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Teacher Perceptions of Shifts Within the School Culture After Implementation of a Trauma-
Informed Program

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Jennifer D. Green

August 2021

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Dr. Pamela Scott

Keywords: trauma, trauma-informed, teacher perceptions, school culture

ABSTRACT

Teacher Perceptions of Shifts Within the School Culture After Implementation of a Trauma-

Informed Program

by

Jennifer D. Green

The purpose of this study was to examine the educators' perceptions of shifts within the culture of Jefferson Elementary School after the implementation of a trauma-informed approach. This study focuses on examining changes to the school culture after implementing trauma-informed practices. As educators continue to feel the pressure of increased academic expectations alongside the social and emotional demands that arise from childhood trauma, increased support through trauma-informed practices becomes necessary for the wellbeing of everyone. However, there are challenges in the implementation of these practices which can impact the culture of the school.

The researcher used the qualitative method of case study to complete this research. The researcher conducted and recorded individual teacher interviews, focus group interviews, and analyzed documents to provide an in-depth understanding of the case being studied. This case study provides a detailed picture of how teachers in the school perceived the changes within the culture after the implementation of a trauma-informed approach.

The researcher found that implementation of a trauma-informed approach positively impacted the school culture. Through analysis of the individual interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, and document analysis, the participants described their experiences. When

collectively analyzed, these experiences provided a thorough understanding of the positive shifts to the school culture brought by the implementation of a trauma-informed approach.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my children, McKinley and Bronson Norris. I hope to instill within you the importance of hard work and dedication. Thank you for your understanding when my homework took priority over playing outside or hanging out together at home. I hope you see my dedication as a foundation for your own perseverance. I love you both.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Researchers have studied the lasting cognitive and behavioral impacts that childhood trauma has on an individual (Felitti et al., 1998). Attempting to understand and respond to the overwhelming needs, schools have long felt the burden of educating students suffering from trauma (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Trauma-informed schools strive to create an environment that supports the academic success of all students, despite the trauma within their lives.

Background

Childhood trauma is the experience that can result from adversity (Bartlett & Sacks, 2019). Adversity can be defined in several ways, but it is typically an experience that threatens a child's life or safety. Adversity can also arise from poverty, discrimination, or bullying. While not all events of adversity lead to trauma, some experiences are more likely to cause physical or psychological harm. Adverse childhood experiences (ACES) refer to specific adverse experiences that have shown to directly impact children's growth and development. Trauma occurs when adverse experiences become overwhelming.

Exposure to childhood trauma can impact many areas of a child's development (Hoover, 2019; Margolius et al., 2020). In their research on promoting resilience in children with ACES, Sciaraffa et al. (2018) cited numerous studies that cite ACES as affecting brain development. Students have difficulties paying attention, problem-solving, and controlling impulses. Bethell et al. (2014) also found decreased levels of school engagement and a greater likelihood of grade retention amongst children with ACES.

Felitti et al. (1998) examined the relationship between ACES and adult health. This

landmark study revealed that health risks and disease increased dramatically for adults who had experienced ACES. These findings included higher rates of illnesses like heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. The likelihood of illegal drug use and alcoholism also increased. This research highlighted the devastating consequences that can result from childhood trauma.

Felitti et al. (1998) called attention to the consequences of childhood trauma.

Understanding the impacts of trauma, with the realization that consequences can persist throughout a lifetime, has sparked an emergence of services and programs that work to alleviate the burden of childhood trauma (“SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma,” 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Through recognition of the need for trauma-informed practices in the school environment, school administrators have been tasked with implementing this support (Cole, 2014). As daily fixtures in the lives of students, it is often the school personnel who are the first to recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma (Bell et al., 2013). All students, regardless of the type or severity of trauma they have experienced, benefit from trauma-informed practices. However, there is a gap in the research as to how these practices have influenced the school culture, particularly as perceived by the teachers. The need exists to explore the experiences of classroom teachers who have implemented a trauma-informed approach in a school-wide initiative.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it adds to the body of research surrounding trauma-informed approaches and their impact on school culture. Culture is a powerful force within the organization of the school (Deal & Peterson, 2016). This case study will provide a detailed

picture of how teachers in the school perceived the changes within the culture after implementation of the trauma-informed approach.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the educators' perceptions of shifts within the culture of Jefferson Elementary School after the implementation of a trauma-informed approach. Included in this chapter are the research questions, the researcher's role in the study, and a description of the participants and the school in which they teach. Also, the methods of data collection and data analysis are detailed, as well as the overall research design. This study will provide a better understanding of the implementation of trauma-informed approaches and their perceived impact on school culture.

Theoretical Framework

Throughout the years, theories have developed as an attempt to address and explain how schools can successfully implement initiatives and how reforms can impact school culture (Axelrod et al., 2006). As student safety and mental health concerns prompt trauma-informed initiatives in schools, understanding organizational change and school culture become increasingly important (Champine et al., 2019). This qualitative study examined the educator's perspectives of shifts within the school culture after implementation of a trauma-informed approach. The researcher framed this study within two theories: Change Theory and Schein's Classification of Cultural Levels. Change theory will be the lens through which the implementation of the trauma-informed approach is perceived. The analysis of the school culture will be viewed through the application of Schein's classification of cultural levels.

The first level of culture is artifacts (Schein, 2006). This level is comprised of the things

in an organization that can be seen, heard, and felt. Examples include language, style, ceremonies, and rituals. Although this level of culture is easy to discover, the artifacts' meaning and importance to the organization are difficult to determine. Therefore, artifacts cannot be used on their own to determine an organization's culture.

Espoused beliefs and values comprise the second level of culture (Schein, 2006). These beliefs and values are the basis through which the group solves problems. They are the result of prior learning and shared experiences. These beliefs and values provide insight as to the importance of the organization's artifacts.

Schein's (2006) third level of culture encompasses the basic underlying assumptions of the organization. These assumptions are from the successful implementation of the organization's beliefs and values. They are often unconscious but provide the foundation for the culture (Maslowski, 2006). These assumptions are shared throughout the organization, so challenges to these are met with anxiety and discomfort (Schein, 2006). Assumptions are incredibly difficult to change, as they are engrained into the identity of the organization. Debate and confrontation with these assumptions is almost always met with resistance.

Transforming a culture is directed at the basic underlying assumption of the organization (Schein, 2006). Change Theory works to challenge these assumptions, critically examining the ideas and practices that drive the work of the organization (Fullan, 2001).

Research Questions

The central question for this study was: What are the educator's perceptions of changes to the school culture after implementation of the trauma-informed approach? The following research questions were used to guide the examination of educators' perceptions of the changes:

1. How do the educators perceive the school culture?

2. What are the educators' perceptions of the trauma-informed approach on student behavior?
3. What are the educators' perceptions of the trauma-informed approach on classroom instruction?
4. What are the educators' perceptions of changes in relationships after the implementation of the trauma-informed approach?
5. What are the educators' perceptions of changes in the school after the implementation of the trauma-informed approach?

Definitions of Terms

In order to provide a clear understanding of the terms specific to this study, definitions for the following terms have been included.

- **School Climate:** Climate is the collective mood, the quality and character of the school (Gruehert 2008; NSCC, 2021).
- **School Culture:** According to Deal and Peterson (2016) culture is a “school’s unwritten rules and traditions, customs, and expectations” (p. 7).
- **Trauma:** Trauma is defined as an event that threatens the health or safety of a child, or threatens a child’s perception of health or safety (Bell et al., 2013; NCTSN, n.d.).
Examples include domestic violence, loss of a loved one, long-term child abuse, bullying, physical abuse, or neglect.
- **Trauma-Informed:** According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014), the program, organization, or system is defined as trauma-informed when it “fully integrates knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures,

and practices, and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization” (p. 9)

Limitations and Delimitations

This study was limited to the educators who had experienced the implementation of a trauma-informed approach at one elementary school. Their experiences may not represent those educators who have implemented similar frameworks at other schools. Furthermore, participation in this study was voluntary. The experiences of teachers who did not participate may differ from those who did participate.

This study was delimited to the experiences of educators at one elementary school. The researcher limited participation in this study to educators who taught at the school during implementation of the trauma-informed approach and continue to be employed at the same school.

Chapter Summary

The researcher focused on examining changes to the school culture after implementing a trauma-informed approach. Individual and group interviews, as well as document analysis, provided insights into teacher perceptions of these changes. This chapter details information relevant to the background and purpose of this study. Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to trauma-informed approaches and organizational change. Chapter 3 is comprised of the research methods and process for data collection.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The review of essential literature lends to an understanding of the change process and how the change process is reflected within the implementation of a trauma-informed approach. This approach is further investigated through an understanding of school culture.

Trauma-Informed Care

Student Discipline

Challenging behaviors can create stressful classroom situations, impacting the mental and emotional wellbeing of school faculty (Anderson et al., 2015; Blitz et al., 2020). In a study by Alter et al. (2013), teachers were asked which student behaviors caused the most disruptions in the classroom. The behavior that teachers identified as the most frequent and most problematic was ‘off-task’ behavior. This behavior is especially problematic as it can lead to other disruptive and distracting situations in the classroom. Reducing the amount of time that a teacher must spend addressing misbehaviors in the classroom allows for an increase in time to provide quality instruction (Anderson et al., 2015; Gage et al., 2018). However, teachers have reported struggles and discouragement when addressing challenging behaviors.

Most teachers, according to a study by Westling (2010), indicated that student behavior could be improved. However, the researchers found that teachers did not use the most effective strategies for classroom behavior management. Although teachers had the support to address misbehavior, they did not have the knowledge or preparation required to apply research-based strategies. A study from Gage et al. (2018) further supported this issue. This study found that teachers who use evidence-based classroom management practices have students who are more engaged in the instruction. Teachers who do not use evidenced-based strategies have more

negative interactions with students and do not have high levels of student engagement. Students are more successful when their teachers use evidence-based classroom management practices and have positive interactions with their teachers. This study highlights the importance of introducing research-based classroom management strategies.

Schools have traditionally used exclusionary discipline practices to manage behavior (Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010). Exclusionary discipline removes a student from the classroom or school through expulsion or suspension. This results in lost instructional time and negative impacts to the educational experience. Noltemeyer and Mcloughlin recognized the importance of alternate discipline practices that have fewer negative consequences to a student's education. With the understanding that misbehavior will continue to occur despite the measures taken, schools must choose the discipline practices that provide fair and positive consequences without imposing negative academic outcomes.

Furthermore, working with students who have experienced traumas and chronic stress is challenging (Overstreet, 2015). Students experiencing the effects of trauma present emotional and behavioral needs that extend beyond basic classroom management strategies (Anderson et al., 2015; Overstreet, 2015). Reactions and behaviors of traumatized students can often be misunderstood, and they can exhibit behaviors that disrupt the school and classroom environment (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009; Overstreet, 2015). Teachers lose valuable moments to support a child's emotional growth when trauma-related behavior is mistaken as defiance (Overstreet, 2015). This issue highlights the importance of equipping faculty with the skills and knowledge to understand the effects of trauma on children. Teachers need support and education to address varying emotional needs while providing a rigorous academic curriculum (Anderson et al., 2015; Blitz et al., 2020; Overstreet, 2015). A new approach is required when addressing

student discipline.

Positive Behavior Supports

Positive behavior support (PBS) removes the punitive aspect of behavior management, substituting it with social-emotional development (Albrecht & Brunner, 2019). Social-emotional development provides students with the necessary skills to navigate emotional experiences and social relationships (Elias et al., 2014). Social-emotional development is linked to emotional intelligence (O’Neal, 1996). Emotional intelligence refers to a person’s ability to identify their feelings and use them to make good decisions. A student with high emotional intelligence is able to control impulses and better manage their mood. As well, they are able to interact more appropriately with their peers, exhibiting the skills necessary to understand appropriate social behaviors.

Emotional intelligence is learned (O’Neal, 1996). Therefore, children can be presented with skills and strategies to help increase their emotional intelligence. In this lies the importance of a caring adult to teach these skills and strategies. Emotional lessons, through social interactions, shape a child’s brain. These lessons will benefit an individual for a lifetime. Hence, elementary grades are vital periods for the implementation of preventative interventions (McDaniel et al., 2017). Ensuring that students receive the proper support at an early age is essential to preventing further gaps. Early interventions set students towards a future that is more emotionally-healthy and socially productive (Elias et al., 2007).

Through social-emotional development, PBS addresses students’ needs for meaning and purpose (Elias et al., 2014; George, 2018). Social-emotional learning programs have revealed significant positive effects on student behavior and conduct (Durlak et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2018). While these programs do not focus on academic remediation, students develop the

character attributes that reinforce determination and resolve. These characteristics help students face challenges both in the classroom and in their personal lives (Elias et al., 2014).

PBS is a public health framework that focuses on the prevention of problem behaviors (Sugai & Horner, 2006). Behavior is addressed through a system change (Childs et al., 2016, PBIS website). This response means that the entire way the school operates shifts towards behavior support (George, 2018). It is not a new curriculum or program, but the application of research-based strategies and interventions to support student behavior (PBIS website). The strategies focus on prevention and positive reinforcement, rather than consequences and punishment (Sugai & Horner, 2006). When student behavior does not respond to proactive behavior strategies, school personnel implement interventions to provide additional behavior support.

PBS consists of three components: universal support, group support, and individual support (Childs et al., 2016; Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009; Sugai & Horner, 2006). Universal supports are the behavior expectations all students are expected to follow, while group support and individual support provide the additional layers of instruction to ensure behaviors are addressed at the most appropriate level for the individual student.

Trauma-Informed Programs

Trauma-informed programs, through positive behavior interventions and supports, focus on the collaboration of schools, families, and community partners to make schools physically and psychologically safer (Champine et al., 2019; Hoover, 2019; Plumb et al., 2016). These programs are a systems-based approach that recognizes all students can benefit from services that support and advance mental health (Champin et al., 2019; Harper & Temkin, 2019; Plumb et al., 2016; SAMHSA, 2014). They take advantage of the best methods to create a supportive

learning environment and a safe, supportive school climate and culture (Harper & Tempkin, 2019, Plumb et al., 2016). Although the focus of trauma-informed programs is the prevention, treatment, and recovery of trauma, these services can assist all students to achieve educational success (Buxton, 2018; Hanson & Lang, 2016; Plumb et al., 2016).

Trauma-informed programs work to ensure everyone in the organization is aware of the impacts of trauma and is responsive to the needs of people affected by trauma (Hanson & Lang, 2016; Plumb et al., 2016). According to Brunzell et al. (2015), there are three domains used when integrating a trauma-informed program in a school. The first domain is repairing regulatory abilities. This domain refers to introducing predictability and patterns into the school day. Students learn strategies to self-regulate and have opportunities to practice mindfulness. The second domain is repairing rational capacities. Teachers work with students to develop emotional intelligence, learning to understand how they feel and better manage their emotional responses. Teachers and students work together to build healthy relationships, encouraging feelings of belonging and attachment to the classroom and their peers. The third domain is maximizing psychological resources. Through this domain, teachers create opportunities for students to have positive experiences that allow them to be successful and cultivate a growth mindset.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014) acknowledges four assumptions that everyone in the school must accept to successfully implement a trauma-informed program. First, everyone must have a basic understanding of how trauma can impact an individual. Trauma can influence a person's behavior and impede an individual's ability to be successful in certain situations (Overstreet, 2015). Second, those in the organization must recognize the signs of trauma (SAMHSA, 2014). Trauma can present differently depending on the individual, so it is important to have assessment techniques to ensure students receive the

most appropriate support for their needs. (Harper & Temkin, 2019; SAMHSA, 2014). This recognition leads to the third assumption, the organization must be prepared to respond to people who have experienced trauma (SAMHSA, 2014). School leaders should provide training on evidence-based practices that will allow staff to ensure individuals receive appropriate services (SAMHSA, 2014). The fourth assumption is that the organization will work diligently to resist the re-traumatization of individuals. It is important for the organization to avoid worsening an individual's trauma symptoms or interfering with an individual healing (Harper & Temkin, 2019; SAMHSA, 2014).

Federal and state policies recognize the importance of incorporating trauma-informed practices in schools. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) allows schools to have flexibility in developing policies to address childhood trauma (Hoover, 2019). In 2018, the House of Representatives passed H. Res. 443. This resolution acknowledged the importance of trauma-informed policies. Chapter 421 of the Public Acts of 2019 requires the Tennessee Department of Education to guide districts in the development of trauma-informed discipline practices ("Trauma-Informed Discipline Practices", n.d.). Through this initiative, positive discipline practices replace punitive discipline structures. Schools are encouraged to balance policies related to safety and security with trauma-responsive policies that focus on student mental health (Hoover, 2019)

Tennessee has adopted a version of the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework that uses positive, non-punitive methods to encourage appropriate behavior (Tennessee Behavior Supports Project, 2020). This framework is Response to Instruction and Intervention- Behavior (RTI²-B). RTI²-B is a multitiered system geared towards teaching every child prosocial behavior while providing the necessary support to reach all children. Prosocial

behavior skills give students the foundation for building relationships and interacting well with others (Tennessee Behavior Supports Project, 2020). This program, through collaboration with all school-stakeholders, believes every student can be taught prosocial behavior skills.

Response to Intervention

Response to Intervention (RTI) is not a new concept in education. According to Hawken et al. (2008), this program uses a multi-tiered system to ensure all students receive the support they need at the most appropriate level. Educators have traditionally used RTI as a method of identifying students who are at risk for a learning disability. Teachers provide students with increasing levels of academic support, dependent on their specific needs. RTP²-B follows the same framework. Schools use evidence-based interventions and supports to teach prosocial behavior and social-emotional skills (Tennessee Behavior Supports Project, 2020). School leaders collect data to identify the students who need extra support to learn these skills, and school personnel implement appropriate interventions. Schools provide interventions through the multi-tiered system, allowing students to receive the most appropriate level of support for their individual needs.

Tier I

Schools implement primary prevention, or Tier I, for all students in the school (Horner et al., 2010). The support that students receive in Tier 1 is universal, meaning everyone is provided with the skills and services that promote positive social and emotional well-being (Hoover, 2019). According to the Instruction and Intervention for Behavior (RTP²-B) Handbook (n.d.), this program focuses on creating a positive climate, ensuring behavior expectations are communicated clearly, and providing teachers with classroom management support. School

personnel routinely collect data about any problem behaviors, and teams within the school use this data to ensure students are receiving the proper level of support (Horner et al., 2010).

In Tier 1, positive behavior is reinforced school-wide (Horner et al., 2010). According to the Tennessee Behavior Supports Project (2020), expectations for behavior are defined, taught, and modeled through instructional practices. Everyone in the school, from teachers and administrators to custodial staff and bus drivers, promotes the school-wide behavioral expectations (Horner et al., 2010).

Albrecht and Brunner (2019) confirmed the importance of Tier I interventions for disciplinary referrals and school climate. In this study, school leaders gave teachers a questionnaire to complete following the implementation of a social-emotional curriculum. Although teachers indicated that Tier I interventions were not effective with regards to behavioral referrals, researchers found office disciplinary instances decreased and climate and staff morale increased after one year. The researchers discovered that, although the staff had not fully accepted the value of the interventions, the integration of positive behavior supports did show to benefit the school environment.

Schools have used several methods to identify students needing more support than Tier I interventions can provide (Hawken et al., 2008). The intention of the multi-tiered systems of support is to ensure students receive the most appropriate support to meet their emotional and behavioral needs (Splett et al., 2018). This response is often determined by the number of office discipline referrals that a student has received in a given time. Other times, schools identify the need for Tier II interventions through teacher referral. In a study by Splett et al. (2018), the researchers examined the need for universal screening of students to expand access to Tier II intervention. Universal screening can help to identify students who may need mental health

interventions but would not typically be identified. This study found that as school leaders identified more students as at-risk in Tier I interventions, their needs were not so severe as to require Tier II interventions. These results shed light on the importance of ensuring Tier I services are adequate to support behavioral and mental health of all students. Tier I services should include resources to build social-emotional skills. By ensuring this support at the most basic level, school professionals can provide the proactive support to prevent students from ultimately moving into the higher tiers of more intensive support. This focus on behavioral practices provides students with a supportive and nurturing foundation that will allow them to be successful in the school setting (George, 2018).

Tier II

Tier II is also referred to as a secondary intervention (Horner et al., 2010). Students are moved into the second tier when they need more support than is available in Tier I. While they continue to receive support in the first tier, school personnel provide these students with additional interventions that are targeted to address their specific skill deficits (Tennessee Behavior Support Project, 2020). The aim of Tier II intervention is to identify students whose behaviors could cause concern in the future, preventing problem behaviors from manifesting into major disciplinary concerns.

Interventions enacted at the second level of support are typically provided in a small group setting (RTI framework, n.d.). There are several evidence-based practices listed in the RTI2-B framework that provide students with increased focus and instruction of positive behavior support. As students progress through Tier II intervention, school personnel monitor their response to the instruction to ensure that they receive the most appropriate support to reach their goals.

Studies have shown the importance of Tier II intervention with respect to student emotional and behavioral functioning (Horner et al., 2010; McDaniel et al., 2018). McDaniel et al. (2018) identified two Tier II intervention methods. Check-In/Check-Out (CICO) is a research-based intervention that matches students with a teacher (Horner et al., 2010; McDaniel et al., 2018). That teacher identifies behavioral goals for the student, providing daily feedback toward accomplishing that goal. The second Tier II intervention, Coping Power (CP), is an evidence-based cognitive-behavioral intervention that teaches at-risk students coping skills and problem-solving strategies for social situations through small-group instruction (McDaniel et al., 2018).

Through analysis of teacher ratings of externalizing behavior and risk, McDaniel et al. (2018) found students to have decreased their levels of problem behaviors through these Tier II interventions. At-risk students who did not receive interventions did not decrease problem behaviors. This study revealed that appropriate Tier II interventions can prevent escalating behavioral issues. This is important because McDaniel et al. (2018) cite numerous studies that have shown negative school experiences, including problem behaviors and disciplinary issues, to lead to negative family and community interactions and greater risks for mental health issues. Providing early support to interfere with the further development of at-risk behaviors provides students with the skills to create a more positive school experience, like reducing the risks of peer problems and exclusionary discipline.

Tier III

The last level of support is tertiary intervention or Tier III (Horner et al., 2010). This level is the most intensive support, tailored toward students whose behavior is negatively impacting their school success in such a manner that Tier I and Tier II supports are not addressing their unique needs (“Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI2-B) Framework.”

, n.d.) While Tier I and Tier II supports are still applied, staff members create an individualized plan that will assist students in meeting the expectations of behavior. Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA) and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP) are examples of intensive intervention plans that have shown to benefit the development of prosocial behaviors (TN Behavior Support Project, 2020).

The 3 tiers of RTI2-B work together to ensure every child has the tools and support to succeed in the school environment (“Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI2-B) Framework.”, n.d.). As children build relationships with other students and adults at the school, and feel safe because of the behavior policies and discipline practices, the school environment becomes a more positive and welcoming place. Implementation of RTI2-B creates a foundation for school improvement. These practices foster changes within school climate and school culture.

School Climate

Defining School Climate

Climate is the collective mood, the quality and character of the school (Gruehert 2008, NSCC). It describes the quality of individual experience within the school, encompassing the personal contact and unique experience that a person has within the organization (Smith et al., 2014; NSCC). It reflects the social, emotional, civic, ethical, and academic experience of all stakeholders (Thapa et al., 2012). Teachers and students thrive in organizations that have a happy, positive climate (Gruehert, 2008).

School climate can be defined through the analysis of four domains (Wang & Degol, 2015). The first domain is academic. Academic refers to the learning atmosphere in the school, teacher practice, and school leadership. The second domain, community, encompasses

interpersonal relationships. Students feel welcome and included within the school, building feelings of trust and respect (Thapa et al., 2012). The third is safety (Wang & Degol, 2015). Safety refers to feelings of physical and emotional security at the school, as well as the consistency of discipline and behavior management practices. School administration deal proactively with threats of violence, and threats against faculty and students are taken seriously (Thapa et al., 2012; Wang & Degol, 2015). The fourth domain is the institutional environment (Wang & Degol, 2015). This domain includes everything from lighting, class sizes, and the availability of materials. Together, these four broad domains provide a picture of the school environment, allowing school leaders to target the best interventions for school improvement.

Student experience within these domains has shown to influence academic, behavioral, and social outcomes (Thapa et al., 2012; Wang & Degol, 2015). Students have shown greater academic achievement and increased attendance rates in positive school climates (Smith et al., 2014). Behavioral problems are also minimized (Wang & Degol, 2015). Students have better relationships with faculty, staff, and their peers. This leads to students feeling more emotionally and physically comfortable while at school

School climate affects the stress levels, feelings of teaching efficacy, and job satisfaction of school faculty (Collie et al., 2012). Teachers experienced less stress and were more satisfied when they perceived that students were more motivated and better behaved. They doubted their teaching abilities when students misbehave, especially when they felt as if they did not have the strategies and skills to foster student engagement. Teachers with access to professional development opportunities and resources to support teaching practices were more confident of their abilities (Wang & Degol, 2015). They also formed closer and more supportive relationships with students.

Measuring School Climate

School climate has multiple dimensions, allowing it to be measured using several different methods (Wang & Degol, 2015). These methods are often used to determine how variables impact school climate, or how interventions influence climate. Regardless of the method used, studies commonly look to collect data through an individual's perception of the climate.

The most common method to collect data about school climate is through the use of surveys (Wang & Degol, 2015). Participants are asked to describe their experiences using Likert scales or yes and no responses. This method allows researchers to understand agreement and disagreement within the elements of climate. Surveys also provide researchers with the ability to question large populations quickly and efficiently.

Collecting data through interviews and focus groups is another method used to evaluate school climate (Wang & Degol, 2015). This method allows researchers the ability to develop a better understanding of the why and how of participants' responses. Interviews and focus groups can provide more detailed and descriptive information than survey data.

School Climate and Trauma

Paramount to the implementation of trauma-informed practices is the impact of this program on school climate (TN Behavior Supports Project, 2020). Building a positive school climate is an important concern for school leaders, as it impacts everyone in the school community. According to the Tennessee Behavior Supports Project (2020), "school climate is improved when building relationships are a priority and the academic, behavioral, and social needs of all students are addressed."

In a study of five schools in the Baltimore City Schools district that had each

purposefully worked toward improving school climate, Smith et al. (2014) identified five practices that school personnel implemented to specifically target school climate. These practices include: relationships, high expectations, consistency and fairness, communication and messaging, and the use of resources effectively and innovatively. These practices parallel many principles of social-emotional learning and trauma-informed practices.

Two practices, in particular, stand out. The first is developing relationships (Smith et al., 2014). Adults are intentional to learn the names of students, greeting them and engaging in conversation. Faculty treat each other with politeness and respect. Parents feel welcomed and have positive interactions with faculty and staff. The second practice is consistency and a sense of fairness. Consistency strengthens school climate, both in schedule and activities (Pawlo et al., 2019). Teachers can enhance school climate and social-emotional learning through enacting predictable schedules and routines, providing a sense of consistency and stability for all students. Furthermore, all students are held to high expectations. There is a mutual understanding that all students can succeed and are encouraged to do their best. There are also clear expectations and consequences for behavior. By focusing on prosocial behaviors and decreasing attention to problem behaviors, teachers can create a climate that is supportive and encouraging (Pawlo et al., 2019). Bad choices and misbehavior are not ignored but dealt with proactively, without damaging relationships (Smith et al., 2014). Teachers focus classroom time on teaching and learning, not discipline.

School Culture

Defining School Culture

Culture is the force within an organization that makes it a special place (Deal & Peterson, 2016). It is the distinct identity of the organization (Roach & Kratochwill, 2004). Culture

encompasses the unwritten rules and rituals, the patterns of behaviors, and the beliefs that determine how people interact and behave (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Drolet & Lindstrom, 2017). The terms school climate and school culture are often used interchangeably (Gruenert, 2008). However, each has a distinct role when leaders work towards school improvement with the implementation of trauma-informed practices.

School culture consists of the elements that make the school favorable for teaching and learning (Connelley, 2013). This includes the social environment, physical environment, and emotional environment (Drolet & Lindstrom, 2017). The social environment refers to how teachers and students interact amongst their peers and amongst each other (Drolet & Lindstrom, 2017). In a strong social environment, the relationships are positive, creating a sense of belonging (Drolet & Lindstrom, 2017; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Everyone feels welcome, despite their diverse needs and backgrounds (Connelley, 2013). Differences are celebrated and different perspectives are valued (Connelley, 2013; Drolet & Lindstrom, 2017).

A threat to the social environment, directly impacting school culture, is teacher isolation (Roby, 2011). In a study by Roby (2011), school leaders ranked factors that impact school culture. The two highest concerns for school culture were directly related to the social environment. The first concern was teacher isolation. A study by Hongboontri (2014) reiterated this concern, who found teacher isolation to be a barrier towards a collaborative culture. Teacher isolation prevents constructive feedback and encouragement. The school culture suffers when teachers are unable to collaborate and interact with each other (Drolet & Lindstrom, 2017; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). The second concern was trust between teachers and administrators (Roby, 2011). A strong culture values collaborative decision making (Connelley, 2013). Administrators embrace the opinions and perspectives of the teachers, and teachers feel

their experiences and concerns are valued.

The physical environment is the look and feel of the school building and classrooms (Drolet & Lindstrom, 2017). The school building is well-maintained, clean, and organized. The atmosphere of the school is warm, and people feel welcome when they enter the building or classrooms (Connelley, 2013; Drolet & Lindstrom, 2017). There is an overall sense of safety and security within the school. Teachers apply consistent expectations for student behavior, and classroom management policies provide physical and emotional security.

The school's behavioral expectations and discipline policies shape the emotional environment (Drolet & Lindstrom, 2017). Students know and understand what the rules and expectations are for the school and classroom. Everyone is held accountable. When students do not meet these expectations, there are several interventions that teachers can apply to help the students succeed. This idea also requires communication and collaboration amongst school faculty and administration (Bambara et al., 2012). Expectations and policies must have mutual understanding and be applied equally and fairly by all staff (Bambara et al., 2012; Drolet & Lindstrom, 2017).

These different environments work together to create conditions that support deep learning and provide a strong foundation for social and emotional support (Connelley, 2013). School culture is less about a person's actions and behaviors, but more about the conditions that drive behaviors (Roach & Kratochwill, 2004). The culture reflects the meaning behind what people say and do. Hence, culture plays a vital role in how people perform at school (Deal & Peterson, 2016). It is a determining factor in successful teaching and learning.

Elements of School Culture

School culture consists of several elements (Deal & Peterson, 2016). These include

symbols, values, stories, rituals, and traditions. The development of these elements into the everyday routine provides the foundation for a school that is academically focused while still providing the nurture and care to support faculty and students (Deal & Peterson, 2016).

Organizations develop a shared set of values, beliefs, and assumptions to drive the actions of the group (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Gruenert, 2008). These elements combine to create a set of expectations that group members follow in order to fit in with their peers (Gruenert, 2008). The expectations transform into a set of norms. Groups hold members accountable to comply with the norms, and schools are no different. Norms are often the unwritten rules of the organization, guiding behavior and preferences.

Norms are an important aspect of school culture because, whether explicit or implicit, they govern how members of the organization feel about and react to different situations (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Drolet & Lindstrom, 2017; Gruenert, 2008). They can be positive or negative (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Drolet & Lindstrom, 2017). Negative, dysfunctional norms are harmful to the school culture (Deal & Peterson, 2016). However, a strong culture with positive norms creates a strong foundation for school improvement efforts, like implementation of trauma-informed programs (Gruenert, 2000).

Deal and Peterson (2016) refer to several studies where schools generated improvements due to the strong ties amongst the values, beliefs, and trust shared in the school. The bonds between those who work in the school are strengthened as everyone works toward a shared goal defined by a clear mission statement. Their work has meaning and purpose, further intensifying the relationship between those within the school to the school itself. School members feel supported and encouraged, creating a team-like environment. The school is a special place, loved by not only the faculty and students but the community as well.

Importance of School Culture

School culture has undeniable importance toward the satisfaction and success of both school personnel and students. Deal and Peterson (2016) revealed: “a positive culture helps people aspire to great things, a negative culture traps people in a powerful pocket of incompetence.” Avoiding the development of a negative or toxic culture should be the goal of every school administrator. In a toxic culture, teachers become dissatisfied, unenthusiastic, and depressed. Their willingness to collaborate or try new things disappears, replaced by indifference and apathy. The school is no longer a special place, and the morale of everyone suffers. Toxic culture can be an additional stress for children, further magnifying the effects of trauma (Harper & Temkin, 2019; Pawlo et al., 2019).

Measuring School Culture

Evaluating school culture is an ethnographic endeavor (Roach & Kratochwich, 2004). It involves observation and interview with the school population, uncovering the underlying beliefs that drive behavior in the school. School culture is measured by surveys and interviews, with a focus on cultural behaviors (Roach & Kratochwich, 2004; Wagner, 2006). Wagner (2006) identified three culture behaviors that drive strong school cultures. The first is professional collaboration. Professional collaboration is the staff’s ability to work together. The second is affiliative and collegial relationships. This means that faculty and staff are kind to one another and have good working relationships. The third behavior is efficacy or self-determination. This behavior reflects people’s beliefs in themselves to create change and improve their professional skills.

Gruenert (2000) had previously identified six factors used to evaluate school culture. These parallel many of the ideas from Wagner (2006). The first two factors, collaborative

leadership and teacher collaboration, describe school administration and teachers' ability to maintain relationships and work together. This ties into another factor, collegial support. This idea refers to the ability of everyone to work together well. Another factor to measure school culture is the value teachers place on professional development to improve their work in the classroom. This factor follows with unity of purpose. Unity of purpose measures the ability of the school to work toward a common purpose. Last is learning partnership. This factor looks beyond the faculty and staff to determine parent and community involvement in working together for the success of the school.

Culture encompasses many different aspects, each combining to form a belief system that drives the work of the school (Gruenert, 2008). It is through the use of questionnaires, surveys, observations, and interviews that school leaders can develop a complete picture of the school culture (Maslowski, 2005; Roach & Kratochwich, 2004). Understanding the school culture is vital when considering the implementation of initiatives like trauma-informed approaches.

School Culture and Trauma

Schools that do not have supportive learning environments will struggle to meet the needs of children exposed to trauma (Harper & Temkin, 2019). Positive school culture is a critical component of supportive learning environments. Students receive the support and services they need to lessen the effects of trauma. There are opportunities for students to pursue their interests and showcase their strengths (Pawlo et al., 2019). Student struggles are met with support and understanding, rather than harsh punishments (Harper & Temkin, 2019).

Eliminating toxic culture and preventing the re-traumatization of children requires a holistic shift in how school personnel manage student discipline, mental health, and student efficacy (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Increasing the capacities of both teachers and

students to address emotional and behavioral challenges, despite outside influences, are vital components of addressing the needs of children while creating a culture that uplifts and encourages them (Pawlo et al., 2019).

Several recent studies warrant an emphasis on school culture (Hoover, 2019; Shell, 2010). In a study by Shell (2010) examining teacher perception of student behavior on school culture, the researcher found that teachers perceived student behavior to have the greatest impact on the school culture. Not only was misbehavior a major concern, teachers felt that discipline and consequences were not equally or consistently applied to all students. The school culture suffered as teachers perceived a leniency and inequality of disciplinary action. The transition to trauma-informed practices can be a difficult transition for school faculty as it represents a new perspective on disciplinary action (Hoover, 2019). Addressing student behavior in this manner looks different from traditional punitive practices. This shift in practice requires all stakeholders to understand the necessity of trauma-informed practices for the benefit of the students. Furthermore, it requires a commitment toward fidelity in implementation to see this initiative flourish (Harper & Tempkin, 2019). Failure to ensure the proper resources and support for faculty during the implementation process can negatively impact the school culture.

However, school culture is not solely determined by student discipline and student mental health. The additional stress of integrating trauma treatments into the classroom can create an emotional toll on teachers, further impacting school culture. Teachers can experience secondary trauma through their work. Secondary trauma is the experience that an individual can have when working closely with others impacted by trauma, especially when they do not feel like they have sufficient resources or support (Blitz et al., 2016; Brunzell et al., 2018). In a study performed by Blitz et al. (2016), teachers discussed their perceptions of taking care of the emotional needs of

students impacted by trauma. They revealed the anxiety and fear they often feel managing the variety of needs, as well as their lack of confidence in implementing strategies to help the students at school. There was an underlying tone of frustration. Teachers felt alone in their classrooms without the needed collaboration from other staff and parents. This study found that greater attention must be given to the skills that teachers possess to address trauma and emotional needs in the classroom. Collie et al. (2012) further reiterate this finding. They found that, although learning new strategies to help with the social-emotional learning of students can be stressful, as teachers implemented these strategies and became more confident in using these methods, they experienced less stress and greater job satisfaction. Furthermore, as teachers' confidence in managing classroom behaviors increased, student misbehavior did not increase their stress levels.

Within the implementation of trauma-informed practices, teacher self-efficacy is a vital aspect of school culture. The concept of self-efficacy refers to the idea that teachers believed in and had confidence in their abilities to meet the needs of students in their classrooms (Delale-O'Conner et al., 2017). Building self-efficacy ensures that teachers possess the resources and tools to provide the best learning space for the needs of all students.

Teacher self-care is a needed component to building a trauma-informed school environment, often lessening the effects of secondary trauma. However, self-care is not a traditional part of teacher-education courses. In fact, in a study of preservice teachers, many did not recognize the effects of secondary trauma, nor see the benefits of utilizing self-care to alleviate the burden of stress (Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019). As these preservice teachers move into the classroom, their risk of burnout increases. This study found that the emotional impact of trauma must be addressed for teachers with the same intensity as measures are put in place to

meet the needs of students. As teachers collaborate with students to improve their experiences in the classroom, mental health professionals and peer support systems within the school must collaborate with teachers in order to build the efficacy and resiliency needed to face the challenges of trauma (Blitz et al., 2016; Craig, 2016). Providing a learning environment where everyone in the school can grow, students and teachers included, will create the foundation for a positive school culture.

School Culture and Change

The culture of a school must encourage learning and growth for the implementation of new initiatives to flourish (Deal & Peterson, 2016). There is a balancing approach that must occur between the growth of school culture and the implementation of new programs. It is vital to recognize the importance of maintaining the school culture while working to improve the culture. Focusing on the future while still providing the encouragement and support in the present are important considerations as school leaders move into the change process (Fullan, 2001).

The Change Process

Change Theory requires an overhaul in the practices of conversation and communication of an organization. Glover (2013) addressed this need by stating, “We must relearn the ancient skills of conversation. We must learn again how to inquire- how to dialogue and how to discuss.” This need is realized in the practice of open inquiry. Open inquiry, as defined by Glover (2013), “is a set of leadership practices that can surface authentic voice, thereby generating and releasing organizational participant energy to challenge barriers that interfere with success” (p. 15). The ability to learn and think together is tantamount for true, lasting change to occur. Glover also

addressed the work of William Isaac, who discusses dialogic leadership. In dialogic leadership, all participants have an opportunity to speak their voice while at the same time suspending their own beliefs to truly appreciate and consider the opinions of others. This style of communication is critical during change initiatives because it allows all participants to voice their perspectives.

Due to the fact that change can have deep, lasting effects through the many facets of an organization, it is important that all members have a platform on which they can voice their concerns and questions (Glover, 2013). Leaders are not omniscient. They may not have considered topics of concern and outcomes that can impact initiatives. Group members must know their voices and concerns have been heard in order to feel comfortable following through with a leader's plan. As Glover (2013) revealed, when people feel like you value their input and thoughts, they are more likely to give consideration and value to your words. This understanding and mutual respect provide cohesiveness that will allow the organization to move forward. When people know what they are working towards, know the rationales for moving in a certain direction, and when they feel school leaders consider their needs and interests - they recognize their purpose and place in the organization as it moves forward (Sergiovanni, 2007).

The implementation of trauma-informed practices represents a major philosophical shift in behavior management (Nolemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010). Ensuring a successful change in both mindset and practice requires careful consideration of the change process (Axelrod et al., 2006). Several theories have developed that support the change process in educational organizations.

Organizational Change Theories

Given the wide scope of change theories, a leader must have a background in how these theories work and how the implementation of change, according to an articulated theory,

can provide the most effective means of promoting lasting change (Evans et al., 2012). Evans et al. discussed the problem of undertaking change with an individual approach. When leaders try to incite change on their own, relying on their own personal style and ideas, an organization can suffer. The authors cite a study showing that when school leaders approached change on their own, without using an established change theory, vision and leadership across the district suffered. Therefore, it is important that educational leaders research and evaluate the different change theories, coming to a consensus on what theory would work best for that particular area or project. Working together, in a unified approach, will allow for the most effective and lasting change.

Continuous Improvement Model

Evans et al. (2012) discussed four different theories that can be helpful when leaders are undertaking the task of change. The first change theory is the Continuous Improvement Model (CIM). This model emphasizes the necessity of a shared vision amongst all members of an organization. The shared vision controls decisions and actions within the organization. When all members are working towards a shared vision, and have resources and education that allow them to progress toward that common goal; they become empowered and more effective as educators. Members collect data as changes progress, and this data drives further actions (Evans et al., 2012).

The CIM uses a four-step cycle to support change, named the plan-do-study-act cycle. The planning stage refers to identifying the shared vision of the organization. The plan is implemented, the data are collected and studied, and the data drive the next steps (Evans et al., 2012). This theory could be incredibly beneficial when implementing a plan in a school. The school leader works with the faculty to identify a vision or an idea that all will work toward.

School leaders will put a plan into place to achieve that vision, with teachers receiving the education, resources, and support they need to fulfill the plan. Data are gathered, and leaders determine further actions based on the data.

Organizational Learning

The second change theory discussed by Evans et al. (2012) is Organizational Learning. This theory is an important change theory to be considered in a school setting. Organizational learning can be divided into single loop and double loop learning (Argyris, 1977). Most organizations do well with single loop learning. This learning identifies a problem and creates a solution. Double loop learning, however, is more difficult. It is in double loop learning that real change can occur in an organization. This learning challenges the policies and procedures. Established norms and beliefs are met with revolutionary and creative ideas. A problem is addressed or a change is made, as in single-loop learning, but the solution has a deeper impact over the organization as a whole (Evans et al., 2012).

Learning Organizations

The third change theory is that of Senge's Learning Organizations (Evans et al., 2012). An organization becomes a learning organization when all members play a part in, and take responsibility for, learning (Senge, 2005). All members are committed to common goals and extraordinary results.

According to Senge (2005), learning organizations realize their full potential through the development of 5 disciplines. The first discipline is personal mastery. This means that everyone within the organization is committed to growth and continued learning. This leads to the second discipline, mental models. Mental models are the shared assumptions and beliefs in the organization. In order to enact change, it is necessary to carefully examine the underlying

beliefs of the organization. The third discipline is building a shared vision. This requires the organization to have a shared hope for the future. Members of the organization are committed to, and striving towards, this goal. There is a collective commitment that extends beyond compliance. Shared vision is followed by team learning. Like in personal mastery, all members of the organization are as equally committed to their self-growth as they are to the growth of the organization. The final discipline, systems thinking, brings all of the disciplines together within the same conceptual framework. The organization is strengthened through the combined disciplines of personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning. Systems thinking encourages a belief that real change can be accomplished in the organization. Although each discipline is independently important for success, it is when the 5 disciplines work together that the full potential of the organization can be realized.

Appreciative Inquiry

The fourth change theory explored by Evans et al. (2012) is that of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) by Cooperrider. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) begins with an organization reflecting on its strengths, not its weaknesses. AI focus on the positive core of the organization (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). The positive core is the set of strengths and assets that give an organization its unique identify. According to AI, positive change begins through investigation into the positive core, what the organization does best. The organization identifies areas of strength to use as the foundation of change. This whole process is incredibly positive; the possibilities of the future are building on what the organization already does with success (Evans et al., 2012).

AI has a four-step process (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). The first step is discovery. Discovery is the process of asking people in the organization what it does best and how they see the organization in the future. The second step is dream. In this step, the organization envisions

the future based on fully utilizing its strengths. The third step is design. This step requires the organization to define its vision and purpose. The final step is destiny. Destiny is the organization's movement towards transformation. Members work together using their strengths to embark on a transformational movement of positive change.

People in leadership roles in an AI approach are referred to as positive change catalysts (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Leaders look for, and encourage, the best. They are a source of guidance throughout the change process. AI can be especially rewarding when bringing change in a school. Instead of focusing on the elements that the teachers, students, and administrators lack as many recent reforms have done, principals and teachers can focus on building strengths.

Despite the unique qualities that each change theory possesses, one underlying component is prevalent, a common goal or shared vision. Before an organization implements any amount of change, no matter how insignificant, a leader must identify and communicate the desired end result. Beyond that, change will take time regardless of the approach. The members of the organization must understand that any approach will not provide an immediate fix. As well, every person in the organization is responsible for their own individual learning and growth. Despite the differences in each approach, individual and group learning must take precedence (Evans et al., 2012). Any attempts to bring change within an organization will be met with difficulties and setbacks. However, with an understanding of the different change theories and the structures and supports needed to implement each one, leaders can promote more effective change towards greater positive outcomes for the school. The uniqueness of change, the distinctive qualities of each organization, the special circumstances of each situation- all of these factors play an important role in the attributes an effective leader of change must possess.

A Leader of Change

Fullan (2001) provided a discussion of the six leadership styles identified by Goleman. Two of the six leadership styles are not productive in leading change, a coercive leader and a pacesetter leader. Fullan referenced Goleman's findings as to why these particular leaders would not be effective in bringing about change within an educational organization. Goleman revealed that pacesetter leaders have too many ideas, too quickly. They try to change too many things, too fast. People become frustrated because they cannot keep up with the explosion of change going on around them. In a similar fashion, a coercive leader will not see an organization rally around a change initiative. According to Fullan (2001), Goleman's coercive leader has great ideas, but cannot get anyone excited to follow through with them. A coercive leader, as defined by Fullan (2001), "demands compliance" (p. 35). Organizations do not rally around a leader who commands and orders, regardless of how great the ideas (Fullan, 2001). A good leader must possess other qualities that allow them to be successful.

The leader who can spark and inspire change in an organization is a moral leader. A moral leader encompasses the other six leadership styles identified by Goleman (Fullan, 2001) by one particular trait addressed by Sergiovanni (2007) - common cause. A moral leader identifies a vision for an organization and addresses that vision by having all members working together toward a common purpose. According to Sergiovanni (2007), "action is much more likely to result when leaders and followers are connected to each other by a commitment to common ideas."

A moral leader identifies what is important. When change initiatives occur, a moral leader identifies the importance of the change with respect to the values of the organization. If the change promotes the identified values, those working within the organization are more

motivated to act and commit to the changes (Sergiovanni, 2007). Sergiovanni revealed, “moral leadership is the means that principals and others can build connections.” Those who are connected to an organization feel ownership, pride, and responsibility toward the success of their place and they are more committed to the steps needed to strengthen and fulfill the organization’s purpose. By building personal connections, leaders have the foundation to implement change initiatives.

Sergiovanni (2007) identified five forces that a leader should encompass: “technical, human, educational, symbolic, and cultural”. He revealed that three of these forces, technical, human, and educational, are critical for effective leadership. Excellent leadership, however, is found in the final two forces, symbolic and cultural. Both of these forces provide the foundation for meaning and purpose. Leaders have the responsibility to create a strong culture in an educational organization. Culture provides an atmosphere of collective values, allowing educators the ability to all work together towards something meaningful. Building that culture of shared values (while communicating and protecting those values) is a critical task for an effective leader. A leader must be intentional in developing the shared goals and spreading the mission of the school.

A leader of change not only encompasses certain leadership styles and forces, but effective leaders of change exhibit behaviors that promote successful change initiatives (Higgs & Rowland, 2011). Higgs and Rowland (2011) completed a study of leader behavior in 33 organizations. This research revealed 4 behavior sets that were most effective towards change implementation. The acknowledgment that these leaders were not self-focused prefaced each behavior. These behaviors followed leaders who focused less on themselves as individuals and focused more on building relationships and establishing communication through the change

process.

According to Higgs and Rowland (2011), the first behavior set is Attractor. The attractor behavior refers to the leader's ability to focus the organization on a shared vision (Fullan, 2001; Higgs & Rowland, 2011). This idea leads to the second behavior set, Edge and Tension (Higgs & Rowland, 2011). This describes a leader's capacity to keep the organization on course. The leader is honest about the challenges and understands the difficulties of rethinking old habits. Yet despite the challenges, the leader continues to encourage those in the organization to move forward. A successful leader also has the behavior set of Container. This leader sets clear and consistent expectations while remaining confident and calm when issues arise. The final behavior set is Transforming Space. Transforming Space means that the leader works within the present moment, remaining attentive to present needs.

Fullan (2001) revealed that a leader of change must behave in a purposeful way, highlighting the findings from Higgs and Rowland (2011). Successful leaders do not encompass the attributes described in this section without focus and effort (Fullan, 2001). Successful leaders cultivate these traits and behaviors through education and experience, fostering their commitment to effective leadership during a change initiative.

Organizing Schools to Promote Change Culture

Efforts to create lasting organizational change have alarmingly low success rates (Axelrod et al., 2006; Higgs & Rowland, 2011). Almost 70% of organizational change initiatives fail, despite an Oxford University study that determined more than half of the employees were committed to meaningful change efforts (Axelrod et al., 2006). There is a disconnect between the desire for change and the implementation of change efforts.

The issue arises within the initiation of the change effort. Those enacting the changes

are met with resistance and skepticism by other members of the organization. Peter Senge referred to this as the engagement gap (Axelrod et al., 2006). Members of the organization feel removed from the decision-making process and lack ownership for changes being implemented. Their lack of inclusion within the change initiative sparks mistrust and resistance. Successful change requires closing this engagement gap. Relationship-building within the organization is a critical step. Allowing for meaningful collaboration and participation in the change initiative will ensure all members feel as if they have a voice and impact towards the change effort. Leaders must give special focus towards relationship-building within the organization.

Creating coherence and establishing a culture of collaboration are essential pieces to building the relationships capable of initiating and sustaining change (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Schools are constantly in a state of churn. Standards are changing, new teachers and principals are arriving, and teachers are retiring (Finnigan & Daly, 2017). With so much movement in and out of an organization, it is incredibly hard to develop and sustain trusting, emotional relationships. Finnigan and Daly (2017) studied the effects of churn in a midsize suburban school district and how the effects impacted the relationships between school leaders and teachers and the relationships of school leaders with other leaders in the district. Unfortunately, they found that the leaders who were most sought after for their experience and advice were the leaders most likely to leave a district. These departures are particularly detrimental to initiating impactful change. When the people who leave are the most frequently trusted when problems arise, it creates a void in the organization that can be hard to fill. Finnigan and Daly (2017) discuss the two negative results leadership churn has on the lives of teachers. First, it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify a shared vision for the future of the organization. New leadership will bring new ideas, frustrating previous efforts. Second, leadership churn affects the relationships

teachers have with fellow teachers. Teachers are not working toward a shared goal and become apathetic to their job and school.

Churn, unfortunately, is inevitable. Therefore, schools must create a culture that can withstand churn and make strides toward improvement. Fullan and Quinn (2016) discussed this idea of withstanding churn by the concept of coherence. They revealed a four-part framework that will guide leaders toward developing coherence within an organization. The first part is focusing direction. Leaders must identify a moral purpose for the organization. With constant churn, one thing must remain the same- a shared vision. The second part is cultivating collaborative cultures. People are more comfortable sharing knowledge and listening to the ideas of others when they are part of an organization focused on building respectful, trusting relationships (Fullan, 2001). Leaders must be lead learners in an organization. They must have the capacity to look at all of the knowledge and decide what is best for the organization even if it may not follow their original thinking. They show others that learning and growing are important. This leads to the third component, deepening learning. Leaders must set up teams that can share knowledge and respectfully consider all options before making a decision. Glover (2013) cited the work of Senge when he discusses the type of leaders that develop in a learning organization: the executive leader, line leaders, and network leaders. Despite their specific functions within the learning organization, these leaders are all focused on improving instruction and becoming better learners. The fourth component is securing accountability, specifically building internal accountability. Leaders and those within the organization must take personal responsibility towards moving the school forward (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

The goal of coherence building is to create a culture that can withstand churn. Churn means that leaders will inevitably depart from the organization. However, if coherence making

has been intentional and effective, the forward progress of the school will not waiver when a leader leaves. Those in the leadership teams of the school can keep the focus on the moral purpose in sight, moving the school forward, despite the churn occurring around it. It is then that leaders can know, regardless of their departure, that they have made a lasting impact on the organization (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Leaders in education must be prepared to lead change initiatives. Societal pressures placed on schools through legislation and standardized testing, as well as the ever-evolving demands of the workforce, requires that educational organizations be places of innovation. Leaders must possess the qualities and knowledge that allow them to bring purposeful direction to a school. Having a clear vision for the future, working hard with all members in the organization to achieve common goals, and placing the right supports in place according to recognized change theories provide a strong foundation for successful leadership in education.

Trauma-Informed Practices and Change Initiatives

The implementation of trauma-informed practices requires changes in both school policy and professional practice. Classroom management and behavior modification undergo major philosophical shifts in policy and mindset, requiring diligence in the change process. Legislation has necessitated changes in school policy. Federal and state policies recognize the importance of incorporating trauma-informed practices in schools. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) allows schools to have flexibility in developing policies to address childhood trauma (Hoover, 2019). In 2018, the United States House of Representatives passed H. Res. 443. This resolution acknowledged the importance of trauma-informed policies. Chapter 421 of the Public Acts of 2019 requires the Tennessee Department of Education to guide districts in the development of trauma-informed discipline practices (“Trauma-Informed Discipline Practices”,

n.d.). Through this initiative, positive discipline practices replace punitive discipline structures. Schools are encouraged to balance policies related to safety and security with trauma-responsive policies that focus on student mental health (Hoover, 2019).

Changes within Teacher Practice

School policy changes influence change within teacher practice. As school policies trend toward trauma-sensitive practices, teachers have aligned their classroom practices surrounding three themes. These themes include building relationships with students, creating environments that are culturally responsive and sensitive to the student population, and providing responses that allow students to successfully navigate through the struggles that accompany trauma (Crosby, 2015; Delale-O’Conner et al., 2017).

Relationships

Building relationships refers to the intentional practice of creating bonds with students that extend to all aspects of instruction (Delale-O’Conner et al., 2017). Through relationships, teachers invest emotionally in the experiences and struggle their students face (Dutro et al., 2014). Teachers invite and encourage students to share their stories, recognizing that these life experiences are important to students’ academic performance (Delale-O’Conner et al., 2017; Dutro et al., 2014).

By building relationships, teachers invite openness and vulnerability, understanding that the pain and struggles students have faced are often shared experiences within the class (Dutro et al., 2014). Sharing challenges and welcoming life experiences provide teachers with opportunities to build connections from students’ lives outside of school to the classroom. Student experience becomes a part of the classroom.

Relationships allow teachers to better understand their students, fostering genuine and

patient interactions (Brunzell et al., 2018). Teachers are better equipped to create interesting and engaging lessons because they know their students' strengths and interests (Brunzell et al., 2018, Delale-O'Conner et al., 2017). This creates a positive learning environment because students see how their lives are reflected in the classroom. Teachers are also encouraged through positive student interactions and feel more confident in their abilities to educate and impact the lives of students (Brunzell et al., 2018).

Culturally Responsive Environments

In order for teachers to create environments that are culturally sensitive to the needs of students outside of the school, teachers must understand the communities where the students live (Brunzell et al., 2018, Delale-O'Conner et al., 2017). The socio-economic landscape can provide valuable insight into the struggles and potential sources of trauma that students encounter (Delale-O'Conner et al., 2017). The recognition that the situations and experiences that students have outside the school have an impact on academics is important for teachers to consider, which becomes even more apparent through teacher-student relationships (Brunzell et al., 2018; Delale-O'Conner et al., 2017). Teachers can become more familiar with the landscape outside of the school by volunteering or partnering with different agencies and attending community events (Delale-O'Conner et al., 2017). Involvement in the community is a direct reflection of the importance of developing relationships. As teachers show an interest in the activities that students participate in outside of school, students feel more connected with and valued by their teachers. This response, in turn, strengthens the teacher-student bond in the classroom. As well, an increased focus on the community provides teachers with the realization that their work in the classroom is affecting the entire community. Although the teachers focus on academics, the evidence of the wider scope of the teacher's impact in the community is brought in view. This

fact not only encourages the teacher's sense of influence in the lives of the students but also provides students with positive experiences with teachers outside of the school environment.

Appropriate Responses

The third focus within the change of teacher practice is that of appropriate response. Building teacher capacity to have the resources and skills that will cultivate positive and healthy interactions with students is important within the implementation of trauma-informed care (Brunzell et al., 2018). Most teachers do not have the background nor training that is required to handle all of the situations that can arise when interacting with students exposed to trauma, but Brunzell et al. (2018) discuss the importance of teachers becoming "therapeutically informed." This idea means teachers have strategies to create the consistency and stability in the classroom that will allow all students to thrive. Teachers work to create spaces that promote healthy, positive interactions. They have the tools to de-escalate situations with yelling or isolating students. Teachers, through their relationships with students, are more likely to understand the context or misbehaviors and can provide appropriate solutions to overcome struggles and promote healing (Brunzell et al., 2018, Delale-O'Conner et al., 2017). The ability of the teacher to self-regulate serves as a living example for students who may not have adults in their lives to model appropriate responses (Brunzell et al., 2018, Delale-O'Conner et al., 2017; Dutro et al., 2014).

The development of these themes within classroom practice provides the foundation for successful implementation of trauma-informed practices. Teachers have the knowledge and confidence to create a classroom environment that caters to the needs of all students by strengthening relationships, creating culturally responsive environments, and providing appropriate responses (Delale-O'Conner et al., 2017).

Chapter Summary

As educators continue to feel the pressure of increased academic expectations alongside the social and emotional demands that arise from childhood trauma, increased support through trauma-informed practices becomes necessary for the wellbeing of everyone (Cole, 2014; Felitti et al., 1998). However, there are challenges in the implementation of these practices, which can impact the culture of the school. This study examined how the implementation of these practices influenced the culture of the school.

Chapter 3. Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the educators' perceptions of shifts within the culture of Jefferson Elementary School after the implementation of a trauma-informed approach. This study will provide a better understanding of the implementation of a trauma-informed approach and the perceived impact on school culture. Included in this chapter are the research questions, the researcher's role in the study, and a description of the participants and the school in which they teach. The methods of data collection and data analysis are detailed, as well as the overall research design.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the educators' perceptions of shifts within the culture of Jefferson Elementary School after the implementation of a trauma-informed approach. The researcher collected data regarding the perceptions of educators through interviews and documentation, and then analyzed it to answer the following research questions:

1. How do the educators perceive the school culture?
2. What are the educators' perceptions of the trauma-informed approach on student behavior?
3. What are the educators' perceptions of the trauma-informed approach on classroom instruction?
4. What are the educators' perceptions of changes in relationships after the implementation of the trauma-informed approach?
5. What are the educators' perceptions of changes in the school after the implementation of the trauma-informed approach?

Design of the Study

The researcher determined that this study would be appropriately examined through a qualitative approach. Qualitative study explores underlying causes to develop a deep understanding of a problem (Byrne, 2017). This study described the lived experience of teachers in one school by collecting non-numerical, rich and descriptive data through interviews and document analysis. Analysis of the data required searching for common themes and ideas to understand the experience of the educators.

Qualitative studies typically focus on one particular group or site (Byrne, 2017; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). This means the sample size is relatively small. In this study, the researcher focused on the lived experiences of educators at one elementary school. Their experiences may not be shared by, nor similar to, educators in other schools.

The qualitative method employed for this research was a case study. A case study allows the researcher to develop a deep understanding of the focus of the study through the collection and analysis of rich data (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). According to Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, case studies grew in popularity for educational research in the 1970s and 1980s. At that time, school leaders began to acknowledge the importance of capturing data as it occurred in the natural classroom environment. Researchers were able to provide an understanding of why and how certain classroom policies and procedures were successful (Mills et al., 2010). Case study research is also beneficial to developing good teacher practice. Research can show how policies and procedures work in different settings, allowing teachers and school leaders the opportunity to consider how the practice may apply to their particular situation.

Site Selection

Jefferson Elementary School is located in rural Tennessee. This school was chosen for this study because it is in the third year of a three-year process to becoming a trauma-informed school. There are 24 full-time certified teachers.

This school is a designated Title I school with 73.2% of students receiving free or reduced price lunch. Currently, there are 332 students enrolled. The student population is predominantly white, with Hispanic students representing the highest racial diversity.

Population and Sample

The researcher used purposeful sampling to identify participants. Purposeful sampling is a means to recreate the population of teachers in a way that fulfills the purpose of the study (Maxwell, 2009). For participation in the study, the researcher identified two criteria. The first criterion was that the teacher must be currently employed at the elementary school. The second criterion was that the teacher also had to have been employed at the elementary school at the time of the implementation of the trauma-informed approach. These selection requirements were used to gain a better understanding of how the implementation of the approach impacted the school's culture.

Of the currently employed teachers, the researcher identified 21 teachers that met both criteria for participation. They were currently employed at the elementary school and had been employed at the school since the inception of the trauma-informed approach.

Data Collection Strategies

The first step in the data collection process was to obtain permission to conduct the

study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from East Tennessee State University. Upon IRB approval, the Director of Schools for the district in which the school is located provided his permission and support. Permission to conduct the study was also obtained from the school principal. After permission had been granted, the identified teachers at the elementary school were contacted with a request to participate in the study. Each potential participant was provided with a description of the study and the purpose in conducting the study. The researcher requested a follow-up interview, and a list of willing participants was created.

Individual Interviews

The primary data collection method for this study was through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen in order to allow for a detailed response around specific topics that the study will explore (Gil et al., 2008). The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in the interview process while still providing organization around specific areas of interest (Gil et al., 2008; Petty et al., 2012).

Of the currently employed teachers, 21 teachers had been employed at the school since the inception of the trauma-informed approach. Through purposeful sampling, 12 classroom teachers were identified to complete individual interviews. The researcher personally contacted these teachers to participate in the study.

Interviews were conducted at a time and place convenient to the participant. Interviews were held in-person or through an online platform. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Focus Group Interviews

This study also collected data through focus group interviews. Focus groups are small groups of study participants (Kitzinger, 1995). The researcher interviewed these participants together in order to encourage dialogue and communication. This allowed the researcher to gain

a deeper understanding of the group's experience.

The researcher's role in the focus group was to ask questions that will support conversation and debate (Kitzinger, 1995). The intent of the focus group was to allow the participants to explain their perspectives and encourage discussion.

This study used three focus groups for the purpose of data collection. The first focus group was comprised of classroom teachers not selected for individual interviews. The second focus group was Related Arts teachers. The third focus group was made up of the School Principal and Counselor.

Document Review

Data were also collected through document analysis. Document analysis serves five specific functions in qualitative research (Bowen, 2009). Documents allow a researcher to provide historical context and background information. They can also serve as the catalyst for other questions, complimenting the interview process. Documents can supplement research. As well, documents allow a researcher to discover changes and developments that had occurred. Finally, document analysis can be used towards credibility and trustworthiness. Findings through document analysis can corroborate interview and observation data. Documents considered for this study were disciplinary referrals and school climate survey data.

Data Analysis Strategies

The researcher framed this study within two theories: Change Theory and Schein's Classification of Cultural Levels. Change theory was the lens through which the implementation of the trauma-informed practices are perceived. The analysis of the school culture was viewed through the application of Schein's Levels of Culture.

Data collected through participant and focus group interviews were transcribed and

coded. Coding allowed the researcher to better understand the data and make sense of it in a way that can be reported (Elliott, 2019). The researcher began with open coding, moving line-by-line through the interview transcripts (Holton, 2007). Codes were created for as many categories as necessary. The researcher continually created new categories, and saturated existing categories as the coding process unfolded. Patterns formed in the themes and categories. Following open coding, the researcher used selective coding to determine the most important categories (Mills et al., 2012). It was through selective coding that themes emerged to provide insight to understand the collected data.

Two forms of analysis were used for documents. First, the documents underwent a content analysis (Bowen, 2009). This analysis examined the documents for important information. Then, a thematic analysis was performed. The documents were carefully reviewed, coded, and examined for emerging themes. These themes were then compared to the interview transcriptions through the constant comparison method (Holton, 2007). According to Glaser and Strauss, constant comparison allows for categories to merge (Anfara et al., 2002).

Constant comparison of the interview transcript data and the document analysis led to the emergence of core categories (Holton, 2007). Core categories are the key themes that have developed after data analysis. Emergent themes from the interviews and document analysis were reported in Chapter 4, with the inclusion of specific quotes from the interviews that supported the themes.

Triangulation occurred through the analysis of multiple sources of data (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2014). This study used data from individual interviews, focus group interviews, and document analysis. If the analysis of the different sources contradicted itself, the data would suggest that further investigation must occur (Bowen, 2009). If the analysis of the

sources shared similar findings, more confidence can be given to the results.

Assessment of Quality and Rigor

Anfara et al. (2002) detail 4 criteria for assessing the quality and rigor of qualitative research. These include: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Strict standards for quality and rigor ensure that the researcher and stakeholders can be confident that the results are reliable and valuable. The researcher conducted all data collection and analysis. It is therefore essential to establish credibility and trustworthiness in the research methods and findings.

Anfara et al. (2002) cite Creswell's eight verification procedures to protect the validity and trustworthiness of research: "(a) prolonged engagement and persistent observation, (b) triangulation, (c) peer review or debriefing, (d) negative case analysis, (e) clarifying researcher bias, (f) member checks, (g) thick description, and (h) external audits" (p. 30). It is further advised that at least two verification procedures are addressed in a qualitative research study.

This case study will ensure trustworthiness and credibility through triangulation and member checks. Member checks will be performed for all interview participants. Member checks allow participants to review the information they have provided (Frey, 2018). Participants will be provided the transcripts of their interviews to assess the interpretation, review accuracy, and include any clarifying information that would aid in the analysis of the data. Furthermore, triangulation will occur through the analysis of multiple sources of data (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2014). Triangulation will strengthen the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the study.

Ethical Considerations

According to Mills et al. (2010), anonymity and confidentiality are important concepts tied to case study research. Anonymity refers to the protection of any information that would identify individual or locations. Confidentiality is the protection of data collected during research. This includes oral and written data.

Strict care was taken to protect the identity of the participants and the location of the elementary school. Pseudonyms were given to the participants and the school. Any identifying information about the school or its location has been omitted. The researcher worked carefully to protect the identity of the participants. Pseudonyms allowed the teachers to remain anonymous. With respect to confidentiality, all recorded data and transcripts were kept on the researcher's password-protected computer.

The research was conducted according to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) permission and protocol. Participants were fully informed of the purpose of the study, and any assessment of risk was considered for each participant. Participation in this study was completely voluntary.

Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative study, the researcher's role is that of an interpreter (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). The researcher uses multiple sources of information to collect detailed and thorough data (Creswell et al., 2007). After analysis of the data, the researcher interprets meaning through a focus on key issues and themes.

Summary

This study was conducted to examine the educators' perceptions of shifts within the school culture of Jefferson Elementary School after the implementation of a trauma-informed approach. This chapter provided an explanation for the qualitative case study method used for this study. The researcher conducted and recorded individual teacher interviews, focus group interviews, and analyzed documents to provide an in-depth understanding of the case being studied.

Chapter 4. Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the educators' perceptions of shifts within the culture of Jefferson Elementary School after the implementation of a trauma-informed approach. The researcher collected data regarding the perceptions of educators through interviews and documents, and then analyzed it to answer the following research questions:

1. How do the educators perceive the school culture?
2. What are the educators' perceptions of the trauma-informed approach on student behavior?
3. What are the educators' perceptions of the trauma-informed approach on classroom instruction?
4. What are the educators' perceptions of changes in relationships after the implementation of the trauma-informed approach?
5. What are the educators' perceptions of changes in the school after the implementation of the trauma-informed approach?

Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews with individual teachers. Three focus groups were also used for purposes of data collection. The first focus group was comprised of classroom teachers not selected for individual interviews. The second focus group was Related Arts teachers. The third focus group was made up of the School Principal and Counselor. The researcher interviewed these participants together in order to encourage dialogue and communication. This allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the group's experience.

Data were also collected through document analysis. Documents considered for this study were disciplinary referrals and school climate survey data.

Interviews were audio recorded. Transcripts of interviews were provided to all participants to ensure accuracy. Participants were allowed to provide any additional information they would like to include. Transcripts were reviewed, coded, and examined for emerging themes.

Table 1 represents how the interview questions addressed each research question. The numbered interview question in the interview question column corresponds to the research question it addressed.

Table 1

Research Question and Interview Question Matrix

Research Question	Interview Question
How do the educators perceive the school culture?	2A, 3B
What are the educators' perceptions of the trauma-informed approach on student behavior?	3A, 4B
What are the educators' perceptions of the trauma-informed approach on classroom instruction?	4A, 5B
What are the educators' perceptions of changes in relationships after the implementation of the trauma-informed approach?	5A, 6B
What are the educators' perceptions of changes in the school after the implementation of the trauma-informed approach?	6A, 7A, 7B, 8B

Participants

Individual Interviews

Of the currently employed teachers, 21 teachers had been employed at the school since

the inception of the trauma-informed approach. Through purposeful sampling, 10 classroom teachers were identified to complete individual interviews. Table 2 provides a summary of the demographic information pertaining to the classroom teachers.

Table 2

Interview Participants

Name	Gender	Education	Years of Experience	Grade Level
Teacher 1	F	Bachelors	28	1
Teacher 2	F	Masters	27	1
Teacher 3	F	Masters	15	5
Teacher 4	F	Bachelors	7	5
Teacher 5	F	Masters	10	SPED K-4
Teacher 6	F	Bachelors	12	K
Teacher 7	M	Masters	24	SPED 3-5
Teacher 8	F	Bachelors	23	RTI K-5
Teacher 9	F	Masters	14	Pre-K
Teacher 10	F	Bachelors	8	2

Focus Groups

Three focus groups were also interviewed. The intent of the focus groups was to allow the participants to explain their perspectives and encourage discussion. The first focus group was comprised of two classroom teachers. Table 3 provides a summary of the demographic information pertaining to the Classroom Teacher Focus Group participants.

Table 3*Classroom Teacher Focus Group*

Name	Gender	Education	Years of Experience	Grade Level
Teacher 11	F	Bachelors	16	K
Teacher 12	F	Bachelors	18	K

The second focus group was comprised of two Related Arts teachers. Table 4 provides a summary of the demographic information pertaining to the Related Arts focus group participants.

Table 4*Related Arts Teacher Focus Group*

Name	Gender	Education	Years of Experience	Grade Level
Teacher 13	F	Bachelors	28	PE K-5
Teacher 14	F	Masters	31	Librarian

The third focus group was comprised of the school principal and school counselor. Table 5 provides a summary of the demographic information pertaining to this focus group.

Table 5*Principal and School Counselor Focus Group*

Name	Gender	Education	Years of Experience	Role
Administrator 1	M	Education Specialist	20	Principal
Counselor 1	F	Bachelors	32	Counselor

Interview Results

Data collected through participant and focus group interviews were transcribed and coded. The researcher began with open coding, moving line-by-line through the interview transcripts (Holton, 2007). Codes were created for as many categories as necessary. The researcher continually created new categories, and saturated existing categories as the coding process unfolded. Patterns formed in the themes and categories. Following open coding, the researcher used selective coding to determine the most important categories (Mills et al., 2012). It was through selective coding that themes emerged to provide insight to understand the collected data. Credibility of this research is supported by triangulation of teacher interview responses, focus group interview responses, and document analysis.

The researcher determined the themes that emerged in response of Research Question 1 are: increased empathy towards students and an increased focus on building relationships. The themes that emerged in response of Research Question 2 are: a focus on positive behaviors, an increased awareness of replacement skills, and a focus on individualized approaches to discipline. A focus on developing relationships and being consistent with expectations are the themes that emerged in response of Research Question 3. The themes that emerged in response of Research Question 4 are: increased collaboration, increased accountability with expectations, and embracing students as individuals. The themes that emerged in response of Research Question 5 are: increased comfort with classroom management strategies, an increased focus on building relationships, and being consistent with expectations. The results of this study are organized by the research questions that guided this study.

Research Question 1

How do the educators perceive the school culture?

The themes that emerged when educators were asked their perceptions of the school culture after the implementation of the trauma-informed practices were: increased empathy and increased focus on building relationships.

Increased Empathy Towards Students

Participants indicated that, after implementation of the trauma-informed approach, interactions within the school have shown more empathy for students' backgrounds and situations.

Teacher 1 said:

I have to step back and weigh-in and consider before I ever speak to a student that's having emotional issues. I have to stop and just peel back those layers. It used to be, it was just an automatic punishment, no matter what they did. Since trauma-informed has come in, you look at all those layers before and think about what you want to say when there's an episode going on. I've seen it move away from that old-school discipline into a thoughtful type of discipline. You are weighing in the kids' situations a whole lot more than you used to.

Teacher 5 said:

There's more approaching children's needs with understanding what they may be going through at home. And I've seen it evolve from principals who did use corporal punishment, to where we are now. We try to meet needs on the front end and try to use preventative behavior approaches. I think it's just more about meeting students' needs. In previous years, with some of the previous administrations we've had at the school, I'm sure that children did not feel that they could approach the school leadership with problems. Now they feel that they can.

Teacher 14 revealed:

I feel like I have been better trained to look at new situations in a different light. Try to understand where the child is coming from instead of just looking at it as bad behavior.

Trying to understand why the child is acting this way.

Teacher 6 also supported this theme of empathy:

There is more of a “stopping to consider backgrounds,” things that the children may have gone through and how that has affected them. Just becoming more aware of what they are dealing with.

Teacher 9 said:

It’s more warm. I guess you’d say welcoming, understanding. The kids are more open with the things they are dealing with, that cause the behaviors that we’re trying to deal with.

Increased Focus on Building Relationships

Participants indicated that there had been an increased focus on building relationships.

Teacher 12 said:

We’re a lot more focused on building relationships with the children. Not that we necessarily weren’t in the past, but I think we make a bigger point to do it now.

Teacher 13, a participant in the Related Arts Focus Group, revealed a new role for the Related Art’s teachers that directly impacted relationship development:

For the Related Arts teachers there has been a big change because we also do lunch duties. We’ve been able to build relationships with students.

Teacher 14, also a participant in the Related Arts Focus Group, supported this concept of relationship development:

I think we all have a better relationship with the children as far as just talking to them on a day-in day-out basis, with being able to do lunch duty and things like that.

Research Question 2

What are the educators' perceptions of the trauma-informed approach on student behavior?

Each participant was asked their perceptions of the trauma-informed approach on student behavior. Teachers discussed a focus on positive behaviors, an increased awareness of replacement skills, and a focus on individualized approaches to discipline.

Focus on Positive Behaviors

Participants indicated an increased focus on positive behaviors.

Teacher 7 said:

What I notice, and what I think has changed the most, is we've went from focusing on negative behaviors to focusing more on positive behaviors, trying to turn negatives into positives.

Teacher 5 reiterated the importance of positive behaviors by stating her focus on positive behavior strategies. This was discussed by Teacher 3 as well:

I have focused a lot more on positive behavior. It has really helped me focus on bringing out the positive things, and rewarding the positive things, and not focusing so much on the negative. I still catch myself doing that, that's easy to do, but a big part of this program is to focus on what they are doing well, and rewarding that. Not ignoring the negative things but trying more to focus on the positive things. That's what I've been trying to do a lot, have a better attitude about things in general. Trying to be more positive, trying to find different ways to motivate them.

Increased Awareness of Replacement Skills

The use of replacement skills was an important change for many of the participants.

Administrator 1 said:

I don't think a lot of the teachers, until they realize the trauma-informed situation and how students are coming in with these different issues, what they are really dealing with in the classroom. I have had them tell me how it's helped them in the classroom, not only working with these kids on an individual level instead of a group level like we've done before, but also to have tools to work with them.

Teacher 13 said:

Originally I used the 3-strike rule. It worked, and it would still work. However it is different, because now we're teaching the kids replacement skills. In PE those replacement skills could be: talk it out, walk away, or play rock-paper-scissors, or maybe I need to apologize. Instead of before where I was using, "Let's take a quick time-out. Let's get our behavior back in control and then you can rejoin." Here, with the calm-down corner, we are trying to teach replacement skills for them.

Teacher 2 revealed:

I have a calm-down corner in the room where you try to teach them some strategies, "Let's calm down." "Let's count down." We have some little techniques like that.

Teacher 10 also referenced the idea of the calm-down corner as a replacement skill:

If kids feel like that they may blow up, not really have a good grip on their emotions, and they feel like they need to exclude themselves, I'll let them go back there in the calm-down corner. I usually have a timer. They can set it for 5 minutes. Then after that, they

can also take a bathroom break to stretch their legs for a second. They have that calm down. I think it's very beneficial as far as getting control of their emotions.

Counselor 1 described a situation where a male student had slapped a female student in the cafeteria. After finding out this student had witnessed domestic violence at home, his replacement skill was education on domestic violence. His punishment was to fold pamphlets for a local domestic violence shelter. The Counselor revealed:

I think he folded a hundred every day for those two weeks he folded pamphlets. That's something that's going to make an impression. It's going to be ingrained; he's going to think about that. We could have just sent him home for two or three days. There wouldn't have been a replacement skill, and there wouldn't have been a restorative practice. Nothing would have been learned from that.

The Counselor also added:

We do solution cards, and we just give them examples of other things you can do besides fight, or have an argument or disagreement. Their favorite is rock-paper-scissors to decide. That's a lifelong skill to keep.

Focus on Individualized Approaches to Discipline

Participants discussed a focus on individualized approaches to discipline.

Teacher 7 said:

I've always tried to relate and put myself in my students' shoes. It just heightened that awareness to try to look at that individual student and their circumstances. Try to find the root of the behaviors or try to find what will work as far as discipline or rewards. That is what I have emphasized and focused on.

Teacher 4 said:

It has made me more thoughtful. I try not to just react to the momentary behavior as much. I try to be more thoughtful to what else might be going on.

Teacher 9 further supported this theme of individualized approaches to discipline:

We do a lot more conversations about things instead of things like timeout. We do have to sit and talk sometimes, but it's not just "sit down!" It's more of a conversation.

Teacher 11, of the Classroom Teacher Focus Group, added:

When you have a relationship with the student, we tried to look into why they are behaving the way that they are. If there is a reason, or they have just been a stinker that day.

Adding to this statement, Teacher 12 of the Classroom Teacher Focus Group said:

Being mindful when they do do something, to look at their background. Handle the situation best for them.

Research Question 3

What are the educators' perceptions of the trauma-informed approach on classroom instruction?

The participants were asked their perception of the trauma-informed approach on classroom instruction. While eight of the individual interviews and one of the focus group interviews did not report any changes to classroom instruction, two themes emerged within the discussion. These themes were: a focus on developing relationships and increased consistency of expectations.

Increased Awareness of Individual Student Needs

Counselor 1 said:

We have classroom meetings where the teachers meet. They have a question of the day, and there's open discussion about it. I have seen a change in just having students in their

class, to really knowing the students in their class. They will say, “Will you talk to him? Mom and dad had a fight last night and he was telling me about it.” Those are things that wouldn’t have been shared before. That’s the most important thing about being trauma-informed is having those relationships

Counselor 1 further added:

I think that it has really been...being fair and equal are not the same thing. It’s not from a sarcastic point of view, it’s from an empathetic point of view. What you need right now is not what they need. I’m going to take care of him right now, and when you need something different, I’m going to take care of you too.

Teacher 14 revealed:

I think maybe just a little more aware of what children you’re putting together or putting into groups. I was much more aware of who could get along with who, and those kinds of things. I think I probably put more thought into what students I’m putting with what students.

Teacher 4 further supported this theme:

I am more thoughtful about how to approach topics, and how to approach answers, and students’ effort and homework. All kinds of things like that.

Teacher 6 added:

I was mindful. With assignments, these kids are going to have help at home. These are the kids that aren’t. So how can you level that playing field? What can you do for them? Which is really what the trauma-informed makes you think about.

Administrator 1 revealed:

I am not wanting to say it’s a complete and total mindset shift, but it’s been a mindset

change that I can see in the staff here. They realize that the way we used to do things is not the most appropriate way to handle everything, and that every child has a different situation that requires a different response.

Being Consistent with Expectations

Teacher 3 said:

We've implemented school-wide, we all use the same kind of rules and school-wide discipline policy. The Related Arts teachers use it. It's posted everywhere in the hallway. The kids know it. We drill that in every year in the beginning. We talked about it in our classroom. The Related Arts teachers talk about it. It's very structured. It's very consistent. Everybody knows. You know what our expectations are, and what the consequences are, and we're pretty consistent that way.

Teacher 9 further supported this theme:

We do a couple of weeks at the beginning of the year that's just routines and procedures.

Administrator 1 said:

The trauma-informed approach has allowed us to include behavior as one of our instructional approaches of our school. You learn how to behave appropriately. Before we started this, every single day, from people who are great employees, great staff members, great teachers, you would hear them say things like, "they know better than that." Now we don't hear that because I think we've ingrained in them that no, a kid is not born knowing how to behave. It's taught to them.

Research Question 4

What are the educators' perceptions of changes in relationships after the implementation of the trauma-informed approach?

The participants were asked how they perceived changes in relationships after the implementation of the trauma-informed approach. Teachers discussed an increase in collaboration, increased accountability with expectations, and embracing students as individuals.

Increased Collaboration

Teacher 1 said:

We're all in the same boat. We are all more willing to, instead of labeling a kid "a discipline issue, you're going to have trouble," we're willing to share on that specific case. "This is what we did this year, and this is what we've done last year. Try to continue to try these things, and there's something that you might want to add." As these kids go from grade to grade, we have a package for each one of them. We all just work hand-in-hand together. We are able to communicate in a practical way.

Teacher 10 said:

There are times when you have an issue in the classroom, and you can go to a fellow peer and say, "You know, I'm having an issue with a student, he or she's doing this. Do you have any advice or something that I could possibly try?"

Teacher 12 stated:

We help each other out, no matter the grade of the kid. They can send us any kid in the school with a note that says "Hey, I need a minute to get myself back together." We give him a job, or we talk to him for a minute, and then send them back. Hopefully they have regained their composure. It helps the teacher out and the kid. I think we work well together as a school to do stuff like that, help each other out.

Teacher 6 shared:

There is more of an interaction with other teachers sharing. If we knew, "ok this person

came in this morning, they are having a really tough day. I've already pulled them up and talked to them. Know this is what is going on with them." There was an increase in that kind of communication among us as the teachers.

Teacher 9 added:

The teachers are more willing to help each other. We now have on our Google Chat, a group chat, the time-out room. If you are feeling overwhelmed, or even if you just need a bathroom break, you can go to the group chat and just put "I need five minutes, I need a bathroom break." Somebody will come on and say, "I'm on my way!" You go and relieve each other.

Teacher 1 said:

I am more inclined to ask for help because there are people in this building that have far more training than I do, especially with these severe kids.

Teacher 13 discussed:

We have at our fingertips resources that truly help us. We have our principal, vice principal, and our school counselor. They are a great help. We know that they're there to help us and to collaborate with us, to join in with us.

Increased Accountability with Expectations

Teacher 3 said:

It's really made us hold each other accountable because we know that we're expected to put in these practices, we're expected to model this. We have to follow through with whatever it is we say we're going to do. We can't just say, "Okay, you're going to have this discipline" and then not follow through with it. We have to hold each other accountable. We have to want to keep each other on the same track.

Teacher 2 further added:

You do build your relationships with your students in the class because you're giving them clear expectations. These are your consequences. These are going to be your rewards. Also, throughout the school, the school has come together. All the leadership has to be on the same page with all of the expectations across the school. We have rules throughout the school that are reminders of how to act in the classroom, in the hallway, in the cafeteria, in the bathroom. Everybody's all on the same page.

Embracing Students as Individuals

Teacher 7 said:

It's opened my eyes to look at each student as an individual even more, and then try to relate. You know, "what are they going through?" or their situation. I've gotten to know more students, know their names. Try to build relationships.

Teacher 4 said:

I think it has motivated me to get to know the students better. And it's always hard with time constraints, and things like that, and focus on curriculum and so much to cram in. But I think it's motivated me, because there's so much focus on what's underneath the surface. It's really helped me realize it's really important to take the time to get to know them better.

Teacher 14 stated:

I think we have a better relationship with the kids as far as trying to understand them and getting to know them better on a personal basis.

Teacher 5 further supported this theme:

Students are more open to conversations with teachers, principals, and assistant

principals. I think that they're more likely to go to a guidance counselor and talk about problems when they are experiencing a need at home.

Teacher 6 added:

The kids start to realize that you're seeing them more as people instead of just being anonymous in the classroom and feeling like they just blend in and that they don't matter. When you are singling them out and talking to them, they start to realize "Hey, they're seeing as somebody, not just a face in the room."

Research Question 5

What are the educators' perceptions of changes in the school after the implementation of the trauma-informed approach?

The participants were asked to discuss their perceptions of changes in the school after the implementation of the trauma-informed approach. The themes that emerged from this discussion were: increased comfort with classroom management strategies, increased consistency with expectation, and an increased focus on building relationships.

Increased Comfort with Classroom Management Strategies

Teacher 7 said:

I think there is more discipline, or more behavioral instances, that are being handled with individual teachers in the classroom more so than referrals to the office. I think that there's more discipline being implemented and rewards on the classroom level.

Teacher 2 said:

We've implemented a lot of great positive things. We have shout-outs every day. At the end of the day, we have a special table, where they get to sit at the table for positive reinforcement. There's a lot of great things like that.

Administrator 1 stated:

The teachers have cool-down stations in their rooms. They have sensory tools. They have actual tools in their hands. People are more comfortable working with those students than they ever were before. We've actually expanded their toolbox. When our toolbox gets bigger, we feel more comfortable with it.

Counselor 1 also supported this theme:

I have certain outcomes that my grant has to meet in order for funding to continue from one year to the next. And my referrals for individual students dropped, I have to see 7% of the population. We were having a discussion out in the office and I said, "I'm worried I'm not gonna make my outcome about seeing 7% of the population." And I found out what's going on. A teacher said, "The reason why you're not getting the referrals is because you've given us the tools to be able to handle that on our own without having to come to you so often." So we went from getting everything to doing a true pyramid model of the multi-tiered system that we use with the state of Tennessee. We're actually seeing when we get a referral now, it is a tier two, or tier three referral.

Being Consistent with Expectations

Teacher 2 said:

It has been very positive where all the teachers are doing the same thing consistently. Reminding them of the rules consistently. We go through the rules every 9-weeks, consistently. "What are the classroom rules, the hall, the bathroom, the cafeteria?"

Teacher 7 said:

The Related Arts team is doing a really good job of going over the school expectations. There are five or six areas, classroom being one of those expectations. And those

expectations, the students are aware of those. There are charts. I have one in my classroom. There's charts for the classroom expectations. There's one in the cafeteria for the cafeteria expectations. Students are more informed of what is expected of them as far as behavior.

Teacher 1 also supported this theme:

We have a behavior management program now. That's something that's consistent every year. We can remind them of the rules, how they affect the whole classroom, how they affect the child individually- all the good things that come with the expectation, that never used to be.

Teacher 3 stated:

Kids feel safe and accepting being consistent throughout the building. It's a big deal for everybody. It just really has helped a lot of things go a lot smoother. The parents know what to expect year to year, and I think that consistency is a big deal.

Teacher 3 also discussed this theme:

I think the kids feel appreciated. I think they feel a lot more understood. I think they appreciate the consistency. I think they appreciate the stability. So many of them do not get that, and they come here and try to control their environment because the environment at home is out of control. I think knowing that they have somewhere to go, that's going to be the same day-in and day-out is a safety net for them. It's really reassured them to know that, they are expected to do what they are supposed to do, but its also safe.

Increased Focus on Building Relationships

Teacher 4 said:

In my classroom, I think the biggest success has been implementing the morning meetings, which we did as part of our trauma-informed push last year. It's a time that is set aside that the academics can't crawl into and take over. It's just set aside for building relationships. I think that has really made a big different.

Teacher 12 said:

I think we have better relationships with our kids in the classroom, and better relationships with the other teachers as far as to help them out and rely on each other. We are struggling with the amount of help we have. We help each other out.

Teacher 14 stated:

Building relationships has definitely been a positive. It's like everyone is on board. We know the children that need that extra help, and that extra pat on the back. We are all more aware. When we see a child that looks upset, or there is definitely something going on or something is wrong, I think we're picking up on it quicker. I think we have definitely built better relationships with the kids themselves.

Document Analysis

The researcher used school climate survey information and discipline referral data to support the analysis of the individual interview and focus group interviews.

Preliminary results from the school climate survey for the 2020-2021 school year were examined. The school climate survey report is provided by the TN Department of Education. Students and parents take the survey, providing responses to statements about supportive relationships in the school, school connectedness, bullying, and safety. Administrators receive a report with a mean score ranging from 1-5, as there are five possible responses to each question

(strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree). The closer the mean score is to 5, the better. For questions about how often something happens, there is a percentage score. A high percentage indicates a lower score, while a lower percentage indicates a high score. An example of this would be a questions related to bullying on the student survey. This preliminary report, however, has provided all responses as percentages; the mean score has not yet been calculated.

Several responses stood out in relationship to this research study. When students were asked about supportive relationships with teachers, 78.1% strongly agreed and 11.3% agreed that their teacher cared about them. When asked if their teacher would help them if they were feeling sad or angry, 65% of students strongly agreed and 16.2% agreed. In addition, 59.6% of students strongly agreed and 19.3% agreed that there was at least one teacher in the school that they could go to if they felt unsafe. These responses support the findings from the Research Questions 1, 4, and 5. The findings from these research questions emphasized a focus on building relationships and being aware of individual student needs. These are reflected in the students' responses.

When asked about supportive discipline, 61.3% of students strongly agreed and 17.5% of students agreed that adults made rules that were fair, and over 80% of students said adults let everyone know what the rules were ahead of time. Furthermore, 71.5% of students strongly agreed and 13.7% of students agreed that adults helped students learn from their mistakes. Over 60% of students also responded that everyone is treated fairly if they break a rule. These responses support the findings from Research Questions 3, 4, and 5. Students have indicated that there are consistent rules that all students are expected to follow. These rules are known, and students understand that the rules apply to everyone.

Other documents pertinent to this study were discipline referrals. In the year before the

implementation of trauma-informed practices, there were 132 office disciplinary referrals (ODR) and 9 instances of out-of-school suspension (OSS). The year following implementation, the number of ODR decreased to 87 and OSS instances numbered 6. Virtual learning and extended absences due to COVID have prevented a direct comparison of numbers for the past two years. Although this year's numbers should not be directly compared to the prior years' numbers due to one third of the school year spent in virtual learning, for the time students were in the building there were 28 ODR and 6 OSS instances.

These referral numbers in the years following implementation of the trauma-informed practices support Research Questions 2 and 5. Teachers are not using traditional punitive discipline measures as shown in the decreasing numbers of ODR. These numbers support the theme that teachers have shifted towards a new focus on positive behaviors. Also, this decrease in ODR reinforces that teachers have become comfortable with classroom management strategies. Teachers have the tools and resources that allow them to handle more student discipline at the classroom level.

Summary

Chapter 4 includes the findings of this study. The central focus of this study was to develop an understanding of the educator's perceptions of shifts in the school culture after implementation of a trauma-informed approach. The researcher collected data through semi-structured interviews with individual teachers, focus group interviews, and document analysis. Interviews were audio recorded. Transcripts of interviews were provided to all participants to ensure accuracy. Participants were allowed to provide any additional information they would like to include. Transcripts were reviewed, coded, and examined for emerging themes. Pertinent

documents were carefully reviewed, coded, and examined for emerging themes. Emergent themes from the interviews and document analysis were reported in this chapter, with the inclusion of specific quotes from the interviews that supported the themes. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5. Summary

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the educators' perceptions of shifts within the culture of Jefferson Elementary School after the implementation of a trauma-informed approach. The central question that guided this study was: What are the educator's perceptions of changes to the school culture after implementation of a trauma-informed approach? The following research questions were used to guide the examination of educators' perceptions of the changes:

1. How do the educators perceive the school culture?
2. What are the educators' perceptions of the trauma-informed approach on student behavior?
3. What are the educators' perceptions of the trauma-informed approach on classroom instruction?
4. What are the educators' perceptions of changes in relationships after the implementation of the trauma-informed approach?
5. What are the educators' perceptions of changes in the school after the implementation of the trauma-informed approach?

The qualitative method employed for this research was a case study. A case study allowed the researcher to develop a deep understanding of the focus of the study through the collection and analysis of rich data (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013).

Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews with individual teachers. This study used three focus groups for the purpose of data collection. The first focus group was comprised of classroom teachers not selected for individual interviews. The second focus group was Related Arts teachers. The third focus group was made up of the School

Principal and Counselor. The researcher interviewed these participants together in order to encourage dialogue and communication. This allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the group's experience.

Data was also collected through document analysis. Documents considered for this study were disciplinary referrals and school climate survey data.

Findings of the interviews and document analysis are reported in Chapter 4. Chapter 1 presented an introduction to the topic. Chapter 2 presented a review of the literature related to this topic, and Chapter 3 detailed the research methodology.

Discussion

Research Question 1 Discussion

How do the educators perceive the school culture?

The participants' responses indicated that the school culture had been perceived as more empathetic, with an increased focus on building relationships. The results of this study align with the supporting research found within the literature review. School culture benefits from the implementation of trauma-informed practices. Through analysis of the individual interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, and document analysis, the participants described their experiences. When collectively analyzed, these experiences provided a thorough understanding of the positive changes to the school culture brought by the implementation of trauma-informed practices.

One result from this study is that relationships benefit from the implementation of trauma-informed practices. There is an intentionality to build caring, thoughtful, and empathetic relationships. This finding aligns with research from Brunzell et al. (2018) and Delale-O'Conner

et al. (2017). Relationships allow teachers to better understand their students, fostering genuine and patient interactions (Brunzell et al., 2018). Teachers are better equipped to create interesting and engaging lessons because they know their students' strengths and interests (Brunzell et al., 2018, Delale-O'Conner et al., 2017). This creates a positive learning environment because students see how their lives are reflected in the classroom. Teachers are also encouraged through positive student interactions and feel more confident in their abilities to educate and impact the lives of students (Brunzell et al., 2018).

Further evidence was provided by a participant of this study who described how relationships benefited from the implementation of trauma-informed practices:

We're a lot more focused on building relationships with the children. Not that we necessarily weren't in the past, but I think we make a bigger point to do it now.

Another participant further described the importance of relationships:

I have to step back and weigh-in and consider before I ever speak to a student that's having emotional issues. I have to stop and just peel back those layers. It used to be, it was just an automatic punishment, no matter what they did. Since trauma-informed has come in, you look at all those layers before and think about what you want to say when there's an episode going on. I've seen it move away from that old-school discipline into a thoughtful type of discipline. You are weighing in the kids' situations a whole lot more than you used to.

Research Question 2 Discussion

What are the educators' perceptions of the trauma-informed approach on student behavior?

The findings from the analysis of the data indicated that the teachers perceived the trauma-informed approach had affected student behavior by increasing the focus to positive student behaviors, with awareness on replacement skills and individual approaches to discipline. This finding is in direct support of the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework detailed in the literature review. Tennessee has adopted a version of the PBIS framework that uses positive, non-punitive methods to encourage appropriate behavior (Tennessee Behavior Supports Project, 2020). This framework is Response to Instruction and Intervention- Behavior (RTI²-B). RTI²-B is a multitier system geared towards teaching every child prosocial behavior while providing the necessary support to reach all children. Prosocial behavior skills give students the foundation for building relationships and interacting well with others (Tennessee Behavior Supports Project, 2020). This program, through collaboration with all school-stakeholders, believes every student can be taught prosocial behavior skills.

Teachers in this study indicated that Tier I and Tier II interventions within the RTI²-B framework had been incredibly successful. One particular beneficial intervention mentioned multiple times was the use of a calm-down corner. Students could sit in the calm-down corner when feeling overwhelmed or over-stimulated.

One teacher stated:

I have 2nd grade. This was starting to be implemented when they were in Kindergarten. They may bring things and tools that they could do to help them calm down or balance their emotions. You know we all have calm down corners here in our school. And it's something they are used to. At the beginning of the year they would say, "Where's your calm down corner just in case I need it?" And you're like, "Oh yeah, they understand what that's for!"

The importance of Tier II interventions were mentioned by several study participants. In particular, teachers referenced the Check-In/Check-Out program as a building block towards positive behavior reinforcement and relationship building.

One participant said:

The kids have a person to go to that was a check-in/check-out partner. They had to fill out a paper. They had to take it with them to every teacher, every day, to see how they did. They had to check-in with that person in the morning, and check-out with that person in the afternoon. That one person was somebody that they knew well, like a teacher they had before. I think that worked really well, because they knew if they were going through something or if they were having an issue. They knew that was that one person they could go to.

The success of this intervention was further praised by another teacher:

We pinpointed kids who were having challenging behaviors in the classroom. Many of those students were assigned a mentor teacher, and they did a check-in/check-out time with that teacher. They have developed special relationships with their mentor teachers, and even if they don't check-in and check-out every single day now, they still have that relationship with that one person in the school. And if they're having a hard time, they can go talk to that person.

Remarks from study participants during the individual interviews and focus groups indicated that Tier III behaviors remained a challenge.

One participant said:

There are a lot of great things like check-in/check-out. The one thing that can be a

challenge are those severe behaviors, just trying to address those. There's not a lot. There might be one child per grade level. But if they dominate your classroom, that's hard. Just like the one this week that had to be removed from my room. As soon as he was brought back into the room, after being out an hour, when the Principal left he immediately started.

Another teacher expressed a similar frustration:

I feel like this works for our common kids that have behavior issues. For our more severe cases, if they've been diagnosed with something or have some serious issues that are underlying at home, these strategies typically don't really (from my experience, somebody might have different experiences, but for me when I have my serious cases) it just doesn't work.

The Administrator also discussed the challenges of severe behaviors:

There are still a handful of children here that, as we said, are literally standing at the top of the pyramid. We don't know exactly what to do with those students. We've not found out their exact trigger or how to help. You know, 95-99% of our children here, we're flowing. Everything is going good. We have help in place that they know where to go. But there are still those few kids at the very top of the pyramid that, as a principal, it hurts me because we are not able to help them as much as we possibly can.

Research Question 3 Discussion

What are the educators' perceptions of the trauma-informed approach on classroom instruction?

Most participant responses indicated that the trauma-informed approach did not have an effect on classroom instruction. Based on findings within the literature review, the notion that

trauma-informed approaches did not influence classroom instruction is supported. Social-emotional learning programs, like trauma-informed approaches, do not focus on academic remediation (Durlak et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2018). Social-emotional learning approaches have revealed significant positive effects on student behavior and conduct, allowing students to develop the character attributes that reinforce determination and resolve. These characteristics help students face challenges both in the classroom and in their personal lives (Elias et al., 2014).

Although teachers did not perceive a direct link between trauma-informed practices and their instructional practices, several teachers mentioned direct instruction of behavior expectations. Prior research indicated the importance of focusing on behavioral practices as a means to create a supportive and nurturing foundation for student success (George, 2018).

The school counselor, when discussing changes to classroom instruction, said:

As part of the instructional environment at the school, we've taught everyone at this school that part of the instructional component of the school day is not just math, science, and social studies. It's behavior. It's been a huge shift that we've had in teaching behavior and how to behave. We have videos that we have created with student council. We spend time every nine-weeks reintroducing the behaviors, positive behaviors we want to reinforce with them.

She continued by stating:

When you look at the instructional umbrella, the trauma-informed approach has allowed us to include behavior as one of our instructional approaches. You learn how to behave appropriately.

Direct instruction of behavioral expectations encouraged consistency. The Principal added this observation:

Instructionally-wise with data, how we would address and look at changes, there are improvements. I can see overall classroom environment improving. Lost instructional time has been less, and because of this, that helps.

A review of the literature has shown schools that do not have supportive learning environments will struggle to meet the needs of children exposed to trauma (Harper & Temkin, 2019). Positive school culture is a critical component of supportive learning environments. Students receive the support and services they need to lessen the effects of trauma. There are opportunities for students to pursue their interests and showcase their strengths (Pawlo et al., 2019). Student struggles are met with support and understanding, rather than harsh punishments (Harper & Temkin, 2019). This supports the themes that emerged from this research question. Teachers have an increased awareness of individual student needs and are more consistent with behavioral expectations.

Research Question 4 Discussion

What are the educators' perceptions of changes in relationships after the implementation of the trauma-informed approach?

Prior research has shown that a threat to the social environment, directly impacting school culture, is teacher isolation (Roby, 2011). In a study by Roby (2011), school leaders ranked factors that impact school culture. The two highest concerns for school culture were directly related to the social environment. The first concern was teacher isolation. A study by Hongboontri (2014) reiterated this concern, who found teacher isolation to be a barrier towards a

collaborative culture. Teacher isolation prevents constructive feedback and encouragement. The school culture suffers when teachers are unable to collaborate and interact with each other (Drolet & Lindstrom, 2017; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014).

The researcher found that the implementation of trauma-informed practices improved teacher relationships, particularly teacher collaboration. This worked to combat teacher isolation. One teacher mentioned that the implementation required the teachers to communicate and interact more frequently. She stated:

It's really nice to communicate a lot better, just to make sure that everybody's on the same wavelength. They're doing the same practices, "Ok, are you telling the kids this way? Are you doing this with the kids?" It's really made us stay accountable with each other.

Another teacher mentioned positive interactions between teachers:

We are more aware of other people's feelings, trying to think through why they did or why they said what they said, rather than just jumping and being vindictive. You know, just barking back. I think we have, even with each other as teachers, I think we better understand the position that we're in as teachers, what we're going through as far as with the children and things like that. I think we're a little easier on each other.

Research Question 5 Discussion

What are the educators' perceptions of changes in the school after the implementation of the trauma-informed approach?

A review of prior literature has shown that teachers' perceptions of student behavior have the greatest impact on school culture (Shell, 2010). The school culture suffers as teachers perceived a leniency and inequality of disciplinary action. Findings from the literature suggest

that frequent and purposeful instruction on behavioral expectations and consequences contributed to the perception of consistency. The participants in this study indicated an increased comfort with classroom management strategies, an increased focus on building relationships, and being consistent with expectations. This positively influenced the school culture by improving student behavior.

One teacher spoke of the changes within the school culture:

With trauma-informed, you build your relationships with your students in the class because you're giving them clear expectations. "These are your consequences. These are going to be your rewards." Also, throughout the school, the school has come together. All the leadership has to be on the same page with all of those expectations across the school.

However, addressing student behavior in this manner looks different from traditional punitive practices. One of the biggest changes in the school was the shift from punitive to trauma-informed practices. Data collected from the interviews highlighted the mindset shift:

Two teachers mentioned their training with Assertive Discipline. One elaborated on her mindset shift:

The teachers used to be a lot more assertive, I think we've backed down just a little bit with "It is because I said so. Because I'm the teacher and I said to do what you're going to do." We have learned different skills and how to approach the child. We have a lot of kids that we work with now that are aggressive themselves. We have to be careful how we approach them; the "I said so" approach doesn't work at all. We've had to learn

how to stay calm ourselves and talk to them in a calm voice and handle the situation a little more with kid gloves.

Another explained her thoughts:

I still do the assertive, a lot of assertive in my classroom. But when you do have those severe students, you have to take a different approach with them.

Teacher 5 described how trauma-informed practices may look to those unfamiliar with this approach:

I think sometimes people from outside our school may have the perception that when students have challenging behaviors at school, we take them for a walk and buy them a Coke, and that's not it. It looks like we're reinforcing bad behaviors, but that's not always what's happening. Sometimes students do, working in Special Education; kids do sometimes have challenging behaviors. They do need that break time, whether they think they can ask for it or not. Sometimes they just need a break from the classroom.

Sometimes a Guidance Counselor or an Assistant will take them for a walk to just get away from things. I think, from the outside, it could be perceived as rewarding bad behavior. But, like I said, that's not the case.

Overall, participant responses were positive as to the changes that had occurred in the school. However, change had not been an easy transition. One teacher explained:

I'll tell you, initially, I was skeptical of the trauma-informed. I was one of the people that kind of sat in the back of the room and thought, you know. Then, watching our administrator and the other leaders in our building embrace it, I thought "Well, you

know, they are serious about this.” As educators, we see these programs come and go, you know, the next greatest and latest. But they have really embraced it.

Underlying assumptions about student behavior and classroom management have been challenged as teachers have learned new approaches to discipline through the trauma-informed approach. This is directly related to Change Theory. Change Theory works to challenge underlying assumptions, critically examining the ideas and practices that drive the work of the organization (Fullan, 2001). Assumptions are incredibly difficult to change, as they are engrained into the identity of the organization. Debate and confrontation with these assumptions is almost always met with resistance. Teacher statements have indicated initial resistance and skepticism. However, an emphasis on classroom management strategies, an increased focus on building relationships, and being consistent with expectations have positively changed the school culture.

Recommendations for Practice

After a review of the relevant literature and an analysis of the data collected, the researcher has made the following recommendations for practice:

- Administrators should thoroughly prepare teachers prior to implementation of the trauma-informed practices. Preparation should include reasoning and rationale to establish credibility for the approach. Reactions and behaviors of traumatized students can be misunderstood (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009; Overstreet, 2015). This highlights the importance of equipping faculty with the skills and knowledge to understand the effects of trauma on children. Teachers need support and education to address varying emotional needs while providing a rigorous academic curriculum

(Anderson et al., 2015; Blitz et al., 2020; Overstreet, 2015). Administrators should provide comprehensive professional development and continuous, on-going support to address the needs of teachers.

- Administrators should create a team of leaders to help support and encourage their peers. Peer support systems within the school must collaborate with teachers in order to build the efficacy and resiliency needed to face the challenges of trauma (Blitz et al., 2016; Craig, 2016). Providing a learning environment where everyone in the school can grow will create the foundation for a positive school culture.
- Teachers should be open to collaboration and working with peers to improve their interactions with students and managing challenging behaviors. The ability to collaborate and work together is an important aspect of the school culture. Wagner (2006) identified three culture behaviors that drive strong school cultures. The first is professional collaboration. Professional collaboration is the staff's ability to work together. The second is affiliative and collegial relationships. This means that faculty and staff are kind to one another and have good working relationships. The third behavior is efficacy or self-determination. This behavior reflects people's beliefs in themselves to create change and improve their professional skills. The implementation of trauma-informed practices encourages all three culture behaviors.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings and conclusions of this research have enabled the researcher to identify the following recommendations for future research:

- A qualitative study could be designed to study the teacher perceptions of shifts within

the school culture after implementation of a trauma-informed approach in middle schools or high schools.

- A qualitative study could be designed to investigate student perceptions of shifts within the school culture after implementation of a trauma-informed approach.
- A qualitative study could be designed to research a principal's approach to leading a change towards implementation of a trauma-informed approach.
- A quantitative study could be designed to determine the relationship between the implementation of a trauma-informed approach and teacher climate survey data.

Conclusion

As educators continue to feel the pressure of increased academic expectations alongside the social and emotional demands that arise from childhood trauma, increased support through trauma-informed practices becomes necessary for the wellbeing of everyone (Cole, 2014; Felitti et al., 1998). However, there are challenges in the implementation of these practices, which can impact the culture of the school. The purpose of this study was to examine the educator's perceptions of shifts within the culture of Jefferson Elementary School after the implementation of a trauma-informed approach.

The researcher found that implementation of a trauma-informed approach created a positive shift in the school culture. Through analysis of the individual interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, and document analysis, the participants described their experiences. When collectively analyzed, these experiences provided a thorough understanding of the positive changes to the school culture brought by the implementation of the trauma-informed approach.

Although the researcher recognizes that the findings only apply to this elementary school,

the results of this study are supported by the relevant literature. By identifying the educators' perceptions in this study, schools who hope to implement a trauma-informed approach will have a better understanding of how this will impact their school culture.

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APPENDIX: Interview Guide

Interview Questions: Individual Teachers, Classroom Teachers Focus Group, Related Arts Teachers Focus Group

- 1A Describe your position at the school.
- 2A Describe how the school culture has changed since implementation of the trauma-informed program.
- 3A In your classroom, how have trauma-informed practices changed behavior and discipline?
- 4A In your classroom, how have trauma-informed practices changed your instruction?
- 5A Describe how your relationships with others in school have changed since the implementation of the trauma-informed practices.
- 6A What has been the biggest change in the school since implementing trauma-informed practices?
- 7A What have been the most successful aspects of implementing trauma-informed practices?
What have been the biggest challenges?

Focus Group Interview Questions: Principal & School Counselors

- 1B Describe your role at the school.
- 2B Why did you decide to implement a trauma-informed program at the school?
- 3B Describe how the school culture has changed since implementation of the trauma-informed program.
- 4B Describe how discipline has changed since the implementation of trauma-informed practices.
- 5B What have you noticed with respect to changes in classroom instruction since implementing the program?
- 6B Describe how relationships have changed since implementation.
- 7B Describe the biggest change in the school since implementing trauma-informed practices.
- 8B What have been the most successful aspects of implementing trauma-informed practices?
What have been the biggest challenges?

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