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NOVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR PREPAREDNESS
TO TEACH STUDENTS EXPERIENCING TRAUMA:
A MIXED METHODS STUDY

By

LISA CIGANEK

A doctoral dissertation submitted to the
College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Education
in Curriculum and Instruction

Southeastern University
October, 2020

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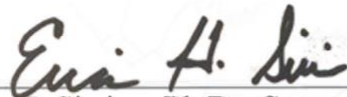
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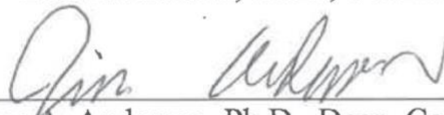
Janet L. Deck, Ed.D., Dissertation Chair



Thomas J. Gollery, Ed.D., Committee Member



Erica H. Serrine, Ph.D., Committee Member



James A. Anderson, Ph.D., Dean, College of Education

DEDICATION

“So, Mom – when are you going to get your doctorate?” I had barely finished my master’s degree when my oldest son asked me that question. Honestly, the thought had never occurred to me. In the years that followed, I focused on supporting my husband as he returned to college (as he had done for me), teaching, serving in church, and raising my boys. I thought I was done with school, but God had other plans for me. I am grateful for His leading and His hand on my life. I wish to dedicate this work to my husband, Glenn, whose prayers, love and encouragement dared me to think I could complete this monumental task. Glenn, you are the love of my life and my best friend. Thank you for the many nights, weekends, and homecooked meals you sacrificed as I researched and wrote. To my children, Rob and Josh, thank you for believing your mom was capable of more. God used you both to motivate me when I wanted to quit. Remember, I am cheering for you in your pursuits the way you cheered for me in this one! Thanks to Katie, my daughter-in-love and fellow foodie, who shared recipes for me to try when I needed a break. I honor my parents, Judy and Vince, who taught me the importance of learning from an early age and who still think I’m the smartest student in the class. Lastly, I dedicate this work to my students. You inspire me to continue learning, and I thank God every day for the privilege of being part of your lives.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To borrow from an old proverb, it takes a village to earn a doctoral degree. I would not have completed this journey without the support of special people God placed along the way. First, I must express my deepest thanks to my friend and chair, Dr. Janet Deck. I am so thankful for the many ways Dr. Deck invested in me during this process.

I would also like to convey my appreciation to Dr. Erica Serrine and Dr. Thomas Gollery, both of whom served on my committee. From the moment I met with Dr. Serrine about my ideas for this study, she was a never-ending source of information about trauma, and she welcomed this educator's voice at the research table. I was blessed to work with Dr. Gollery as my methodologist. He was always willing to explain the data "one more time" when I wasn't sure of myself after the first explanation (or two). I am also grateful for Kelly Hoskins and Dr. Cassandra Lopez who spent hours editing my work. I am a stronger writer because of their feedback.

The professors in the Center for Doctoral Studies at Southeastern University are extraordinary individuals. I appreciate their commitment to academic excellence and spiritual integrity. Dr. Sarah Yates, Dr. Patty LeBlanc, and Dr. Charles Smith were particularly influential throughout my program. Also, Professor Amy Beatty and her team at Steelman Library have my gratitude for the many books and articles they obtained for me from libraries all over the country.

When the world was turned upside down by the global pandemic this past spring and education moved online, elementary teachers in two Florida school districts sacrificed precious

time to answer my survey and lend their voices to this study through personal interviews. I appreciate the contributions of each one.

My deepest gratitude belongs not only to my family, but to my circle of friends near and far who have supported me throughout this process. Adrienne Garvey cheered me to the finish line in the middle of her own dissertation process. I found a lifelong friend in Tara Bensinger. I am thankful for Tara's calm spirit and well-timed texts. My colleagues in Cohort G have shared resources and celebrated every milestone. Most of all, I am grateful for my cherished friend of 27 years, Jeanine Hillman, who prayed me through the immensely difficult times my family experienced during this undertaking and never complained when I cut our Panera dates short so I could get back to my writing. My victory is your victory.

Abstract

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore how graduates of traditional teacher preparation programs perceived their preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma stemming from adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). The study focused on the perceptions of novice teachers working in Title 1 schools across two school districts in Central Florida. The quantitative research portion of the study involved an online survey addressing the impact of teacher preparation program coursework and clinical experiences on the teachers' perceptions of preparedness. Qualitative data was gathered from semi-structured interviews after the survey to give voice to the novice teachers' perceptions of preparedness. Study findings yielded implications relevant to the critical need for the inclusion of SEL competencies and trauma-informed teaching practices in teacher preparation programs. A clear need exists for leadership and faculty in traditional teacher preparation programs to purposefully transform university coursework and clinical experiences and ensure program outcomes include aspects of trauma-informed care.

Keywords: novice teachers; teacher candidates; preservice teachers; teacher perceptions of preparedness; teacher preparation; teacher education; trauma-informed teaching; SEL competencies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication iii

Acknowledgments iv

Abstract vi

Table of Contents vii

List of Tables xi

I. INTRODUCTION 1

 Background of the Study 2

 Theoretical Framework 5

 Significance of the Study 6

 Overview of Methodology 7

 Research Design 7

 Research Questions 8

 Research Hypotheses 8

 Data Collection and Procedures 9

 Quantitative Data Analysis 10

 Analysis by Research Question 11

 Limitations 12

 Definition of Key Terms 12

 Summary 13

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE 15

 Theoretical Framework 16

 Adverse Childhood Experiences 17

 Teacher Perceptions of Preparedness 22

 Teacher Preparation: Coursework and Clinical Experiences 34

 Teacher Preparation: Social-Emotional Learning 41

 Summary 47

| | |
|---|----|
| III. METHODOLOGY | 49 |
| Research Design..... | 49 |
| Research Questions | 50 |
| Research Context | 50 |
| School District 1 | 50 |
| School District 2 | 51 |
| Research Participants | 52 |
| Survey Participants | 52 |
| Interview Participants | 52 |
| Instrumentation | 53 |
| Online Survey | 53 |
| Interviews | 54 |
| Data Collection | 55 |
| Quantitative Data | 55 |
| Qualitative Data | 55 |
| Data Analysis | 57 |
| Preliminary Analysis..... | 57 |
| Analysis by Research Question | 58 |
| Question 1 | 58 |
| Question 2..... | 58 |
| Question 3..... | 59 |
| Question 4..... | 59 |
| Summary | 60 |
| IV. RESULTS..... | 61 |
| Research Context | 61 |
| Quantitative Research Analysis | 62 |
| Population and Sample Size | 62 |
| Research Instrumentation and Validation | 62 |
| Hypotheses..... | 63 |
| Research question 2 | 63 |
| Research question 3 | 63 |
| Preliminary Data Analysis | 64 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Response rate..... | 64 |
| Missing data..... | 64 |
| Internal reliability | 64 |
| Survey item analysis..... | 65 |
| Findings by Research Question | 67 |
| Question 1..... | 67 |
| Question 2..... | 68 |
| Question 3..... | 70 |
| Summary of Quantitative Findings..... | 72 |
| Qualitative Data Analysis | 73 |
| Methods of Data Collection..... | 73 |
| Themes..... | 75 |
| Theme 1: Student interactions | 75 |
| Theme 2: Awareness/Preparation | 77 |
| Theme 3: Coursework | 79 |
| Theme 4: Clinical experience | 80 |
| Theme 5: Methods of preparation | 82 |
| Evidence of Quality | 84 |
| Summary of Qualitative Findings..... | 84 |
| Summary..... | 85 |
| V. DISCUSSION..... | 86 |
| Review of Methodology | 86 |
| Summary of Results..... | 87 |
| Discussion of Quantitative Research | 89 |
| Research Question 1 | 89 |
| Research Question 2 | 91 |
| Research Question 3 | 91 |
| Discussion of Qualitative Research | 92 |
| Emergent Themes from the Interviews..... | 93 |
| Theme 1: Student interactions | 93 |
| Theme 2: Awareness/Preparation | 94 |
| Theme 3: Coursework | 97 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Theme 4: Clinical experience | 100 |
| Themes Connected to Research Question 4 | 102 |
| Study Limitations..... | 106 |
| Implications for Professional Practice | 107 |
| Recommendations for Future Research | 110 |
| Conclusion | 111 |
| References..... | 112 |
| Appendix A | 120 |
| Appendix B | 121 |
| Appendix C | 123 |
| Appendix D..... | 127 |
| Appendix E | 129 |
| Appendix F..... | 130 |

LIST OF TABLES

| Table | Page |
|---|------|
| Table 1: Interview Participants’ Professional Demographics | 53 |
| Table 2: Essential Characteristics by School District (2018-2019) | 62 |
| Table 3: Internal Reliability Levels (α)..... | 65 |
| Table 4: Descriptive and Inferential Comparison of Novice Teacher Response to Survey Items | 66 |
| Table 5: Comparison of Overall Perceptions of Preparedness to Teach Students Experiencing Trauma by Category of Professional Experience | 68 |
| Table 6: Mathematical Relationships by Category for Overall Perceptions of Preparedness to teach Children Experiencing Trauma for Novice Teachers | 69 |
| Table 7: Comparisons of Correlations of Coursework and Clinical Experiences with Perceptions of Preparedness to Teach Students Experiencing Trauma by Category of Professional Experience | 70 |
| Table 8: Magnitude of Effect Comparison: Novice Teachers and Veteran Teachers by Elements associated with Preparing Teachers to Teach Students Experiencing Trauma | 72 |
| Table 9: Interview Participants’ Professional Demographics | 74 |
| Table 10: Themes Emerging from Interview Data..... | 75 |
| Table 11: Novice Teachers’ Recommendations for Teacher Preparation Programs | 82 |

I. INTRODUCTION

Each new school year presents a fresh group of students bringing their life experiences into the K-12 classroom. For nearly half of the school-aged children in the United States, those life experiences include situations of trauma and stress and are known as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs; Sacks & Murphey, 2018). ACEs are traumatic events or facets of a child's environment that damage his or her sense of safety and stability during childhood (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Economic stress, divorce or separation, violence in the home or neighborhood, substance abuse, loss of a family member to death or incarceration, natural disasters, and physical abuse or neglect are some examples of ACEs (Pickens & Tschopp, 2017). Unfortunately, the risk factor of one ACE increases the risk for multiple ACEs; an average of 22% of children in the United States have experienced more than one adverse childhood experience (Bethell, Davis, Gombojav, Stumbo, & Powers, 2017). Childhood trauma impacts a child's brain development, educational achievement, and behavior (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Teachers need a repertoire of management strategies and high-impact instructional practices to help students experiencing trauma attain academic success.

Teachers who work with students in Title 1 schools witness the impact of ACEs on learning each day. Title 1 schools are so designated because they serve high numbers of students from low-income families and, as a result, receive federal funding under Title 1, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Elementary and Secondary Education Act

1965). Although ACEs are not limited to one income group, 58% of children with ACEs live in households with incomes less than 200% of the federal poverty level (Bethell et al., 2017). However, poverty is just one of the many forms of trauma which students in Title 1 schools experience (Izard, 2016). Teacher preparation programs must ensure that teacher candidates are prepared with more than information on poverty and social class, which is often the dominant focus of teacher preparation program coursework and clinical experiences (Bertrand, 2017).

This dissertation is an explanatory sequential mixed methods study of how graduates of traditional teacher preparation programs perceive their preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma stemming from adverse childhood experiences. The study focused on the perceptions of novice teachers working in Title 1 schools across two school districts in Central Florida. School District 1 is mildly diverse (less than 40% of students are non-White) and serves nearly 75,000 students, 56% of whom are economically disadvantaged. Forty-six schools in District 1 meet the criteria for Title 1 funding (Florida Department of Education, 2019). School District 2 is somewhat diverse (60% of students are non-White) with over 104,000 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Seventy-four percent of students in District 2 are economically disadvantaged. In District 2, 89 schools meet the criteria for Title 1 funding (Florida Department of Education, 2019). District 1's graduation rate (88.3%) was slightly higher than the graduation rate in District 2 (81.2%) in 2019, the most recent year for which data is available (Florida Department of Education, 2019). Both school districts earned a performance grade of *B* for the 2018-2019 school year (Florida Department of Education, 2019).

Background of the Study

The need for trauma-sensitive schools and trauma-informed teachers has captured the attention of politicians, researchers, and educators for at least the last 20 years. In 2000,

Congress established the National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative (NCTSI) as part of the Children's Health Act to address trauma's impact on the mental health of children, teenagers, and families (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, 2012). In August 2019, Congressional representatives introduced an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 that outlined criteria for the use of federal monies to support trauma-informed practices in schools (H.R. 4146, 2019). If the act is passed, states will be permitted to use federal funds for professional development, implement changes to disciplinary practices, and integrate social-emotional learning in the curriculum (H.R. 4146, 2019).

Traumatic experiences affect children of all races, genders, ethnicities, geographic locations, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Honsinger & Brown, 2019; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Students who are impacted by trauma have difficulty regulating their behaviors and engaging with learning in the classroom because trauma changes the brain's capacity to manage information (van der Kolk, 2014). In fact, prolonged stress can result in shrinkage of the brain's hippocampus, which plays a role in translating information from working memory to long-term storage (Sousa, 2017; Zadina, 2014). Trauma-affected children may display aggressive behaviors, struggle to interact with peers, contend with attention or memory issues, and fail to succeed academically (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2016).

Teachers struggle with their classroom roles as the result of the shift in expectations concerning teachers' responsibilities for a child's social and emotional development (Alisic, 2012). Teachers find balancing the needs of one child who is experiencing trauma-induced stress with the needs of all students in the classroom difficult and lack confidence in knowing how to respond (Alisic, 2012). Academic learning is at the forefront of a teacher's priorities, but the

teaching of concepts related to wellbeing is a hidden curriculum for teachers (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2018). Although more experienced teachers may have learned to deal with these issues, first-year and novice teachers are especially challenged by the lack of formalized training in teacher preparation programs and by the absence of any definitive school protocol (Alisic, 2012). Teachers who lack strategies for working with students experiencing trauma may unintentionally hinder a student's ability to self-regulate and engage in learning (Brunzell et al., 2018). Therefore, the need exists for both teachers and administrators to be trained how to support trauma-affected students in the classroom (Jones, 2019).

Coursework in teacher preparation programs lacks a focus on childhood trauma (Alisic, 2012; Bertrand, 2017; Jones, 2019). Substantial amounts of time spent in clinical experiences (including, but not limited to, field experiences, practicums, and student teaching) alongside coursework also contribute to a teacher's perceptions of preparedness for the classroom (Green-Derry, 2014). Teachers who understand the impact of trauma and stress on learning, approaches to intervene when stress interrupts a student's ability to learn, behavioral strategies, and protective measures to guard themselves against secondary trauma have an advantage in managing the classroom (Anderson, Blitz, & Saastamoinen, 2015). Learning to recognize the signs of trauma and then effectively implementing appropriate interventions allows teachers to create the type of environment that will facilitate learning for all students (Jones, 2019). The extent to which teachers are prepared to address students' needs is "closely associated with the curricular influence of the teacher preparation program through which they matriculate" (Green-Derry, 2014, p.119). Accordingly, coursework in teacher preparation programs should provide teachers the opportunity to become trauma-informed and then to practice the learned strategies in an authentic classroom context during clinical experiences.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used to guide this study is based on Gloria Ladson-Billings's (1995) notion of culturally relevant pedagogy. Although Ladson-Billings's (1995) initial discussion focused on improving educational opportunities for African-American students, the concept of culturally focused or culturally relevant pedagogy can be applied to teacher preparation as it relates to teaching students who have experienced or who are experiencing trauma. In the context of culturally relevant pedagogy, teachers must understand how the culture of trauma permeates the classroom environment. Pedagogy and practice function synergistically (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Integrating culturally focused pedagogy with established learning outcomes in coursework and clinical placements in trauma-sensitive schools will lead to teachers who are well-prepared to meet the academic, emotional, and social needs of students experiencing trauma (Green-Derry, 2014).

Problem/Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore how graduates of traditional teacher preparation programs perceive their preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma stemming from adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). The study focused on the perceptions of novice teachers working in Title 1 schools across two school districts in Central Florida. At this stage in the research, novice teachers were defined as educators who have been teaching between two and four years (Bertrand, 2017). Traumatic events include poverty, domestic violence, neglect, abuse, displacement, natural disasters, and the loss of a loved one (Pickens & Tschopp, 2017). Traditional teacher preparation programs are teacher education programs that are typically housed in postsecondary institutions and are charged with preparing instructional personnel for

the classroom in alignment with qualifications for state teacher certification (Florida Department of Education, n.d.).

Significance of the Study

Trauma-informed teaching is a relatively new area in the literature. Although the body of literature is rich with studies pertaining to teacher preparation and issues such as poverty or cultural responsiveness (Bertrand, 2017; Hardy, 2014; Milner & Laughter, 2014), an insufficient amount of published studies explore the level to which teacher preparation programs equip teachers to work with students experiencing trauma (Brunzell et al., 2018, Jones, 2019). Studies abound concerning the design of a trauma-sensitive environment, but the perspectives of teachers regarding their own preparedness to teach children experiencing trauma have not been widely researched (Alisic, 2012; Brunzell et al., 2018). Teachers must adapt instruction to meet the needs of all children, and more specifically the needs of children whose life experiences include homelessness, violence, food insecurity, and lack of quality health care (Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2019). Teachers need trauma-informed pedagogical practices to meet the self-regulatory, relational, and academic needs of students experiencing such trauma (Brunzell et al., 2018). Teacher preparation programs must help teacher candidates develop a teaching practice that promotes deep learning for students and is trauma-sensitive (Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2019). Coursework and clinical experiences should allow teacher candidates to apply learning in high-needs schools where they can learn the art of teaching twenty-first century skills to students whose cognitive energies are undermined by the effects of trauma (Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2019). This study contributes to the body of literature concerning the development of teacher preparation programs and provides a foundation upon which teacher preparation programs may

build to enhance their core curricula with coursework and clinical experiences to address the impact of trauma on learning.

Overview of Methodology

Research Design

This study was an explanatory sequential mixed methods research. After obtaining approval from the Southeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and each of the selected school district's Institutional Review Boards, the researcher first collected and analyzed quantitative data, then collected and analyzed qualitative data to explain and elaborate upon the quantitative findings (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2016). The researcher used purposive sampling to allow for deliberate identification of criteria for selecting the sample (Gay et al., 2016). The sample for this study was composed of 521 teachers at 135 Title 1 schools across two counties in Central Florida who completed a teacher preparation program.

The researcher invited participants to complete a researcher-created online survey. The survey consisted of questions addressing three areas: (a) teacher perception of preparedness to teach children experiencing trauma, (b) teacher perception of the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs in training educators to teach children experiencing trauma, and (c) factors impacting the teachers' sense of preparedness with trauma-informed teaching strategies. The survey questions were primarily structured items with a minimal number of unstructured items.

Once survey data was gathered, the researcher used random purposive sampling to select participants with whom follow-up interviews were conducted. Random purposive sampling allowed the researcher to choose participants who will contribute to the understanding of the quantitative data (Gay et al., 2016). Semi-structured qualitative interviews provided a

conversational opportunity for the participants to share more detailed information, such as personal narratives, and served as a complement to the quantitative data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Research Questions

Four questions guided the study:

1. To what extent do novice teachers in Title 1 elementary schools feel prepared to teach students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs?
2. Considering preservice university coursework and clinical experiences, which is perceived by novice teachers to be most predictive of preparing them for teaching students experiencing trauma?
3. Was there a statistically significant difference in study participant response effect by category of professional experience across elements associated with perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma?
4. What are novice teachers' suggestions for improvements in teacher preparation programs to prepare teachers to work with students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were proposed regarding research question two:

H₀: There is no significant difference in the perceived effectiveness of coursework or clinical experiences (e.g., field experiences, practicums, student teaching) in preparing novice teachers to teach students experiencing trauma.

H₁: Coursework was a statistically significant predictor of novice teachers' perceived preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma.

H_2 : Clinical experiences were a statistically significant predictor of novice teachers' perceived preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma.

For research question three, the following hypotheses were presented:

H_0 : There is no significant difference in study participant response effect by category of professional experience across elements associated with perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma.

H_1 : There is a significant difference in study participant response effect by category of professional experience across elements associated with perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma.

Data Collection and Procedures

Data were collected in two parts: a survey (quantitative) and semi-structured interviews (qualitative). After obtaining approval from the Southeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and each of the selected school district's Institutional Review Boards, novice teachers working in K-12 Title 1 schools in two Central Florida counties were invited to complete a researcher-created online survey (see Appendix C) consisting of 15 items.

Participants were also asked to provide demographic information related to length of teaching experience, school district affiliation, and length of teaching in Title 1 schools. Survey questions asked participants to rate the perceived extent to which they were prepared for teaching students experiencing trauma using a scale ranging from 5 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*).

Following analysis of the quantitative data, the researcher purposefully selected 14 teachers with three years' experience or less to participate in semi-structured interviews at sites chosen by the interviewees. The purpose of the follow-up interviews was to gather qualitative data that would provide additional insight from participants and elaborate on the quantitative

findings. Eight of the 14 invited participants agreed to submit to an interview. After obtaining consent from each participant (see Appendix D), the researcher conducted the semi-structured interviews of the eight participants using the questions in the provided interview guide (see Appendix E), asking follow-up questions as needed (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The researcher took audio recordings during each interview. Recordings were transcribed and sent to participants for verification. The researcher subsequently coded the transcripts for common themes.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Three areas were analyzed prior to the analysis of the quantitative research questions posed in the study: missing data, internal consistency (reliability) of participant response, and essential demographic identifying information.

Missing data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. More specifically, frequency counts (n) and percentages (%) were utilized for illustrative and comparative purposes. The randomness of missing data was assessed using Little's MCAR test statistic. An MCAR value of $p > .05$ was considered indicative of sufficient randomness of missing data. Missing data values of 5% or less were considered inconsequential, thereby negating consideration of data imputation techniques.

Cronbach's alpha (α) was used to assess internal reliability of participant response to the survey instrument. The researcher applied an F test to evaluate the statistical significance of α . Fisher's ratio (F) values of $p < .05$ were considered statistically significant. All survey items were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques for illustrative and comparative purposes. Cohen's d represented the means by which the effect size of study participant response to the items on the research instrument was measured.

Essential demographic information was analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. Specifically, frequency counts (n) and percentages (%) were utilized for illustrative purposes. The analysis, interpretation and reporting of all quantitative findings was addressed exclusively through IBM's 26th version of its Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Analysis by Research Question

The study's research questions were addressed broadly using a variety of descriptive, associative, predictive, and inferential statistical techniques. Frequency counts (n), measures of central tendency (mean scores) and variability (standard deviation) represented the primary descriptive statistical techniques used.

In research question one, the one-sample *t* test was used to assess the statistical significance of participant response. Cohen's *d* was used to assess the magnitude of effect (effect size). Cohen's parameters of interpretation of effect sizes were employed for comparative purposes.

For research question two, the mathematical relationship between study participant perceptions of university coursework and clinical experiences and the dependent variable of overall perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma was evaluated using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (*r*). Follow-up correlational comparisons of coursework and clinical experiences with perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma according to category of professional experience were conducted using the Fisher's *r* to *z* Transformation statistical technique.

In research question three, the *t* test of independent means was used to assess the statistical significance of difference in mean scores between coursework and clinical experiences. The assumptions of "normality" and "homogeneity of variances" were assessed

using the Shapiro-Wilk test and the Levene test respectively. Cohen's d was used to assess the magnitude of effect (effect size). Cohen's parameters of interpretation of effect sizes were employed for comparative purposes.

In research question four, the audio recordings of the qualitative interviews were transcribed. Transcripts were sent to participants for verification and then coded for common themes. The researcher subsequently compared the themes to the results of the survey as a way of explaining and elaborating upon the quantitative data.

Limitations

The sample for this study was drawn from two counties in Central Florida; therefore, the results may not be generalizable to other school districts in Florida or in other states. Because the data represents the novice teachers' perceptions of preparedness, the perceptions of participants in the present study may not represent those of novice teachers at Title 1 schools elsewhere. Further, this study was limited to novice teachers working in Title 1 schools; therefore, the perceptions of novice teachers at non-Title 1 schools are not reflected in the results. Teachers' willingness to participate may present another limitation. Lastly, the current study did not explore the perceptions of novice teachers who completed non-traditional teacher preparation methods, such as district-provided alternative certification programs.

Definition of Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined for consistency and clarity:

- **Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)** are traumatic events or facets of a child's environment that damage his or her sense of safety and stability during childhood (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019).

- **Clinical experiences** include supervised field experiences, practicums, and student teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2014).
- **Novice teachers** are educators who have been teaching between two and four years (Bertrand, 2017).
- **Traditional teacher preparation programs** are typically housed in postsecondary institutions and are charged with preparing instructional personnel for the classroom in alignment with qualifications for state teacher certification (Florida Department of Education, n.d.).
- **Trauma** is an event (or series of events or circumstances) that an individual experiences as a result of ACEs. Trauma results in lasting adverse effects mentally, physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and academically (Pickens & Tschopp, 2017).
- A **trauma-sensitive school or classroom** provides an environment where students feel safe, welcomed, and supported and where trauma's impact on learning is central to how the school interacts with students (Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative, n.d.).

Summary

This study explored the perceptions of novice teachers from in Title 1 elementary schools across two school districts in Central Florida related to their preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma as a result of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). The survey and subsequent interviews provided valuable data for teacher preparation programs to more effectively prepare teacher candidates for the classroom. The researcher sought to learn: (a) the extent to which novice teachers working in Title 1 elementary schools feel prepared to teach

students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs, (b) whether novice teachers perceived preservice university coursework or preservice clinical experiences as most effective in preparing them for teaching students experiencing trauma, (c) whether there was a statistically significant difference between the effectiveness of preservice university coursework or preservice clinical experiences in preparing novice teachers, and (d) what improvements the leaders of university-based teacher preparation programs should make to prepare teachers for working with students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs.

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the current study. In Chapter 2, the researcher discusses the scholarly literature on ACEs, teacher preparation, novice teachers, and trauma-informed teaching. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used to conduct the study, including sampling method, participants, instruments used, and data collection procedures. In Chapter 4, the researcher presents the results of the study according to each research question. Chapter 5 outlines the researcher's interpretation of the data, relationship of the findings to existing literature, implications of the study, and recommendations for further research.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to explore how graduates of traditional teacher preparation programs perceive their preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma as a result of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). The study focused on the perceptions of novice teachers working in Title 1 elementary schools across two school districts in Central Florida. The body of literature is rich with studies relative to teacher preparation and issues such as poverty or cultural responsiveness (Bertrand, 2017; Hardy, 2014; Milner & Laughter, 2014). However, an insufficient amount of published studies explored the level to which teacher preparation programs equip teachers to work with students experiencing trauma as a result of adverse childhood experiences (Brunzell et al., 2018, Jones, 2019). Studies abound related to the design of a trauma-sensitive classroom environment, but the perspectives of teachers related to their own preparedness to teach children experiencing trauma have not been widely researched (Alisic, 2012; Brunzell et al., 2018).

The researcher studied literature applicable to the research topic and the methodology. The literature was discovered using electronic search tools in several academic databases, including ERIC, ProQuest, and EBSCO. Studies were selected from the last six years of the literature, but in a few cases, seminal works prior to 2014 were reviewed because of their foundational importance. The first section of the literature review outlines the theoretical underpinnings of the present study. The next section provides a review of the literature

concerning how adverse childhood experiences affect children in the classroom. The third section includes studies on teachers' perceptions of their preparedness for working with students experiencing trauma. The fourth section addresses the clinical and coursework aspects of teacher preparation programs as described in the literature. Lastly, research connected to the inclusion of social-emotional learning in teacher preparation is described.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used to guide this study is based on Gloria Ladson-Billings's (1995) notion of *culturally relevant pedagogy*. Ladson-Billings (1995) designed this theoretical model as a three-pronged approach for improving outcomes for African-American students. Culturally relevant pedagogy addresses student achievement, affirms students' cultural identity, and encourages critical thinking that questions the inequities so often evident in schools (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings (2014) later noted the conceptualization of culturally relevant pedagogy should continuously evolve as the needs of students evolve.

In the current study, the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy can be applied to teacher preparation as it relates to teaching students who have experienced or who are experiencing trauma. All teachers must understand the prevalence of trauma resulting from adverse childhood experiences and the nature of trauma's influence on emotions, cognition, social relationships, and behaviors (Blitz, Yull, & Clauhs, 2020). Culturally responsive teaching requires educators to adjust long-held beliefs and teaching strategies as they meet the needs of students whose cultures and experiences are very different from their own (Lambeth & Smith, 2016). Applying the perspective of culturally responsive teaching to the current study, teacher candidates should understand how to view students through a trauma-sensitive lens and then be prepared to employ strategies to promote academic success, resilience, and self-determination in students (Blitz et

al., 2020). Throughout teacher preparation programs, teacher candidates need to develop the practice of asking, “What is happening with you?” rather than “What is wrong with you?” as they work with students experiencing trauma during clinical experiences (Thomas, Crosby, & Vanderhaar, 2019). Teacher educators’ deliberate integration of culturally responsive teaching strategies with established learning outcomes in coursework and clinical placements in trauma-sensitive schools will lead to teachers who are well-prepared to meet the academic, emotional, and social needs of students experiencing trauma from adverse childhood experiences (Green-Derry, 2014).

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse childhood experiences are traumatic events or facets of a child’s environment that damage his or her sense of safety and stability during childhood, resulting in immediate and lifelong impact (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019; Felitti et al., 1998).

Nationally, 10% of children from birth through age 17 are considered high risk, having experienced three or more ACEs in their lifetimes (Sacks & Murphey, 2018). Black, non-Hispanic children and Hispanic children experience ACEs at a much higher rate than White, non-Hispanic children and Asian children (Sacks & Murphey, 2018). Having reviewed data from the 2016 National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH), Sacks and Murphey (2018) identified divorce and economic hardship as the most prevalent ACEs reported at the national level and in every state. School violence and natural disasters are ACEs that can place whole school populations at risk (Zadina, 2014).

Multiple researchers have presented evidence that children who have experienced ACEs tend to suffer negative impacts to their health and wellbeing as they mature (Bethell, Davis, Gombojav, Stumbo, & Powers, 2017; Jones, 2019; Metzler, Merrick, Klevens, Ports, & Ford,

2016; Sacks & Murphey, 2018). Bessel van der Kolk (2014) called childhood trauma “the hidden epidemic” (p. 151). Van der Kolk (2014) specifically mentioned patterns of dysregulation, trouble focusing and concentration, cognitive issues, and challenges in relationships with self and others as key elements in the profile of a child suffering the effects of ACEs. Unfortunately, traumatic events in childhood are not out of the ordinary for children, and the consequences of experiencing a traumatic event filter into the classroom (Alisic, 2012). Students experiencing trauma may struggle academically, lack initiative and motivation, demonstrate an inability to self-regulate, and experience problems in relationships with peers or teachers (Jones, 2019).

Hinojosa, Hinojosa, Bright, and Nguyen (2019) examined the connection between ACEs and grade retention in school-aged children (6-17 years old). Hinojosa et al. (2019) reviewed a subsample of children ($n = 53,771$) who completed the ACEs questionnaire in the 2011-2012 National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH). The researchers’ expressed purpose was to explore the effects of individual ACEs on grade retention, the additive effect of ACEs on grade retention, and the relative effects of ACEs on grade retention when race and ethnicity were considered (Hinojosa et al, 2019). Using multivariate logistic regression, Hinojosa et al. (2019) analyzed the odds of grade retention for each individual ACE listed in the NSCH survey and then adjusted the data for child, family, neighborhood, and race/ethnicity factors. Then, the combined ACE scale was entered into Stata software to calculate the additive effects of all ACEs. Lastly, Hinojosa et al. (2019) calculated marginal predicted probabilities for grade retention to determine how race and ethnicity contributed to the relationship between ACEs and grade retention. Four ACEs were associated with higher rates of grade retention:

- economic hardship;

- parental incarceration;
- community violence; and
- domestic violence (Hinojosa et al., 2019).

Parental incarceration proved to be the strongest predictor of grade retention for students with ACE exposure, and students with multiple ACEs had a greater risk for repeating a grade (Hinojosa et al., 2019). Another notable finding was the increase in odds of retention for White, Hispanic, and multiracial children as the number of ACEs increased, but there was no difference in the odds of retention for Black children with additive increases in ACEs (Hinojosa et al., 2019).

Hinojosa et al.'s (2019) research was limited by the use of a “snapshot” view of students that relied on student and parent recollection of experiences. Also, the researchers were unable to address other issues affecting grade retention such as standardized test scores, grades, attendance, and whether students met academic standards in core subjects (Hinojosa et al., 2019). However, the findings demonstrate a prevalent issue for which teachers must be prepared.

In contrast to Hinojosa et al.'s (2019) research involving ACE exposure as reported on a national survey, Christopher Blodgett and Jane Lanigan (2018) conducted quantitative research using education personnel (teachers, principals, and school psychologists) as reporters of ACE exposure in K-6th grade students. Blodgett and Lanigan (2018) assessed the relationship between ACE exposure and academic risk, specifically, whether a dose-response effect existed between a student's number of ACEs and school attendance, behavior, and academic performance. The researchers hypothesized a dose effect would be evident, meaning the number of ACEs would be positively associated with absences, behavior problems, and the failure to meet academic standards (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018). Personnel at 10 elementary schools (five

Title 1 and five non-Title 1) from four school districts in a Northwestern metropolitan area de-identified classroom rosters containing the names of students who were randomly selected for the study ($N = 2,101$). Blodgett and Lanigan (2018) used Felitti's (1998) original ACE survey, but removed questions related to neglect and abuse to eliminate the prospect of mandatory reporting and replaced them with questions concerning homelessness, lack of basic necessities, community violence, and contact with local child welfare authorities. Nearly 200 school professionals, including 100 classroom teachers, completed the resulting 10-question survey regarding students' ACE exposure utilizing their factual knowledge of the students' experiences in the previous 12-months and since birth (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018).

When reporting data, school personnel re-identified students to ensure that Blodgett and Lanigan (2018) did not have access to identifying student information. The researchers assessed the interaction of ACE and student demographics using descriptive and nonparametric statistical tests. Binary logistic regression analysis, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and generalized estimating equations (GEE) analysis were used to separately test the correlation between ACE exposure and attendance, school behavior, and academic success (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018). A frequency analysis revealed divorce as the most common ACE among students (36%). ANOVA analyses showed ACE exposure was significantly related to race, enrollment in special education programs, and qualifying status for free or reduced meals, but not to gender or grade level (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018). Thirty-four percent of students with ACE exposure ($N = 1078$) were not meeting academic standards in reading, writing, and/or mathematics. Students having attendance issues demonstrated a significantly higher ACE score ($M = 1.8, SD = 1.3$) when compared with students who attended school regularly, on time, and remained at school the entire day ($M = 0.8, SD = 1.9$). Concerning academic risk, Blodgett and Lanigan (2018) found

an increase in the mean ACE scores of children as the number of school performance concerns increased, $F(1, 2098) = 169.9, p < .0001$. Data analysis also revealed that mean ACE scores for students in the Title 1 schools, $F(1, 2091) = 23.2, p < .0001$, were higher than the mean for students in non-Title 1 schools (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018).

Despite the lack of interrater reliability in reporting ACE exposure (because multiple school professionals furnished information), the results of Blodgett and Lanigan's (2018) study established the definitive association between ACE exposure and school success. The researchers discussed the need for educators who understand and skillfully manage the multiple challenges presented by students with ACE exposure, especially since those students may not meet the systemic thresholds to receive services or interventions (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018). Teachers can offset the potential effects of ACE exposure by creating an educational environment responsive to the needs of students who are experiencing trauma because of ACEs. While ACE exposure does not guarantee a student will have problems in school, Blodgett and Lanigan's (2018) research confirmed ACE exposure as an indicator of a student's risk. The results of Blodgett and Lanigan's (2018) study illustrated the pressing need for teacher preparation in the area of trauma-informed school practices.

The seminal study conducted by Vincent J. Felitti et al. (1998) is at the heart of any discussion related to ACEs. Working with a California medical group, Felitti et al. (1998) surveyed adults ($N = 13,494$) to identify a relationship between childhood abuse, household dysfunction, and long-term medical problems. Seventy percent of eligible adults completed the survey that contained questions in three categories of abuse (e.g., psychological, physical, and sexual) and four categories of household dysfunction (e.g., exposure to substance abuse, mental illness, violent treatment of mother, and criminal behavior). After excluding respondents who

did not meet specific criteria or who did not respond to certain questions, Felitti et al. (1998) analyzed data for 59.7% of the original survey respondents ($n = 8,056$). Data analysis revealed a significant ($p < .05$) relationship between the number of childhood exposures and six major diseases along with behaviors placing the adults' health at risk (Felitti et al., 1998). Felitti et al.'s (1998) research underscored the necessity for measures to prevent ACE exposure and to help children and adolescents avoid engaging in coping behaviors that would pose a long-term risk to their health. Such measures included collaboration between medical, public health, education, and community agencies to mitigate the lasting effects of ACE exposure (Felitti et al., 1998).

Van der Kolk (2014) identified education as “the greatest hope” (p. 353) for children experiencing trauma. Trauma-sensitive interventions are easily integrated into the daily routines of the classroom and can make a difference when implemented school wide (van der Kolk, 2014). School can be the place where students can find safety, learn skills to help them regulate their emotions and behavior, and feel seen and valued (van der Kolk, 2014). Educators need to fully understand the impact of ACEs and should be well equipped with strategies to address the needs of students experiencing trauma as a result of ACE exposure.

Teacher Perceptions of Preparedness

Teacher preparation programs should engage teacher candidates in thinking just as much, or more, about *who* is being taught as they do about *what* is being taught (White, 2017). Researchers estimate that 61% of school-aged children have experienced a traumatic event by age 17, with 41% experiencing more than one such event (Finkelhor, Turner, Shattuck, & Hamby, 2015). As previously stated, ACEs result in the manifestation of stressors debilitating to a child's ability to learn. Teachers must be prepared to adapt instruction to meet the needs of all

children and be poised meet the unique needs of students whose life experiences involve traumatic events (Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2019).

Lombardi (2019) interviewed 10 early childhood teachers from one southern state in the United States to learn how the teachers' perspectives of their preparation experiences influenced both the teaching strategies they used and the learning environments they created for their emergent learners. Using a qualitative approach grounded in Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, Lombardi (2019) conducted 60-minute interviews with each teacher; the interviews provided the preschool teachers the opportunity to share the context and content of their teacher preparation programs and their experiences with teaching children who had experienced trauma. The interviews were transcribed and coded according to key words and phrases. Lombardi (2019) identified six themes in the data, three of which are relevant to the current study: (a) teacher preparation in formal/college courses, (b), self-efficacy, and (c) the need for teacher preparation experiences.

The participants in Lombardi's (2019) study expressed the opinion that trauma-related courses should be incorporated in college and university teacher preparation programs for all majors. None of the participants in Lombardi's (2019) study could remember having any education course focused on childhood trauma or trauma-informed teaching. Similar to the teachers in Bixler-Funk's (2018) study discussed later in this literature review, the preschool teachers in Lombardi's (2019) study revealed topics such as teaching children with special needs and behavior and classroom management were thoroughly addressed in the participants' college coursework, but the issue of childhood trauma was overlooked (Lombardi, 2019). As a result, the participants did not feel confident in their effectiveness when teaching children who have experienced trauma (Lombardi, 2019). Echoing themes found in Reker's (2016) research, study

participants suggested methods for adding trauma-informed teaching strategies to teacher preparation programs, such as school site visits, coaching from experienced teachers, and mentoring, with the ultimate goal of improving the academic and social-emotional development of the emergent learners in their classrooms (Lombardi, 2019). Although limited in sample size and regional location, Lombardi's (2019) study presented a compelling case for the importance of equipping teachers to work with students experiencing trauma.

While Lombardi's (2019) work focused on the experiences of preschool teachers, Jones's (2019) qualitative action research study afforded a view of K-12 teachers' lived experiences with students impacted by trauma and identified the supports needed to teach those students effectively. Jones utilized purposive sampling to gather the targeted number of teacher participants for the study ($n = 10$) from K-12 public schools in the northeastern United States. The study participants held master's degrees in education and had been teaching for an average of 18.9 years. Jones (2019) recorded 60 to 90-minute phone interviews with participants, assigned each participant a numeric identifier for confidentiality, and transcribed the interviews for verification and coding purposes using interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Although the teachers in Jones's (2019) study possessed a basic knowledge of trauma, the findings indicated the teachers did not clearly understand the long-term implications of ACEs on learning and development. Similar to Lombardi's (2019) findings, all participants in Jones's (2019) study identified a need for training in effective methods to support students who were experiencing trauma, specifying that their teacher preparation programs did not incorporate trauma-informed teaching in education courses. Participants reported they were well equipped with training in behavior management, the impact of poverty on students, and state- or federally-mandated topics (e.g., mandatory reporting, discrimination), but districts and schools rarely

offered professional development concerning trauma-informed teaching. The teachers in Jones's (2019) study reported that having knowledge and skills concerning ACEs would allow them to engage students in learning more effectively. Jones (2019) noted her concern that without appropriate training on the signs and symptoms of trauma-related stress, teachers may not perceive trauma as a barrier to students' learning and would not have the tools to assist the students. Jones (2019) echoed the concerns expressed in Reker's (2016) study, particularly when a teacher lacks awareness of a student's trauma history, the teacher may be unable to meet the impacted student's needs effectively.

In contrast to Lombardi's (2019) and Jones's (2019) studies concentrating on the perceptions of seasoned teachers, Maria Paz Tagle (2019) analyzed the perceptions of novice teachers in her research. Paz Tagle (2019) "took as a guide the study done by Dillon (2004) about the perceptions of K-5th grade teachers and their experiences during their first two years of teaching and compared Dillon's results with the perceptions and experiences of teachers 15 years later" (p. 22). In Paz Tagle's (2019) qualitative study, novice teachers were defined as those teachers who had been teaching up to four years. Taking a phenomenological approach, Paz Tagle (2019) conducted in-depth interviews with 17 novice K-8th grade teachers from three Tennessee school districts. Fourteen of the teachers attended a traditional, four-year teaching program at a college or university, and the remaining three teachers chose education as a second career, having completed a master's program in teaching to be eligible for certification (Paz Tagle, 2019). Teachers received the interview questions ahead of time so they could consider their responses prior to taking part in the interviews. After interviewing the teachers, Paz Tagle (2019) transcribed the interviews, sent the transcripts to the study participants for verification, and then coded the transcripts for recurring themes.

All of the teacher participants voiced positive feelings about their teacher preparation programs overall; however, nine participants felt they were not adequately prepared to teach (Paz Tagle, 2019). The teachers agreed they were prepared to understand curriculum and to execute teaching strategies effectively, but named trauma, poverty, behavior problems, differentiation, social-emotional issues, and the “clerical aspects of teaching” (p. 103) as issues that were not addressed during their respective teacher preparation programs (Paz Tagle, 2019). All participants expressed the need for more time in field experiences and in student teaching with a stronger connection between theory and practice (Paz Tagle, 2019), resembling earlier findings from McElwee, Regan, Baker, and Weiss (2018) and Singh (2017).

Anne-Marie Bixler-Funk’s (2018) doctoral research centered on preservice teachers’ understanding of trauma, the impact of trauma on learning, and the preservice teachers’ preparedness to teach students who have experienced trauma. Preservice teachers from midwestern universities who had completed university coursework and were completing clinical experiences in secondary (6th-12th grade) school placements in a metropolitan school district in Kansas were invited to in-person, semi-structured interviews with the researcher (Bixler-Funk, 2018). Only seven of the 20 invitees chose to participate in the study, narrowing the scale to which the study could be generalized.

Once the interviews were transcribed and verified, Bixler-Funk (2018) developed a series of codes to analyze responses. Recurring themes were identified first, and then codes were created to develop the researcher’s understanding of the responses. Study participants described little or no coursework focused on trauma and its impact on academic and socio-emotional learning (Bixler-Funk, 2018). Teacher preparation programs addressed differentiation, multicultural education, child psychology, disabilities, and human growth and development, but

trauma was not included. The preservice teachers in Bixler-Funk's (2018) study stressed their perceived inadequacy to meet the needs of their students experiencing trauma and their lack of confidence in knowing how best to support the students. Study participants recommended several methods for improving teacher preparation programs, such as spending more time in classrooms, having opportunities to problem solve, collaborating with teachers prior to the clinical experience, and additional real-world connections in coursework (Bixler-Funk, 2018).

Atiles, Oliver, and Brosi (2017) also worked with preservice teachers in their research. Atiles et al. (2017) explored teacher self-efficacy related to awareness of trauma's effects on children. An all-female sample of 72 preservice teachers majoring in early childhood education at a midwestern university completed a questionnaire comprised of 47 Likert-type items. The preservice teachers were asked to rate their knowledge concerning the stress responses displayed by children and their sense of self-efficacy for responding to the manifestations of that stress. The study participants demonstrated a moderate awareness ($M = 45.70$, $SD = 15.18$) of the effects of divorce on children (Atiles et al., 2017). A positive, statistically significant correlation ($r = .455$, $p = .000$) was found between the preservice teachers' sense of efficacy and their awareness of divorce's effects on children (Atiles et al., 2017). Although the preservice teachers took courses in human development, facilitating pro-social behavior in the classroom, and family relationships and variables affecting early childhood development, Atiles et al. (2017) stated teachers should specifically understand the socio-emotional needs of children from divorced families and the connection between childhood stress and academic challenges. Further, preservice teachers should be equipped with strategies for easing the burden of traumatic stress in their students and thereby increase the teachers' efficacy in meeting the needs of children from divorced families (Atiles et al., 2017).

Reker's (2016) research was topically similar to Bixler-Funk's research, but Reker focused on a different population. Reker (2016) gathered data in an exploratory study concerning teachers' perceptions of the need for trauma-sensitive environments, teachers' roles in supporting students experiencing traumatic stress, and teachers' perceived level of self-efficacy in supporting students experiencing traumatic stress. Study participants were early childhood, elementary, middle, and high school teachers from public schools in a selected county of Nebraska. A total of 327 teachers completed the online survey instrument that contained 34 close-ended questions and 12 open-ended questions. Participants used a five-point Likert scale to respond to close-ended prompts addressing training experiences (preservice and in-service), faculty/staff roles, and self-efficacy. At the end of each section, participants could respond to an open-ended question to provide additional information or clarification.

Survey results indicated teachers agreed students experiencing stress resulting from childhood trauma need additional academic, behavioral, and emotional supports in the classroom (Reker, 2016). Qualitative data pointed to the need for communication between stakeholders; when teachers were not informed concerning a student's history of trauma, they were not able to meet the student's academic, behavior, and emotional needs effectively (Reker, 2016). Approximately 45% of the teachers ($n = 147$) reported they had not received training in childhood trauma during their preservice training for licensure, and almost half (49%) of the teachers indicated that their teacher preparation programs did not prepare them with strategies to support students experiencing traumatic stress (Reker, 2016). Data revealed no statistically significant difference in levels of self-efficacy for meeting students' academic needs ($p = .139$) or emotional needs ($p = .326$) when years of teaching experience were considered (Reker, 2016).

Reker (2016) concluded there was a “critical need for increased trauma-specific training for teachers in all grade levels and at every stage of their careers” (p. 149). Specifically, Reker (2016) suggested that teacher preparation programs and school districts work together to provide preservice teachers with opportunities to increase their understandings of child traumatic stress and develop effective interventions for meeting student needs in the classroom. New teachers would also need training to expand their knowledge of behavior management strategies in classrooms serving students experiencing trauma (Reker, 2016).

Along the lines of Bixler-Funk’s (2018) and Reker’s (2016) qualitative research concerning teacher preparedness and trauma, Lisa Green-Derry (2014) utilized case-study methodology to learn how graduates from a southeastern Louisiana university college of education perceived their preparedness to meet the academic needs of students traumatized by natural disasters. The selection of the study population began with purposive sampling but soon developed into snowball sampling by the time participant recruitment was complete. Administrators with teaching experience and faculty in the university’s college of education were included along with preservice and in-service teachers enrolled in the college of education. The resulting sample of 17 participants was racially and ethnically diverse, and all participants resided in New Orleans at the time of Hurricane Katrina. Green-Derry (2014) collected data by means of semi-structured individual interviews and a focus group as well as a review of pertinent university documents (e.g., course descriptions, syllabi, student reflections and assignments). Six overarching themes emerged after Green-Derry coded the transcripts and the university documents, then triangulated all data sources (Green-Derry, 2014). The themes included (a) teacher preparedness, (b) lack of teacher preparedness, (c) instructional practices before and after

Hurricane Katrina, (d) teachers' experiential learning, (e) teachers' lived experiences, and (f) students' emotional needs.

Ten of the 13 teacher participants expressed positive perceptions of their readiness to meet the needs of students traumatized by natural disasters (Green-Derry, 2014). The teachers identified the experiential learning component (i.e., field experiences and student teaching) of their teacher preparation programs as influential in their preparedness. Although the college of education faculty and administrators readily acknowledged the insufficiency of coursework related to trauma, the faculty and administrators agreed with the teacher participants that clinical experiences proved to be essential to teacher preparedness (Green-Derry, 2014). The value of the participants' lived experiences as teachers, preservice teachers, or K-12 students displaced during Hurricane Katrina also became apparent as they considered preparation for meeting the needs of students experiencing trauma. However, meeting the emotional needs of students following trauma was one aspect of teaching that challenged the preservice and in-service teachers' self-efficacy (Green-Derry, 2014). Despite engaging in university coursework related to diversity, teachers struggled with successful alignment between classroom practices and the emotional needs of students who had suffered traumatic experiences (Green-Derry, 2014).

From a qualitative perspective, Buchanan and Harris (2014) also explored teachers' experiences working with students who had experienced trauma. Using a qualitative approach grounded in phenomenology, the researchers interviewed six junior-high and high school teachers with an overall goal of understanding the personal and professional supports necessary for teachers to help students reconnect and feel safe in the classroom after a suicide attempt. The researchers recorded each interview and kept journal notes. Interview recordings were

subsequently transcribed and read multiple times by the researchers and participants to identify common themes between the teachers' experiences.

The teachers in Buchanan and Harris's (2014) study expressed "feelings of care and worry similar to that of a parent of a student in crisis" (p. 12). One common theme was the expansion of the teacher's role beyond facilitator of student learning; participants specified coping with students' mental health as another facet of their classroom responsibilities. These teachers voiced both a desire to support their students and an uncertainty as to how to help, citing a lack of preparation and education concerning appropriate strategies and resources (Buchanan & Harris, 2014). Teacher participants emphasized the need for preservice teacher training focused on assisting students in crisis (Buchanan & Harris, 2014). Buchanan and Harris (2014) concluded teacher preparation programs should consider student mental health in any curriculum for preservice teachers.

Students' stress and the concern over teachers' roles were issues discussed in Dutch researcher Eva Alisic's (2012) work. Alisic (2012) employed a qualitative research method to understand elementary teachers' approaches to working with children experiencing trauma. Twenty-one teachers from 13 schools participated in semi-structured interviews conducted by teams of students in their final year of their bachelor's degree at the university where Alisic (2012) was teaching at the time of the study. Almost half of the teacher participants had been teaching for more than 10 years, and a third had fewer than three years of experience. One-fourth of the participants were men.

In Alisic's (2012) study, two students served on each interview team; one student functioned as primary interviewer while the other student was an observer. Alisic (2012) listened to the recorded interviews and provided feedback to the student interviewers. Interviews were

transcribed and codes were assigned to participants to maintain anonymity. The researcher and interview teams used a summative analysis approach to analyze the data; the resulting summaries were verified by the teacher participants and coded for overarching themes. Four core themes emerged from the data: (a) the teacher's role, (b) meeting the needs of one child as opposed to the group's needs, (c) the need for professional development, and (d) the stress of working with students experiencing trauma (Alisic, 2012).

Teachers in Alisic's (2012) study reported that a focus on social-emotional learning (SEL) seemed to be overtaking the focus on teaching academic skills. Most of the teachers asserted their primary role was that of teacher rather than social worker. The teachers were challenged by the conflicting needs of one child versus the needs of the whole class and were uncertain as to how to balance those needs. A clear majority of the teacher participants felt less than competent in knowing how to respond to students experiencing trauma. For example, the teachers wondered how or if they should talk about the traumatic event and how they could help a student recover (Alisic, 2012). The more seasoned teachers in the study pointed out the need for teacher preparation programs to include courses focusing on trauma, including ways for teachers to mitigate the emotional burden they felt from working with students experiencing trauma (Alisic, 2012).

Student mental health was likewise the subject of Onchwari's (2010) research. Onchwari (2010) found preservice and in-service teachers felt only moderately prepared to handle their students' stress. Using a five-part questionnaire-style survey, 160 preservice teachers and 55 in-service teachers randomly selected from four elementary teacher-training colleges reported their perceived level of preparedness to manage sources of stress in children. Part 1 of the survey requested demographic information. Part 2 sought information on teacher perceptions of

preparedness using a Likert scale. In Part 3, participants rated resources that they considered useful in learning about how to handle stress in their students (results of this part were not reported). Part 4 contained three scenarios representing three types of stress in children: (a) family-related, (b) school-related, and (c) society-related. Lastly, in Part 5, participants responded to one open-ended question requesting suggestions for teacher preparation programs about preparing candidates to work with children experiencing stress.

On average, 34% of the participants ($n = 215$) felt moderately prepared to handle children's stress in the classroom (Onchwari, 2010). Using a one-way ANOVA to compare perceived levels of preparedness, Onchwari reported statistically significant differences among levels of preparedness for family-related, school-related, and society-related stressors ($F = 6.0, p = .001$) but no statistically significant differences between the two teacher groups. Family-related stressors were connected to relationships in the family, such as the illness of a parent or loss of a pet. School-related stressors involved relationships with teachers and peers, and a child's academic performance. Society-related stressors arose from external sources such as parents' jobs, transiency, changes in socioeconomic status, or community threats. Teachers indicated they felt most prepared to manage school-related stressors, but they considered themselves least prepared to manage society-related stressors. None of the 75 teachers who answered the open-ended question in Part 5 believed their teacher preparation programs prepared them well to handle the stress of their students. Suggestions from the participants who responded to Part 5 included providing preservice teachers with additional coursework on the topic of stress and placing them in field experiences where they would be exposed to children suffering high levels of stress. Onchwari's (2010) findings indicated that teacher candidates

would benefit from a stronger focus on student mental health as part of their teacher preparation programs.

Teacher Preparation: Coursework and Clinical Experiences

Traumatic experiences affect children from all races, genders, ethnicities, geographic locations, and socioeconomic backgrounds (Honsinger & Brown, 2019; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Teacher preparation programs must help teacher candidates develop a teaching practice that promotes deep learning for students and that is trauma-sensitive (Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2019). Coursework and clinical experiences should allow teacher candidates to apply learning in high-needs schools where they learn the art of teaching twenty-first century skills to students whose cognitive energies are undermined by the effects of trauma (Darling-Hammond & Oakes, 2019).

McElwee, Regan, Baker, and Weiss (2018) studied the extent to which classroom context and relationships affected the appropriation of teacher preparation coursework during a preservice teacher's clinical experience. The research team used purposeful sampling to identify study participants from a teacher education program at a public university in the eastern United States. Potential participants were special education majors enrolled in a culminating clinical education experience under the mentorship of a K-12 classroom teacher and a university supervisor. Participants completed two eight-week placements during the course. Recruitment efforts resulted in a very small sample ($n = 6$) of preservice teachers, five of whom were female, and all participants were White.

An 11-question interview protocol was used to guide the 60-minute interviews addressing how the context of the clinical experience, relationships in that context, and university coursework influenced the instructional decisions made by teachers during the clinical

experience. Following the interviews, McElwee et al. (2018) successfully observed three of the six participants to note instructional strategies, classroom management, and behavioral strategies. (The remaining three observations could not be conducted due to a variety of circumstances.) Participants wrote papers reflecting on their instructional decisions, relationships, and professional growth at the end of each experience. McElwee et al. (2018) analyzed the data to understand “how, when, and why the participants did or did not use the pedagogical skills” (p. 28) learned during their university coursework. All data sources were coded before further analysis. The research team conducted a comparative analysis across sources and a cross-case analysis for broad themes (McElwee et al., 2018).

Three aspects of the context in each clinical experience influenced whether the preservice teachers appropriated their university coursework. First, all participants reported the infrastructures of the schools where they were placed had an effect on their use of coursework, specifically the content taught (i.e. math, reading, science, or social studies) and the service delivery models (i.e., self-contained classroom, general education classroom, or co-teach model) (McElwee et al., 2018). Participants had the opportunity to use skills learned during university coursework when placed in a content-specific classroom (McElwee et al., 2018). Placement in a co-teaching instructional model also allowed participants to appropriate their learning from coursework (McElwee et al., 2018). Relationships formed during the clinical experience presented another influential aspect of the clinical experience. A positive working relationship with the mentor teacher provided study participants with the confidence that they could apply their special education coursework in the classroom (McElwee et al., 2018). Lastly, participants expressed the need to appropriate coursework in the absence of background experiences working with students with disabilities (McElwee et al., 2018).

The findings from McElwee et al.'s (2018) study are consistent with previous research concerning the impact of clinical experiences on teacher preparation (Bertrand, 2017; CAEP, 2013; Singh, 2017). The infrastructure of a preservice teacher's clinical placement and the relationship with the mentor teacher influence the extent to which the preservice teacher practices the pedagogical skills learned in university coursework (McElwee et al., 2018). Applying McElwee et al.'s (2018) findings to the current study, preservice teachers should participate in clinical experiences at trauma-informed school settings under the guidance of mentor teachers who have experience in trauma-informed teaching.

Citing a lack of research on effective features of clinical experiences for preservice teachers, Singh (2017) examined how elementary teacher candidates at a public liberal arts college in the northeastern United States perceived the effect of clinical experiences on their preparation for the classroom. During clinical experiences in PK-12 schools, preservice teachers were expected to practice their learned pedagogical skills in diverse settings (Singh, 2017). A sample of 28 ($N = 28$) undergraduate students enrolled in the elementary teacher education program participated in the study. Twenty-five participants were female, and all participants were White (Singh, 2017). Study participants responded to a questionnaire containing 21 Likert-style questions and one open-ended question allowing for additional comments. Participants completed the questionnaires in 15-20 minutes during one of their education courses. Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .86$) was used to calculate internal consistency of the questionnaire (Singh, 2017).

All participants agreed that clinical experiences helped decrease their anxiety about teaching and helped them connect theory with practice (Singh, 2017). Eighty-five percent stated their clinical experiences provided opportunities to apply university coursework to classroom

practice (Singh, 2017). Although the study was limited by small sample size, convenient sampling procedures, and experimenter bias, the results supported the vital influence of clinical experiences on teacher preparation and the value of connecting university coursework to practical experience.

Similar to Singh's (2017) research measuring the effect of clinical experiences on teacher preparation, Smith, Farnan, Seeger, Wall, and Kiene (2017) utilized a mixed-methods approach to measure the effect of clinical experiences in urban, diverse settings on the self-efficacy of teacher candidates from rural areas. Typically, the teacher candidates at the studied rural, public, Midwestern university were not placed in schools serving students from diverse racial, ethnic, language, or low socioeconomic backgrounds (Smith et al., 2017). Faculty from the teacher preparation program established a partnership with an urban school to engage teacher candidates in clinical experiences differing greatly from their own school experiences (Smith et al., 2017). Most of the research participants ($N = 35$) in the Smith et al. (2017) study were White (96%) and female (83%). Smith et al. (2017) gathered data through pre- and post-surveys, post-experience written reflections, and focus groups. A four-point Likert scale was used in the 16-item survey, and the resulting data were transformed to an Excel spreadsheet. The research team looked specifically for a change in item response from agreement to disagreement or vice versa (Smith et al., 2017). Using axial coding, Smith et al. (2017) analyzed and coded narrative responses for emergent themes. The research team worked independently during the coding process and subsequently compared themes for consistency.

Chi square analysis of the data revealed a statistically significant change, $\chi^2(1, N = 35) = 4.56, p = .033$, in teacher candidates' perceptions of their own efficacy in teaching students from diverse backgrounds (Smith et al., 2017). Qualitative data provided additional insight

concerning teacher candidates' personal biases and their comfort levels working with students from diverse backgrounds. Specifically, the clinical experiences allowed teacher candidates to discover inner biases that could prejudice the development of teacher-student relationships (Smith et al., 2017). Teacher candidates who were initially anxious about the diverse settings in which they would teach later expressed the experience had been “transformative” (Smith et al., 2017, p. 18). Smith et al.'s (2017) study findings shed light on needed changes to the university's teacher preparation program to allow teacher candidates more rich experiences with students from diverse backgrounds. Similar to other cited studies (Bertrand, 2017; Hardy, 2014; McElwee et al., 2018; Singh, 2017), the study performed by Smith et al. (2017) demonstrates the need for coursework and clinical experiences which provide teacher candidates with opportunities to apply their learning in diverse settings, including Title 1 schools.

Meg White's (2017) mixed-methods study of a teacher education program at a liberal arts university in the northeastern United States also provided an analysis of the effectiveness of clinical experiences for preservice teachers. Junior- and senior-level students in the university's teacher preparation program who were enrolled in a fieldwork seminar course taken concurrently with a pedagogical course centered on instructional practices and teaching techniques. The seminar course required students to complete 80 hours of classroom experience in an urban school setting along with attending four in-class meetings to discuss the clinical experience and assignments (White, 2017). White (2017) collected quantitative data from a 19-question survey completed by study participants ($n = 150$) before and after the clinical experience. Paired *t*-statistics were used to analyze response data using SPSS data analysis software. Qualitative data was extracted using axial coding and consisted of three assignments from the seminar course and a reflective essay summarizing the clinical experience (White, 2017).

The surveys and the reflective essays, in particular, demonstrated the positive influence of the 80-hour clinical experience on preservice teachers' perceptions of teaching in urban classrooms (White, 2017). There was a significant difference between the preservice teachers' overall levels of confidence for teaching in an urban setting before the clinical experience and after the clinical experience; both the survey data and statements from the reflective essays highlighted the teachers' feelings of preparedness for the urban classroom (White, 2017). Preservice teachers wrote statements such as, "I now feel like I would be comfortable teaching in an urban area, and I would absolutely take the opportunity to do so," and "This experience changed my outlook on teaching in urban districts, and it was one of the best experiences of my life" (White, 2017, p. 8). Although White's (2017) study was limited to one university in one urban school district, the data suggested preservice teachers benefit from experiencing a substantial amount of time in clinical experiences in conjunction with classroom learning. The research findings from Smith, et al. (2017), Singh (2017), and McElwee et al. (2018) also support White's (2017) assertion that clinical experiences "combined with university coursework offers a rich, experiential learning experience for preservice teachers" (White, 2017, p. 15).

Adding to the body of research on teacher preparation, Bertrand (2017) initiated a qualitative research study to examine how elementary preservice teachers completing field experiences and internships in Title 1 schools perceived their preparation for teaching in Title 1 schools. Three types of sources provided data for the study: (a) document analysis of course syllabi and course readings, (b) semi-structured interviews with faculty members and preservice teachers, and (c) a *photovoice* project (Bertrand, 2017). In the document analysis portion of the study, three years' worth of education course syllabi and course readings were analyzed to determine the extent to which the preservice teachers were being prepared with information

about teaching students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Faculty members for the applicable courses were subsequently interviewed for insights on the learning outcomes listed in the syllabi. Bertrand (2017) discovered only four of ten courses devoted any class time to discuss how to meet the needs of students in Title 1 or high poverty schools, and often those discussions were held over just one or two class sessions.

Using convenience sampling, Bertrand (2017) invited sixty teacher candidates to participate in interviews; six participants from diverse backgrounds and ages agreed to take part in the study. Interviews were 20 to 35 minutes long and were conducted face to face or over Skype. Bertrand (2017) recorded the interviews, transcribed the recordings, and coded the transcripts to develop broad categories and themes. Participants shared the lack of diversity in faculty and in the student body affected how prepared they felt to teach in Title 1 schools because of the lack of diverse perspectives (Bertrand, 2017). The preservice teachers were able to identify some aspects of their coursework, for example, specific course readings or community mapping activities completed in two of their required courses, which enabled the teachers to feel more equipped to teach (Bertrand, 2017). However, the interview participants agreed their university coursework and clinical experiences did not adequately prepare them to teach in Title 1 schools (Bertrand, 2017). Recommendations from the study centered on two areas: (a) redesigning coursework to integrate material more effectively about Title 1 schools and how to work with diverse learners, and (b) implementing mandatory field experiences in Title 1 schools involving continual dialogue with effective teachers in those schools (Bertrand, 2017). The recommendations made in Bertrand's (2017) research are important to the current study of novice teachers working in Title 1 elementary schools because many of the conditions existing

for families in Title 1 schools, such as poverty or homelessness, are associated with ACE exposure.

The perceptions of novice teachers were also the focus of Hardy's (2014) mixed methods study. Hardy (2014) investigated the extent to which novice teachers in southeast Georgia believed their university teacher preparation programs addressed classroom diversity and the design of a culturally responsive classroom. Taking a sequential explanatory approach, Hardy (2014) surveyed teachers with less than three years' experience in a Georgia school district and followed the survey with interviews to further explain the quantitative data. Participants ($n = 149$) answered 20 survey questions using a five-point Likert-type scale to provide data about their university preparation for teaching students who are culturally diverse. The teachers who agreed to be interviewed responded to eight interview questions (semi-structured and open-ended). Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and cluster analysis; qualitative data were transcribed, coded in three levels, and connected to the quantitative data to draw conclusions (Hardy, 2014).

Both quantitative and qualitative data supported the finding that teachers believed they had not been fully prepared to teach students from diverse backgrounds effectively (Hardy, 2014). Interview data revealed the teachers learned as they taught and relied on their personal experiences in the classroom (Hardy, 2014). Hardy's findings are important in the context of the current study because the populations of Title 1 schools are often comprised of students from diverse backgrounds (Blitz et al., 2020).

Teacher Preparation: Social-Emotional Learning

As teachers of the whole child, educators must be proficient in developing students' social-emotional competencies as well as students' academic skills (CASEL, 2013). The

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has identified five areas in which teachers should employ strategies to promote student growth in social-emotional learning (SEL): self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making skills (CASEL, 2013). Students who have experienced trauma often have difficulty regulating their emotions and demonstrating appropriate social skills, so direct instruction in SEL competencies is vital (Izard, 2016; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014; Pickens & Tschopp, 2017). Engaging students in SEL improves student mindsets concerning themselves, relationships with others, and school (CASEL, 2013). School officials, teachers, parents, and policymakers recognize the urgency for schools to address students' mental health needs, and teachers must leave their preparation programs with the knowledge and skills required to help students (Nenonene, Gallagher, Kelly & Collopy, 2019). Ample research exists on the importance of implementing SEL in K-12 schools, but the rise in student mental health problems and school-related violence has demonstrated the need for preparing teachers with SEL competencies during teacher preparation programs (Ball, Iachini, Bohnenkamp, Togno, Brown, Hoffman, & George, 2016; Donahue-Keegan, Villegas-Reimers & Cressey, 2019; Nenonene et al., 2019).

The teacher education faculty in a Midwest private university engaged in a two-year process to focus on the perceived need for including SEL competencies in the university's teacher preparation program. Nenonene, Gallagher, Kelly, and Collopy (2019) led colleagues in a professional learning community (PLC) that (a) evaluated the extent to which SEL and culturally responsive teaching were integrated in the program, and (b) participated in professional development related to the integration of SEL in courses. Sixteen faculty members (N = 16) completed two questionnaires over a 15-month period to assess perceptions of the

extent to which SEL was already integrated in their courses. In the first survey, five Likert-style questions using a 5-point response scale were included along with one open-ended response question to allow participants to discuss examples of SEL currently integrated in the courses participants were teaching. Twelve of the 16 faculty members completed the second survey that asked an open-ended question related to the effectiveness of the PLC. Nenonene et al. (2019) did not report the quantitative findings of the survey, instead reporting the qualitative data used to develop the narrative discussion of their study.

Prior to engaging in professional development, the education faculty believed that SEL competencies were already embedded in the courses they taught (Nenonene et al., 2019). Ongoing professional development and discussions during PLC meetings subsequently provided faculty with the opportunity to recognize additional areas for integrating SEL competencies in the teacher education program, leading to a mapping process by which SEL competencies were infused into the curriculum (Nenonene et al., 2019). While initially the PLC's focus was on the future benefits to K-12 learners, the education faculty agreed that embedding the SEL competencies and modeling instructional strategies for those skills would support preservice teachers' learning and implementation of SEL in their clinical experiences (Nenonene et al., 2019). SEL competencies were not completely absent from the coursework in Nenonene et al.'s (2019) study; the education faculty had simply taken a generalized, unfocused approach to teaching the skills (Mukhopadhyay, 2017).

Katherine Main (2018) also researched SEL in teacher education. Main (2018) studied the extent to which embedding social and emotional skills in a teacher education course increased preservice teachers' readiness for integrating those skills into their approach to classroom teaching. Main (2018) drew the study sample ($n = 218$) from all students ($N = 342$)

enrolled in a course concentrated on adolescent development theory and practice. Using the culminating assessment task from the course—a research essay—Main (2018) analyzed the preservice teachers' levels of awareness concerning social and emotional skills and the likelihood of including social and emotional skills in their teaching across curriculum areas (the students had not been openly directed to include social and emotional skills in the essay). The five SEL competencies defined by CASEL informed the coding process of *evident* or *not evident* as Main (2018) searched for clear embedding of social and emotional skills in the students' assignments. Data analysis revealed 39% of the study participants addressed the development of social and emotional skills in their individual curriculum areas (Main, 2018). The results of Main's (2018) study demonstrated the potential for improving teachers' self-efficacy to teach social and emotional skills by intentionally teaching and modeling SEL competencies during coursework in the teacher preparation program, furthering the previous work of Atilas, Oliver and Brosi (2017) and Alisic (2012).

The integration of SEL competencies in teacher education programs was also the subject of Mukhopadhyay's (2017) research. Mukhopadhyay (2017) used a mixed-methods approach to understand how a particular teacher education program facilitated instruction in SEL competencies for teacher candidates. Data sources informing Mukhopadhyay's (2017) research included a survey of students in the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program ($N = 781$) which addressed one research question along with document analyses and interviews that provided qualitative information to answer the remaining two research questions. Only the qualitative research portion of Mukhopadhyay's (2017) work proved relevant to the current study.

During qualitative data collection, Mukhopadhyay (2017) interviewed faculty leaders ($n = 5$) and students in their first or second year of the MAT program ($n = 9$) to understand SEL

instruction from a programming perspective and from the learner's perspective. The faculty interviews, course syllabi and course materials provided a look at how the teacher preparation program addressed SEL in terms of the formal program. Mukhopadhyay (2017) transcribed the interviews, then coded and summarized the topics discussed to identify themes in alignment with CASEL's (2013) language for instruction in SEL competencies. The faculty acknowledged they did not explicitly teach SEL; rather, faculty included SEL competencies indirectly, by virtue of the learning outcomes mandated by the program itself (Mukhopadhyay, 2017). Further, the faculty could not agree on whether SEL should be purposefully included in the curriculum (Mukhopadhyay, 2017). The students in Mukhopadhyay's (2017) study developed awareness of SEL from clinical experiences and personal experiences (e.g., volunteering) rather than from theoretical learning in courses. The participants also expressed a lack of confidence in their own knowledge concerning SEL and found themselves searching for ways to meet student social-emotional needs on their own (Mukhopadhyay, 2017). Implementation of SEL in the participants' classrooms was incidental and was limited to a few aspects of the CASEL (2013) framework (Mukhopadhyay, 2017). Since many states require the integration of SEL into a teacher's practice (Ball et al., 2016), it is evident teacher candidates should purposefully learn and practice SEL during teacher preparation.

Lynne Stasiak's (2016) research is relatable to the work of Nenonene et al. (2019). Whereas Nenonene et al. (2019) investigated the explicit and implicit applications of SEL competencies in teacher education courses from the perspective of faculty, Stasiak (2016) asked preservice teachers directly how they had been prepared to address SEL competencies. Stasiak (2016) employed a phenomenological approach to examine how junior-level education students, senior-level education students in their final semester of student teaching (referred to in the study

as preservice teachers), and practicing teachers were prepared to address SEL in classrooms. The overall purpose of the study was to influence outcomes in teacher preparation programs and to inform teacher practice (Stasiak, 2016).

Stasiak (2016) used stratified, criterion sampling from a population of students to whom she had access at the small liberal arts college in the northeastern United States where she works. Practicing teachers were selected from one elementary school where the education students completed clinical experiences. Three focus groups comprised of seven junior-level students ($N = 38$), six preservice teachers ($N = 35$), and five practicing teachers ($N = 35$) along with four subsequent individual interviews provided data for Stasiak's (2016) qualitative research. Twelve of the students were elementary education majors, one was a secondary education major, and all practicing teachers taught in grades K-5. Stasiak (2016) provided study participants with the list of questions at the start of each focus group as well as professional teaching standards and CASEL's (2013) overview of SEL competencies. The researcher encouraged participants to jot notes as they processed the conversation and documented behaviors that would not be represented in the audio recordings of the sessions. After each focus group, Stasiak (2016) noted initial observations, transcribed the audio recordings, and proceeded to develop codes for data review. Using charts to help organize the data, Stasiak (2016) analyzed the data for each focus group then compared and contrasted the data between groups. Four themes unfolded, one of which is meaningful to the current study: training in SEL (Stasiak, 2016).

The results proved consistent across all focus groups: participants did not believe they were explicitly prepared to teach SEL competencies (Stasiak, 2016). The student groups' understandings related to SEL arose primarily from modeling by education professors, positive student-professor relationships, and a safe college classroom environment. Classroom teachers

gained knowledge about SEL from professional development opportunities (Stasiak, 2016). Half of the preservice teachers ($n = 6$) commented that coursework alone would not have prepared them to teach SEL skills in the classroom. Junior-level participants ($n = 7$) noted their understanding of SEL came with observing classroom teachers during their clinical experiences when they saw how teachers addressed student behaviors. Stasiak's (2016) findings are notably aligned with Singh (2017) and White (2017) in demonstrating the interdependence of teacher preparation coursework and clinical experiences to prepare teacher candidates for the classroom.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the current literature related to adverse childhood experiences and teacher preparation. Children who experience ACEs face negative consequences in school (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018; Hinojosa et al., 2019; van der Kolk, 2014) and in their health and wellbeing both as children and adults (Felitti et al., 1998; van der Kolk, 2014). Teachers are positioned to have a favorable influence on students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs, but teachers must be adequately prepared to do so. Preservice and practicing teachers do not feel confident in their abilities to meet the needs of students experiencing trauma (Green-Derry, 2014; Lombardi, 2019; Reker, 2016). The teachers' lack of confidence can be traced to the scarcity of explicit instruction in trauma-informed teaching strategies and SEL competencies in teacher preparation programs (Bixler-Funk, 2018; Buchanan & Harris, 2014; Jones, 2019; Stasiak, 2016), although students may be learning those topics indirectly (Mukhopadhyay, 2017; Nenonene et al., 2019). The work of multiple researchers indicated that coursework and clinical experiences matter during a teacher's preparation, and more time in clinical experiences leads to positive outcomes for teacher candidates (McElwee et al., 2018; Paz Tagle, 2019; Smith et al., 2017; Singh, 2017; White, 2017). A slight majority of the studies

reviewed in this chapter focused on perceptions of preservice teachers concerning their teacher preparation programs. In contrast, the current study highlighted the perspectives of practicing novice teachers relative to their preparation. The methods used to investigate novice teachers' perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma will be outlined in Chapter 3.

III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore how graduates of traditional teacher preparation programs perceive their preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma stemming from adverse childhood experiences. Chapter 3 presents a description of the approach to data collection and analysis in each phase of the study. This study was an explanatory sequential study in which quantitative and qualitative methods were used to gather data from novice teachers in two Central Florida school districts. The mixed methods research design of the study involved the collection of quantitative data from an online survey followed by qualitative data obtained during eight semi-structured interviews with novice teachers from both school districts.

Research Design

The researcher chose an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design to allow for analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. The research was explanatory in nature because the initial quantitative data were explained by the qualitative data gathered subsequent to quantitative data collection (Creswell, 2014). A sample of 521 elementary teachers in 135 Title 1 schools across two Central Florida counties was surveyed concerning their teacher preparation programs. Following the quantitative data collection, 14 teachers were invited to participate in follow-up interviews for the qualitative portion of the study. Four research questions were posed at the outset of the study. The first three research questions were addressed in the quantitative portion of the research and the fourth question was informed by the qualitative data.

Research Questions

As stated in Chapter 1, four questions guided the present study:

1. To what extent do novice teachers in Title 1 elementary schools feel prepared to teach students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs?
2. Considering preservice university coursework and clinical experiences, which is perceived by novice teachers to be most predictive of preparing them for teaching students experiencing trauma?
3. Was the difference between the program element (either coursework or clinical experiences) perceived at the highest degree statistically significantly different than the other program element?
4. What are novice teachers' suggestions for improvements in teacher preparation programs to prepare teachers to work with students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs?

Research Context

The study focused on the perceptions of novice teachers in Title 1 elementary schools across two districts in Central Florida. The two school districts were selected because of their proximity to the university at which the researcher teaches; education students from the university may be placed in one of the school districts for the final student teaching experience. Approval from the Institutional Review Board for School District 2 was obtained in mid-February 2020, and approval for School District 1 was received in early March. The research activities spanned three months in the spring of 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

School District 1

School District 1 is the 11th largest school district in the state of Florida and serves nearly

75,000 students (Florida Department of Education, 2019). Instructional programs include traditional instruction for prekindergarten through twelfth grade, career academies, charter schools, adult education, and virtual schools. The student population is mildly diverse (less than 40% of students are non-White) and 56% of the students are from families who are economically disadvantaged (Florida Department of Education, 2019). Thirty elementary schools in School District 1 meet the criteria for Title 1 funding (Florida Department of Education, 2019). Teachers in Title 1 elementary schools make up 20% of the instructional staff hired in the last two years. Overall, 32.4% of the teachers in School District 1 have taught four years or less (Florida Department of Education, 2019). The graduation rate for students in School District 1 was 88.3% in 2019, the most recent year for which data are available (Florida Department of Education, 2019). School District 1 earned a performance grade of *B* for the 2018-2019 school year (Florida Department of Education, 2019).

School District 2

School District 2 is the seventh largest school district in the state of Florida and serves over 104,000 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade each year (Florida Department of Education, 2019). The student population is more diverse than School District 1 (60% of students are non-White) and a higher percentage of students in School District 2 (74%) come from families who are economically disadvantaged (Florida Department of Education, 2019). Overall, 90 schools out of the district's 150 schools meet the criteria for Title 1 funding (Florida Department of Education, 2019). School District 2 employs 6,412 teachers, 28.7% of whom have been teaching less than four years (Florida Department of Education, 2019). The graduation rate for students in School District 2 was 81.2% in the 2019 school year, and the

district earned a performance grade of *B* for that school year (Florida Department of Education, 2019).

Research Participants

Survey Participants

The researcher used purposive sampling to allow for deliberate identification of criteria for selecting the study sample (Gay et al., 2016). The population for this study consisted of novice teachers working in Title 1 elementary schools across two Central Florida school districts. Novice teachers were operationally defined in the present study as educators who have been teaching between two and four years (Bertrand, 2017). Once IRB permissions were secured, the research, assessment, and evaluation offices in each school district provided the researcher with documents listing the names of all teachers hired since January 2018. Using each school district's public online staff directory and individual school websites, the lists were reduced to the names of teachers at Title 1 elementary schools. In School District 1, a total of 314 teachers were emailed invitations to complete the online survey. Survey invitations were emailed to 207 teachers in School District 2.

Interview Participants

Interview participants were identified from affirmative responses to the final question on the online survey indicating that the respondent was willing to be interviewed. The criteria were the same as for the survey: novice teachers working in Title 1 elementary schools in School District 1 or School District 2. A total of 14 study participants expressed an interest in being interviewed, but only eight participants agreed to participate. The eight interviewees were female, White teachers working in Title 1 elementary schools who had been teaching for three years or less. The four teachers interviewed from School District 2 taught in a region of the

district where the majority of Title 1 schools are found. Table 1 outlines the interview participants’ professional demographics.

Table 1

Interview Participants’ Professional Demographics

| Participant Number | Teaching Experience | Certification | Grade (2019-2020) | School District |
|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | < 1 year | Elementary Education | 2 | 1 |
| 2 | 1-2 years | Elementary Education | 1 | 1 |
| 3 | <1 year | Elementary Education | 5 | 1 |
| 4 | 2-3 years | Elementary Education | 3 | 1 |
| 5 | 2-3 years | English | 3-5 | 2 |
| 6 | < 1 year | Elementary Education | 4 | 2 |
| 7 | 1-2 years | Elementary Education | K-2 | 2 |
| | | Exceptional Student Education | | |
| 8 | 1-2 years | Elementary Education | 1 | 2 |

Instrumentation

Online Survey

The researcher invited participants to complete a researcher-created online survey (Appendix C). The survey consisted of questions addressing three areas: (a) teacher perception of preparedness to teach children experiencing trauma, (b) teacher perception of the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs in training educators to teach children experiencing trauma, and (c) factors impacting the teachers’ sense of preparedness with trauma-informed teaching strategies. Survey questions were primarily structured items with a minimal number of unstructured items. The online survey collected participants’ basic demographic data (i.e., name, school, and number of years teaching) and their responses to the survey items constructed from the research questions. A consent form (Appendix B) was built into the survey so that the

respondent could opt out before answering any questions. The language used in the instruction portion of the survey clarified that demographic information was collected for the purposes of classification only. The definitions of key terms were outlined at the beginning of the survey to provide respondents with a clear and consistent understanding of the topic.

Likert-style items ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* were used to measure the extent to which the teachers perceived their teacher preparation program coursework and clinical experiences prepared respondents to teach students experiencing trauma stemming from ACEs. One multiple-choice type question was used to identify methods by which teachers learned whether students experienced an adverse event during childhood. The final survey question was open-ended so respondents could indicate whether they were willing to be interviewed. Survey questions were validated by experts in the field being researched and research methodologists before being distributed to participants.

Interviews

The semi-structured interviews consisted of five questions aimed at delving more deeply into each teacher's involvement with students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs. Specifically, the questions were designed to address research question four: What are novice teachers' suggestions for improvements in teacher preparation programs to prepare teachers to work with students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs? The teachers answered questions related to their experiences with traumatized students, the levels of support in their teacher preparation programs and in their current teaching situations, and strategies for meeting the needs of students experiencing trauma. Experts on the researcher's dissertation committee validated interview questions. The interview guide can be found in Appendix E.

Data Collection

Quantitative Data

After receiving approval from Southeastern University and both school districts, the researcher emailed invitations to participate in the online survey created in Google Forms. The email (Appendix A) contained background information on the study, the online survey link, and contact information for the researcher. Emails were sent to prospective respondents in School District 2 in early March and to School District 1 in early April. Noticing minimal participation, presumably due in part to challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher sent follow-up email invitations to participants in April (School District 2) and early May (School District 1). At the close of the data collection period in mid-May, 43 teachers had completed the survey; 28 teachers responded from School District 1, and 15 teachers responded from School District 2. The survey was created using the Google Forms platform for ease in collecting and exporting data for subsequent analysis.

Qualitative Data

The researcher's initial IRB request stated that the interviews would be conducted face-to-face. Due to the ongoing pandemic, the institutional review boards from both school districts required the researcher to submit updated documents outlining how the interviews would be conducted. When approval was received for online interviews, the researcher sent an email to the addresses provided by each of the fourteen participants who indicated their willingness to be interviewed. The email contained the Informed Consent for Participation in Interview Research (Appendix D), and eight participants responded with a signed consent and a request to schedule an interview. Once a mutually agreeable time for the interview was arranged with a participant, the researcher sent a calendar invitation with a link to the Zoom virtual conference room. Two

follow-up emails were sent, and phone calls were made to the six survey participants who did not respond to the initial contact.

Each of the eight participants signed and returned the consent form prior to the interview. The researcher began each interview by reviewing the consent form, answering participant questions about the form, and confirming the participant's agreement to be interviewed. Participants were informed that identifying information would not be included in the reporting of any data gathered from the interview. Using a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix E), the researcher interviewed seven teachers remotely via Zoom and one teacher by telephone. The semi-structured interview format allowed the researcher to start the interview with specific questions and to expand the discussion based on the interviewees' responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). During the interviews, the researcher sought to minimize bias by bracketing her experiences as a college of education professor and thus seeking to understand the participants' experiences without harboring prior assumptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The Zoom interviews were simultaneously recorded on the researcher's password-protected laptop and on the Otter voice-recording app for iPhone as a backup, and the telephone interview was recorded on the researcher's secure laptop. The researcher also took handwritten notes during the recorded conversations as a method for identifying follow-up questions. Each interview was subsequently transcribed by the researcher and sent to the interviewees for verification of accuracy. The researcher assigned a code to each participant as the interviews were held to protect the privacy of the interviewee and removed any reference to personal or school information from the interview transcripts.

Data Analysis

Preliminary Analysis

The survey data ($n = 43$) were first analyzed to ensure that all participants met the appropriate criteria for inclusion in the study's sample. The respondents provided demographic information in their answers to the first three survey questions that were used to determine whether each respondent was a qualifying participant, including the length of the respondent's teaching experience. Three areas were analyzed prior to considering the data for the quantitative research questions posed in the study: missing data, internal consistency (reliability) of participant response, and essential demographic identifying information.

Missing data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. More specifically, frequency counts (n) and percentages (%) were utilized for illustrative and comparative purposes. The randomness of missing data was assessed using Little's MCAR test statistic. An MCAR value of $p > .05$ was considered indicative of sufficient randomness of missing data. Missing data values of 5% or less were considered inconsequential, thereby negating consideration of data imputation techniques.

Cronbach's alpha was used to assess internal reliability of participant response to the survey instrument. The researcher applied an F test to evaluate the statistical significance of Cronbach's alpha. Fisher's ratio (F) values of $p < .05$ were considered statistically significant. All survey items were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques for illustrative and comparative purposes. Cohen's d represented the means by which the effect size of study participant response to the items on the research instrument was measured.

Essential demographic information was analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. Specifically, frequency counts (n) and percentages (%) were utilized for illustrative

purposes. The analysis, interpretation and reporting of quantitative findings were addressed exclusively through IBM's 26th version of its Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Analysis by Research Question

The study's quantitative research questions were addressed broadly using a variety of descriptive, associative, predictive, and inferential statistical techniques. Frequency counts (n), measures of central tendency (i.e., mean scores) and variability (i.e., standard deviation) represented the primary descriptive statistical techniques used.

Question 1. To what extent do novice teachers in Title 1 elementary schools feel prepared to teach students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs?

Survey items 5 through 13 addressed this first research question. The one-sample t test was used to assess the statistical significance of participant response. The alpha level of $p < .05$ represented the threshold for statistical significance of finding. Cohen's d was used to assess the magnitude of effect (i.e., effect size). Cohen's parameters of interpretation of effect sizes were employed for comparative purposes. Further, the t test of Independent Means assessed the statistical significance of difference in the response to research question one by participant category of professional experience (novice teacher v. veteran teacher).

Question 2. Considering preservice university coursework and clinical experiences, which is perceived by novice teachers to be most predictive of preparing them for teaching students experiencing trauma?

Survey items 14 and 15 addressed the second research question. The mathematical relationship between study participant perceptions of university coursework and clinical experiences and the dependent variable of overall perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma was evaluated using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient

(*r*). Follow-up correlational comparisons of coursework and clinical experiences with perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma according to category of professional experience were conducted using the Fisher's *r* to *z* Transformation statistical technique.

Question 3. Was there a statistically significant difference in study participant response effect by category of professional experience across elements associated with perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma?

Survey items 5 to 13 were used to address this third research question. The *t* test of independent means was used to assess the statistical significance of difference in mean scores between coursework and clinical experiences. The alpha level of $p < .05$ represented the threshold for statistical significance of finding. The assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variances were assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test and the Levene test respectively. Values of $p > .05$ were indicative of both assumptions having been satisfied. Cohen's *d* was used to assess the magnitude of effect (i.e., effect size). Cohen's parameters of interpretation of effect sizes were employed for comparative purposes.

Question 4. What are novice teachers' suggestions for improvements in teacher preparation programs to prepare teachers to work with students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs?

The final research question was qualitative in nature and was addressed by conducting teacher interviews. After transcribing the audio recordings of the interviews, the researcher sent each participant his or her transcript to review for accuracy. The researcher also transcribed the handwritten notes taken during each interview. Once all participants verified their individual transcripts, the researcher began the coding process by reading the interview transcripts to

identify recurring words, phrases, concepts, and themes that aligned with the interview questions across the responses from both school districts (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The researcher kept a workbook for ease in developing codes and defining themes. The subsequent readings focused on coding for themes arising from the existing literature and new concepts or ideas commonly raised by the interviewees (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Once thematic patterns emerged, themes were categorized across and within the school districts. The researcher then compared the overall themes and the district-specific themes with the results of the survey as a way of explaining and elaborating upon the quantitative data.

Summary

This chapter provided a description of the research methods used in this explanatory sequential research study concerning novice teachers' perceptions of their preparation to teach students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs. Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the online survey data and the qualitative data gathered from the semi-structured interviews.

IV. RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore how graduates of traditional teacher preparation programs perceive their preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma stemming from adverse childhood experiences. The study focused primarily upon the perceptions of novice teachers employed in Title 1 schools within two school districts located in Central Florida. The mixed methods research design of the study involved the collection of quantitative data from an online survey followed by qualitative data obtained during eight semi-structured interviews with novice teachers from both school districts. Employing the mixed methods research design allowed the researcher to use the qualitative data to add strength and context to the quantitative findings. Three research questions of a quantitative nature and one qualitative research question were posed at the outset of the study.

Research Context

The study focused on the perceptions of novice teachers in Title 1 elementary schools across two districts in Central Florida. The two school districts were selected because of their proximity to the university at which the researcher teaches; education students from the university may be placed in one of the school districts for the final student teaching experience. The information in Table 2 provides detailed context for each school district in the current study.

Table 2

Essential Characteristics by School District (2018-2019)

| | Rank by Size | Number of Students | Number of Title 1 Schools | Percentage of Novice Teachers | State Grade |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|
| School District 1 | 11th | 75,000 | 30 | 32.4% | B |
| School District 2 | 7th | 104,000 | 90 | 28.7% | B |

Quantitative Research Analysis

Population and Sample Size

The researcher employed a non-probability sampling methodology reflecting a convenient, purposive approach to gathering study participants (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2019). The population for this study consisted of novice teachers working in Title 1 elementary schools across two Central Florida school districts. Novice teachers were operationally defined in the present study as educators who have been teaching between two and four years (Bertrand, 2017). In School District 1, a total of 314 teachers were emailed invitations to complete an online survey. Survey invitations were emailed to 207 teachers in School District 2. Overall, 43 teachers from the selected population ($N = 521$) responded to the online survey; 28 teachers worked in School District 1, and 15 teachers were employed in School District 2.

Research Instrumentation and Validation

A survey was created because a standardized instrument did not exist that specifically addressed the study’s research topic and research problem. Instrument validation procedures were conducted in both the a priori and posteriori phases of the validation process. Study data were initially collected and recorded in Excel spreadsheet format. The analysis, interpretation,

and reporting of quantitative findings were executed using the 26th version of IBM's *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS).

Hypotheses

Research question 2. Considering preservice university coursework and clinical experiences, which is perceived by novice teachers to be most predictive of preparing them for teaching students experiencing trauma?

*H*₀: There is no significant difference in the perceived effectiveness of coursework or clinical experiences (e.g., field experiences, practicums, student teaching) in preparing novice teachers to teach students experiencing trauma.

*H*₁: Coursework is a statistically significant predictor of novice teachers' perceived preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma.

*H*₂: Clinical experiences are statistically significant predictors of novice teachers' perceived preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma.

Research question 3. Was there a statistically significant difference in study participant response effect by category of professional experience across elements associated with perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma?

*H*₀: There is no significant difference in study participant response effect by category of professional experience across elements associated with perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma.

*H*₁: There is a significant difference in study participant response effect by category of professional experience across elements associated with perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma.

Preliminary Data Analysis

Descriptive, inferential, and associative statistical approaches were used to address the study's preliminary analysis and the three formally stated quantitative research questions.

Response rate. A total of 43 teachers responded to the study's research instrument, representing a response rate of 8.5%. Although a response rate of at least 50% was sought at the outset of the study, the response rate achieved in the current study closely approximated the customary response rate (10% to 15%) for external surveying approaches (Fluid Surveys, 2014).

Study participants having less than three years of teaching experience were designated as novice teachers and represented 58.1% ($n = 25$) of the study's sample, with the remaining 41.9% ($n = 18$) of study participants being identified as veteran teachers who had more than three years of professional teaching experience. Regarding the two school districts from which the study's sample was accessed, nearly two-thirds (65.1%; $n = 28$) represented School District 1 with the remaining 34.9% ($n = 15$) representing School District 2. The researcher's primary focus was on analyzing data concerning novice teachers; however, with the realization that a control group was inadvertently created, data relative to veteran teachers was included in some analyses.

Missing data. The study's data set was 100% intact at both the "person level" (demographic identifiers) and essential variable level. The 100% level of study participant completion rate of survey items on the research instrument far exceeded the customary 78.6% achieved in the surveying process (Fluid Surveys, 2014).

Internal reliability. The internal reliability of study participant response to survey items on the study's research instrument was assessed using the Cronbach's alpha (α) statistical technique. As a result, the overall level of internal reliability of $\alpha = .90$ achieved in the study was considered excellent (Field, 2018). Table 3 contains a summary of the findings for the

internal reliability of study participant response to survey items on the research instrument by category of school district, category of professional experience, and overall.

Table 3

Internal Reliability Levels (α)

| Category | Items (<i>n</i>) | α |
|-------------------|--------------------|----------|
| School District 1 | 9 | .91 |
| School District 2 | 9 | .89 |
| Novice Teachers | 9 | .91 |
| Veteran Teachers | 9 | .84 |
| Overall | 9 | .90 |

Survey item analysis. All survey items represented on the study’s research instrument were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques for illustrative purposes and eventual comparative purposes. The Cohen’s *d* statistical technique represented the means by which the magnitude of effect (effect size) of study participants’ responses to survey items on the research instrument was measured. Table 4 contains the summary of findings for survey items represented on the study’s research instrument.

Table 4

Descriptive and Inferential Comparison of Novice Teacher Response to Survey Items

| Survey item | Mean | SD | <i>t</i> | <i>d</i> |
|---|------|------|----------|----------|
| Regular clinical observations of trauma sensitive teaching strategies | 3.40 | 1.23 | 1.63 | 0.33 |
| Opportunity in clinical experiences to teach students experiencing trauma | 3.64 | 1.17 | 2.70* | 0.55 |
| Observation of teachers demonstrating skills in coping with secondary trauma | 3.40 | 1.15 | 1.73 | 0.38 |
| Clinical experience(s) allowed for applying the learning from my teacher preparation program coursework related to teaching students experiencing trauma. | 3.60 | 1.04 | 2.88** | 0.58 |
| Teacher preparation program coursework emphasized the importance of establishing classroom routines for students experiencing trauma. | 4.00 | 1.04 | 4.80*** | 0.96 |
| Teacher preparation program coursework provided the appropriate strategies to manage behavior issues in students experiencing trauma. | 3.36 | 1.15 | 1.57 | 0.31 |
| Teacher preparation program coursework satisfactorily addressed the social-emotional aspect of teaching. | 3.52 | 1.26 | 2.05* | 0.41 |
| Teacher preparation program coursework provided an opportunity to develop a greater understanding of the impact trauma has upon a child's ability to engage in learning. | 3.32 | 1.25 | 1.28 | 0.26 |
| Teacher preparation program coursework emphasized creating a trauma-sensitive classroom environment for students. | 3.24 | 1.20 | 1.00 | 0.20 |
| Overall, perceptions of clinical experience(s) (e.g., field experiences, practicums, student teaching) while enrolled in a teacher preparation program prepared for success in teaching students who are experiencing trauma. | 3.36 | 1.08 | 1.67 | 0.33 |
| Overall, coursework in the teacher preparation program prepared for success in teaching students who are experiencing trauma. | 3.16 | 1.18 | 0.68 | 0.14 |

Note. $n = 25$. * $p \leq .05$; ** $p = .008$; *** $p < .001$

Findings by Research Question

Question 1. To what extent do novice teachers in Title 1 elementary schools feel prepared to teach students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs?

The one sample t test was used to assess the statistical significance of study participant response to research question one. As a result, the study participant mean score response to research question one of 3.50 ($SD = 0.90$) was manifested at a statistically significant level, $t(24) = 2.76, p = .01$. Using the Cohen's d statistical technique to assess the magnitude of effect of study participant response to research question one, the effect for study participant response was considered medium ($d = 0.56$).

The finding for novice teacher study participant perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma by virtue of university coursework was statistically significant, $t(24) = 2.57, p = .02$, reflecting a medium effect ($d = 0.52$). The finding for novice teacher study participant perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma by virtue of university clinical experiences was also established at a statistically significant level $t(24) = 2.51, p = .02$, reflecting a medium effect ($d = 0.51$).

Using the t test of independent means to assess the statistical significance of difference in the response to research question one by participant category of professional experience, a marginally statistically significant difference was manifested $t(41) = 1.74, p = .09$, favoring study participants considered novice teachers for overall perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma. Given the effect size, a larger sample size would have resulted in a more statistically significant difference. Using Cohen's d to assess the magnitude of effect for the difference in study participant response by category of professional experience in research question one, the effect for study participant response was considered between medium and large

($d = 0.63$). Table 5 displays the summary of findings for the comparison of overall perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma for category of professional experience.

Table 5

Comparison of Overall Perceptions of Preparedness to Teach Students Experiencing Trauma by Category of Professional Experience

| Professional Experience | n | Mean | SD | <i>t</i> | <i>d</i> |
|--------------------------|----|------|------|----------|----------|
| Novice (≤ 3 Years) | 25 | 3.50 | 0.90 | 1.74† | 0.63 |
| Veteran (> 3 Years) | 18 | 3.06 | 0.70 | | |

† $p = .09$ ($p < .10$)

The finding for study participant perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma by virtue of university coursework favored novice teachers at a non-statistically significant level $t(41) = 1.09, p = .28$, reflecting a small/medium effect ($d = 0.36$). Moreover, the finding for study participant perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma by virtue of university clinical experiences favored novice teachers at a statistically significant level $t(24) = 3.07, p = .004$, reflecting an approximately very large effect ($d = 1.18$).

Question 2. Considering preservice university coursework and clinical experiences, which is perceived by novice teachers to be most associated with preparing them for teaching students experiencing trauma?

Hypotheses. The researcher proposed three hypotheses for research question two:

H_0 : There is no significant difference in the perceived effectiveness of coursework or clinical experiences (e.g., field experiences, practicums, student teaching) in preparing novice teachers to teach students experiencing trauma.

*H*₁: Coursework is a statistically significant predictor of novice teachers’ perceived preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma.

*H*₂: Clinical experiences are statistically significant predictors of novice teachers’ perceived preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma.

Analysis and findings. Using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (*r*) to evaluate the mathematical relationship for study participant perceptions of coursework and clinical experiences and the dependent variable of overall perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma, a slight non-statistically significant associative advantage (Fisher’s $z = 0.27$; $p = .39$) was visible in study participant perceptions of university coursework ($r = .88$; $p < .001$) as being more mathematically related to perceptions of overall preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma. Table 6 reflects the summary of findings for the mathematical relationships between study participant perceptions of university coursework and clinical experiences and the dependent variable of overall perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma:

Table 6

Mathematical Relationships by Category for Overall Perceptions of Preparedness to Teach Children Experiencing Trauma for Novice Teachers

| Category | <i>n</i> | <i>r</i> |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|
| University Coursework | 25 | .88*** |
| Clinical Experiences | 25 | .86*** |

*** $p < .001$

A follow-up correlational comparison of university coursework and clinical experiences with perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma by category of professional experience was conducted using the Fisher’s *r* to *z* transformation statistical

technique. The mathematical relationships favored study participants identified as novice teachers over veteran teachers for both university coursework and university sponsored clinical experiences. Table 7 contains a summary of findings for the comparison of correlations of coursework and clinical experiences with perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma by category of professional experience.

Table 7

Comparisons of Correlations of Coursework and Clinical Experiences with Perceptions of Preparedness to Teach Students Experiencing Trauma by Category of Professional Experience

| Professional Category | Coursework <i>r</i> | Clinical Experiences <i>r</i> | <i>z</i> | <i>p</i> |
|--------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|----------|----------|
| Novice (≤ 3 Years) | .88 | .86 | 1.68 | .04* |
| Veteran (> 3 Years) | .67 | .71 | 1.21 | .11 |

* $p < .05$

Question 3. Was the difference in study participant response effect by category of professional experience across elements associated with teaching students experiencing trauma?

Hypotheses. The researcher presented the following hypotheses for research question three:

H_0 : There is no significant difference in study participant response effect by category of professional experience across elements associated with perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma.

H_1 : There is a significant difference in study participant response effect by category of professional experience across elements associated with perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma.

Analysis and findings. Using the Cohen’s *d* statistical technique for comparative purposes, all nine elements of preparing teachers to teach students experiencing trauma were

compared by study participant category of professional experience. As a result, eight of the nine comparisons favored study participants identified as novice teachers. In one comparison, the element of “Teacher preparation program coursework satisfactorily addressed the social-emotional aspect of teaching” reflected a very slight advantage ($d = 0.01$) for study participants identified as veteran teachers. Table 8 contains a summary of the comparative magnitude of effect for novice and veteran teachers by elements associated with preparing teachers to teach students experiencing trauma.

Table 8

Magnitude of Effect Comparison: Novice Teachers and Veteran Teachers by Elements associated with Preparing Teachers to Teach Students Experiencing Trauma

| Survey Item | Novice <i>d</i> | Veteran <i>d</i> | Favoring |
|--|-----------------|------------------|----------|
| Regular clinical observations of trauma sensitive teaching strategies | 0.33 | -.20 | Novice |
| Opportunity in clinical experiences to teach students experiencing trauma | 0.55 | 0.05 | Novice |
| Observation of teachers demonstrating skills in coping with secondary trauma | 0.38 | -.06 | Novice |
| Clinical experience(s) allowed for applying the learning from my teacher preparation program coursework related to teaching students experiencing trauma. | 0.58 | -.11 | Novice |
| Teacher preparation program coursework emphasized the importance of establishing classroom routines for students experiencing trauma. | 0.96 | 0.51 | Novice |
| Teacher preparation program coursework provided the appropriate strategies to manage behavior issues in students experiencing trauma. | 0.31 | 0.00 | Novice |
| Teacher preparation program coursework satisfactorily addressed the social-emotional aspect of teaching. | 0.41 | 0.42 | Veteran |
| Teacher preparation program coursework provided an opportunity to develop a greater understanding of the impact trauma has upon a child's ability to engage in learning. | 0.26 | 0.17 | Novice |
| Teacher preparation program coursework emphasized creating a trauma-sensitive classroom environment for students. | 0.20 | -.93 | Novice |

Summary of Quantitative Findings

The quantitative portion of the study rendered several key findings. Overall, a statistically significant difference was shown in the levels of preparedness for teaching students experiencing trauma according to participant category of professional experience. University

coursework was more mathematically related to novice teachers' perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma than clinical experiences. Coursework and clinical experiences were more highly predictive indicators of preparedness for novice teachers than for veteran teachers.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The researcher sought to elaborate on the quantitative data with the use of a qualitative study. The goal of the qualitative study was to further investigate the extent to which novice teachers who answered the survey felt prepared to teach students experiencing trauma as the result of ACEs. The interview questions were designed to expand the survey findings and allow the teachers' voices to be heard.

Methods of Data Collection

Interview participants were identified from affirmative responses to the final question on the online survey indicating that the respondent was willing to be interviewed. The criteria were the same as for the survey: novice teachers working in Title 1 elementary schools in School District 1 or School District 2. A total of 14 study participants expressed an interest in being interviewed, but only eight participants agreed to participate. The eight interviewees were female, White teachers working in Title 1 elementary schools who had been teaching for three or fewer years. The four teachers interviewed from School District 2 taught in a region of the school district where the majority of Title 1 schools are found. Table 9 outlines the interview participants' professional demographics.

Table 9

Interview Participants' Professional Demographics

| Participant Number | Teaching Experience | Certification | Grade Level (2019-2020) | School District |
|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | < 1 year | Elementary Education | 2 | 1 |
| 2 | 1-2 years | Elementary Education | 1 | 1 |
| 3 | <1 year | Elementary Education | 5 | 1 |
| 4 | 2-3 years | Elementary Education | 3 | 1 |
| 5 | 2-3 years | English | 3-5 | 2 |
| 6 | < 1 year | Elementary Education | 4 | 2 |
| 7 | 1-2 years | Elementary Education | K-2 | 2 |
| | | Exceptional Student Education | | |
| 8 | 1-2 years | Elementary Education | 1 | 2 |

The researcher began each interview by reviewing the consent form, answering the participant's questions about the form, and confirming the participant's agreement to be interviewed. Participants were informed that identifying information would not be included in the reporting of any data gathered from the interview and that they could withdraw from the interview at any time. The researcher interviewed seven teachers remotely via the Zoom videoconferencing platform and one teacher by telephone using an interview guide (Appendix E). The Zoom interviews were simultaneously recorded on the researcher's password-protected laptop and on the Otter voice-recording app for iPhone as a backup, and the telephone interview was recorded on the researcher's secure laptop. The researcher also took handwritten notes during the recorded conversations as a method to identify follow-up questions. Each interview was subsequently transcribed by the researcher and sent to the interviewees for verification.

After the interview transcripts were verified by all interviewees, the interview transcripts were numbered, and the participants were identified by the corresponding numerical identifiers

(Participant 1 through Participant 8). The researcher read the transcripts multiple times to get an in-depth understanding of the data. The transcripts were coded and analyzed for themes aligning with the four research questions, themes connected to the survey questions, themes arising outside the four research questions, and themes associated with the professional literature. Using Creswell and Poth’s (2018) lean coding approach, the researcher wrote short memos in the margins while reading each of the transcripts and kept a short list of categories arising from the data. The categories were expanded and revised with each reading, then color-coded and sorted into codebooks for analysis. Ultimately, the initial categories were narrowed to five predominant themes as displayed in Table 10.

Table 10

Themes Emerging from Interview Data

| Theme | Description |
|------------------------|---|
| Student interactions | Common experiences involving teachers’ classroom interactions with students experiencing trauma |
| Awareness/Preparation | Concern and frustration over the perceived lack of preparation for working with students experiencing trauma |
| Coursework | Little to no coursework was available in the novice teachers’ preparation programs that addressed the needs of students experiencing trauma |
| Clinical experience | The importance of having multiple opportunities during teacher preparation to work with students experiencing trauma |
| Methods of preparation | Methods for building awareness in the teacher preparation program concerning the effects of trauma on students and learning |

Themes

Theme 1: Student interactions. The participating teachers shared common experiences involving their classroom interactions with students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs. Every participant described at least one negative interaction with students in a class who displayed signs of exposure to trauma. The teachers learned about their students’ ACEs in one of three ways. One approach was to build relationships with students. Participant 3 said, “When

the students come and they tell you about these factors of their lives, you begin to learn a little bit more.” Participant 6 conducted a home visit to “see the environment in which my student was surrounded and immersed every day.”

Another method by which participants learned about students’ ACEs was through direct conversation with them during regular classroom activities. Participant 4 shared her conversation with a student about the student’s weekly visits to her father’s home, stating, “And so she told me that it’s not a very positive experience for her. She feels like her dad only pays attention to her stepmom and pays less attention to her.” Participant 5 discussed how she uses one-on-one reading conferences to learn more about her students, explaining that she listens for “something that triggers my radar” for a follow-up conversation with the student. Participant 6 described a student who came to her during recess and “unleashed a story on me about how her family, her mother is an alcoholic and she gets arrested a lot…”

All of the teachers articulated a variety of behaviors, both positive and negative, by which students communicated their responses to trauma. Participant 1 shared an example of what such communication looks like in her classroom:

They just lash out in class, and so in my mind, I think, “Okay, they just hate learning.

They just hate me. They just hate this.” But really, I think they experience so much at home, and they don’t really know how to let those feelings out except to just get attention.

Participant 4 mentioned that at times, a student’s lashing out behavior is more than what can be handled in the classroom. She told a story about a student who did not know how to handle his anger. However, she also did not know how to handle his anger, and so he had to be removed

from her room. In contrast, Participant 5 described a student with a different kind of behavior than the physical aggression and anger discussed by the other participants:

It's not that he can't behave in class, but he overdoes things when he's stressed. So rather than being a bad behavior, he's buckling down. He's really trying hard. He's trying to be the funniest, smartest guy in the room. And so, it doesn't look like someone else's anxiety...I see that as a kid he's trying to cope with that this way and that. So sometimes, it's coping skills you see and not misbehavior.

The teachers acknowledged that student behaviors are a response to the trauma the student is experiencing. Changing their own mindsets concerning student behaviors is the first step many of the teachers have taken when it comes to working with students experiencing trauma.

Participant 7 made a statement that was reflective of what all participants seemed to be communicating:

You try to keep in mind that they might be bringing something to your classroom that you have no control over, like abuse or being in a hurricane. I'm very much aware that behavior is a form of communication.

Although seven of the eight participants felt that they had administrative support for the challenges arising from negative student behaviors in the classroom, all eight participants agreed that they lacked clear direction for addressing the social-emotional needs of students experiencing trauma.

Theme 2: Awareness/Preparation. All the interviews revealed that the novice teachers did not feel prepared to work with students experiencing trauma. Participants noted that no specific trauma-related courses were provided in their teacher preparation programs, and as a result, the teachers felt ill-equipped for meeting the needs of these students. Participant 8 plainly

stated, “As one person in a classroom, you definitely feel unprepared. There’s not a ton of supervision, not a ton of support available.” A perceptible frustration was noted in several participants’ discussions of their preparation related to the level of awareness concerning students experiencing trauma. For example, Participant 1 asserted, “We should be more aware of this going into teaching.” Developing an awareness of what trauma is and “knowing the science behind the trauma and its impacts would be extremely beneficial” for teachers, according to Participant 6. Along with practical classroom management tools, exposing teacher candidates to useful methods for understanding the effects of a student’s out-of-school environment on classroom learning is critical according to Participant 4: “They’ll tell you, ‘Okay, you need to have your rules. You need to have a reward system. Have a behavior plan,’ but they don’t teach you how to learn a child’s story.”

Addressing student behavior was the primary concern for teachers in terms of preparation for working with students experiencing trauma. With regard to handling student behaviors, Participant 1 shared, “I don’t really know how to react to them [students who lash out due to trauma] except to just give them a minute to calm down and just go from there.” Participant 2 confessed, “Most of the time I just couldn’t do it on my own.” Describing a physical interaction between students in her classroom, Participant 4 said, “I was not prepared for that [fighting and arguing] when I did my school program.”

The teachers also mentioned feeling unprepared for the diversity of students they would encounter after completing a teacher preparation program. Without background knowledge from coursework, clinical experiences, or personal circumstances related to trauma, the level of perceived teacher self-efficacy related to working with students experiencing trauma was limited. Participant 6 explained she “wasn’t really prepared to work with the diversity of students” she

currently teaches and that students shared stories about their personal experiences she could not relate to. Participant 6 said these experiences were ones “that I never heard before in my life because I grew up in a completely different area where it’s more middle class and upper middle class, so it was just very different for me.” Along the same lines, Participant 7 observed, “If you grew up basically in a family who did not have a lot of dysfunction, some of the trauma these children have been through may be startling to that person who had a healthy family.” Participant 4 simply stated, “I definitely was not prepared when I came out of my program to deal with those kinds of kids.”

Although all the participants expressed the belief that they were not prepared sufficiently during their teacher preparation programs, Participants 2 and 3 acknowledged that equipping teachers to address the diverse needs of students experiencing trauma would be difficult. Participant 2 concluded, “I don’t really think there’s any way that you can. It’s just through experience.” Participant 3 added, “I personally feel like nothing can prepare you for when they are your own students that you are responsible for...Nothing can truly prepare you for that until you’re in it.”

Theme 3: Coursework. Overall, the teachers agreed that specialized coursework related to trauma-informed practices is a necessary part of teacher preparation. Every teacher completed a course in classroom management during the preparation program, but no courses involving trauma-informed practices for the classroom had been offered. The classroom management course content emphasized topics such as constructing rules, setting classroom routines, clarifying expectations, and creating behavior plans. Although such topics are important, the teachers believed that the course outcomes fell short in preparing them to work with students experiencing trauma. Participant 6 said the classroom management course did not equip her “in

the sense of understanding social-emotional and trauma-informed care and understanding that behavior is a form of communication.” Participant 6 further elaborated on this point:

It’s not just about being able to deal with a certain child that has this behavioral issue—it’s understanding the trauma and the background of that child and how it impacts their social skills and their academic growth, because it has such a huge impact. That’s something that I wish I had when I was in college.

Participant 3 and Participant 7 spoke about courses in which trauma was briefly mentioned during a discussion about issues affecting students but was not addressed in depth.

All the participants agreed that trauma is an essential topic in teacher preparation program coursework and that the instruction should be both comprehensive and explicit. Participant 4 suggested that preservice teachers “should take at least one or two courses in dealing with and working with kids who have experienced trauma. I think trauma-informed care would be one.” Likewise, Participant 5 observed that “it would have been helpful at the undergrad level or at the master’s level—probably at the undergrad level—to have some type of class on trauma-informed care.”

Theme 4: Clinical experience. Every teacher echoed the literature in stressing the importance of having classroom experiences with a mentor teacher during teacher preparation. Participant 1 felt confident after her clinical experiences, stating, “I was able to see how teachers respond to things.” Participant 2 believed some aspects of working with students can only be learned in the classroom: “I don’t know what could prepare you unless you actually do it.” Participant 4 noted, “My hours of observation that I had to complete helped me quite a bit.” Participant 5 simply said, “The personal experience helped me a lot.”

The scope of the teachers’ classroom experiences working with students impacted by

trauma varied among participants, as did the opportunities to see effective strategies modeled for them. When considering how her mentor teachers demonstrated methods for assisting these students, Participant 1 reflected, “I’ve seen them address it, but I don’t know if it was the proper way to do it or if it helped.” Participant 2 shared, “I honestly feel like even in my field studies, it was more like they tried to hide the bad things from us because they didn’t want to scare us away.” Participant 6 said, “If there were students that had trauma, I wasn’t made aware of them.” However, Participant 3 experienced the opposite:

One thing that was extremely beneficial to me was, when I was interning at this school, seeing how my cooperating teacher handled working with those students that we had identified had gone through trauma. To see what works so well and what benefitted the students and what was effective for that teacher is something I can see, watch, kind of almost test it out for myself and then apply the next time that I came across that issue.

Of all the interviewees, Participants 3 and 7 advocated most strongly for engaging preservice teachers in clinical experiences prior to graduating from a teacher preparation program. Participant 3 deemed herself fortunate to have “a ton of field study clinical opportunities” during her program because “the most experience in preparation comes from actually being in the schools...the direct exposure to working with students like that is what prepares you the most, in my opinion.” The location of Participant 3’s clinical opportunities also made a difference in her sense of preparation:

I happened to go into teaching in the same county where I did my field studies. When you do your field study in a particular county or area or a similar ring of schools, I think that it really gives you a good idea of the general population. You know how the district approaches something. That was a context that was beneficial and definitely prepared me

from studying in that county to working in that county.

Participant 7 described her clinical experience as “just wonderful,” having a teacher who was “very supportive” to the point that “I learned more from the actual classroom experience than, say, from the textbook part of it.” Later in the interview, Participant 7 reiterated, “I will say that you learn more from actually being in the classroom.”

Theme 5: Methods of preparation. The researcher posed research question four to interviewees to solicit recommendations for improving the way teacher preparation programs equip graduates to work with students experiencing trauma. When asked the research question, “What are novice teachers’ suggestions for improvements in teacher preparation programs to prepare teachers to work with students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs?” the teachers’ ideas were distributed into two major categories, *components to include in coursework* and *clinical experience*. Table 11 displays the sub-categories of participants’ recommendations and the number of times each was mentioned in the interviews.

Table 11

Novice Teachers’ Recommendations for Teacher Preparation Programs

| Components to include in coursework | Number of mentions | Clinical experience | Number of mentions |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|--|--------------------|
| Research | 3 | Field study hours | 1 |
| Case studies | 1 | Observations and reflections with mentor teacher | 1 |
| Relationship building | 1 | Look-fors | 1 |
| Trauma-informed care | 3 | Authentic experience | 1 |
| Teacher mindset | 2 | | |

Although the participants spoke directly about the importance of clinical experiences throughout their interviews, when the time came to suggest program improvements, the teachers

focused more intently on the necessary elements of university coursework. Participant 1 said, “I really think a course would be good. Like an actual class that we would have to go to.”

Participant 4 proposed that preservice teachers “should take at least one or two courses in dealing with and working with kids who have experienced trauma. I think trauma-informed care would be one.”

Engaging in research and developing an appropriate teacher mindset for working with students experiencing trauma were two other elements identified by participants as critical elements of university coursework. Participant 1 offered an approach where preservice teachers would conduct or read “research from schools that have had trauma or students that have had trauma and the repercussions of it.” Participant 6 expressed “knowing the science behind trauma and its impacts...would be extremely beneficial as a teacher.” Participant 7 suggested that preservice teachers conduct research and “think critically about situations they might not be familiar with” such as adverse childhood experiences. Knowing how to “learn a child’s story” was important to Participant 4. Participant 5 recommended preservice teachers learn to develop a positive mindset and to use a strengths-based teaching approach, for example, “How can I help this child achieve greatness?”

None of the participants referred to SEL competencies in their responses concerning improvements for teacher preparation programs. The teachers interviewed for the present study have had to seek out professional development related to SEL and trauma-informed care on their own. Participant 1 “asked other teachers what they do,” much like Participant 6 who “was kind of learning as I was going along.” Participant 3 “attended a trauma-informed teaching seminar provided by my district geared toward new teachers.” Participants 5, 6, and 8 (who teach in the same school district) each described the schoolwide efforts on their individual campuses to

engage teachers in learning about SEL and trauma-informed care. However, the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 supports the inclusion of SEL competencies in university coursework for preservice teachers.

Evidence of Quality

Validity and reliability are paramount in producing credible research. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended that qualitative researchers employ a minimum of two strategies to validate qualitative research. Four strategies were used in the present student to ensure validity. First, the researcher bracketed her experiences as a teacher educator and former Title 1 elementary school teacher in order to maintain objectivity during the interviews and data analysis. The researcher solicited feedback from each participant as to the accuracy of the interview transcripts. Thick descriptions of the participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 263) added to the richness of the findings and added to the transferability of the findings. Lastly, the researcher's dissertation chair acted as a peer reviewer in the examination of the researcher's codebooks.

Reliability of the qualitative findings was enhanced by utilizing the same procedures throughout the interview process. A common interview protocol was used with every participant, each interview was recorded using a high-quality recording device, and the digital files were subsequently transcribed. Each participant reviewed and approved her interview transcript for accuracy before the researcher analyzed the transcripts for similar themes.

Summary of Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data revealed shared themes within the interview responses. Commonalities were discovered in the teachers' interactions with students who are experiencing trauma, the level at which teachers felt prepared to work with these students after their teacher preparation programs, and the level of awareness concerning trauma-informed teaching

strategies from both university coursework and clinical experiences. The interviews demonstrated the overall need for a more focused and intentional approach to equipping preservice teachers for meeting the needs of students who have suffered adverse childhood experiences.

Summary

Chapter 4 presented an overview of the quantitative and qualitative data related to the teachers' perceptions of their preparation to teach students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs gathered from novice teachers at Title 1 elementary schools in two Florida school districts. Overall, the findings revealed that university coursework and clinical experiences were highly influential in the teachers' sense of preparation. Chapter 5 will provide a detailed discussion of the findings, limitations of the current study, implications of the study's findings, and recommendations for future research and practice.

V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to explore how graduates of traditional teacher preparation programs perceive their preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma stemming from adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). The study focused on the perceptions of novice teachers working in Title 1 schools across two school districts in Central Florida. Chapter 5 provides a review of the research problem and research methodology utilized in the present study followed by a discussion of the research questions, summary of findings, significance of the study, limitations, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

Review of Methodology

The explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design of the study involved the collection of quantitative data from an online survey followed by qualitative data obtained during eight semi-structured interviews with novice teachers from both school districts. Four research questions were posed at the outset of the study. The first three research questions were addressed in the quantitative portion of the research and the fourth question was informed by the qualitative data. A sample of 521 elementary teachers in 135 Title 1 schools across two Central Florida counties was surveyed concerning their teacher preparation programs. The survey consisted of questions addressing three areas: (a) teacher perception of preparedness to teach children experiencing trauma, (b) teacher perception of the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs

in training educators to teach children experiencing trauma, and (c) factors impacting the teachers' sense of preparedness with trauma-informed teaching strategies.

Following the quantitative data collection, 14 teachers were invited to participate in semi-structured follow-up interviews for the qualitative portion of the study. The eight teachers who consented to be interviewed worked in Title 1 elementary school and had been teaching for three years or less. The interviews consisted of five questions aimed at delving more deeply into each teacher's involvement with students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs. Each interview was held at a mutually agreeable time using video conferencing software and was audio recorded. The researcher subsequently transcribed the recordings and sent the transcripts to each interviewee for verification of its accuracy. After the interview transcripts were verified by all interviewees, the researcher coded and analyzed the transcripts for themes aligning with the present study.

Summary of Results

The researcher first analyzed the survey data in three areas prior to reporting the findings for the quantitative research questions: missing data, internal consistency (reliability) of participant response, and essential demographic identifying information. Missing data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. More specifically, frequency counts (n) and percentages (%) were utilized for illustrative and comparative purposes. The randomness of missing data was assessed using Little's MCAR test statistic. An MCAR value of $p > .05$ was considered indicative of sufficient randomness of missing data. Missing data values of 5% or less were considered inconsequential, thereby negating consideration of data imputation techniques.

Cronbach's alpha was used to assess internal reliability of participant response to the survey instrument. The researcher applied an F test to evaluate the statistical significance of Cronbach's alpha. Fisher's ratio (F) values of $p < .05$ were considered statistically significant. All survey items were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques for illustrative and comparative purposes. Cohen's d represented the means by which the effect size of study participant response to the items on the research instrument was measured. Essential demographic information was analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. Specifically, frequency counts (n) and percentages (%) were utilized for illustrative purposes.

The response rate for the current study was 8.5%, slightly less than the generally accepted response rate for external surveys (10% to 15%). However, the shortfall in responses was not surprising given the period of punctuated equilibrium occurring worldwide during the process of data collection in the spring of 2020. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the study's population provides a plausible explanation for the low response rate. Although the response rate was lower than expected, the 100% participant completion rate of survey items on the research instrument provided support for the credibility of the subsequent data analyses.

Internal reliability across all survey items was considered excellent. When the data were organized by categories, such as by school district or years of experience (novice or veteran), the internal reliability was also considered very good or excellent. The high level of internal consistency of responses in the current study is further supportive of the credibility of the eventual findings for the three quantitative research questions.

Concerning the qualitative portion of the study, the fourth research question was answered within the five themes emerging from the interview data. Commonalities were discovered in the teachers' interactions with students who are experiencing trauma, the extent to

which teachers felt prepared to work with these students after their teacher preparation programs, and the level of teacher awareness concerning trauma-informed teaching strategies from both university coursework and clinical experiences.

Discussion of Quantitative Research

Research Question 1

To what extent do novice teachers in Title 1 elementary schools feel prepared to teach students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs? The results of the researcher-created survey demonstrated an overall perception of preparedness. The mean score of 3.50 for novice teachers participating in the study was statistically significant with a standard deviation of 0.90. Additionally, the magnitude of effect for research question one was considered medium ($d = .56$). The finding for novice teachers' perceptions of preparedness as a result of university coursework was statistically significant ($p = .02$) with a medium effect ($d = .52$). Similarly, the finding for novice teachers' perceptions of preparedness by virtue of clinical experiences during their teacher preparation programs was statistically significant ($p = .02$) and reflected a medium effect ($d = .51$). The recency of the novice teachers' clinical experiences may have contributed to the effect.

When the study participants' responses were analyzed by category of professional experience (veteran teacher or novice teacher), a marginally statistically significant difference was evident ($p = .09$), favoring the novice teachers for overall perceptions of preparedness. The effect size was considered between medium and large ($d = .63$). Although the finding was close to significant, the difference was marginally statistically significant due to sample size. Given the effect size, a sample size of 62 participants was needed for a significant finding. Further, the finding for perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma as an outcome of

university coursework favored novice teachers at a non-statistically significant level ($p = .28$), reflecting a small to medium effect ($d = .36$). This finding suggests that learning from university coursework may have been at the forefront of the minds of novice teacher participants in comparison with the veteran teacher participants. Lastly, the finding for perceptions of preparedness by virtue of clinical experiences also favored novice teachers at a statistically significant level ($p = .004$), reflecting a rather large effect ($d = 1.18$). There are a few potential reasons for this finding. First, novice teachers would likely remember their clinical experiences because of the recency of those classroom encounters. The novice teachers may have had meaningful encounters during their clinical experiences that contributed to their sense of preparation. Another reason is the clinical experiences offered in teacher preparation programs may have been refined in the last three to four years, resulting in more opportunities to work with students experiencing trauma. For example, some universities now require preservice teachers to complete a teacher residency which allows the teachers to link theory and practice by working alongside a mentor teacher for an entire school year rather than a limited number of hours in a semester (Mourlam, DeJong, Shudak, & Baron, 2019). Also, a rise in the existence of professional development schools and university-school district partnerships has led to a concerted effort to carefully match preservice teachers with supportive K-12 classroom teachers who will serve as mentors during clinical experiences (Fisher-Ari, Eaton, & Dantzler, 2019).

The findings concerning overall preparedness are interesting when considered alongside the data collected from the follow-up interviews. It is important to note that the findings center on overall perceptions of preparedness for teaching, not necessarily for teaching students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs. The findings for research question one demonstrate the

value of both university coursework and clinical experiences in teacher preparation programs, aligning with research presented by Bertrand (2017), McElwee et al. (2018), and Singh (2017).

Research Question 2

Considering preservice university coursework and clinical experiences, which is perceived by novice teachers to be most predictive of preparing them for teaching students experiencing trauma? A slight non-statistically associative advantage was seen in study participant perceptions of university coursework as being more mathematically related to perceptions of overall preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma. Both university coursework and clinical experiences were more predictive of preparedness for novice teachers than for veteran teachers. Again, one reason for the predictive nature of this finding may be related to the fact that novice teachers completed university coursework and clinical experiences more recently than the veteran teachers did. The novice teachers may have perceived themselves to be more prepared as a result of ongoing improvements to teacher preparation programs. Further, the veteran teachers may not have had any instruction on teaching students experiencing trauma. The veteran teachers may have credited their post-graduation classroom experiences as being more relevant to their preparedness for teaching students experiencing trauma. The researcher was disappointed that neither coursework nor clinical experience was more significantly predictive of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma. The discussion of the qualitative portion of the study will address this finding in greater detail.

Research Question 3

Was there a statistically significant difference in study participant response effect by category of professional experience across elements associated with perceptions of preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma? Following the survey, nine elements

associated with preparing teachers to teach students experiencing trauma were compared by study participant category of professional experience (veteran teacher or novice teacher). Eight of the nine comparisons favored study participants who self-identified as novice teachers. Only one of the survey items demonstrated a large to very large effect for novice teachers: “Teacher preparation program coursework emphasized the importance of establishing classroom routines for students experiencing trauma.” This finding demonstrates the benefit of an intentional focus in teacher preparation coursework on classroom routines. The interview data would later confirm the participants’ comfort level with establishing classroom routines and other elements of classroom management for all students rather than specifically for students experiencing trauma.

Among all survey items, “Teacher preparation program coursework emphasized creating a trauma-sensitive classroom environment for students” evidenced the largest difference in the magnitude of effect between novice teachers ($d = 0.20$) and veteran teachers ($d = -0.93$). Novice teachers agreed with the survey statement to a small extent, whereas the veteran teachers largely disagreed. The novice teachers’ responses show teacher preparation programs may be giving some attention to creating a trauma-sensitive classroom environment for students, but not enough to help them feel prepared. This particular finding correlates with research conducted by Main (2018) and Nenonene et al. (2019) and is further explained by the qualitative portion of the present study.

Discussion of Qualitative Research

The qualitative data gathered from the eight novice teachers who teach at Title 1 elementary schools (four teachers from each sampled school district) revealed shared themes within the interview responses. Commonalities were discovered in the teachers’ interactions

with students who are experiencing trauma, the level at which teachers felt prepared to work with these students after their teacher preparation programs, and the level of awareness concerning trauma-informed teaching strategies from both university coursework and clinical experiences. The interviews demonstrated the overall need for a more focused and intentional approach to equipping preservice teachers for meeting the needs of students who have suffered adverse childhood experiences. Each theme is discussed comprehensively in this section.

Emergent Themes from the Interviews

The researcher identified five predominant themes during the interview process: student interactions, awareness/preparation, coursework, clinical experience, and methods of preparation. The first four themes will be discussed in this section. The fifth theme will be addressed in connection with Research Question 4.

Theme 1: Student interactions. The novice teachers who were interviewed shared common experiences involving their classroom interactions with students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs. The participants identified behavior (positive or negative) as a form of communication for students experiencing trauma, and each participant provided instances of observed behaviors from their classrooms. For example, Participant 1 talked about how students “just lash out in class.” Participant 5 described how students demonstrate coping skills such as pressuring themselves to be the best or “trying to be the funniest, smartest guy in the room” in response to trauma. All eight teachers felt they lacked clear direction for addressing the social-emotional needs of these students.

The fact that every novice teacher interviewed in the current study had encountered students experiencing trauma is important, because it is likely these students can be found in every classroom, Title 1 or otherwise. Izard (2016), McInerney and McKlindon (2014), and

Pickens and Tschopp (2017) each documented the difficulty students have in regulating their emotions and demonstrating appropriate social skills during and after the students experience trauma. Since improving students' social-emotional skills positively impacts their mindsets, relationships, behavior, and academic achievement (CASEL, 2013), teachers need to be equipped with strategies for helping students regulate their behaviors and emotions. The teachers interviewed for the current study linked their responses to the students' behaviors to their lack of awareness and preparation for working with students experiencing trauma.

Theme 2: Awareness/Preparation. The novice teachers collectively believe teacher preparation programs must engage students in learning about trauma. Nearly all of the interviewed teachers expressed concern over the lack of attention during teacher preparation to trauma-informed teaching and strategies for working with students experiencing trauma. Participant 1 was quite vocal about her teacher preparation program, stating, "We didn't have a specific class or course addressing that," and "We should be more aware of this going into teaching." Participant 4 said, "I didn't really have any courses related to working with kids with trauma," and further expressed her desire to see improvements in teacher preparation programs, saying, "I wish they'd offer courses." Participant 5 took a class taught by a professor who described her personal traumatic experiences as an immigrant to the United States, but the professor did not specifically teach trauma-related topics. Participant 6 believed "knowing the science behind the trauma and its impacts would be extremely beneficial" for teachers entering the profession. When asked, Participant 6 was unsure if there were students in the classrooms where she completed her clinical experiences who had experienced trauma, stating, "If there was [sic] students that had trauma, I wasn't made aware of them."

Participant 3 and Participant 7 had slightly differing experiences from the aforementioned participants in terms of developing an overall awareness of trauma. Participant 3 noted trauma was not only discussed in her program, but students were encouraged throughout “to look and pay attention to not just necessarily trauma specifically, but any exceptional situation a student might be going through.” Trauma was discussed “very briefly” in Participant 7’s program for preservice teachers majoring in exceptional student education. She explained, “It went over different kinds of disabilities and touched on how trauma could contribute to some of the issues that the child has.” Participant 7 observed that teacher preparation programs “should at least bring to your attention-because if you grew up in a family who did not have a lot of dysfunction, some of the trauma these children have been through may be startling to that person who had a healthy family.”

In addition to expressing a lack of awareness concerning trauma, the novice teachers discussed the pedagogical gap in their training. None of the novice teachers in the current study were offered any specific trauma-related courses in their teacher preparation programs which would prepare them for the kinds of behaviors and academic challenges exhibited by students experiencing trauma. Participant 2 said she could not manage the students on her own. The novice teachers recognized preservice teachers should learn ways to understand how a student’s out-of-school environment affects classroom learning. For example, Participant 4 said, “They’ll tell you, ‘Okay, you need to have your rules. You need to have a reward system. Have a behavior plan,’ but they don’t teach you how to learn a child’s story.” This same participant later shared, “I definitely was not prepared when I came out of my program to deal with those kinds of kids.” Participant 6 shared how the stories she hears from students are vastly different from her own upbringing in an upper-middle class area. Without a background in childhood trauma or

trauma-informed teaching, Participant 6 explained, “I wasn’t really prepared to work with the diversity of students that I have now.” The teachers in the current study had learned classroom management strategies, methods of differentiation, and techniques to address the needs of students with disabilities, but they did not receive instruction in specific strategies for working with students experiencing trauma.

Participant 2 and Participant 3 agreed they should have been more prepared with an understanding of childhood trauma and appropriate trauma-informed teaching strategies during their teacher preparation programs. However, both participants acknowledged the difficulty of training preservice teachers to teach students experiencing trauma. Participant 2 explained, “I started thinking of how I would teach a teacher or try and prepare someone for a student who’s experienced trauma. I don’t really think there’s any way that you can. It’s just through experience.” Participant 3 shared a similar thought, saying, “I personally feel like nothing can prepare you for when they are your own students that you are responsible for. Nothing can truly prepare you for that until you’re in it.” The statements made by both participants demonstrate the importance of providing preservice teachers with diverse clinical experiences during their teacher preparation programs, including multiple opportunities to work with students experiencing trauma. The essential nature of authentic, diverse clinical experiences during teacher preparation programs is further discussed in later sections.

The data gathered from the participants’ responses aligned with findings in the research conducted by Lombardi (2019), Jones (2019), Bixler-Funk (2018), and Onchwari (2010). Similar to the current study, the teacher participants in Lombardi’s (2019) study did not recall having any education course in their teacher preparation programs that focused on childhood trauma or trauma-informed teaching and lacked confidence in their abilities as a result. The

teachers in Jones's (2019) study did not engage in coursework incorporating trauma-informed teaching strategies. Much like the novice teachers interviewed in the present study, the teachers in Jones's (2019) research had been well-equipped with training in behavior management, the impact of poverty on students, and state-or federally-mandated topics, but the teachers did not gain an understanding of trauma during teacher preparation that would empower them to engage students in learning more effectively. Likewise, the preservice teachers in Bixler-Funk's (2018) study described little or no coursework focused on trauma and the impact of trauma on academics and perceived themselves as unprepared to meet the needs of their students experiencing trauma. Lastly, Onchwari's (2010) findings indicated that preservice teachers would benefit from a stronger focus on student mental health as part of their teacher preparation programs. The interview data collected in the present study strongly suggest the need for teacher preparation program faculty, at the very least, to bring awareness to the topic of childhood trauma and teach strategies for developing a trauma-sensitive classroom environment.

Theme 3: Coursework. Taking the conversation related to awareness and preparation one step further, the novice teachers discussed the need for specialized coursework related to trauma-informed teaching practices during their teacher preparation programs. The interviewees articulated their collective belief that learning outcomes in university coursework fell short in preparing them to work with students experiencing trauma. A powerful observation came from Participant 6 when she said the classroom management course she took in her teacher preparation program did not equip her "in the sense of understanding social-emotional and trauma-informed care and understanding that behavior is a form of communication."

Elaborating on this point, Participant 6 stated:

It's not just about being able to deal with a certain child that has this behavioral issue – it's understanding the trauma and the background of that child and how it impacts their social skills and their academic growth, because it has such a huge impact. That's something I wish I had when I was in college.

Undeniably, the need for comprehensive, explicit learning on the topic of childhood trauma and its influences on the whole child exists in traditional teacher preparation programs. Preservice teachers are expected to appropriate the skills learned from university coursework during their clinical experiences (McElwee et al., 2018). The content of university coursework has rightly focused on preparing teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities, support students who speak languages other than English, differentiate content, redirect behavior, and manage a classroom. However, the novice teachers in the current study made it clear that these topics, while important to a teacher's success, are not enough to help them feel prepared for the challenges of working with students experiencing trauma. Participant 4 suggested that preservice teachers "should take at least one or two courses in dealing with and working with kids who have experienced trauma. I think trauma-informed care would be one." Participant 5 agreed: "It would have been helpful at the undergrad level or at the master's level – probably at the undergrad level – to have some type of class on trauma-informed care." It is evident the teachers believe learning about trauma, the impact of trauma on a child's development, and methods for implementing trauma-informed teaching practices are essential to their sense of preparation for the classroom.

The literature is replete with research validating the present study's interview data related to university coursework. Much like the teachers in the present study, the early childhood teachers in Lombardi's (2019) qualitative study expressed the opinion that trauma-related

courses should be incorporated in university teacher preparation programs for all majors. Similarly, Jones's (2019) findings supported the idea that preservice teachers should have training in effective methods for working with students experiencing trauma. Jones (2019) concluded that without appropriate training on the signs and symptoms of trauma-related stress, K-12 teachers may not perceive trauma as a barrier to students' learning and would not be well-equipped to assist these students. The seasoned teachers in Alisic's (2012) study pointed out the need for teacher preparation programs to include courses addressing trauma, including ways for teachers to manage their own stress arising from working with students experiencing trauma as the result of ACEs. An important distinction between these three studies and the present study is the teachers' level of professional experience. Lombardi (2019), Jones (2019), and Alisic (2012) conducted research with seasoned teachers, while the current study focused on novice teachers. However, a common thread is visible among the four studies: teachers do not feel prepared to meet the needs of students experiencing trauma with a sufficient level of knowledge and understanding.

Bertrand's (2017) research into whether teacher preparation programs are developing teachers to work in Title 1 schools also has application to the present study. The preservice teachers in Bertrand's (2017) study did not have access to university courses that they felt adequately prepared them to work with the kinds of learners they would encounter in Title 1 schools. The novice teachers in Hardy's (2014) mixed methods research also lacked meaningful coursework which would have enabled them to work with students from diverse backgrounds effectively. Although students experiencing trauma can be found in any classroom, student populations in Title 1 schools are often diverse, and the children face many of the conditions associated with ACE exposure (Blitz et al., 2020). Similar to the programs in Bertrand's (2017)

and Hardy's (2014) research, the teacher preparation courses available to the novice teachers in the present study seemed insufficient to empower them to meet the needs of traumatized students in their respective Title 1 schools.

Theme 4: Clinical experience. A preservice teacher's clinical experiences are the opportunities for application of university coursework (McElwee et al., 2018; Singh, 2017). The terms by which these experiences are referred varies by program; some commonly used terms include *field studies*, *internship*, and *student teaching*. The teachers in the current study spoke the most passionately about the value of classroom experiences in teacher preparation programs. Engaging in clinical experiences with the support of a mentor teacher (also referred to as a *cooperating teacher*) provided teachers hands-on practice with the art of teaching. Participant 1 found confidence in observing her cooperating teacher: "I was able to see how teachers respond to things." Participant 4 and Participant 5 said simply having personal experience in a classroom "helped me quite a bit." Much like other professions, there are some aspects of teaching that can be learned best by doing, as noted by Participant 2 when she said, "I don't know what could prepare you [for teaching] unless you actually do it." Participant 3 shared some of the most impactful thoughts of all eight teachers in describing her clinical experiences:

One thing that was extremely beneficial to me was, when I was interning at this school, seeing how my cooperating teacher handled working with those students that we had identified had gone through trauma, to see what works so well and what benefitted the students and what was affected for that teacher is something I can see, watch, kind of almost test it out for myself and then apply the next time that I came across that issue. Participant 3 considered herself fortunate to have had "a ton of field study clinical opportunities" during her teacher preparation program because "the most experience in preparation comes from

actually being in the schools...the direct exposure to working with students like that is what prepares you the most, in my opinion.” Along the same lines, Participant 7 made two statements during her interview as to how beneficial the clinical experiences were during her teacher preparation program, saying, “I learned more from the actual classroom experience than, say, from the textbook part of it,” and “I will say that you learn more from actually being in the classroom.”

Clinical experiences also contributed to the teachers’ sense of self-efficacy when they graduated and began teaching in their own classrooms in Title 1 schools. For Participant 3, teaching in the same geographical area where she completed her clinical experience had an impact on her sense of preparation:

I happened to go into teaching in the same county where I did my field studies. When you do your field study in a particular county or area or a similar ring of schools, I think that it really gives you a good idea of the general population. You know how the district approaches something. That was a context that was beneficial and definitely prepared me from studying in that county to working in that county.

Participant 3’s comments demonstrate the importance of setting in clinical placements and echo the teacher candidates in Smith et al.’s (2017) mixed-methods research documenting the necessity for teachers to be placed in diverse classrooms, including Title 1 schools.

The merit of clinical experiences in preparing teachers for the classroom cannot be overstated. Clinical experiences help to decrease anxiety and to connect theory with practice (Singh, 2017). The teachers in the present study explicitly stated how influential clinical experiences were in developing their sense of overall preparedness for teaching. Similarly, the teachers in Green-Derry’s (2014) research identified clinical experiences as vital to their

preparedness for teaching. Further, the data in White's (2017) study suggested preservice teachers benefit from experiencing a substantial amount of time in clinical experiences in conjunction with classroom learning. Teaching is both an art and a science (Eyler, 2019; Marzano, 2007). Neither the arts nor the sciences are learned merely from textbooks; experiential learning with an instrument or in a laboratory is an essential part of developing proficiency. Teaching is no different; the qualitative findings in the current study show preservice teachers must have the opportunity to connect textbook learning with the authenticity of the classroom.

Themes Connected to Research Question 4

What are novice teachers' suggestions for improvements in teacher preparation programs to prepare teachers to work with students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs? The teachers were eager to convey their ideas for enhancing the learning in teacher preparation programs so new teachers are ready to work with students experiencing trauma. Collectively, the novice teachers recommended enhancements aligning with the existing research. Despite the strong emphasis in other areas of the qualitative data on the importance of clinical experiences, it is noteworthy that the teachers' direct responses to the question centered mainly around content they believed must be included in university coursework. The data from the current study revealed participants would like to see courses added to teacher preparation programs dedicated specifically to preparing them for meeting the needs of students who have experienced trauma, validating previous findings by Lombardi (2019) and Jones (2019).

Participant 1 suggested course content should include conducting research and "reading research from schools that have had trauma or students that have had trauma and the repercussions of it." Adding to the recommendations in research by Atilas et al. (2017) and

Reker (2016), Participant 6 proposed that preservice teachers understand the science behind trauma and its impacts on children. Teachers who understand the impact of trauma and stress on learning, appropriate interventions, behavioral strategies, and protective measures to guard themselves against secondary trauma have an advantage in managing a classroom (Anderson et al., 2015). Moreover, according to Participant 7, preservice teachers should engage in scenario-based tasks requiring them to consider situations with which they may not be familiar, such as adverse childhood experiences. Participant 4 passionately expressed her belief that learning ways to understanding a child's story should be emphasized and practiced during teacher preparation. Lastly, Participant 5 conveyed the importance of developing a positive mindset and a strengths-based teaching approach. The relationship between a positive teacher mindset and teacher effectiveness was documented by McLaughlin (2019), whose findings showed teachers having a growth mindset were more effective teachers because they believed their teaching practices would positively impact the achievement of their students.

Statements made by multiple participants during their interviews indicate that preservice teachers should learn the signs of trauma in students. For example, Participant 1 and Participant 4 mentioned anger; Participant 5 noticed low self-esteem and very reserved behaviors; and Participant 6 discussed attention-seeking behaviors such as aggression and sneakiness as indicators that a student may be experiencing trauma. The interview data revealed preservice teachers must not only learn behavior management strategies, but teachers should also be aware that behavior is a form of communication.

Regarding clinical experiences, the novice teachers in the present study suggested increasing the number of required field study hours, aligning with recommendations in the studies conducted by Paz Tagle (2019), Bixler-Funk (2018), and Green-Derry (2014). The

teacher participants in Paz Tagle's (2019) study shared they would have benefitted from additional field experience hours and a yearlong student teaching experience. Bixler-Funk (2018) found that preservice teachers believed collaborating with mentor teachers and clear connections between coursework and clinical practice would improve clinical experiences and lead to a greater sense of preparation. Participant 1 added that providing "look-fors" when preservice teachers complete classroom observations would be beneficial. Also, completing clinical experiences with students who are experiencing trauma would allow preservice teachers to connect their classroom practice with meeting the needs of real students (Green-Derry, 2014). Affirming the findings in previous research by Lombardi (2019), Bixler-Funk (2018), and McElwee et al. (2018), the teachers also mentioned the critical nature of observing a mentor teacher working with students experiencing trauma and then reflecting on what was seen.

The qualitative data also revealed suggestions for improvement provided indirectly by the teachers during interviews. First, university faculty in teacher preparation programs should be intentional about raising awareness that trauma exists and has adverse effects on children. Reker (2016) proposed partnerships between teacher preparation programs and school districts to provide preservice teachers with opportunities to gain background knowledge concerning child traumatic stress and effective interventions for meeting student needs.

Teacher educators should deliver instruction in methods for teachers to address the social-emotional needs of students experiencing trauma. Trauma-informed instruction in teacher preparation programs must be purposeful and practical (Mukhopadhyay, 2017), and teachers must be proficient in developing students' social-emotional competencies as well as academic skills (CASEL, 2013). Further, statements made by the interview participants attested to the need for preservice teachers to observe and practice strategies for managing the behaviors of

students experiencing trauma and helping those students successfully regulate their emotions. Buchanan and Harris (2014) advised teacher preparation programs to consider student mental health in their curriculums. Alisic (2012) demonstrated concern for preservice teachers' emotional health while working with students experiencing trauma.

Another theme discovered in the interview data was the urgency of increasing preservice teachers' background knowledge concerning diversity. Participant 6 specifically stated she did not have previous experience or preparation with the kinds of diverse populations she is currently teaching. As Bertrand's (2017) research showed, preservice teachers need both coursework and field experiences involving student populations which are culturally, racially, and economically diverse. Furthermore, statements made by the novice teacher interview participants in the current study established that teacher preparation programs should provide students with clinical experiences in classrooms where the effects of trauma are prevalent, including Title 1 schools.

McElwee et al. (2018) pointed out that a preservice teacher's clinical placement and relationship with the mentor teacher influence the extent to which the preservice teacher practices the pedagogical skills learned in university coursework. Preservice teachers need to participate in clinical experiences in trauma-informed school settings under the direction of experienced mentor teachers. Singh (2017) and Smith et al. (2017) discovered that clinical experiences in diverse settings helped to decrease preservice teachers' anxiety about teaching and helped them connect theory with practice. Bertrand (2017) asserted that teacher preparation programs should implement mandatory field experiences in Title 1 schools to give preservice teachers the necessary experience working with a diversity of learners. Bertrand's (2017) conclusions are relevant to the present study for two reasons. First, all of the teachers interviewed for the present study are currently teaching in Title 1 schools. Also, Bertrand's

(2017) research applies because many of the conditions existing for families in Title 1 schools are associated with ACE exposure.

Study Limitations

Data from the current study provided an informative look at the perceptions of novice teachers concerning their preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma as a result of ACEs. However, several limitations exist. First, a period of punctuated equilibrium (the global COVID-19 pandemic) forcibly impacted the nature of the study's data collection, leading to a lower response rate. Teachers began transitioning from in-person to remote learning immediately after the researcher e-mailed invitations to complete the online survey. Completing a survey or participating in a research study was likely a low priority for the teachers at that time.

This study was non-experimental in nature, so manipulation of the variables was not possible. In the quantitative portion of the research, the researcher was unable to control for years of professional experience, so there was an imbalance in the numbers of novice teachers who responded as opposed to the number of veteran teachers who responded to the survey. Additionally, the research sample was small. Forty-three out of 521 teachers responded to the quantitative portion of the study and eight teachers were interviewed. An overall sample of 60 survey respondents (30 in each group) would have fulfilled sample estimations.

Because the data represented the novice teachers' perceptions of preparedness, the data from the present study may not represent those of novice teachers at Title 1 schools elsewhere. Further, this study was limited to novice teachers working in Title 1 schools; therefore, the perceptions of novice teachers at non-Title 1 schools are not reflected in the results. Also, the current study did not explore the perceptions of novice teachers who completed non-traditional teacher preparation methods, such as district-provided alternative certification programs.

Lastly, the research was limited to two school districts in Central Florida; therefore, the results may not be generalizable to other school districts in Florida or in other states.

Implications for Professional Practice

If education is “the greatest hope” (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 353) for children experiencing trauma, then teacher preparation program leadership and faculty must continue to be innovative and reflective in their approaches to preparing teachers for those students. Data from the current study and the literature support consideration of refinements to teacher preparation program coursework as well as clinical experiences. However, the leadership in colleges of education should first appraise the capacity of the teacher preparation program’s faculty to teach trauma-informed practices. The faculty may need professional development on trauma-related topics before alterations to courses can be made.

Degree programs and required hours might need adjustment (within applicable state guidelines) to include courses and learning outcomes addressing trauma-informed teaching (Bixler-Funk, 2018; Buchanan & Harris, 2014; Jones, 2019; Lombardi, 2019; Main, 2018). College of education faculty should evaluate overall program learning outcomes and course learning outcomes to determine the extent to which trauma-informed teaching practices are addressed with intention in all education majors (Nenonene et al., 2019). The inclusion of one learning outcome in a course may not allow for the depth of study necessary for preservice teachers to be adequately prepared in trauma-informed teaching practices. Therefore, multiple learning outcomes should be included in every education course to ensure trauma-informed practices are taught, rehearsed, connected to clinical experiences, and assessed.

Programs of study should include at least one comprehensive course in topics such as the prevalence of trauma, the nature of trauma, signs of trauma, and trauma’s impact on the whole

child and learning. The interview data and the literature support revisions to course content that incorporate additional trauma-related issues such as SEL competencies, behavior regulation and de-escalation strategies including positive behavior interventions and supports, practices for developing a growth mindset in teaching, approaches to culturally responsive teaching, and effective teaching strategies for working with diverse learners (Atilas et al., 2017; Bertrand, 2017; Bixler-Funk, 2018; Buchanan & Harris, 2014; Jones, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lombardi, 2019; Reker, 2016). Methods of creating safe classroom environments, building meaningful connections with students, creating effective routines, implementing trauma-informed discipline strategies, maintaining active supervision, and managing compassion fatigue are additional subjects deserving of attention in teacher preparation programs (Honsinger & Brown, 2019; Izard, 2016; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014; Pickens & Tschopp, 2017). Preservice teachers should conduct research in the form of case studies (which could be connected to their clinical experiences) demonstrating their application of trauma-informed teaching theory to the classroom. Further, the creation of endorsements or certificate programs would expand learning opportunities for preservice teachers desiring to teach in school districts with a high number of Title 1 students or in third-world countries where the incidence of trauma due to poverty and violence is extreme.

Clinical experiences “combined with university coursework offer a rich, experiential learning experience for preservice teachers” (White, 2017, p. 15). An interdependence exists between university coursework and clinical experiences in preparing teachers for the classroom (Stasiak, 2016). The novice teachers who were interviewed for the current study verbalized their beliefs that coursework alone does not prepare teachers for the classroom. The interview data in the present study also revealed that teachers want additional time and a variety of experiences in

their placements to allow them to transfer theory to practice. Further, the literature documents that a preservice teacher's feelings of preparedness are impacted by her experiences in authentic classroom settings during field studies, internships, and student teaching (Green-Derry, 2014; Onchwari, 2010; Singh, 2017). Therefore, the faculty responsible for coordinating clinical experiences should continually reassess all aspects of the placement process.

Preservice teachers who were not exposed to cultural, racial, or economic diversity before entering a teacher preparation program can find it challenging to work with diverse populations of students. Consequently, clinical education coordinators should arrange for field placements at trauma-informed school settings under the guidance of mentor teachers who have experience in trauma-informed teaching (McElwee et al., 2018). Additionally, it is critical that clinical education coordinators visit school sites to ensure that preservice teachers are learning from the most proficient educators. Preservice teachers should be required to complete at least one field experience in a Title 1 school. University-school district partnerships could also be mobilized to provide preservice teachers with district-funded opportunities for hands-on learning about child trauma and effective interventions for meeting the needs of students experiencing trauma (Reker, 2016). Teacher residencies are an innovation that must be considered at the undergraduate level rather than being reserved for graduate-level education.

Although trauma-informed teaching is a relatively new area in the literature, childhood trauma as a societal condition is not new. Bessel van der Kolk (2014) called childhood trauma "the hidden epidemic" (p. 151). Recognizing the emerging student mental health crisis, state departments of education have begun to issue mandates for the teaching of SEL competencies in K-12 schools, but thus far, there is no requirement that SEL be included as a core topic in teacher education curriculum. A review of 730 teacher preparation programs showed the majority of

teacher education programs in 49 states did not address SEL competencies in coursework (Schonert-Reichl, Kitil, & Hanson-Peterson, 2017). The time has come for educational policymakers to require teacher preparation programs to include trauma-informed teaching, including SEL competencies, in the curriculum for every teacher candidate. Further, state departments of education should require documentation of training in trauma-informed teaching practices with any application for a teaching credential. In the absence of such policy, the leadership and faculty of teacher preparation programs bear the responsibility to ensure their graduates are fully prepared with a theoretical and practical understanding of trauma and trauma-informed teaching.

Recommendations for Future Research

The researcher's primary recommendation is that the current study should be replicated in the absence of a global event, such as a pandemic, and its resulting punctuated equilibrium. Replication would allow for a larger sample size, stronger statistical power, and additional qualitative data without the external influence of an event such as the global pandemic. Further research could also include repeating the study with an expanded population to include novice teachers from all grade levels and all schools – public, private, religious, and charter schools – instead of solely Title 1 elementary schools. Veteran teachers could also be surveyed and the results compared to those of novice teachers.

The leadership and faculty of a teacher preparation program could conduct similar mixed-methods research with its graduates to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. Additionally, in light of the qualitative findings, empirical research could be conducted that would pilot test a university course written to address the elements suggested by the novice teachers in the current study. Pre-course and post-course data could be gathered from teacher candidates to assess the

impact of the course on perceptions of preparedness for working with students experiencing trauma.

Conclusion

The current study has established the need for leadership and faculty in traditional teacher preparation programs to purposefully transform university coursework and clinical experiences to include aspects of trauma-informed care. The novice teachers' voices spoke loudly to the need for comprehensive coursework and authentic opportunities to work with students experiencing trauma. The nature of the student population in our classrooms changes as society changes, and as a result, teacher preparation programs must change. Teacher candidates should leave their preparation programs understanding how to see students through a trauma-sensitive lens and ready to employ strategies to promote academic success, resilience, and self-determination in students (Blitz et al., 2020). Since a link exists between teacher retention and the extent to which teachers feel prepared for the classroom upon graduating from a teacher preparation program (Zhang & Zeller, 2016), improving the quality of teacher preparation programs will likely result in teachers who are thoroughly prepared to meet the academic, emotional, and social needs of students experiencing trauma stemming from adverse childhood experiences.

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Appendix A

Teacher Perceptions Survey Invitation to Participate

Dear <First Name>:

I am writing to request your participation in a short online survey of novice teachers at Title 1 schools in <Name> County.

This survey is designed to gather information for a research project conducted by Lisa Ciganek related to her dissertation. The information will be used to understand how effective teacher preparation programs are in preparing teachers to work with students experiencing trauma.

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary, and you may opt out of any question in the survey. All of your responses will be kept confidential and will be reported in aggregated form.

The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete.

If you have any questions about the survey, or have difficulty in accessing the site or completing the survey, please contact Lisa Ciganek at laciganek@seu.edu

**To participate, please click on the following link:
[survey link]**

Sincerely,

Lisa Ciganek
Doctoral Candidate
Southeastern University

Appendix B

Teacher Perceptions Survey Consent to Participate

Title: Novice Teachers' Perceptions of Their Preparedness to Teach Students Experiencing Trauma

Investigators: Dr. Janet Deck
Director of the Center for Doctoral Studies
Southeastern University
Lakeland, FL

Lisa Ciganek
Doctoral Student
Southeastern University
Lakeland, FL

What to Expect: This research study is administered online. Participation in the study involves completion of an online survey. The survey involves questions about your teacher preparation program. You may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. You will be expected to complete the survey once. It should take you about 10 minutes to complete.

Risks: There are no risks associated with this study.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you. However, you may gain an appreciation and understanding of how research is conducted.

Compensation: None.

Your Rights and Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. Research records will be stored on a password protected computer in a locked office and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. Data will be destroyed five years after the study has been completed. Audio tapes will be transcribed and destroyed within 30 days of the interview.

Contacts: You may contact any of the researchers at the following addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study:

Dr. Janet Deck
jldeck@seu.edu
863-667-5737

Lisa Ciganek
laciganek@seu.edu
863-667-5308

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the IRB Office: IRB@seu.edu.

If you choose to participate: Please click NEXT if you choose to participate. By clicking NEXT, you are indicating that you freely and voluntarily agree to participate in this study and you also acknowledge that you are at least 18 years of age. Completion of the survey will be considered to be your consent.

It is recommended that you print a copy of this consent page for your records before you begin the study.

Thank you so much for your assistance in this important research study.

Appendix C

Teacher Perceptions Survey

Demographic information to be collected

Name

School

Length of teaching experience

Definitions

For the purposes of this survey, the following terms are defined for consistency and clarity:

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are “potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years) such as experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect; witnessing violence in the home; and having a family member attempt or die by suicide. Also included are aspects of the child’s environment that can undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding such as growing up in a household with substance misuse, mental health problems, or instability due to parental separation or incarceration of a parent, sibling, or other member of the household” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019).

Trauma is an event (or series of events or circumstances) that an individual experiences as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening. Trauma results in lasting adverse effects mentally, physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and academically (Pickens & Tschopp, 2017).

Secondary trauma is emotional stress that results from an individual (i.e., a teacher, social worker, child welfare professional) hearing about someone's firsthand traumatic experiences (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.).

A **trauma-sensitive school or classroom** provides an environment where students feel safe, welcomed, and supported and where trauma's impact on learning is central to how the school interacts with students (Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative, n.d.).

Traditional teacher preparation programs are typically housed in postsecondary institutions and are charged with preparing instructional personnel for the classroom in alignment with qualifications for state teacher certification (Florida Department of Education, n.d.).

1. How have you determined whether students in your classroom have experienced an adverse childhood experience leading to trauma? Please select all that apply.

5-Direct conversation with parents

4-Direct conversation with students

3-Review of cumulative file

2-Conversation with another teacher

1-Other

2. During the clinical aspect (e.g., field experiences, practicums, student teaching) of my teacher preparation program, I was able to regularly observe cooperating teachers modeling trauma-sensitive teaching strategies.

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Uncertain 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

3. My clinical experience(s) (e.g., field experiences, practicums, student teaching) in the teacher preparation program provided me the opportunity to teach students experiencing trauma.

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Uncertain 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

4. My clinical experience(s) (e.g., field experiences, practicums, student teaching) in the teacher preparation program allowed me to observe teachers who demonstrated skills in coping with secondary trauma.

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Uncertain 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

5. My clinical experience(s) allowed me to apply the learning from my teacher preparation program coursework related to teaching students experiencing trauma.

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Uncertain 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

6. My teacher preparation program coursework emphasized the importance of establishing classroom routines for students experiencing trauma.

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Uncertain 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

7. My teacher preparation program coursework provided me with appropriate strategies to manage behavior issues in students experiencing trauma.

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Uncertain 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

8. My teacher preparation program coursework satisfactorily addressed the social-emotional aspect of teaching.

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Uncertain 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

9. My teacher preparation program coursework provided me an opportunity to develop greater understanding of the impact trauma has upon a child's ability to engage in learning.

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Uncertain 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

10. In my teacher preparation program coursework, an emphasis was placed upon creating a trauma-sensitive classroom environment for students.

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Uncertain 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

11. Overall, my clinical experience(s) (e.g., field experiences, practicums, student teaching) while enrolled in a teacher preparation program prepared me for success in teaching students who are experiencing trauma.

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Uncertain 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree

12. Overall, my coursework in the teacher preparation program prepared me for success in teaching students who are experiencing trauma.

5- Strongly Agree 4- Agree 3- Uncertain 2- Disagree 1- Strongly Disagree.

Appendix D

Email and Informed Consent for Participation in Interview Research

Title: Novice Teachers' Perceptions of Their Preparedness to Teach Students Experiencing Trauma

Investigators: Dr. Janet Deck
Director of the Center for Doctoral Studies
Southeastern University
Lakeland, FL

Lisa Ciganek
Doctoral Student
Southeastern University
Lakeland, FL

What to Expect: You will answer five questions in an interview. The interview will be conducted ~~face-to-face~~ online via Zoom. Questions are related to how your university teacher preparation program prepared you for teaching students experiencing trauma. You may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. The interview is designed to last approximately 30 minutes.

Risks: There are no risks associated with this study.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you. However, you may gain an appreciation and understanding of how research is conducted. If you are interested, we will send you a copy of the results of the study when it is finished.

Compensation: None.

Your Rights and Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. Research records will be stored on a password protected computer in a locked office and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. Data will be destroyed five years after the study has been completed. Audio tapes will be transcribed and destroyed within 30 days of the interview.

Contacts: You may contact any of the researchers at the following addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study:

Dr. Janet Deck
jldeck@seu.edu
863-667-5737

Lisa Ciganek
laciganek@seu.edu
863-667-5308

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the IRB Office: IRB@seu.edu.

Participant Rights: I understand that my participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this study at any time, without penalty.

Consent: I have been fully informed about the procedures listed here. I am aware of what I will be asked to do and of the benefits of my participation.

With my signature, I affirm that I am 18 years of age or older.

I have read and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form will be provided to me. I hereby give permission for my participation in this study.

Participant's signature

Date

Participant's printed name

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

Signature of Researcher

Date

For more information, please contact:

Dr. Janet Deck
jldeck@seu.edu

Lisa Ciganek
laciganek@seu.edu

Appendix E

Interview Guide

Interviewer: Lisa Ciganek

Date:

Time:

Participant Number:

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experiences in teaching students who are experiencing trauma.
2. Please describe the level of support from your administrators regarding working with students who are experiencing trauma.
3. Tell me about the courses or experiences in your teacher preparation program that best prepared you to meet the needs of students who are experiencing trauma.
4. Describe some of the most effective strategies have you learned for addressing the academic and behavioral needs of students who are experiencing trauma.
 - a. How did you learn them?
5. Based on your experiences, what are some ways that teacher preparation programs can more effectively prepare teachers for responding to the needs of students who are experiencing trauma?

Appendix F

Institutional Review Board Approvals

Southeastern University
IRB Reviewer's Review Sheet

Protocol #: 2019 ED 42

Exempt: Yes No

Principal Investigator's Name: Janet Deck Today's Date: 01/06/2020

Co-Investigators: Lisa Ciganek, Thomas Gollery

Project Title: Novice Teachers' Perceptions of Preparedness to Teach Students Experiencing Trauma

1. Does the research place subjects at more than minimal risk? Yes No
Minimal risk is defined as the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort is no greater than that ordinarily encountered in daily life or during routine physical or psychological examination or tests)

Notes: _____

2. If more than minimal risk, does the merit of the project outweigh the risks and are the benefits maximized and risks minimized? N/A Yes No

Notes: _____

3. Are there any ethical issues regarding the study's design and conduct? Yes No
Ethical issues may include but are not limited to the Belmont Report principles: respect for persons (voluntary, fully informed consent); beneficence (obligation to protect subjects from harm and secure their well-being); and, justice (benefits and burdens of research are fairly distributed)

Notes: _____

4. Is subject selection equitable? Yes No
If special populations are included the IRB should ensure that subjects can understand the research, give full consent, and voluntarily agree to participate, and they should consider any other possible special problems. Are vulnerable or special populations included in the research?

- Pregnant women
- Fetus/fetal tissue
- Prisoners
- Minors Under Age 18
- Elderly subjects
- Minority groups and non-English speakers
- Patients
- Mentally/Emotionally/Developmentally Disabled persons
- Behavioral Abnormalities, psychological or disease condition
- None of the above, Normal Healthy Volunteers

Notes: _____

5. Is the recruitment and consent process (including telephone scripts, ads, brochures, letters, compensation) fully described, appropriate, and non-coercive? Yes No

Notes: _____

6. Are risks (physical, emotional, financial, legal) to subjects minimized? Yes No

Notes: _____

7. Confidentiality of Data:

Are there procedures for protecting privacy and confidentiality? Yes No

Notes: _____

8. Is Informed Consent Included in the Application? Yes No

Stipulate Missing Elements:

- Is affiliation with SEU clearly noted? Yes No
- Is the Faculty PI identified? N/A Yes No
- Is the study faculty sponsor identified (if appropriate)? Yes No
- Does the consent state the study purpose accurately? Yes No
- Is it clear what the subject(s) will be asked to do? Yes No
- Are risks or discomforts clearly and fully stated? Yes No
- Are benefits clearly and fully stated? Yes No
- Are alternatives listed (if appropriate)? N/A Yes No
- Are confidentiality or anonymity issues addressed? Yes No
- Is the PI's contact information included? Yes No
- Is the IRB's contact information included? Yes No
- Is it stated that the subject can withdraw at anytime? Yes No
- Is the consent understandable at an 8th grade reading level? Yes No

Assent Form

Not Required

- Is one needed (can the child really refuse to participate)? Yes No
- Is it one page or less? Yes No
- Is the language simple and sentences short? Yes No

Notes: _____

Additional Comments/Requirements by IRB:

Study will need approval from the School Districts to proceed.

RECOMMENDATION:

Approved as submitted

Approval Deferred; add'l information required
(additional IRB review required)

Approved with stipulations as noted

Not Approved

Signature: IRB OFFICE

Date: 01/06/2020



[Redacted]
Superintendent of Schools
[Redacted], Florida [Redacted]

Accountability, Research, and Measurement

[Redacted] Director
[Redacted]

e-mail: [Redacted]

March 12, 2020

Lisa Ciganek
[Redacted]

Dear Mrs. Ciganek:

Attached you will find an approval for your research study in [Redacted] County Schools entitled "Novice Teachers' Perceptions of Their Preparedness to Teach Students Experiencing Trauma."

The purpose of your study is to explore how novice, Title 1 teachers who graduated from traditional preparation programs perceive their preparedness to teach students experiencing trauma.

Your [Redacted] County Schools' contact person is [Redacted], School Social Worker, Office for Student Support Programs and Services.

We are always interested in the outcome of research conducted in our school system. When your study is complete, please forward a brief summary of your findings to the Office for Accountability, Research, and Measurement.

Best of luck as you pursue the subject of your research.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]
[Redacted], Director
Office of Accountability, Research, and Measurement

/jg
Attachments

xc: [Redacted], School Social Worker, Office for Student Support Programs and Services

[Redacted]

Handwritten: 7/14/20



Lisa Ciganek

February 7, 2020

Re: *Novice Teachers' Perceptions of Their Preparedness to Teach Students Experiencing Trauma*

Dear Lisa Ciganek,

The *Office of Assessment, Accountability, and Evaluation* has **approved** your request to conduct research. Your research activities are effective from February 10, 2020 through June 1, 2020. We are requesting that all data collection be completed prior to and after state testing. Any significant changes or amendments to the procedures or design of this study must be approved by resubmitting a request for research that clearly identifies these methodological changes.

In the interest of continued research benefits and the coordination of research interests, we ask that you mail one copy of your finalized research product and a one-page executive summary for our research webpage at the conclusion of your study. This information, and any other relevant information you may have, will be filed in our research library and added to the annotated listing of research projects. We look forward to reading the results of your study and any suggestions they may offer toward improving academic services for students.

If you have any questions, or if I can be of any further assistance, please contact me or [redacted]

Best wishes on your research endeavors.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

Senior Director

[Redacted] County Public Schools

STUDENTS FIRST

