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Laëtitia Sakponou

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Evaluating Outcomes of Trauma-Sensitive Trainings in Schools: A Rapid Review

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

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## **Abstract**

Trauma-sensitive schools focus on forming supportive relationships and safe spaces which help build resilience in students. School psychologists have been providing professional development opportunities for school personnel. When evaluating a professional development training, collecting data on teacher acceptability is crucial to understanding factors impacting implementation integrity. The present study is a review of existing literature and seeks to understand how teacher feedback is evaluated and what factors teachers report as impacting implementation. Three publications were selected as participants to be analyzed. Synthesized themes found included the importance of providing foundational knowledge, the significant impact of system climate, and the value in relationships in schools.

*Keywords:* trauma-sensitive approach, professional development, teacher feedback

## Introduction

In the late '90s, a report came out that changed the way that the effects of childhood trauma are understood. Felitti et al. (1998), found that those who experienced adverse experiences during childhood, such as abuse and neglect, were more likely to have chronic medical conditions, engage in risky unhealthy habits, or struggle with obesity as adults. After Felitti et al. (1998) examined the long-term effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), many institutions better understood the additional need for emotional support. Among those institutions were schools, and the benefits of trauma-informed schools became a crucial topic.

Despite these early findings, childhood trauma continues to be an ongoing crisis about which we are still learning. In 2015, 3.4 million children were reported to have experienced maltreatment or abuse (Gubi et al, 2019). Early childhood traumatic experiences alter brain structure and function which has long-term academic effects. Early interventions, while the brain continues to develop, provide protective factors that diminish the long-term effects of toxic stress (Shamblin et al., 2016). The trauma experienced at a young age affects social and emotional functioning, brain development, hormone and immune response, and the child's interaction with the world around them. Complex trauma, abuse, and neglect affect the student even after they have been removed from the dangerous environment (Shamblin et al., 2016).

One way to address this phenomenon is through a trauma-sensitive lens. Current research may use the term trauma-informed or trauma-sensitive without distinguishing between the two. The Trauma-Sensitive Classroom (Jennings, 2019) expertly details the trauma-sensitive approach in the school setting. This book highlights the importance of

supportive relationships and safe spaces in helping to build resilience in students. It also makes the distinction between the two terms. Trauma-informed has a behavioral health background and emphasizes a clinical knowledge of trauma and traumatic impact. The trauma-sensitive approach has been more typically used in the educational field to emphasize a safe learning space and to minimize the traumatic impact on students' academic performance (Jennings, 2019).

The trauma-informed approach is about understanding the impact and pervasiveness of trauma, being able to identify the symptomology of trauma, using this knowledge to guide interactions responses, and avoiding triggers or re-traumatization (SAMHSA, 2014). The Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) is a trauma-sensitive approach that focuses on skill-building of staff and caregivers with a goal to equip teachers with knowledge and skills to promote social-emotional and positive mental health environments. In this, the focus is to create a resilient, safe, and supportive school environment for all, rather than focusing interventions on one child only (Shamblin et al., 2016). For the sake of this research article, the term trauma-sensitive will be used when the referenced article used either term with the same meaning. Although many articles use the term trauma-informed, trauma-sensitive is the more appropriate term as this study focuses on trauma within the context of schools.

There has been a push in school districts across the United States to incorporate a trauma-sensitive curriculum. According to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the trauma-informed approach includes: (1) understanding the impact and pervasiveness of trauma; (2) identifying the symptomology of trauma; (3) using this knowledge to guide interactions and responses; (4) and avoiding triggers or re-

traumatization (SAMHSA, 2014). Thus, trauma-sensitive schools create an environment that is safe and addresses students' basic and emotional needs first, so that they can focus on their academics (Gubi et al., 2019). Consequently, the role of school psychologists in trauma-sensitive systems is to identify various forms of trauma, understand the needs associated with them, and identify the resources needed to support students (Gubi et al., 2019).

The American Institutes for Research have outlined a curriculum for trauma-sensitive practices and provide 5 domains as guidelines: sharing of information with staff, promoting a healthy and supportive school climate, assessing and intervening based on needs, including stakeholders, and implementing the practices explicitly (Thomas et al., 2019). The review of the past implementation of various programs reinforced the importance of these domains. As school psychologists explore readily available resources, utilizing teachers and the classroom for early screening and intervention is an accessible and crucial aspect to supporting students. Trauma-sensitive schools move away from the traditional format of identifying students who need intervention based on problem behaviors, but rather focuses on prevention, early detection, and monitoring of students' needs (Chafouleas et al., 2016).

This year, the topic of how to provide social-emotional support to students to improve academic achievement became more relevant than ever. With the sudden closure of schools and the uncertainty that followed the spread of Covid-19, schools had to manage continued academics through a traumatic situation for teachers, students, families, and the community. But what is trauma and how can we support teachers who are supporting students experiencing toxic stress? The literature review provides an

understanding of existing information on trauma, trauma professional developments, and the involvement of teachers. The following literature review shows the need for the inclusion of teachers in the evaluation of trauma aimed professional developments. It also reveals that few programs have conducted evaluation of the implementation of an intervention, and fewer still included teachers in the evaluation. The aim of the current study is to explore the means of evaluating teachers and gather teacher feedback after a trauma focused professional development.

## **Literature Review**

### **Trauma-Sensitive Approach in Schools**

A review of the Department of Education websites revealed that most trauma-sensitive practices, in most districts, are embedded in social-emotional learning programs already in place (Thomas et al., 2019). This allows for an easy transition as there is already a foundation in place within the school system. Mental health services provided in schools circumvent barriers to services such as transportation, cost, and accessibility (Hansel et al. 2010). Successful school-wide implementation of trauma-sensitive practices had crucial factors including support provided for teachers, evaluation, and monitoring of implementation, and using a multi-tiered model in framing the trainings and supports provided to students (Berger, 2019). While many school systems have intensive tier three services provided to students in crisis, successful programs also incorporate teachers at a school-wide universal level (Shamblin et al., 2016). The use of a multi-tiered approach led to behavioral support teams better identifying and supporting students at the second and third-tier levels (Shamblin et al., 2016).

Successful implementation of comprehensive school-based services requires professional development and evaluation of the training (Chafouleas et al., 2016). Successful implementation of trauma-sensitive practices was influenced by administration support, prior roles and responsibilities of teachers, engagement of all stakeholders including parents, stigma, and views on mental health, and cultural and linguistic variations (Thomas et al., 2019). Better attitudes and recognition of trauma, self-care, and staff-parent relations have been reported by staff (Shamblin et al., 2016). Building-wide initiatives and collaboration with the community are crucial to implementing evidence-based services with fidelity (Hansel et al. 2010). The success of a school-based model led to district-wide support and was scaled up to be utilized in other schools through the district (Thomas et al., 2019).

The use of pre and post-evaluation is an essential factor in monitoring the impact and success of intervention implementation (Shamblin et al., 2016). Specifically, self-reports are informative to how the students, teachers, and all stakeholders are responding to the intervention (Shamblin et al., 2016). An increase in knowledge on trauma leads to an increase and improvement in mental health resources and each level of support (Shamblin et al., 2016). Data collected from a successful implementation of trauma-sensitive care revealed a decrease in PTSD, anxiety, and depression symptoms post-intervention (Shamblin et al., 2016). Additionally, data indicated an increase in students' appropriate classroom behavior, attention, and externalizing behaviors as reported by teachers and parents (Shamblin et al., 2016). Self-reported ratings revealed a reduction of internalized symptoms in students (Shamblin et al., 2016).

To an outsider, students' responses may appear incongruent and more exaggerated compared to the triggering stimuli. This is important for school staff to consider in their interactions with students. Staff should avoid an authoritarian tone or manner (Minahan, 2019). All students benefit from structure and trustworthy adults; therefore, staff should also be consistent and predictable (Minahan, 2019). Staff members should have a clear schedule and transition warnings to provide transparency and allow time for students to process instruction and respond to the task (Minahan, 2019). Because teachers are busy, they may not remember to check in with a student systematically (Minahan, 2019). Using a timer or telling the student to check-in at a pre-determined time provides consistency and predictability for the student and makes check-in more manageable for the teacher (Minahan, 2019). Relationships between the student and a predictable and attentive adult should be supportive and positive (Post, et al., 2020). These strategies help create a reliable environment that reduces stress for students used to a chaotic situation.

In the classroom, feedback and consequences are often part of the growth process. Students may act out, test boundaries, or engage in disruptive behaviors. Teachers can handle these situations utilizing a trauma-sensitive approach. Sandwich negative feedback by giving positive feedback before and after the negative feedback (Minahan, 2019). Staff need to provide positive attention, not only attention in response to the student doing something wrong (Minahan, 2019). This tells students that their value is not dependent on their actions. Additionally, one-on-one time should not be contingent on the student's behavior (Minahan, 2019). If a student has a trusted adult with whom they value one-on-one time, that interaction should not be taken away as punishment

(Minahan, 2019). It is best for students to have a relationship with someone where they are valued for who they are, not for how well they behave (Minahan, 2019). A stable relationship should be available to the student whether they are having a good day or a not-so-good day (Minahan, 2019).

The classroom environment can be pivotal in helping students with their emotional regulation. If a student is in a heightened emotional state and unable to focus on their academic task, provide them with a break so that they can calm down (Minahan, 2019). When giving students a break have them engage in activities that promote cognitive distractions such as mad libs, I Spy, or other creative tasks (Minahan, 2019). By asking a student to sit quietly without an activity, you give space for the student to ruminate on negative thoughts which may cause them to become more emotionally motivated (Minahan, 2019). Breaks should include cognitive distractions or allow the student to use techniques they may have already learned to process their feelings in a safe and healthy manner (Minahan, 2019). Providing emotional support through these strategies may facilitate a transition back to work and minimize an emotional reaction. When introducing a new academic task or when a student is in a class that is not their strength, provide time for the student to work on a task or an area in which they feel competent (Minahan, 2019). This reduces resistance and avoidance to the new task and builds their self-efficacy (Minahan, 2019). A classroom utilizing trauma-sensitive techniques minimizes problem behaviors by addressing internalizing concerns and promotes an environment that facilitates learning. Teachers have a crucial role in schools as they set the tone for their classroom and the school year.

### **Teacher's Role**

Studies looking at trauma-sensitive care approaches in schools ascertain that the teacher's experiences, perception, values, and knowledge shape their role. School staff have self-reported an increase in knowledge of resources, knowledge of trauma, self-efficacy, and teachers' view of the benefits of the program was linked to positive classroom climate (Shamblin et al., 2016). Broadening the understood role of a teacher facilitated the transition to taking on the trauma-sensitive lens (Thomas et al., 2019). Teachers trained in resiliency correlated with reduced trauma symptomology in students (Thomas et al., 2019). The school-wide model helped provide support to students who had not previously been identified (Thomas et al., 2019). Teachers being trained leads to more screening and therefore more identification and interventions (Thomas et al., 2019). Teachers are crucial in a child's trauma recovery. They offer structure and predictability through familiar routines, emotional processing, and provide a positive environment. Additionally, teachers are uniquely positioned to notice changes in demeanor, behavior, and emotional state which allows for early identification of distress and early intervention (Alisic, 2012). A positive relationship with a caregiver or safe adult is an important factor in building resilience in children. Therefore, working with teachers to build competency and confidence is a crucial goal of trauma-sensitive practices in schools (Shamblin et al., 2016).

There are many ways that teachers can practice from a trauma-sensitive care approach. Teachers should support students' academic and emotional needs (Minahan, 2019). As a staff member has success in building relationships with a student, they should try to lay out the steps they took that worked best and share that information with the

staff so that the student's behavior is more consistent in response to staff's predictability (Minahan, 2019). Relationship building is an essential part of trauma-sensitive schools as it is a primary protective factor for students with trauma (Post, et al., 2020).

Supportive relationships help students to regulate their behaviors and emotions and promote prosocial behaviors (Jennings, 2019). Students actively experiencing trauma may not feel safe even when they are at school (Jennings, 2019). Students with past traumatic experiences may also continue to feel unsafe long after the traumatic event (Jennings, 2019). If a student is feeling unsafe, they are not accessing their frontal lobe and cannot be expected to access the lesson during class time (Jennings, 2019).

### **Teacher Training**

As illustrated above, the role of teachers is crucial to the trauma-sensitive care approach. Training and professional development are, therefore, necessary for successful implementation. Understanding the teachers' view of their role allows for pairing them with trainings and resources that best align with their values (Alisic, 2012). Although some teachers may feel confident to work with kids with trauma, many feel less confident with knowing the best practices to offer support (Alisic, 2012). One struggle teachers face is managing their roles. Many separated their roles as those of a teacher and from those of a mental health provider. This incongruence left many teachers feeling unfit to balance the two roles. Conversely, some rejected a move away from the traditional teacher role that focused solely on academics (Alisic, 2012). A lack of proper training leads to doubt and additional stress for the teacher (Alisic, 2012). Teachers could benefit from additional training that includes explicit rules and protocols (Alisic, 2012). Having a supportive work environment is a key component of a safe and resilient school

environment (Alisic, 2012). For trauma-sensitive school trainings, identification of school resources, family compliance, and the use of multi-tiered systems of supports are additionally needed (Chafouleas et al., 2016).

Research recognizes a lack of expertise for providing evidence-based support from a trauma-sensitive framework. This is one of the greatest challenges to the implementation of professional development (Chafouleas et al., 2016). Considering this, proper training should provide teachers the tools necessary to handle tough situations and tough students (Post, et al., 2020). That feeling of competence and control in a teacher paired with reduced outbursts from students will reduce the teacher's stress and the impact of working with high-needs students (Post, et al., 2020). Lack of training in teachers who work with high-needs populations may experience secondary stress and emotional exhaustion (Post, et al., 2020). This stress strains the relationship teachers build with their students (Post, et al., 2020). Proper training helps best serve the students and build skills for teaching hard-to-reach students and helps reduce the stress put on teachers (Post, et al., 2020).

### **Training Evaluation**

Trainings also need to be evaluated in order to ensure needs are being met, to monitor progress, and to evaluate if strategies are implemented with fidelity. Post et al. (2020) evaluated the implementation of the Child-Teacher Relationship Training (CTRT) at a Title I elementary school by training 4 teachers. The training uses principles behind play therapy to inform how teachers should respond and interact with students. A

registered play therapist, school counselor, and 2 doctoral students trained in Child-Parent Relationship Training (CPRT). CTRT is an adaptation of CPRT conducted as a training for four teachers. The training utilized child-centered philosophy; the impact of trauma, poverty, social justice, institutional racism, poverty; and the effect of Adverse Childhood Experience's (ACE) on the brain on children. After the initial four informational training sessions, additional training was conducted in two phases. In phase 1, teachers practiced the skills with one student while being observed by trainers, and the teachers received feedback before using the skills with their classroom. In phase 2, trainers went into the classroom and modeled CTRT skills, for the proceeding weeks, trainers provided coaching and modeling 2x a week for 30 minutes. Teachers were then asked what they needed and received coaching or modeling subsequently based on their needs. The trainers met with the teacher to supervise and process rather than for training (Post, et al., 2020).

To assess commitment to the trauma-sensitive program, Post et al. (2020) analyzed the experiences and personal values of the trained teachers. The three main aspects that influenced commitment were the level of prior familiarity with play therapy; how teacher personalities matched the training; and seeing the results of the training (Post, et al., 2020). These factors lead to buy-in to the program and a deeper commitment to their role. The participants also reported that the training gave them an appreciation for the soft skills that allowed them to manage their classroom, connect with their students and respond to their students' needs. The teachers reported a change in themselves and their students after the training (Post, et al., 2020). The training and implementation of the program led to reduced stress for the teachers and a quieter and calmer school

environment (Post, et al., 2020). This highlights the value of trauma-sensitive school training as it is essential in supporting both students and teachers and why buy-in to the program matters (Post, et al., 2020).

McIntyre et al. (2019) conducted an evaluation of a 2-day professional development on trauma-sensitive approaches in school (McIntyre et al., 2019). The training utilized the Foundational Professional Development (FPD) in which the format focuses on content knowledge, research background, and rationale for implementation (McIntyre et al., 2019). This evaluation found that a teacher's level of knowledge is directly associated with the acceptability of a training (McIntyre et al., 2019). To have teachers on board with a school initiative, they should know the details and expectations of the initiative (McIntyre et al., 2019).

Although some studies only collected post-data, this data is informative regarding school climate and stakeholders' feedback (Shamblin et al., 2016). A latent result of increased teacher competency and confidence may be a reduction in negative responses to classroom behaviors (Shamblin et al., 2016). This leads to reduced stress in class and increased satisfaction reported by teachers (Shamblin et al., 2016). Utilizing these results and feedback from past trainings informs the development of future professional development.

### **Purpose of the Present Study**

A number of trainings have surfaced to inform schools of the effect of trauma and to guide schools towards a trauma-sensitive format. And while there have been several various trainings, evaluation of these trainings appear to be missing. A review of the

literature indicates that many professional developments often do not seek feedback from the stakeholder, especially teachers, to evaluate the program. As current literature suggests, teachers are aptly positioned to implementing and understanding barriers to implementation. The goals of the training, among many things, should include buy-in from the participants, implementation integrity, and a commitment to change in their schools. An evaluation of programs and what factors influence teachers' ability to implement the trauma-sensitive approach with fidelity inform how future programs are developed.

The current study aims to explore the ways in which a school system supports teachers' ability to implement trauma-sensitive skills after professional development through a rapid review of the literature. This study focuses on the elementary level in consideration of attachment that appears in relationship building and the proximity within which the staff works together (Jennings, 2019). Evaluating professional development feedback at the earlier levels allows for consideration of early attachment between the students and teachers. Additionally, at the elementary level, staff engage with grade-level colleagues as well as colleagues in the grade levels above and below to facilitate transitions allowing for more opportunities for the development of interpersonal support.

This study originally aimed to learn how schools support teachers in implementing strategies after a trauma-informed practices training, and how schools measure the outcome of implementing trauma-informed practices after training.

However, a review of the literature revealed two broader questions:

1. What studies have been conducted that include teachers in evaluating the outcome of trauma-sensitive trainings?

2. What factors are reported to influence teachers' perception of their ability to use tools taught in a trauma-sensitive training?

### **Methodology**

A rapid review of the current literature was conducted following the guidelines and flow diagram from Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (Page et al. 2021). The present study is considered a rapid review, rather than a systematic review because only one reviewer researched the databases and synthesized the results. Ethical approval from the review board was not required due to the methodology. Participating publications are organized alphabetically and chronologically followed by a discussion of the findings. The review and synthesis of the literature were accomplished using narrative analysis (Jahan et al., 2016; Snilstveit et al., 2012). Very few publications met the criteria or focused on teachers in the evaluation of a training or intervention. The qualifying articles had various methodologies, sample size, timelines, number of evaluative data points, which made a quantitative comparison of the results inappropriate as the results may have been unreliable and invalid (Snilstveit et al., 2012). There lacked the possibility for a clear one-to-one comparison. Considering this, the differences in study goals, measurement tools, and the small amount of participating literature included in the current review, a narrative approach to synthesizing the data was most appropriate over a qualitative synthesis (Snilstveit et al., 2012). The narrative style allowed for the synthesis of the articles that focused on themes pulled from the content.

Publications included in this study are empirical, peer-reviewed, studies that evaluated the implementation of a trauma-sensitive approach professional development and examined teacher acceptability and implementation integrity at the elementary level.

The participating publications were identified through searches utilizing electronic databases. Those databases include PsychNet, APAPsycInfo, ERIC, and Education Research Complete. Filters used include peer-reviewed and publication dates between 2000 – 2021. Specific search terms included trauma, trauma-informed care, trauma-sensitive care, trauma schools, professional development, training, personnel training, professional employee training, career development, teacher development, job training, professional training, faculty development, elementary teachers, elementary schools, elementary school teachers, elementary school students, elementary education, acceptability, teacher buy-in, evaluation, educational evaluation, employee reviews, teacher evaluation, mental health program evaluation, educational program evaluation, teacher effectiveness evaluation, course evaluation, self-evaluation, and program evaluation. Synonyms of search terms were included through the index feature on each electronic database.

These searches yielded 191 results, which were reviewed by eliminating duplicates, reviewing titles and abstracts, and comparing contents to the search criteria. After a thorough review, only three publications met inclusionary criteria and were included in this review which the researcher summarized, analyzed for themes, and synthesized appropriate recommendations accordingly. See Appendix 1 for the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram illustrating the review process and how studies were excluded.

## **Results**

### **Characteristics of Publications**

The contents of the participating studies were organized into the appropriate headings for description and comparison of each topic in Appendix 2. The participants, methods, and interventions are described. Primary outcomes are reported according to the study's intended measure.

### ***Study Design and Procedures***

Anderson et al. (2015) developed four professional development workshops for classroom staff with the goal to provide training for social-emotional skill development through a trauma-informed approach. The researchers first provided an initial presentation to the staff on the physiological impact of toxic stress and trauma in students. Researchers then administered a needs assessment to classroom staff and talked to the social worker and principal to better understand the specific needs of the team and the school. Based on initial feedback, the researchers developed 4 targeted workshops. 16 participants completed the post-workshop survey and focus groups. Feedback participants were staff in the classroom working directly with students at the elementary level who support the general education teacher. This includes teacher aides and other paraprofessionals. Following the last workshop, a survey and focus groups were conducted to assess for knowledge gained from the training and to better understand participants' attitudes. Frequency distributions from the survey were calculated. See Appendix D for the table provided in the article showing the findings of the close-ended questions. Content analysis methods were used to categorize and code data from the focus group. Researchers first worked independently to limit bias and then worked together to finalize themes pulled from the focus group feedback.

McIntyre et al. (2018) conducted an evaluation of a 2-day foundational professional development (FPD). One hundred eighty-two primary and secondary teachers from 6 schools in New Orleans, all charter schools, participated in the 2-day training. Participant feedback was gathered at the beginning of day one and at the end of day two. The training was developed mainly with materials from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and focused on providing a common understanding of the impact of trauma, trauma-sensitive approaches, how to best create a trauma-sensitive environment, how to merge new information from the training into existing classroom norms, and how staff can engage in self-care to meet their own needs. Evaluation of this FPD aimed to better understand growth in knowledge after the training compared to before the training. It also aimed to understand how growth in knowledge was associated with participant acceptability of the principles of the training and system fit affected this relationship. A paired-sampled t-test was conducted to calculate growth in training. A multiple regression analysis was used to evaluate the correlation between knowledge growth, teacher acceptability, and system fit.

Opiola et al. (2020) conducted a 22 week-long Child-Teacher Relationship Training (CTRT) with three teachers and gathered data on teacher stress and emotional intelligence and on student behaviors. The CTRT curriculum manual was adapted to follow a weekly format and to use examples appropriate for the elementary level. Each teacher chose one student in their classroom with whom to focus on evaluating and developing a relationship. For the first 11 weeks, participants engaged in training and supervision with researchers. During this time, participants also engaged in weekly one-on-one play with their students. For the second half of the intervention, participants

engaged in 11 weeks of coaching where skills were explicitly modeled by researchers, skills were independently implemented by teachers with feedback, and teachers were observed continuing to independently use skills in the class.

### ***Measurement Tools***

Anderson et al. (2015) first administered a nominal needs assessment and had participants write 5 needs for professional development. Participants then shared their top one need, followed by second and third until all items that participants had written down were represented in the group list. This list was discussed until the group agreed on areas of priority and had a shared definition for each area of interest. These were divided into 4 topics and lead to the development of the four workshops. The workshops focused on neurohormonal impact, positive behavioral interventions and strategies, cognitive-behavioral interventions and strategies, and stress reduction techniques for the students and staff. After the workshop, Anderson et al. (2015) administered a survey and conducted 3 focus groups. The survey included closed-ended and open-ended questions that focused on 4 areas: what was learned from the workshop, what participants want to learn more about, what participants liked about the training, workshop content, and school/workplace climate. Participants were placed in a focus group, there were three total, and all received the same questions about how the information provided in the workshops influenced student interaction; if any of the information learned was shared with the general education teacher; perceptions of how trauma and stress impact the school; integration of trauma-informed skills on the school; and feedback on professional developments that would be helpful to the group.

McIntyre et al. (2018) formatted a questionnaire to assess knowledge pre and post-training. The study adopted the knowledge measure developed by Brown, Baker, and Wilcox (2012) to develop their questionnaire. They assessed knowledge on the prevalence and neurobiological impact of trauma; the need for learning and behavioral supports; SAMHSA's key principles; and secondary trauma occurring in teachers. Adapted subscales from Usage Rating Profile-Intervention Revised (URP-IR) were used to measure acceptability and system fit. Additionally, demographic data was collected in a way that maintained anonymity but allowed the researcher to pair pre and post-training surveys.

Opiola et al. (2020) used several measurement tools to collect data. The Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessment (ASEBA) Teacher Report Form (TRF) was used to evaluate internalizing problems, externalizing problems, and total problems. Specifically, this aimed to understand the teacher's view of the students' social, behavioral, and emotional concerns. The Index of Teaching Stress (ITS) had teachers self-reporting their own stress as related to a student and looked at three domains: attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, student characteristics, and teacher characteristics. The Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) was used to assess the teachers' emotional intelligence and looked at four domains: perceiving emotions, facilitating thoughts, understanding emotions, and managing emotions. The TRF, ITS, and MSCEIT were administered 2 weeks before the beginning of the training, in the middle of the training after the first 11 weeks, and after completion of the training. Scores were calculated from the measures and the TRF t-scores and ITS and MSCEIT raw scores were charted to show the change in scores pre, mid, and post-training. In

addition to these three quantitative measures, Opiola et al. (2020), used informal conversations and debriefing as qualitative data.

### **Risk of Bias**

Research of publications and selection of participating studies was conducted by the researcher alone adding a risk of bias to the current study. The thesis chair and a psychology Librarian were consulted on terms, research process, and inclusionary and exclusionary factors in an attempt to reduce the risk of bias

### **Study Findings**

Anderson et al. (2017) found that classroom staff often feel that they lack training in managing classroom behaviors, a major part of their role. Many struggled to switch from the mindset of a firm tone and punitive response to undesirable behaviors to a more caring tone that promotes the development of social-emotional skills in students. Although the trauma-sensitive training emphasizes the latter and participants understood this and how it relates to trauma, it was hard to change the learned behaviors that they had been engaging in for most of their careers. In addition to this, the working relationships among staff felt dismissive and disrespectful leaving many classroom staff members feeling frustrated. Their learned behaviors and a negative school climate led to a lack of collaboration with school staff and the perceived inability to implement trauma-sensitive skills. This also left some participants unresponsive to the professional development as they felt that nothing would change. This study concluded that skill development is needed in the context of addressing workplace culture.

McIntyre et al. (2018) found that teachers showed significant growth in knowledge after a foundational professional development,  $p < .01$ . Pretraining knowledge was positively correlated with teacher acceptability of trauma approach,  $p < .01$ . When teachers perceived trauma-sensitive approaches as a fit with their system, growth in knowledge positively correlated with teacher acceptability,  $p < .01$ . Conversely, when teachers did not perceive a system fit, knowledge growth negatively correlated with teacher acceptability,  $p < .01$ . This study concluded that a strong and positive system fit supported the implementation of a trauma-sensitive approach. Additionally, negative views of and lower scores regarding system fit had a latent effect of highlighting barriers to implementation and lead to low teacher acceptability scores.

Opiola et al. (2020) found that, when teachers received one-on-one training and supervision for using trauma-sensitive approaches to developing relationships with one of their students, teachers were able to better understand the root cause and concerns behind a student's problematic behaviors. Two out of the three teachers reported a decrease in stress as they learned to identify their students' struggles and understood strategies needed to continue supporting their students. One of the goals of this research was to determine if engaging in CTRT related to an increase in emotional intelligence. In all three teachers, self-reported questionnaires yielded scores that decreased over the course of the intervention. The authors argued that based on the growth in teachers' understanding of their students' needs and concerns, the decline in score was due to teachers being more emotionally attuned to their students. The issue of the validity of the MSCEIT measure was additionally raised as further research indicated that this is a common trend when used to look at changes in emotional intelligence over time.

Additional test-retest validity evaluation of this measure may be appropriate. The researchers concluded that as the teachers gained competence in social-emotional development, became more attuned to students' emotional needs, and gained self-awareness, they were able to more accurately rate their emotional intelligence. This study also found that the building of the teacher-student relationship improved behaviors and attitudes in both the student and teacher which helped their relationship improve. As the teacher worked on developing the relationship, the students became more responsive, developed more trust, engaged in prosocial behaviors, and often decreased the problematic behavior. This was rewarding for the teacher and led to reduced stress, an increase in positive interactions, and a decrease in negative feedback. This self-sustaining approach helped improve the relationship the teacher has with her students.

## **Discussion**

### **Interpretation of Results**

Upon a review of the literature within the past twenty years that focus on the evaluation of professional developments on trauma-sensitive approaches, it was determined that very few have focused on feedback from teachers and school staff, especially at the elementary level. The publications included in the current study aimed to evaluate interventions that utilized a trauma-sensitive approach. The three qualifying articles indicate a lack of consensus for best measurement tools for evaluation of teachers after an intervention, methodology, best practice for follow-up, and the number of follow-up sessions. Additionally, no determination could be made about best practices for teacher feedback in implementation integrity due to limited existing publications.

Anderson et al. (2017) found that lack of information, lack of teamwork, and lack of respect were the main issues that got in the way of teachers utilizing trauma-informed approach skills. Additionally, power difference and respect were an issue within the existing school climate. There seemed to be a lack of communication between teachers, between administrators and teachers, and between teachers and instructional assistants. The power difference was evident and left many feeling disrespected. Staff noted that even when there were multiple adults in the room, the lack of teamwork leads to conflicting expectations and an unstructured unsupportive classroom environment. Instructional assistants and teachers who attended the training felt uncomfortable sharing the information they learned due to power differences or because they felt uncomfortable commenting on someone else's classroom. Teachers reported these systemic climate concerns as barriers to implementation.

McIntyre et al. (2018) found that having prior knowledge and experiencing a growth in knowledge after the FPD, compared to before, lead to high acceptability scores when participants felt supported by their system and when the training fit with the expectations and support of their existing school system. Positive outcomes were dependent on the lens of the existing system and how the training fit with the existing fit. Administrator and peer support appeared to be critical in influencing the teachers' implementation. Similar to Anderson et al. (2017), norms, practices, and expectations of the existing system directly impacted teacher's ability to implement new practices with fidelity.

Opiola et al. (2020) found that the relationship built between student and teacher increased confidence and decreased stress in the teacher. These positive outcomes

influence the classroom climate. This study also suggested that teacher outlook and experience influence the classroom climate and visa-versa. Keeping this in mind, the teacher role and the system climate have a great impact on the successful implementation of a trauma-sensitive approach.

Across the participating publications of the current study, the main factors that influenced teachers' perceptions of trauma-sensitive approaches were knowledge, system climate, and school relationships. Appendix C illustrates how these themes appeared in each participating publication.

### ***Knowledge***

Each study focused on providing a common understanding of trauma or toxic stress, how it affects students and their behaviors, and how it can appear in a classroom. Each training also provided information on protective factors that help minimize the impact of trauma and help develop social-emotional skills in students. Providing knowledge and strategies that teachers can use to support students was an integral part of training. Information was best presented with strategies and tools to implement. Teachers and participants responded positively to gaining foundational knowledge. Two of the studies also emphasized the need for self-care in minimizing secondary trauma in teachers and those in a helping role.

### ***System Climate***

Two of the publications explicitly looked at how system norms influenced the acceptability of participants and implementation integrity. Understanding the existing system norms and considering them in the training approach was explicitly utilized prior

to providing the training in McIntyre et al. (2018). These studies highlighted the importance of addressing existing barriers before implementing new interventions. The existing norms, views, practices, and values in a system impact the school environment and the acceptance of new ideals. If the new ideals align with the existing values and norms, then they can be more accessible to the participants and more easily accepted into the system. When a school system is less flexible, lacks effective peer interactions and teamwork then new approaches and curriculums are less easily adapted. In one system understanding the students' home lives and how it impacted them at school was already part of the norm. Teamwork and problem-solving skills were already a part of how the staff worked together. In this system, the trauma-sensitive approach fit with the existing ideals and was more readily accepted by participants. When the training ideals do not match the existing system climate, then it may highlight the lack of resources and support available to staff and is less likely to lead to implementation. In this case, understanding the barriers and addressing them before implementing an intervention will more likely lead to acceptability.

### *School Relationships*

School relationships impact and are impacted by system climate and are factors in implementation integrity. The school relationships highlighted in the participating publications were teacher-student, teacher-peer, and classroom staff-administration. In systems where there were positive relationships among the staff and staff used open and respectful communication, trauma-sensitive approaches were accepted and implemented. Additionally, leadership that promotes positive and effective problem-solving skills fostered a more positive environment for positive relationships. The administrators have

power in setting the tone and helping to create a collaborative and nurturing or independent and punitive school environment. When participants saw value in the knowledge and skills of the trauma-sensitive approach, they were still not likely to implement the skills when they felt a lack of respect, a lack of collaboration, and negative staff relationships. Lastly, developing strong relationships between the teacher and student is an integral part of the trauma-sensitive approach.

Considering the trend of professional development and training on trauma and the trauma-sensitive approach, a shockingly small amount of research is dedicated to gathering teacher feedback, evaluating implementation integrity, or considering system change theory and the impact of the existing climate on teachers and their implementation behaviors. It is recommended that future research consider the following research questions to help develop best practices in training delivery and evaluation: does the format of a training influence teacher acceptability; does a teacher's professional experience with students with trauma influence acceptability; is acceptability influenced by a teacher's perception of their role and ability to carry out their perceived role; how do schools support implementation; how does school climate impact implementation integrity; does the grade level influence teacher acceptability; and what factors impact implementation integrity despite the presence of acceptability? The Usage Rating Profile-Intervention Revised (URP-IR) assesses acceptability, understanding, home-school collaboration, feasibility, system climate, and system support. It is a tool that can be adapted to fit the specifics of the training and that may provide much of the information needed to theorize the research questions posed previously. Additional research should provide information on the method of implementation, evaluative tools, and strategies for

fostering acceptability, feasibility, and implementation integrity within a given system climate.

### **Limitations**

The current study has limitations worth considering. A review of the literature yielded minimal results for evaluations of trauma-sensitive trainings that included teacher feedback on implementation. Grey literature, or unpublished literature, was not included in the current study. Grey literature can include academic papers, research and committee reports, government reports, conference papers, and ongoing research that may provide data not found in commercial publications. It is important to consider unpublished evidence as grey literature does undergo a review process and provides valuable information. However, for the current study peer-reviewed articles were utilized in the review process. Three publications were included in this analysis of literature. This small sample size should be considered. There is little research and publications looking at this and of the three included, they had varying methodologies, sample size, and timelines for evaluating and data collection. There is a lack of research and cohesion in the studies that do exist. Additional research on the evaluation of trauma-informed professional developments is recommended as it would provide further information and context for the current synthesis of existing literature and inform best practices for implementation integrity.

The methodology of the current study was a rapid review and did not include more than one researcher in the process of research and analysis for inclusion. The use of multiple researchers may allow for less risk of bias. The current study reviews existing literature and past interventions to identify themes in the outcome. A follow-up study that

utilizes the systems change theory in the development, implementation, and evaluation of intervention may help further inform best practices for trauma-sensitive approach professional developments in the future.

### **Implications for School Psychologists**

School psychologists are called upon to promote trauma-sensitive schools. Among the tips and recommendations provided by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) is the implementation of school-wide programs and ongoing delivery of professional development (NASP, 2016). The current study provides information on the factors that impact teachers' implementation behaviors after a trauma-sensitive approach training. This can further inform how to best provide support to schools and teachers. In all intervention implementation, including professional developments, teachers should be involved in the development of the intervention and their feedback should be gathered as well. Similar to Minahan's (2019) strategies, school psychologists must engage in thoughtful interactions to building relationships with staff. In understanding teachers and the school climate they are in, school psychologists can promote change within the teachers' values and within the context of the school.

Additionally, understanding these factors and their influence on systematic change may allow long-term change. School psychologists are often in the role of providing professional developments, especially those focusing on social-emotional growth. To encourage implementation integrity, school psychologists can utilize consultative skills and knowledge of systems change theory. School psychologists are uniquely trained and positioned in schools with the skills to best understand the existing system climate and facilitate the implementation of the trauma-sensitive approach.

Many presentations offered on the topic of trauma include the ACE study, the Paper Tigers film, or foundational information on what trauma is and how it looks in students (Felitti et al., 1998; Redford, 2015). Professional developments need to evolve past these tools and go further. The ACE study matters within the context however, it can bring up painful memories for the audience without recognition or closure (Felitti et al., 1998). Paper Tigers provides a powerful example of trauma in teens and the effect of strong relationships built with the staff however, it is not a manual for implementation of the trauma-sensitive school approach (Redford, 2015). The film does not discuss the ethical considerations, the importance of boundaries for the safety and well-being of staff and students, or the need for staff self-care and minimizing secondary trauma. A trauma-sensitive training should provide foundational information, but then it should explicitly explain how staff can provide a safe school setting through structure, predictability, and relationship building. Staff members do not need to know the details of traumatic events in a student's life in order for their relationship to promote resilience. It is less about the story that a student has but rather understanding that each student may be fighting an invisible battle and that each student deserves a safe space where they can be seen, heard, and given the support to develop regardless of the burden they carry. When operating from this perspective, staff can create a supportive climate where the focus can be on prevention, identification, and continued supports as previously outlined by Chafouleas et al. (2016).

Teachers should not be expected to provide support at the tier-three level. It should be made clear that their role has not shifted to that of mental health professionals. Rather, their presence, interactions with students, and response to unfavorable behaviors

in their existing role allows for a safe space where students can continue to heal and begin to learn. When providing examples and explicit trainings for teachers, school psychologists may utilize existing resources that clearly state expectations for and how to apply a trauma-sensitive approach Chafouleas et al., (2016), Jennings (2019), and Minahan (2019). Providing supports should be a collaborative effort that is feasible for teachers. Trainings and added tasks should be easily scaffolded into existing teacher tasks and should be manageable in time frame. In supporting teachers, school psychologists may limit work for themselves in the long run while ensuring additional supports to students. This should be time efficient service delivery for teachers and school psychologists.

It is recommended that a professional development for a trauma-sensitive approach should begin with providing basic background information. It should provide information already detailed above that encourages relationship building, structure, a plan for heightened situations, and other tools for supporting students. The trainings or, professional development, should include a hands-on proponent that makes the more abstract concepts more tangible. An example would be presenting scenarios and having groups discuss the ways in which they could apply the new skills to handle the situation. Another more targeted exercise is having participants submit examples of a challenging situation they have experienced and having participants role-play a response. These examples show how staff can be involved in the training and also be given a chance to show what they have learned while also showing areas that need to be reviewed. These activities can be formative for the rest of the training by revealing misunderstanding, confusion, resistance, or any disagreement a participant may experience. As a reminder,

staff members are coming into the training with their own past experiences, values, expectations, and biases that color their view of the training. The professional development should include all staff members, encourage collaboration, and have staff members identify one or two colleagues that they feel comfortable discussing concerns as they arise and brainstorm ways to support. The involvement of all staff members should be done in a way that promotes collaboration, limits power differences in the application of strategies, and it should encourage the development of norms that all staff members can utilize. In being mindful of the school climate, the school psychologist may have suggestions ready or may encourage individual anonymous submissions so that all voices are heard, but that any hostility or negativity be kept to a minimum. Feedback provided by the presenter should be mindful of teacher roles and expectations. Specifically, the presenter should understand that some resistance may happen. This may be due to fatigue over meetings and trainings, an incongruence with the new approach and their existing approach. When a presenter discusses being mindful of the authoritarian tone, harsh words, or discipline style, they may want to clarify that, for staff who are firm or follow a no-tolerance policy, the expectation is not to let inappropriate behavior go unaddressed, but rather avoid traumatization and maintain a safe space while giving feedback. A staff member may have a disruptive student who needs to be escorted out of the room and maintain the respect of the student as they explain why they must be escorted out of the room. Teachers should feel confident in their ability to talk to a student about behaviors in a way that fits their values and maintains the student's dignity. Having this conversation explicitly with staff may help limit the perception of incongruence and increase implementation integrity. Finally, feedback from participants must be collected

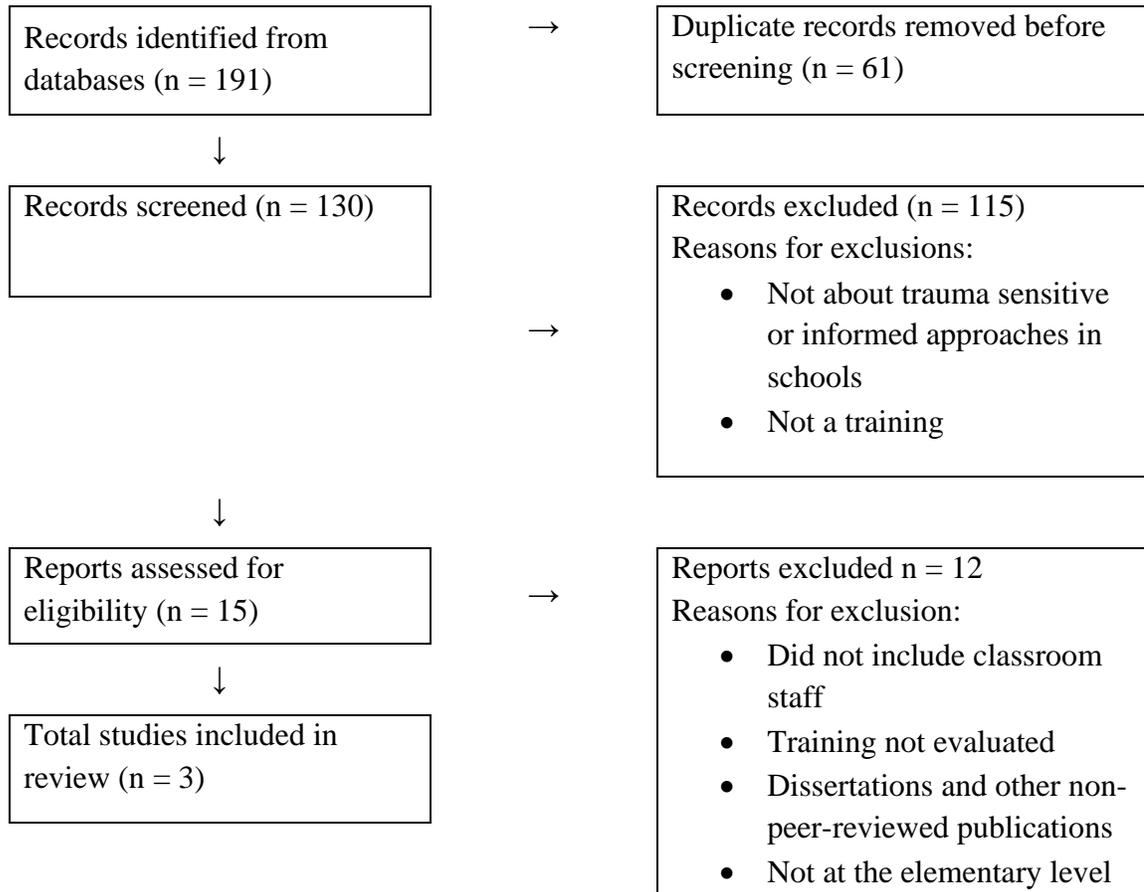
on the professional development itself, but data should also be collected on feasibility and fit of expectations and their existing role and values.

In all interactions, school psychologists consider their stakeholders. This study reveals that this is the case as well in presentations and data collection. When implementing an intervention, information should be gathered on those responsible for implementing the intervention as well as the participants. School psychologists provide many services in schools and do a lot of work to support students. They are encouraged to use all resources, including staff, in maximizing the provision of services.

## Appendix A

Figure 1

*PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram Systematic Search for Rapid Review*



## Appendix B

Table 1

<i>Characteristics of Participating Publications</i>						
Reference (Year)	Goal of Study	Total Number of Participants	Stakeholders Involved in Feedback	Length of Intervention	Measurement Tool Used	Primary Elements Impacting Implementation
Anderson et al. (2015)	Development, implementation, and evaluation of a professional development	16	Classroom Staff	4 separate days	Post-workshop survey developed by the researchers	Staff relationships, and overall school climate influenced teacher implementation of training skills.
McIntyre et al. (2018)	Evaluation of a 2-day foundational professional development (FPD); acceptability among teachers	183	Teachers	2 days	Adapted knowledge measure from Brown and colleagues; subscales from Usage Rating Profile-Intervention Revised (URP-IR)	Prior knowledge, growth in knowledge after the FPD, training expectations fit with current system climate.
Opiola et al. (2020)	Evaluative case study of teachers in a yearlong Child-Teacher Relationship Training	3	Teachers	22 weeks: 11 weeks of training 11 weeks of coaching	Mayer- Salovey- Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT); Teacher Report Form (TRF); Index of Teaching Stress (ITS)	Development of positive student-teacher relationship led to reduction in problematic behaviors in student.

## Appendix C

Table 2

<i>Synthesized Results of Participating Publications</i>			
Reference (Year)	Themes		
	Knowledge	System Climate	School Relationships
Anderson et al. (2015)	Participants lacked training prior to intervention. The professional development informed their response to concerning behaviors.	Overall school climate greatly impacted implementation. Staff relationships lead to a more negative and less supportive school climate.	Staff relationships influenced teacher implementation of training skills. This in turn influenced staff relationship with students.
McIntyre et al. (2018)	Knowledge of trauma and trauma-informed approaches correlated significantly with teacher acceptability.	Teacher acceptability dependent on training fit with current system climate.	Strong teacher relationship necessary to a positive school climate.
Opiola et al. (2020)	Growth in knowledge allowed teachers to try new approaches to student interactions.	Training and feedback provided by school counselors. Feedback and collaboration helped build a safe and supportive space.	Development of positive student-teacher relationship led to reduction in problematic behaviors in student.

**Appendix D**

Close-Ended Survey Questions and Findings from Anderson et al. (2015)

**Table 2. Post-Workshop Survey**

	% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% Disagree	% Strongly Disagree
1. Student disruptive behaviors may be linked to physical changes related to a stressful living environment.	50.0	43.8	0.0	6.3
2. When an adult uses a loud voice or a stern tone it can trigger a high stress response in some students, making behavior worse.	18.8	50.0	31.3	0.0
3. Often, students will only stop a negative behavior if an adult uses an aggressive tone or strong words.	6.3	56.3	31.3	6.3
4. What I learned will be helpful in my work.	6.7	73.3	20.0	0.0
5. I plan to talk to others at my school about this information.	14.3	57.1	21.4	7.1
6. The adults in the school give supportive, corrective feedback to one another when witnessing an adult speaking harshly to a student.	0.0	33.3	60.0	6.7
7. I generally feel respected in the workplace.	33.3	46.7	20.0	0.0
8. My colleagues consistently demonstrate respect for one another.	12.5	50.0	31.3	6.3
9. The adults who work here come together as a team to work...support one another during stressful times.	6.3	62.5	25.0	6.3
10. The adults in the school help each other develop creative, strengths-based responses to difficult problems or issues.	6.3	56.3	37.5	0.0
11. I generally consider my classroom or workspace to be a calm and peaceful environment.	18.8	43.8	37.5	0.0

*Note: n = 16*

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