

INFORMAL TEACHER EXPERIENCES WITH TRAUMA-INFORMED TEACHING PRACTICES: HELPING STUDENTS THROUGH DRAWING ON PAST TEACHING EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory qualitative study will analyze the implementation of trauma-informed teaching practices (TITP) by educators in Connecticut High Schools that have not yet formally implemented TITP programs into their school's pedagogical expectations. In addition, this study seeks to understand the extent of how teachers use past instructional experiences influence their implementation of TITP effectively in classrooms where it is observed. While the TITP framework supports all students, it is meant to sustain students who are experiencing or have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACE). In this study, secondary teachers from Foster High School (FHS) (a pseudonym) will be selected based on their willingness to be a part of this study. Participants will be engaged in a variety of ways to assess their knowledge and implementation of TITP within their classrooms. Preferably, at least one teacher from each content area will be included as a participant in this study. The data collected will be used to investigate the teachers' perspectives regarding TITP in secondary schools. Finally, themes will be analyzed using triangulation, and the findings will be based on the participants' understanding and implementation of Trauma Informed Teaching Practices.

BENEFITS OF RESEARCH

Implementing Trauma Informed Teaching Practices (TITP) in schools by educators can have exponential advantages to students, staff, and other school systems (Hodas, 2006).

Student Benefits:

-Decreased number of disciplinary actions, solitary behavior, a decline in the display of inappropriate behaviors, and an increase in academic achievement (Baker & Brown, 2020).

Teacher Benefits:

-Tend to build stronger relationships, significant commitment to self-care, and increase their knowledge of how TITP positively impacts students (Peterson, 2019).

School/District-Wide Benefits:

-Decrease staff absenteeism, create an increasingly healthier school climate, and increase the retention of teachers (Baker & Brown, 2020).

RATIONALE

Study Rationale



Consequences from Covid-19 have led to an increase in childhood depression and an increase in domestic disputes (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2020)



60% of children will experience at least one of the Adverse Childhood Effects (ACE) annually (Turner, Finkelhor, Ormrod, Hamby, Lee, Mercy, & Holt, 2012)



Exposure to ACE negatively effects cognitive functioning, attention, memory, academic performance, and school-related behaviors (Maynard, Farina, Dell, Kelly, 2019)

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Covid-19 Pandemic has exposed students in the United States to many unusual and sometimes challenging experiences, both inside and outside of schools. Adverse Childhood experiences is a condition that effects individuals with traumas experienced as children (from ages 0-17) such as experiencing: violence, abuse, neglect, witnessing violence, family member death, or suicide (Hodas, 2006).

Educators must be prepared to identify and work with students impacted by trauma. This exploratory qualitative study aims to understand the ways that teachers define and recognize trauma in students, how student trauma is addressed by participants, and the ways past teaching experiences support the participants in their professional development and application of Trauma Informed Teaching Practices (TITP) within teachers' classrooms.

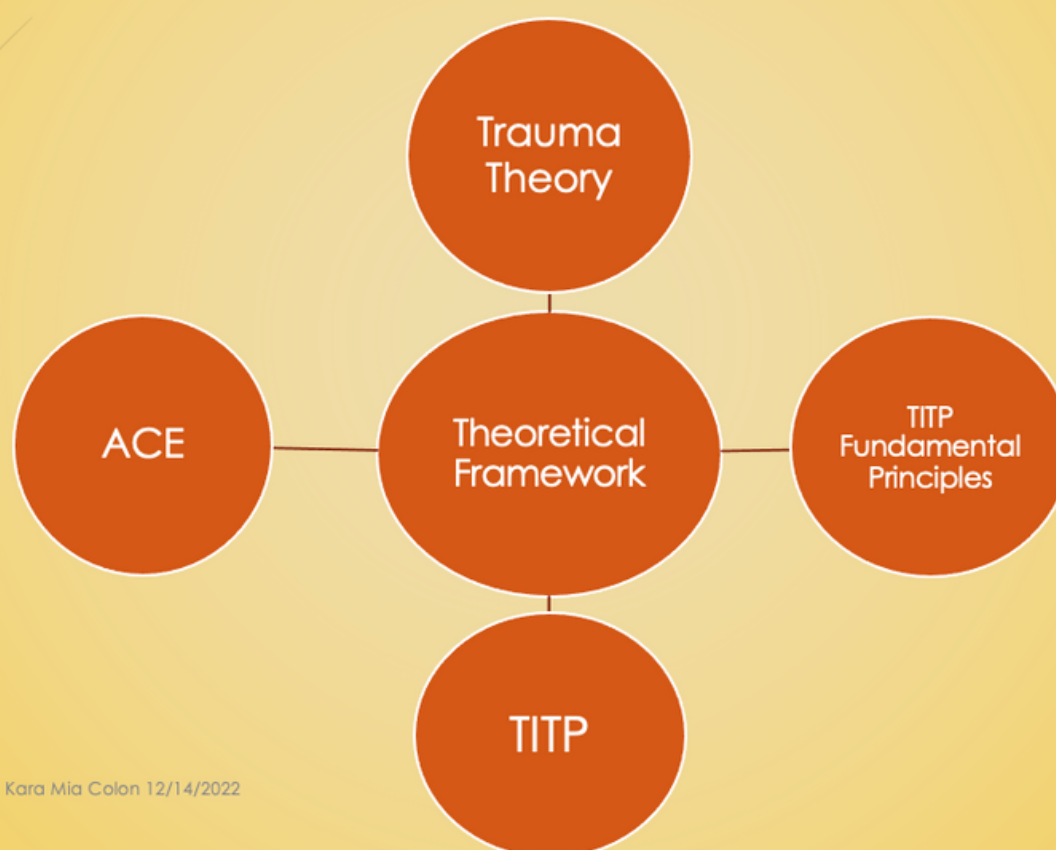
KEY TERMS

- **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE):** are traumas experienced by children ages 0-17, such as: experiencing violence, abuse, neglect, witnessing violence, family member death, or suicide (Hodas, 2006).
- **Trauma:** A response to an adverse external event or series of events that surpass the child's ordinary coping skills (McInerney & McKlinton, 2014).
- **Trauma-Informed Teaching Practices (TITP):** is a framework that guides all adult school staff members to understand trauma, identify trauma in students, implement strategies to support and reengage students, provide students with skills to regulate their stressors, and avoid retraumatization of students (Maynard, Farina, Dell, & Kelly, 2019).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The three constructs that are the essential building blocks for the theoretical framework of this study are: (1) adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), (2) best practices for implementing trauma informed teaching practices (TITP), and (3) the four key underlying principles of TITP commonly used by secondary teachers. These constructs fundamentally shape TITP's principles study throughout the methodology portion of this dissertation with special emphasis found within the creation of the data collection instruments. Moreover, Trauma theory explains that past adverse events can influence a person's socio-emotional, physical, and mental health (Brandall & Ringel, 2019).

Theoretical Framework Overview



The four core ideas describe what a teacher needs to achieve to create an effective, trauma supportive learning environment for ACE students. The research suggests that the successful application of the TITP is contingent upon how an educator applies instructional strategies that employ four constructs as mentioned above within their classroom (Oehlberg, 2008; Blodgett & Dorado, 2016; Peterson, 2019; Baker & Brown, 2020).

Adverse Childhood Experiences. Any negative interaction of a serious nature that has the possibility of impeding a child's safety and well-being can be viewed as an ACE occurrence. Historically, ACEs were defined as only traumatic events like physical, mental, and sexual abuse/neglect, an act of violence, mental illness, and acts of abandonment (such as family incarceration and divorce) (Salmon, Taillieu, Stewart-Tufescu, MacMillan, Tonmyr, Gonzalez, & Afifi, 2022).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. In what ways are high school teachers implementing trauma informed teaching practices (TITP) within their school communities?

2. What types of past teaching experiences support teachers implementation of trauma informed teaching practices?

3. Are there any common personal characteristics of teachers that utilize TITP within in their instruction?

4. Are there any common professional characteristics of teachers that utilize TITP within in their instruction?

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative exploratory study aims to identify Trauma Informed Teaching Practices (TITP) that teachers implicitly implement within their classrooms. A case study is a "qualitative research design that provides an in-depth analysis of a solution for events, groups of people, or individuals by assessing a case or case in a particular setting or context" (Chigbu, p. 4, 2019). This study will analyze a group of teachers working at a Connecticut High School and their understanding of TITP.

RESEARCH DESIGN

- This study will analyze a group of teachers working at a Connecticut High School and their understanding of TITP.
- Homogenous Sampling: The target population (n=226) for this study will be any teacher employed by a Foster High School (FHS).
- Purposeful Sampling: ideally, one teacher from each teaching discipline: Science, Math, English, Art, Social Science, Media, World Languages, Technical Education, Counseling, Family Consumer Science, Special Education, and Physical/Health Education will be the sample for this study (n=12).

DATA COLLECTION

Interviews

- Interviews will take place one time with each participant.
- Interviews allow for researcher "to ask open-ended questions that illicit meaningful and deep responses that takes the stage into a narrative" (Butin, 2010).
- Each interview will be recorded

Participant Observations

- One visit will be made to each participant's classroom
- An observation protocol will be utilized to maintain consistent data collection, enhance validity, and ensure the data collected is aligned with the study's theoretical framework (Butin, 2010).

Writing Prompts

- The written artifacts can be influential, unpredictable, and valuable pieces of data (Butin, 2010).
- Journal entries will be self-reflections to writing prompts

Researcher's Journal

- The objective of a research journal is to organize information, record reactions, and capture detailed descriptions throughout the data collection process (Cassel & Symon, 2004).
- Initial and reflective notes to data

LIMITATIONS

A limitation of this study is that it is specific to a state in the Northeast—Connecticut, which has experienced a mass shooting and worked through legislation and non-profits to address childhood trauma and social-emotional learning. Not every area of the United States has been as proactive with addressing social-emotional learning in schools, and this may mean that the study yields more positive results that may be found other places. Since the teachers in this study have not been explicitly taught to use TITP in the district, a similar study could investigate the ways teachers, who have been professionally trained in TITP, implement the TITP framework into their instruction.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- All participants most likely use TITP within their instruction whether they had formal TITP training or not.
- There is a need for all teachers to be trained in some form of TITP to support better their students' socio-emotional, academic, and mental health needs while in their classroom.
- Based on past teaching experiences, most teachers would welcome more transparency from the administration when they know a student is undergoing a traumatic event.

DISCUSSION

Classroom Environment. One priority for all teachers is to ensure that the classroom is safe. The physical environment and how the space is designed prevent the overstimulation of students by providing an avoidance of triggers, increasing predictability, and supplying structure (Hanover Research, 2019). **Identification of "Caution Signs".** TITP supports teachers to work with and comprehend the ACE effects and better equips them to teach their students better. In addition, teachers require training to effectively identify threats to students' well-being, even if that threat is one of their own. **De-Escalation Protocol.** The best TITP requires teachers to design a procedure for responding to students who are displaying "caution signs" in the classroom. It is vital for teachers to have an action plan to counteract all possible inappropriate behaviors.