

Teacher Candidates' Perceptions of Preparedness of Teaching Students Who Experience Trauma

(Received on November 17, 2020 - Accepted on March 18, 2021)

M. Paige McClain¹

Abstract

Within a Clinical Model of teacher preparation, teacher candidates spend sustained time in classrooms, where they are inevitably exposed to children who experience trauma. Educators need to be prepared to support such learners. This qualitative study analyzed two surveys from 15 early childhood teacher candidates to understand their perceived preparedness to support children who experience trauma. Results indicate that teacher candidates feel “some-what” prepared to support children who experience trauma, but feel as though they need more education, training, and experience. Teacher candidates are concerned about not having the appropriate and effective support and strategies to support all children in the classroom equitably. Respondents believe a seminar of school support personnel is beneficial to their preparation and recognized the value of collaborating with school-support colleagues. Implications point to the need for teacher education programs to require coursework and opportunities for teacher candidates to learn about the biology of trauma and how trauma can impact behavior and functioning. Teacher education programs should embed trauma-sensitive education throughout program experiences.

Key Words: Early childhood education, teacher candidates, teacher education, teacher preparation, trauma

Introduction

It is estimated that somewhere around two in three children, more than 46 million children in the United States, are affected by trauma each year (Cook, 2015; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). The way in which childhood trauma exposures impact a child's educational experiences are vast, affecting students' social, emotional, and behavioral aspects of learning and functioning at school as well as academic progress. The impact of trauma may be visible in many aspects of a child's behavior, and can play a role in how the child interacts with their environment, peers, and teachers, sometimes impacting the entire functioning of a classroom (Buyse et al., 2008; Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004; Spilt et al., 2016; Statman-Weil, 2015). Although the impact of trauma may be evident in a classroom setting, the buffering effect of positive relationships with teachers can be powerful in predicting positive outcomes in their social, emotional, and academic success in school (Buyse et al., 2008; Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004; Spilt et

¹ Ohio University, USA, Curriculum and Instruction, Department of Teacher Education
mc296712@ohio.edu, ORCID: 0000-0001-6435-3209

al., 2016; Statman-Weil, 2015). For these reasons, it is critical that teachers are prepared to recognize and respond to the challenges created by trauma.

This qualitative study sought to understand early childhood teacher candidates' perceptions of their own preparedness to support learners who experience trauma. Additionally, the study sought to identify concerns teacher candidates have with supporting children who experience trauma.

The research was framed by the following questions: 1) In what ways do early childhood teacher candidates believe that an understanding of trauma is relevant for their future classrooms? 2) In what ways do early childhood teacher candidates feel prepared to equitably support learners who have experienced trauma in their classroom? 3) What concerns do early childhood teacher candidates have related to providing equitable support for learners who have experienced trauma? and 4) How do early childhood teacher candidates believe a panel-style seminar of related service providers is beneficial to their teaching students with diverse learning needs?

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Early childhood education is focused on providing students with education related to academic content, social and emotional skills, daily living skills, art, music, and physical education skills, and more. Early childhood educators are tasked with providing academic content, and being role models who facilitate social interactions between students and provide emotional support (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta, 1999). Although it may seem young children show up to school enthusiastic and ready to learn, that is not always the case. Aside from being a human and having "bad" days, there are various contextual aspects which may impair how students interact, experience, and learn in school. One aspect, which is the focus of this article, is trauma.

Childhood trauma and education

The way in which childhood trauma exposures impact a child's educational experiences are vast, affecting students' social, emotional, and behavioral aspects of learning and functioning at school (Craig, 2016; Statman-Weil, 2015). Biologically speaking, young children who face chronic trauma and maltreatment have the part of their brain which is responsible for communicating fear, detecting threat, and other emotions continually activated through those experiences (Perry et al., 1995). The amygdala detects threat and activates the "fight or flight" system within the human body, innately ordering a person to do what it takes to survive the threat at hand. When the amygdala is continuously activated, it physically grows larger and takes up more space in the brain, leaving less space for other executive functioning, planning, and thinking skills (Perry et al., 1995). Because of this continuous activation and the growth of the amygdala, the brain begins to have an exaggerated response to small threats and minor stressors. Because of this biological basis, it is easy to see how this biological

system could lead to various behaviors and responses in an educational setting (Perry et al., 1995; Stokes & Brunzell, 2019). It is important to note that protective factors, such as a steady and supportive family, may help children work through their trauma and provide consistent messaging that they are safe, which could mitigate exaggerated responses to certain stimuli (Burke Harris, 2018).

The activation of an exaggerated threat response could induce some maladaptive behaviors which work as survival mechanisms in the face of a threat; for example, fleeing and hiding, aggressive behavior, or freezing up (O'Neill et al., 2010; Perry et al., 1995; Stokes & Brunzell, 2019). Although these behaviors are adaptive in the moment of a threatening experience, these behaviors among others may be viewed in the classroom as disruptive, disobedient, defiant, resistive, distracting, and/or attention-seeking (Statman-Weil, 2015; Stokes & Brunzell, 2019). This common misinterpretation of student behaviors which could be based in the impact of traumatic exposures result in a number of children who receive incorrect diagnoses, such as Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), or another disability or mental health diagnosis, rather than recognizing trauma as the deeper basis for the behaviors (Burke Harris, 2018; Craig, 2016; Statman-Weil, 2015; van der Kolk, 2005). Additionally as a result, there is an overrepresentation of students who have histories of complex childhood trauma in special education (Statman-Weil, 2015).

Teacher response to trauma

There has been minimal research that has sought to understand teacher candidates' perceptions and experiences of how their teacher preparation program prepared them to teach students impacted by trauma. There is previous research, however, that has identified teachers' preparedness in teaching students affected by trauma (Garrick et al., 2017; Hobbs et al., 2019; Longaretti & Toes, 2017). Generally, teachers often report feeling inadequately prepared, or only moderately prepared, to meet the needs of students impacted by trauma in their classrooms (Garrick et al., 2017; Hobbs et al., 2019; Longaretti & Toes, 2017; Onchwari, 2010). Teachers might be unsure of their role and not sure how to specifically support students who are affected by trauma (Alisic et al., 2012; Brunzell et al., 2019). In one study, educators felt they had not received trauma-informed training and were not given adequate strategies to support the well-being of students who experienced trauma (Brunzell et al., 2019). In another study, teachers' reported perception of difficulty teaching students impacted by trauma was dependent on 1) amount of teaching experience, 2) previous attendance at a trauma-focused training(s), and 3) the number of trauma-impacted students they had taught in the past (Alisic et al., 2012).

The lack of understanding and knowledge about trauma and providing appropriate classroom support can be problematic and may lead to misdiagnosis and implementation of ineffective and inaccurate supports and services (Baweja et al., 2016; Hobbs

et al., 2019; Statman-Weil, 2015). Teachers with inadequate knowledge about trauma and its impacts on learning and development may misinterpret a student's behaviors as acts of defiance or signs and symptoms of a learning disability (Baweja et al., 2016; as cited in Hobbs et al., 2019; Statman-Weil, 2015).

Figure 1 below provides a logical model of the critical concepts which situates the current work with previous research. Trauma, the biological effects of trauma and the presence or absence of a secure parent-child attachment often go hand-in-hand. Children who experience trauma, especially chronic childhood trauma, often do not develop strong and secure attachments with their parents/guardians (Buyse, et al., 2008; Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004; Statman-Weil, 2015). Attachment in early life leads to the development of internal working models or mental representations of relationships (Buyse et al., 2008). Past interactions and responses provide a precedent for how to act and respond when presented with new relationships. Thus, a child without a secure previous attachment may avoid teacher interaction or seek attention from their teacher in inappropriate ways (Craig, 2016; Schwartz & Davis, 2006). This behavior, in addition to the biological effects of experiencing trauma leads to diverse behaviors and responses to stimuli in a classroom setting. The reaction students receive in response to their behavior from their teacher, classroom culture, and/or school is crucial in contributing to their academic motivation and success, future relationships, social and cognitive competence, among other outcomes (Badanes et al., 2012; Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Buyse et al., 2008). Teacher responses and classroom culture is likely guided, at least in part by, their teacher preparation program. Teachers' preparation experiences related to supporting children who experience trauma is crucial.

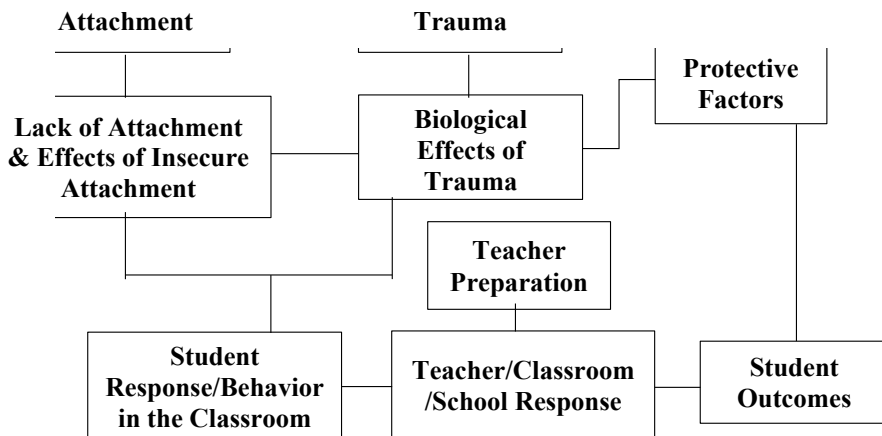


Figure 1: A Logic Model of Critical Concepts

Previous research points to the need to better understand factors which influence educators' perceptions and difficulty providing appropriate support to trauma-impacted students, as well as a need for trauma-informed practice in early childhood settings (Alisic et al., 2012).

The uncertainty and low level of reported confidence may point to the issue that teacher candidates do not receive sufficient education and training to appropriately support their students (as cited in Hobbs et al., 2019). In a Clinical Model of teacher preparation, teacher candidates spend sustained time in classrooms and have significant contact with children (AACTE, 2018). As a result of these interactions with students, and the need for teacher candidates to be prepared for diverse situations and learners' needs in their future classroom, it is crucial for teacher candidates to be prepared to recognize and respond to the impact that trauma has on children.

A Clinical Model of teacher preparation and supporting children who experience trauma

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) published the Blue-Ribbon Panel report (2010) which called for a major shift in teacher preparation, where systems and curricula of partnerships between colleges and PK-12 schools should promote advancing research and reflexive practices while promoting benefits for all participants. This report was reauthorized by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education's (AACTE) publication of the Clinical Practice Commission in 2018 which provided guiding proclamations to guide the implementation of clinical practice in educational settings. This shift in teacher preparation emphasizes promoting positive impacts on PK-12 student learning outcomes through collaborative and sustainable partnerships between PK-12 schools and colleges and authentic field-based experiences for teacher candidates (AACTE, 2018; NCATE, 2010).

While a Clinical Model of teacher preparation seeks to fill gaps between theory and practice, teacher candidates participate in prolonged field experiences where they are authentically and collaboratively a part of the classroom. In teacher candidates' field placements, it is very likely they will come across students who have experienced and are impacted by trauma. Thus, it is necessary for teacher candidates to be able to effectively and equitably recognize and respond to trauma in the classroom. In the Clinical Model of teacher preparation, it is expected that teacher candidates apply their course content knowledge to their clinical placements. In this model of teacher preparation then, it is useful to emphasize knowledge and awareness about trauma and the impact those experiences may have on learners, as well as implementing trauma-informed teaching practices throughout the teacher education program.

Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted at a public, midwestern university which

serves approximately 21,500 students a year at the main campus. The College of Education provides initial teaching certification for both undergraduate- and graduate-level students in a variety of content areas for early childhood education through adolescent-to-young adult programs. The early childhood education (ECE) program grants a bachelor's degree with teacher licensure for preschool to grade 3.

Qualitative survey research was identified as an effective methodology for conducting the research study to understand individuals' experiences and perceptions related to their perceived preparedness to support learners who experience trauma (Glesne, 2016; Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research takes place in the natural, real world, uses methods of inquiry that are interactive, is flexible and emergent, and is fundamentally interpretive (Glesne, 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Patton, 2015). Qualitative methodology allowed the researcher to develop a thick, rich description of the perceptions and experiences of teacher candidates who participated in the research (Glesne, 2016).

Participants

The researcher sought recruitment of early childhood teacher candidates via their junior-level seminar course which is connected to their clinical experiences. Recruitment included the researcher visiting the seminar course to describe the project, provide information related to full participation in the study, and complete a full consent process.

Fifteen teacher candidates participated in the research study. Participants included two men and 13 women. Participants were in the process of completing 250 hours in their clinical field placement at the time the study was conducted. All junior-level teacher candidates who were recruited and participated in the study were placed in one local partnership school. The school in which participating teacher candidates were placed is located in the state's county with the highest rates of poverty, according to 2014-2018 U.S. Census Bureau data.

Data sources

Participants completed two qualitative surveys one week apart; the second after attending a panel of school support personnel who visited their seminar course.

The first survey was completed at the beginning of one weekly seminar class meeting. This survey instrument asked teacher candidates' to describe their understanding of what trauma is, how trauma is relevant in their future classroom, and how they feel prepared to support children who experience trauma. The first survey asked teacher candidates what concerns they had with respect to supporting children in their future classroom who experience trauma. The first survey also asked teacher candidates about their knowledge of the people and roles in a school setting who might be supportive to them as a teacher working with children who experience trauma.

The second survey was completed one week after the first survey. Teacher candidates completed the second survey at the end of the weekly seminar class meeting, directly after having attended the panel of school support personnel. The second survey asked, again, the ways in which teacher candidates felt trauma is relevant in their future classrooms. The survey also asked teacher candidates again, to describe the ways in which they feel prepared to support children who experience trauma, as well as concerns they have. Teacher candidates were asked again, about their knowledge of the people in roles in a school setting who might be supportive to them in working with children who experience trauma. Importantly, the second survey asked teacher candidates to describe the ways in which the school support personnel panel was, or was not, beneficial to their preparedness in supporting children with diverse needs, including those who experience trauma.

Data analysis

The data from both surveys was analyzed using qualitative first- and second-cycle coding techniques. The first cycle of coding yielded codes which were simple and direct, while the second cycle of coding yielded more complex codes, which allowed for organized and synthesized data (Saldaña, 2009). Codes were developed using in-vivo coding methods. In-vivo coding allowed the researcher to share the voices and perspectives of the teacher candidates being studied by developing the codes specifically from the written words of the respondents (Manning, 2017). The researcher employed inductive thematic analysis to describe and report themes and patterns which presented themselves through the data, rather than seeking pre-determined codes from previous studies and literature (Nowell et al., 2017). Codes and themes which emerged from the data are displayed in tables presented throughout the findings section of this manuscript.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is as the instrument (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Patton, 2015). This assumes that the researcher is entirely responsible for the collection and analysis of the qualitative data. I have completed doctoral-level coursework in qualitative methods and have experience conducting qualitative research and writing about qualitative research methods as a graduate assistant on multiple research studies. For this reason, I present myself as qualified to have conducted this qualitative research study.

Throughout my own educational journey and clinical field experiences, I have discovered the number of young children and students who are largely affected by trauma. I have observed instances where the impact of traumatic experiences can play a role in students' learning, attention, emotional regulation, and interactions with peers, as well as interactions with teachers and other adults in the classroom. As a result of

these observations and additional reading and learning about trauma and its impacts, I have developed a general wondering about how early childhood education programs prepare teacher candidates to teach students who experience trauma. Although these experiences have contributed to my wondering about the topic which guides this research study, they could have also influenced my work as a researcher.

To reduce personal bias associated with my passion and excitement about the phenomenon, I employed two methods often used in qualitative research: epoché and bracketing. Epoché involves the researcher actively recognizing and setting aside her own knowledge and perceptions about the topic under study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Patton, 2015). I have actively worked towards recognizing and setting aside my own knowledge and perceptions about the various topics which guide this research study. Bracketing involved me pushing aside my own personal experiences with the topic under study, to perceive it from a fresh perspective, as if for the first time (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I intentionally approached all aspects of conducting this research through a fresh perspective, while trying my best to keep all of my own experiences and biases surrounding the topic pushed aside. Employing these two methods of acknowledging my own biases and personal involvement allowed me to separate personal insight from collection and analysis of data.

Findings

Understanding of trauma

The vast majority (93%) of early childhood teacher candidates who responded to the survey acknowledged that trauma is an event, or series of events which is harmful or negative in some way that may happen in a child's life. Many identified several ways in which this trauma could be harmful, including the psychological, mental, emotional, and physical domains of life. Teacher candidates recognized that experiencing trauma can have a lasting, and even lifelong impact on the students they might be teaching. A few of the candidates (13%) acknowledged that trauma may not only be directly experienced, but can also be indirect experiences, such as witnessing domestic violence. Examples of the codes and themes related to the understanding of trauma are illustrated in Table 1 below:

Table 1.

Example Quotes, Codes, and Themes (Understanding of Trauma)

Example Quote from Survey	First Cycle Code	Second Cycle Code	Theme Emerged
"Trauma is a very broad term but it could be considered anything that is experienced that is harmful, be it physically, emotionally, mentally, etc. which can have lasting negative/harmful effects."	Harmful Event; Negative Impact	Physical, Emotional, Mental Impacts!; Lifelong Impact	Trauma is event, or series of events, which are harmful to a child in many ways; these harmful impacts can be lifelong.

Trauma relevance in the classroom

All of the early childhood teacher candidates surveyed (100%) believe that trauma will be relevant in their future classrooms or is relevant now in their field placement school. Many teacher candidates (47%) responded that because of the lifelong and widespread impact of trauma, having a traumatized student in their classroom may impact that student in unique ways and may even impact the class as a whole. Although a number of the teacher candidates recognized this impact generally, such as "I believe trauma will be relevant in my future classroom, but in many different ways," others identified specific ways in which this impact might be visible. For example, one teacher candidate said, "My students could have trauma in their lives and this could affect their work ethic, attitude, and grades," and another stated, "...there will be students that have experienced trauma that may affect their academic performance, social skills, and overall well-being." One teacher candidate believed trauma has a large relevance in classrooms and stated a feeling of responsibility to respond to these students and their experiences: "Trauma is so relevant to all classrooms. So many children experience some type of emotional, physical, mental, etc. trauma. As a future teacher, I feel it is a responsibility of mine to look out for this/recognize it and do something about it. Oftentimes for a child who has experienced trauma, you [the teacher] are their only "safe haven" and source of safety."

Again, from the second survey, teacher candidates believe that the trauma children face can and will impact them in a variety of ways, including their learning and social and emotional development. Many commented that trauma "will always be relevant," or that "every student has some trauma." Additionally, one teacher candidate from the second survey spoke to the relevance of trauma in a classroom and the importance of

the teacher's response:

Trauma is so relevant in education. It can be easy to get mad at a child for acting out in some way, but when you take the time to empathize with them, you better understand and realize that all the child really needs is someone to be there for them.

Examples of the ways in which quotes related to the relevance of trauma in a classroom were coded and the themes that emerged are displayed in the Table 2 below:

Table 2.

Example Quotes, Codes, and Themes (Relevance of Trauma)

Example Quote	First Cycle Code	Second Cycle Code	Theme Emerged
"I feel that trauma will be relevant in my classroom because there will be students that have experienced trauma that may affect their academic performance, social skills, and overall well-being."	Relevance of Trauma	Various Impacts of Trauma in School (Academic Performance, Social Skills, etc.)	Trauma is relevant in the classroom as it can have various impacts on learners which can effect their schooling experience.
"My students could have had trauma in their lives and this could affect their work ethic, attitude, and grades."	Presence of Trauma; Various Impacts of Trauma in School (Academic Performance, Attitude, etc.)		Trauma is relevant in the classroom as it can have various impacts on learners which can effect their schooling experience.

Preparedness to teach students who experience trauma

Most of the teacher candidates (60%) reported feeling "somewhat" prepared to teach students who may have experienced trauma and having some experience in classrooms where trauma is present during their field placements in local schools. About half of the early childhood teacher candidates (47%) mentioned having some sort of previous training, instruction, or attending a previous seminar which taught them about trauma, but five of the respondents felt there was more for them to learn. Codes and themes related to their perceived preparedness to support children who experience trauma are illustrated in Table 3 below. One teacher candidate reported, "I feel like I need more training and experience," while another said, "I feel somewhat prepared. I have been in a classroom with trauma, but I need more experience to

feel confident.” Only two of the 15 respondents mentioned having coping strategies, mechanisms, and tools to work with students who have experienced trauma.

On the second survey, teacher candidates reported feeling as though they “know enough,” and mention having some experience within their field placement schools. For example, “I think the [placement school] has prepared me to teach students who are dealing with trauma. I’ve had good practice in talking with students and their trauma,” and “I feel much more prepared now than I did a year ago. Seeing it/practicing recognizing and addressing it in my placement has helped a lot.” However, one teacher candidate responded that they “honestly don’t feel knowledgeable of how to approach it.”

Table 3.

Example Quotes, Codes, and Themes (Perceived Preparedness)

Example Quote	First Cycle Code	Second Cycle Code	Theme Emerged
"I feel somewhat prepared. I have been in a classroom with trauma, but I need more experience to feel confident."	Somewhat Prepared	Need More (Training, Experience)	Teacher candidates feel "somewhat prepared" to support learners who experience trauma, but believe more training and experience would be useful.

Concerns with teaching students who experience trauma

The two main themes which came out of teacher candidates’ concerns in teaching students who may have experienced trauma on the first survey are 1) “saying the wrong thing” and/or triggering a student, and 2) providing equitable support to all students. Example quotes, codes, and themes related to concerns teacher candidates have in supporting learners who experience trauma are illustrated in Table 4 below. Many teacher candidates (27%) mentioned feeling concerned about making their students feel welcome, comfortable, and safe in the classroom. One teacher candidate acknowledged that providing equitable support for each student may look different, and stated, “All trauma is different, and therefore every child handles [it] and reacts to things in different ways.” Another major concern many of the teacher candidates (33%) had was related to behavior management in the classroom setting. For example, one teacher candidate shared the concern, “...things they may say that are inappropriate for a school setting, will they act out? If so, how, and how do you help them with it?” Similarly, another teacher candidate responded being concerned with, “How to

react, how to care for them, teaching methods, getting hurt, what if they don't listen, not understanding them," and another, "I am concerned that I may not know how to handle any misbehaviors." One teacher candidate did indirectly recognize that a student's behavior may be a way of communicating and said, "That it will be hard to understand the difficulties they're experiencing. It's hard to decipher what is acting out and what is a call for help."

Most of the teacher candidates (73%) mentioned some ways in which they feel comfortable teaching students with trauma on the second survey: having listening skills, knowing what to say, having good communication skills, and knowing about available resources and when to use them (some pointed to the panel seminar for this learned information). For example, one teacher candidate stated, "I feel like I will be prepared to call social workers when appropriate and provide support for students," and another, "...I will have resources to help me if I reach a place I don't understand." Additionally, a teacher candidate pointed to the seminar panel for increasing their confidence in being prepared to teach students who may have experienced trauma: "After the panel, my confidence is higher. Also, my experience now is helping. I will need more though."

A few of the teacher candidates (13%) reported being knowledgeable about methods to use or having tools available in teaching students who have experienced trauma; however, these teacher candidates did not identify what those teaching tools or methods are. For example, one teacher candidate stated, "I know about many forms of trauma and can react to many," and another, "I am well-aware of what a student faced with trauma looks like and have been taught methods to help." One teacher candidate acknowledged the importance of recognizing behaviors which may be related to the trauma that student has experienced: "I know some behaviors that are trauma-induced so knowing that can help determine how I react to that behavior."

In responding to the concerns they have in teaching students who have experienced trauma, teacher candidates worry about saying the wrong thing, triggering the student and/or making their traumatic experience worse. One teacher candidate stated, "Ensuring that I am truly understanding them and the reasoning behind their actions. Ensuring that I am helping the child with their situation, not making it worse," while another shared a similar concern, "Will I say the wrong thing?"

Another major concern many teacher candidates have is not being able to help the student. For example, a number of the teacher candidates (27%) shared the concern of "having a student that I can't help." One teacher candidate worried "that I won't be able to help in the ways that I want to," and another questioned, "Will I be enough to help them and be a safe space?"

A final major theme that evolved from teacher candidates' concerns on the second survey was related to classroom behavior and not having the correct strategies or techniques to work with the child(ren). One teacher candidate was concerned about "Pos-

sible continuous classroom disruptions,” while another shared, “Dealing with behavior of students who have experienced trauma. Which strategies work best?” One teacher candidate mentioned using the “best” ways to work with the student(s), and shared, “I am concerned about helping them in the proper way,” while another stated, “I worry that I may not know the right techniques to help that specific child.”

Table 4.
Example Quotes, Codes, and Themes (Concerns)

Example Quote	First Cycle Code	Second Cycle Code	Theme Emerged
"I worry I may trigger a student or not be able to comfort them the way they need."	Saying the "Wrong Thing" or Triggering Student	Not Being Able To Help	Teacher candidates have concerns related to unintentionally triggering children and not being able to help them.
"I worry that I may not know the right techniques to help that specific child."	Not Having Appropriate Techniques to Help		Teacher candidates are concerned they do not have appropriate and effective strategies to support children who experience trauma.

Resources available to teachers

Teacher candidates identified several people who they believed would be a useful resource to them in a school setting in teaching students who have experienced trauma. These were co-teachers, mentor teachers, past teachers, (vice) principal(s), school psychologist(s), school psychiatrist(s), guidance counselor(s), school social workers, and staff placed in schools from an outside agency in the area.

On the second survey, which took place after the panel seminar, teacher candidates listed a few additional resources. Some of the resources teacher candidates identified on this survey, and not the first survey, included: school resource officer(s), school nurse(s), speech therapist(s), AmeriCorps members in the school, and paraprofessional(s).

Usefulness of seminar

On the second survey, teacher candidates were asked to “Please describe how you feel today’s seminar did or did not relate to your preparedness of working with students with a diverse set of social, emotional, physical, and academic needs.” Twelve of the fifteen teacher candidates (80%) mentioned that the panel-style seminar was helpful,

two did not comment directly on the helpfulness (responded “N/A”), and one provided a neutral statement (“It gives you an idea of what they go through, real life trauma”). The majority of teacher candidates (80%) pointed to the usefulness of the seminar:

“Today’s seminar helped me realize how many resources there are in a school. How much people do care about the students and how willing they are to help.”

“Today’s seminar gave us very useful information that come from people that work firsthand in schools that we are familiar with.”

“This seminar has prepared me to use other workers in the building as resources to find effective strategies to best support students who have been through/seen trauma.”

“I feel it helped my know how to utilize resources within the building.”

“It helped me feel more prepared.”

Discussion

Most teacher candidates (60%) reported feeling “somewhat prepared” to support learners who experience trauma; this finding is consistent with Onchwari’s (2009) work, which shows preservice and in-service teachers alike perceive themselves as moderately prepared to support students experiencing stress in their early childhood classrooms. Although a majority of teacher candidates surveyed reported feeling “somewhat prepared” to support learners who experience trauma, it is important to consider that in previous research, novel teachers, and teachers in training, may overestimate their preparedness and knowledge related to a topic as a result of knowledge calibration (Cunningham et al., 2004; Hartman et al., 2016). This could mean that while teacher candidates who responded to the survey perceived themselves as being “somewhat prepared,” they could have overestimated their preparedness.

It is inevitable that teachers will have learners within their classrooms who experience trauma and other major stressors (Cook, 2015), thus it is crucial for teacher candidates to feel well-prepared to enter the field and respond to and support all learners. While teacher candidates overwhelmingly reported only feeling “somewhat prepared”, this may point to inadequate coursework and learning opportunities through their teacher preparation programs. It could be useful for teacher preparation programs to require coursework and training opportunities to teach about traumatic events, how trauma alters the body biologically, and how experiencing trauma can impact learners in the classroom setting. Consistent with previous research (Onchwari, 2009), the current study illustrates the need for teacher preparation programs to more thoroughly prepare teacher candidates to support learners who experience trauma and major life stressors. This could include teacher education programs incorporating explicit coursework about trauma and the impacts of trauma. Additionally, teacher preparation programs could emphasize the purpose and importance of each of the program-

matic components to teacher candidates. Previous research conducted by Walsh and colleagues (2011) described how teacher education programs implement trauma-informed curriculum as being inconsistent. For example, some programs incorporate the information in distinct and direct ways, with the topic being standalone content. Other programs, however, integrate the information across topics and coursework within the program (Walsh et al., 2011). Systematically, the development of standards for trauma-informed curriculum would be useful in preparing teacher candidates to support learners who experience trauma and could lead to some consistency across programs.

Of those 15 teacher candidates who participated, only two (13%) reported they believe they have some strategies to support learners who experience trauma. Of those teacher candidates who believe they have strategies to support learners who experience trauma, none of them specified or detailed what those strategies are. Teachers across various previous studies report low levels of preparedness and report lacking the strategies, or knowing what to do, to support children who experience trauma (Bixler-Funk, 2018; Onchwari, 2009). It would be useful for teacher preparation programs to emphasize trauma-sensitive teaching throughout their courses, learning opportunities, and clinical field experiences. When teachers receive adequate preparation to support children who experience trauma, they may recognize behaviors in the classroom setting which may be a biological response to trauma. Teachers who recognize the long-term effects of trauma may be less likely to trigger and retraumatize children through their classroom culture, policies, and activities. Teaching through a trauma-sensitive or trauma-informed lens allows teachers to focus on building positive and strong relationships with their learners (Craig, 2016). When teachers focus on developing relationships with the children in their classrooms, children often have increased motivation for school and learning, feel reciprocated respect and support from their teachers, and develop a healthy internal working model to shape future relationships (Buyse et al., 2008; Craig, 2016; Fredriksen & Rhodes, 2004; Statman-Weil, 2015). Additionally, it is crucial for teachers to understand the effects of trauma and how this may shape children's behavior in the classroom setting to reduce, and ultimately eliminate, inaccurate referrals for special education services (Statman-Weil, 2015).

The majority of teacher candidates who responded to the survey (80% of responding candidates) believed the seminar panel of school support personnel was beneficial to their preparedness to support learners who have diverse needs. The panel seminar teacher candidates attended may be the first interaction teacher candidates have with school support personnel. Meeting and understanding their roles in supporting children is essential in supporting children who experience trauma. Teacher candidates note the importance of experiences working with and collaborating with school support personnel in previous research (Bixler-Funk, 2018). This panel-style seminar could provide teacher candidates an easy avenue to collaborate with school support personnel by introducing them to a variety of resources and roles within a school who

support students' learning in diverse ways. A panel like the one implemented in this research could be useful in better preparing teacher candidates to collaborate with colleagues to support learners with diverse learning needs.

Limitations

The research is limited in that all teacher candidates surveyed in the study were from one Early Childhood Education (ECE) Program, enrolled at one university. While this is beneficial to understanding the context and specific program of interest, it does not necessarily allow for generalizability to other contexts and ECE programs. Educators and researchers reviewing this article should use caution in understanding differences in context and use the findings from this study as insights. Further research is necessary to identify teacher candidate preparedness to support learners who experience trauma in other contexts, such as from additional ECE programs, in other programs such as adolescent and young adult education programs, and from other universities. Reaching a larger and broader sample of teacher candidates could fill additional gaps in the literature.

Recommendations and Future Steps

Findings from the current study are consistent with previous research, showing that teacher candidates feel only somewhat or moderately prepared to support children who experience trauma and major life stressors. Because of this lack of perceived preparedness, it is important that teacher preparation programs emphasize trauma-sensitive teaching practices, while explicitly and more thoroughly preparing teacher candidates to support children who experience trauma. Teacher preparation programs should emphasize trauma-sensitive teaching throughout all their coursework, while also providing a space for explicit instruction about trauma, the impact of trauma on young learners, and trauma-informed teaching.

In terms of the implementation of the school support personnel panel, additional research is necessary. However, it may be useful for teacher preparation programs to develop a more sustainable version of this seminar. It may be useful for teacher candidates to participate in a panel of school support personnel from the schools where they complete each of their field experiences. More research is necessary to determine the most effective implementation of a panel like the one in this research. Learning from various school support personnel, their roles, and how they support children in early childhood settings exposes teacher candidates to supportive roles and resources and models essential collaborative practices that are beneficial to children.

References

- Alisic, E., Bus, M., Dulack, W., Pennings, L., & Splinter, J. (2012). Teachers' experiences supporting children after traumatic exposure. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 25*(1), 98–101. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.20709>
- American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education Clinical Practice Commission (AACTE). (2018). A pivot toward clinical practice, its lexicon, and the renewal of educator preparation. Washington, D.C.: AACTE. Retrieved from <https://aacte.org/professional-development-and-events/clinical-practice-commission-press-conference>
- Badanes, L. S., Dmitrieva, J., & Watamura, S. E. (2012). Understanding cortisol reactivity across the day at child care: The potential buffering role of secure attachments to caregivers. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 27*(1), 156–165. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2011.05.005>
- Baweja, S., Santiago, C. D., Vona, P., Pears, G., Langley, A., & Kataoka, S. (2016). Improving implementation of a school-based program for traumatized students: Identifying factors that promote teacher support and collaboration. *School Mental Health: A Multidisciplinary Research and Practice Journal, 8*(1), 120–131. <https://doi-org.proxy.library.ohio.edu/10.1007/s12310-015-9170-z>
- Bergin, C., & Bergin, D. (2009). Attachment in the Classroom. *Educational Psychology Review, 21*(2), 141–170. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-009-9104-0>
- Bixler-Funk, A. M. (2018). Preservice teachers' perceptions of preparedness in supporting students who have experienced trauma [Doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas]. KU ScholarWorks.
- Brunzell, T., Stokes, H., & Waters, L. (2019). Shifting teacher practice in trauma-affected classrooms: Practice pedagogy strategies within a trauma-informed positive education model. *School Mental Health, 11*(3), 600–614. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-018-09308-8>
- Burke Harris, N. (2018). *The deepest well: Healing the long-term effects of childhood adversity*. Mariner Books.
- Buyse, E., Verschueren, K., Doumen, S., Van Damme, J., & Maes, F. (2008). Classroom problem behavior and teacher-child relationships in kindergarten: The moderating role of classroom climate. *Journal of School Psychology, 46*(4), 367–391. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2007.06.009>
- Cook, G. (2015). Responding to student trauma. *Education Update, 57*(12), 2–6.
- Craig, S. E. (2016). *Trauma-sensitive schools: Learning communities transforming children's lives, K-5*. Teachers College Press.
- Cunningham, A. E., Perry, K. E., & Stanovich, K. E. (2004). Disciplinary knowledge of K-3 teachers and their knowledge calibration in the domain of early literacy. *Annals of Dyslexia, 54*, 139-167. doi: 10.1007/s11881-004-0007-y
- Fredriksen, K., & Rhodes, J. (2004). The role of teacher relationships in the lives

- of students. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 103, 45–54. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.90>
- Garrick, A., Mak, A. S., Cathcart, S., Winwood, P. C., Bakker, A. B., & Lushington, K. (2017). Teachers' priorities for change in Australian schools to support staff wellbeing. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 26(3–4), 117–126.
- Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2001). Early teacher–child relationships and the trajectory of children's school outcomes through eighth grade. *Child Development*, 72(2), 625–638. <https://doi-org.proxy.library.ohio.edu/10.1111/1467-8624.00301>
- Hartman, S. L., Kennedy, C., & Brady, B. (2016). Graduate teaching fellowships as new teacher induction: School university partnerships' impact on teaching self-efficacy. *School University Partnerships*, 9(3), 171–187. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316147801>
- Hobbs, C., Paulsen, D., & Thomas, J. (2019). Trauma-informed practice for pre-service teachers. In C. Hobbs, D. Paulsen, & J. Thomas, Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1435>
- Longaretti, L., & Toe, D. (2017). School leaders' perspectives on educating teachers to work in vulnerable communities: New insights from the coal face. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 42(4), 1–18.
- McInerney, M., & McKlindon, A. (n.d.). Unlocking the Door to Learning: Trauma-Informed Classrooms & Transformational Schools. 24.
- National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). (2010). Transforming teacher education through clinical practice: A national strategy to prepare effective teachers. Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Student Learning. Retrieved from <http://www.ncate.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=zzeiB1OoqPk%3D&tabid=7>
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
- Office of Research, Ohio Development Services Agency. (2020). *The Ohio poverty report*. Retrieved from <https://www.development.ohio.gov/files/research/p7005.pdf>
- Onchwari, J. (2010). Early childhood inservice and preservice teachers' perceived levels of preparedness to handle stress in their students. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 37(5), 391–400. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-009-0361-9>
- O'Neill, L., Guenette, F., & Kitchenham, A. (2010). 'Am I safe here and do you like me?' Understanding complex trauma and attachment disruption in the classroom. *British Journal of Special Education*, 37(4), 190–197. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8578.2010.00477.x>
- Perry, B. D., Pollard, R. A., Blakley, T. L., Baker, W. L., & Vigilante, D. (1995). Childhood Trauma, the Neurobiology of Adaptation, and "Use-dependent" De-

- velopment of the Brain: How “States” Become “Traits.” *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 16(4), 271–291.
- Pianta, R. C. (1999). *Enhancing relationships between children and teachers*. American Psychological Association.
- Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE Publications, INC.
- Schwartz, E., & Davis, A. S. (2006). Reactive attachment disorder: Implications for school readiness and school functioning. *Psychology in the Schools*, 43(4), 471–479. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.20161>
- Spilt, J. L., Vervoort, E., Koenen, A.-K., Bosmans, G., & Verschueren, K. (2016). The socio-behavioral development of children with symptoms of attachment disorder: An observational study of teacher sensitivity in special education. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 56, 71–82. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2016.05.014>
- Statman-Weil, K. (2015). Creating trauma-sensitive classrooms. *Young Children*, 70(2), 1–14.
- Stokes, H., & Brunzell, T. (2019). Professional Learning in Trauma Informed Positive Education: Moving School Communities from Trauma Affected to Trauma Aware. *School Leadership Review*, 14(2), 1–12.
- van der Kolk, B. A. (2005). Developmental trauma disorder: Toward a rational diagnosis for children with complex trauma histories. *PSYCHIATRIC ANNALS*, 35(5), 401–408.
- Walsh, K., Laskey, L., Mcinnes, E., & Mathews, B. (2011). Locating child protection in preservice teacher education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(7), 31–58. doi: 10.14221/ajte.2011v36n7.1