teachers implemented TIPs into their classrooms. The teachers controlled this, so I did not know how well or often each individual teacher implemented TIPs.

A final limitation was the mode of the interviews. Because they were conducted via Zoom, the proximity of face-to-face interviews was absent. Seitz (2016) indicated that face-to-face interviews occur more naturally because they are more personal in nature and individuals can react to body language and nonverbal cues. I used Zoom as the platform based on district guidance and recommendations, and also out of convenience for the participants.

Implications and Recommendations for Further Research

The implications presented in this study are important to the field of education because students are overwhelmingly exposed to trauma, negatively impacting their ability to function in school (Morton & Berardi, 2018; Porche et al., 2016; Ridgard et al., 2015). The findings of the present research indicate that there is a need for schools to continue implementing trauma-informed practices, but that there is more to be done in terms of how teachers are supported in the long-term sustainability of TIPs. This study indicated that school leadership, ongoing professional development, and communication are strong needs for long-term sustainability. This study examined 11 educators' perceptions on the sustainability of the implementation of trauma-informed practices in their Delaware school. Although the responses from the interviews were significant for this study's findings, further research should be conducted with more participants to increase and strengthen the validity of the study results. Because the state of Delaware is a "trauma-informed state," I recommend conducting a similar study with teachers across the state of Delaware from urban, rural, and suburban areas to compare their perceived experiences with those from ABC School. The present study could be replicated but should include a larger population of Delaware educators.

In addition to teachers across the state of Delaware, future research is needed on a national scale from school systems who continue to implement TIPs into their daily engagement with students. Studies utilizing quantitative methodology would help to numerically assign perceptions. A study could consider surveying staff members about their perceptions pre- and postdelivery of TIPs. This would be valuable in determining how and where both national and local funds could be allocated. Research studies would not have to be limited to TIPs implementation but could include staff perceptions on things like: TIPs, Restorative Justice, SEL

(Social and Emotional Learning), or a variety of other programming that addresses the social, mental, and emotional well-being of students. How these programs and strategies align with curricular areas would be valuable to explore, so that teachers can see a streamlined effect, rather than teaching these skills in isolation from their content.

Moreover, further research is needed in the area of teacher preparation programs and how well they prepare educators for the real obstacles in the classroom. Outside of learning child/adolescent development and psychology, the content area, and pedagogical skills in teacher preparation programs, it is suggested that universities begin infusing things like trauma-informed care, social and emotional learning, or multi-tiered systems of supports into their educational programming. Future studies should consider how well college and university programs prepare teachers for the myriad of tasks they actually face during their teaching tenure. It would be interesting to uncover whether or not teacher preparation programs have begun to include many of these extraneous, but necessary topics.

Finally, I suggest that future research explore school communities where a true wrap-around approach exists. This research study pointed at the need for both student and family education on the impacts of trauma and how this knowledge could lead to a shared support of one another, in a true community setting. This study did not specifically focus on the interactions between school and home and if there had been any indication of perceived benefits to families due to TIPs implementation. Future studies could be framed around the impacts in communities where students, families, and community outreach centers/supports learn about the impacts of trauma in a way the educators gained knowledge. Additionally, research could focus on the actual supports necessary to outreach to families in need and how those supports have impacted family dynamics.

Recommendations for Practical Applications

In addition to the suggested future research topics above, there are recommendations for practical application of the findings of the present study. As previously stated and discussed in Chapter 4, the participants indicated that school leadership should develop an accountability check for their TIPs implementation. Although like other instructional strategies, the degree to which each teacher utilizes or implements is different, if the expectation to use them exists, teachers in this study feel that a more concerted effort will be made by staff members. According to the participants, they need a school leader who not only believes in the value of TIPs, but also supports them in their efforts to implement them. This could come in various forms: structured, purposeful time for teachers to meet to discuss students and strategies, ongoing professional development that is scaffolded to each teacher's specific need, and continual checks by administration on the personal well-being of staff members.

While school leaders play a vital role in sustainability, there was also a suggestion for district leaders to clearly articulate their plan or support for TIPs. The participants in the study indicated that they were not aware of the district's stance on TIPs and whether or not they would continue the school's efforts in implementing them. If the school's district mission and vision do not align, then teachers perceive that TIPs will not be sustainable for the long term, despite their value.

With respect to a practical application of the conceptual framework guiding this study, more can be done to assist teachers at the microsystem level. The microsystem is everything that exists within the educator's immediate environment including peer relationships and personal working space. Because their day-to-day work does not cycle through the meso-, exo-, macro-, and chronosystems, they are tasked with making movement within the microsystem. Allowing

teachers a safe space and the time to establish meaningful connections with peers is a critical component to teachers feeling supported. Schools can consider providing this time, much like they have time to discuss curricular content in their Professional Learning Communities (PLCs); but this time would be for teachers to listen, share, and develop practices with one another. Providing teachers with time to regularly connect could increase their confidence in certain trauma-informed strategies and could help them to identify additional areas of growth. With an increase in confidence, opportunities for teachers to create mini lessons for staff members could arise, allowing school leaders the chance to empower teachers to lead professional development sessions. This empowerment could lead to a greater sense of confidence, ownership, and collective use of TIPs in the classroom, providing a greater benefit to the student population.

Finally, the state leaders could reconsider how they communicate with districts and potentially create a position within each district to assist with the implementation of these essential social and emotional strategies. The participants in this study indicated that while the state of Delaware works as a “trauma-informed state” in some capacity, they do not feel that this has been communicated well. There was a clear need suggested by participants for communication to increase and the development of a framework of sorts to assist them with their implementation. With the teacher turnover occurrence, the teachers in this study described feeling frustrated that new teachers (to the school) were not equipped with the same strategies as them, causing the entire staff to go backwards during professional development time. There were no opportunities for them to increase their knowledge; rather they spent time relearning the same ideas and concepts to help the newer staff to reach their level of knowledge or understanding.

Conclusions

This qualitative, phenomenological study explored the perceptions of teachers on the sustainability of trauma-informed practice implementation in a northern Delaware secondary school. The study gathered information about teacher perceptions on preparedness to deliver TIPs, supports for implementation, and needs for long-term sustainability. I conducted semistructured interviews with 11 participants and analyzed the data, which uncovered eight themes: professional development, confidence and knowledge of strategies, awareness of personal trauma, school leadership, allocation of resources, district support, ongoing training, and communication.

This research study emphasized the necessity for teachers to continue receiving guidance and support in their ongoing implementation of TIPs. Based on the findings, efforts should be made in the state of Delaware to streamline their various efforts in supporting students' social and emotional well-being by ongoing professional development for school staff, regular access for teachers to mental health supports, and more consistent and clear communication among stakeholders. The continuation of TIPs implementation along with the additional support needed could provide a positive impact not only on the students, but on school staff. If teachers are continually expected to do more, then they not only need the training, but they also need consistent support from school and district leadership as well as the state leadership.

In conclusion, teachers in this particular Delaware school believe in the value of TIPs and have observed a change within themselves in terms of how they interact with students. They have increased their ability to forge connections with students and learned strategies that have had positive impacts on their classrooms. They have also begun to understand how prolonged exposure to trauma impacts students in the classroom, rather than thinking that there is

something “wrong” with students. However, they feel that they need ongoing support, guidance, and accountability from their school leadership team. Additionally, consideration should be made in terms of how teachers are prepared for going into the profession at their respective colleges and universities. If colleges and universities can begin to align their programs with what state boards of education expect from their teachers, perhaps those in the education sector will have a mutual understanding of the educational framework for success.

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Appendix A: Email to Potential Participants

Dear ABC School Staff,

Thank you for taking the time to read this email. My name is Joy Campbell. I am completing a qualitative research study in completion of my dissertation at Abilene Christian University. I hope to learn more about teachers' perceptions of the sustainability of trauma-informed classrooms. Many of you have participated in extensive professional development on Trauma-Informed Practices (TIPs). You are eligible for this study if you have participated in this professional development for at least two full school years.

There is one portion to this research study: participation in an interview, consisting of the participant and the researcher. I am hoping to have 10-12 interested participants for this study. Both classroom teachers and support staff (including school administrators) are invited to express interest in participation. If you are interested in participating, please complete the following Google Form linked here: _____ by this date _____. Once the Google Form closes, the researcher will be in touch with you to outline the details of the interview.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any given time. Your participation in this study would have minimal risk to you. Participants will remain anonymous.

I will maintain appropriate confidentiality. The attached consent form has additional information for your reference.

Thank you for your consideration in assisting me with this research study. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may email me at xxxxxx@acu.edu.

Joy Campbell
EdD Candidate
Abilene Christian University

Appendix B: Consent Form for Participation

You may be able to take part in a research study. This form provides information about that study, including the risk and benefits to you as a potential participant. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions that you may have about the study. You can ask about research activities and any risks or benefits you may experience.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate; or if you choose to participate and are selected, you may end your participation at any point without penalty to you.

PURPOSE AND DESCRIPTION: This study will explore teachers' perceptions of the sustainability of trauma-informed practices in their classroom settings.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in one Zoom interview, expected to last approximately one hour. During the course of the interview, you will be asked to detail your perception about trauma-informed practices, the supports you need to implement them, and how you perceive their sustainability. The Zoom interview will be recorded for transcription purposes and the audio file will be kept in a password protected file. The video file will be destroyed. You will have the opportunity to review the audio file for accuracy and provide the interviewer with corrections or additions, if necessary.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: There are very limited risks to result from participating in this study. Below is a list of the foreseeable risks, although unlikely.

- Breach of confidentiality: maximum efforts will be taken to ensure confidentiality is upheld
- Emotional awareness: very rarely, do participants experience more emotional awareness; given the context of the study, this may not be a negative consequence

A potential benefit from participating in this study could include an increase in self-awareness as it relates to implementing trauma-informed practices in your classroom. There is no guarantee that you will experience personal benefits from participating in this study, however.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES: There are no known alternative procedures or treatments that may be classified as advantageous to participants in this study.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY: Any information you provide to the researcher will be confidential to the extent allowable by the law. Some identifiable data may have to be shared with individuals outside of the researcher, such as members of the ACU Institutional Review Board. Your confidentiality will be protected by the researcher by maintaining data on password protected drives or folders accessed through password protected devices. After a suitable time upon the conclusion of the study, the data will be deleted in an appropriate manner.

The primary risk with this study is breach of confidentiality. During the interviews, there may be some personally-identifying questions asked. This information will not be shared in the final presentation of data analysis.

COLLECTION OF IDENTIFIABLE PRIVATE INFORMATION OR BIOSPECIMENS:

After identifying information is removed, as detailed above, your data may be used for future research, including by other researchers, without contacting you for permission.

CONTACTS: If you have any questions about this research study, please contact Joy Campbell at xxxxxx@acu.edu, doctoral student at Abilene Christian University. If you are unable to reach the doctoral candidate or wish to speak to someone else, please contact Dr. Casey Reason at xxxxxx@acu.edu. Finally, if you have concerns about this study, believe you may have been injured as a result of participation, or have general questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact ACU's Chair of the Institutional Review Board and Executive Director, Megan Roth, PhD at: (xxx) xxx-xxxx or xxxxxx@acu.edu.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: The researcher anticipates a total of 10-12 participants in the interviews.

Your participation may be ended early by the researcher for certain reasons. For example, we may end your participation if you no longer meet study requirements, the researchers believe it is no longer in your best interest to continue participating, you do not follow the instructions provided by the researchers, or the study is ended. You will be contacted by the researchers and given further instructions in the event that you are removed from the study.

Please let the researcher know if you are participating in any other research studies at this time.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT SECTION:

If you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, please sign and date below. Please do so only after you have read all of the information and any questions you have were answered to your satisfaction. If you wish to have a copy of this consent form, please contact the researcher. You do not waive any legal rights by consenting to this study.

Signed Name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C: Semistructured Interview Questions

In order to build rapport and gain a brief background of the participants, the initial questions are:

- Please tell me about how you got into education as a profession.
- Tell me about your experience so far in K-12 education.
- How do you think your personal experiences have influenced where you are [professionally] today?
- What are your longer-term educational or professional goals?

The following questions will be asked and are categorized, per the research question to which they pertain. As per semistructured interviews, there may be natural, organically flowing questions that occur as a follow-up to some responses. Those are the less-structured type of questions and will depend on each participant. Questions in the tables below will be asked of each participant.

Classroom Teacher Questions

RQ1: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in northern Delaware perceive their preparedness to implement trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?	RQ2: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in Northern Delaware perceive their support in their ongoing implementation of trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?	RQ3: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in northern Delaware perceive the longer-term sustainability of trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?
1.1 Tell me about your professional development in TIPs.	2.1 Tell me about how the staff engages with one another, in terms of learning about TIPs from one another.	3.1 Describe the ongoing professional development plan for TIPs.
1.2 Describe how you feel about TIPs as an effective engagement strategy for students.	2.2 How do you care for yourself when you are stressed?	3.2 Please detail current educational initiatives in which you are involved. You may include initiatives at the building, district, and state levels.
1.3 How has your participation in TIP professional development increased your confidence in delivering TIPs to your students?	2.3 What types of improvements would you like to see in terms of how TIPs are implemented in your school?	3.3 Describe for me where you see TIPs in the next 3 years. The next 5 years.
1.4 What are some specific strategies that you have	2.4 What types of supports do you need in order to better implement TIPs?	3.4 What will need to be in place, both on an institutional

utilized that would be considered a TIP?		level and district/state level for TIPs to be sustained?
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Non Classroom Teacher Questions

RQ1: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in northern Delaware perceive their preparedness to implement trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?	RQ2: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in Northern Delaware perceive their support in their ongoing implementation of trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?	RQ3: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in northern Delaware perceive the longer-term sustainability of trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?
1.1 Tell me about your professional development participation in TIPs.	2.1 Tell me about how the staff engages with one another, in terms of learning about TIPs from one another.	3.1 Describe the ongoing professional development plan for TIPs.
1.2 Describe how you feel about TIPs as an effective engagement strategy for students.	2.2 How do the teachers at this school care for themselves when they are stressed out?	3.2 Please detail current educational initiatives in which you are involved. You may include initiatives at the building, district, and state levels.
1.3 How has your participation in TIP professional development increased teachers' ability to engage with students at your school?	2.3 What types of improvements would you like to see in terms of how TIPs are implemented in your school?	3.3 Describe for me where you see TIPs in the next 3 years. The next 5 years.
1.4 What are some specific trauma-informed strategies you have observed teachers utilizing in their classrooms?	2.4 What types of supports do teachers need in order to better implement TIPs?	3.4 What will need to be in place, both on an institutional level and district/state level for TIPs to be sustained?

School Administrator Questions

RQ1: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in northern Delaware perceive their preparedness to implement trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?	RQ2: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in Northern Delaware perceive their support in their ongoing implementation of trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?	RQ3: How do teachers in a comprehensive public secondary school in northern Delaware perceive the longer-term sustainability of trauma-informed practices in their classrooms?
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1.1 Tell me about your school's professional development participation in TIPs.	2.1 Tell me about how the staff engages with one another, in terms of learning about TIPs from one another.	3.1 Describe for me the general process your staff goes through when adopting or implementing something new.
1.2 How has your school's participation in TIP professional development increased teachers' ability to engage with students at your school?	2.2 How do the teachers at this school care for themselves when they are stressed out?	3.2 Describe the ongoing professional development plan for TIPs.
1.3 What are some specific trauma-informed strategies you have observed teachers utilizing in their classrooms?	2.3 What types of improvements would you like to see in terms of how TIPs are implemented in your school?	3.3 What types of supports are currently in place at the district level, for teachers to continue their implementation of TIPs?
1.4 What kind of impact have TIPs had on your school's discipline referrals?	2.4 What types of support do teachers need in order to better implement TIPs? What, if anything, have they stated to you?	3.4 What will need to be in place, both on an institutional level and district/state level for TIPs to be sustained?

Appendix D: IRB Approval Email

Date: May 2, 2023

PI: Joy Campbell

Department: ONL-Online Student, 17250-EdD Online

Re: Initial - IRB-2023-8

Teacher Perceptions on the Sustainability of Trauma-Informed Practices in Delaware Schools

The Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *Teacher Perceptions on the Sustainability of Trauma-Informed Practices in Delaware Schools*. The administrative check-in date is --.

Decision: Exempt

Category: Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording). Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

Research Notes:

Additional Approvals/Instructions:

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable. All approval letters and study documents are located within the Study Details in Cayuse IRB.

The following are all responsibilities of the Primary Investigator (PI). Violation of these responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of research by the Institutional Review Board. If the Primary Investigator is a student and fails to fulfil any of these responsibilities, the Faculty Advisor then becomes responsible for completing or upholding any and all of the following:

- When the research is completed, inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. If your study is Exempt, Non-Research, or Non-Human Research, email orsp@acu.edu to indicate that the research has finished.
- According to ACU policy, research data must be stored on ACU campus (or electronically) for 3 years from inactivation of the study, in a manner that is secure but accessible should the IRB request access.
- It is the Investigator's responsibility to maintain a general environment of safety for all research participants and all members of the research team. All risks to physical, mental, and emotional well-being as well as any risks to confidentiality should be minimized.

For additional information on the policies and procedures above, please visit the IRB website <http://www.acu.edu/community/offices/academic/orsp...> or email orsp@acu.edu with your questions.

Sincerely,

Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board