Educator perceptions of the care and instruction of trauma exposed students in a small, urban, Christian school.

Amanda L. Petters

University of Louisville

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.library.louisville.edu/etd

Part of the Educational Leadership Commons

Recommended Citation

https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/4204
EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF THE CARE AND INSTRUCTION OF TRAUMA
EXPOSED STUDENTS IN A SMALL, URBAN, CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Amanda Petters
B. A., Indiana University, 1998
B. S., Indiana University, 2001
M. Ed., Indiana University, 2005

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Education and Human Development of the
University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Organizational Development

Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation, and Organizational Development
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

December 2023
All Rights Reserved

Amanda Petters
EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF THE CARE AND INSTRUCTION OF TRAUMA EXPOSED STUDENTS IN A SMALL, URBAN, CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

By

Amanda Petters
B.A., Indiana University, 1998
B.S., Indiana University, 2001
M.Ed., Indiana University, 2005

A Dissertation Approved on

November 7, 2023

by the following Dissertation Committee:

Dissertation Chair
W. Kyle Ingle, Ph.D.

Deborah L. Powers, Ed.D.

Douglas M. Stevens, Ed.D.

Geneva A. Stark, Ph.D.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my children Sam and Ela. You inspire me to continue pushing myself to be my best, find the opportunity in every challenge, and are my greatest love in this world. I love and thank you for the joy you have each brought to my life. Thank you for the sacrifices that you had to make for this to happen. My hope is that this can serve to inspire you to see that our limitations in life exist in our heads, and that with determination and commitment you too can achieve your dreams.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all of those that continue to believe in me, particularly when life is hard, I get tired, and feel discouraged. I thank my children Sam and Ela for the time and sacrifices you continued to make and the encouragement you provided throughout this journey. Thank you to my siblings Stephanie, Garrett, and Whitney for your encouragement, my family that chose me; my step-parents Leslie and John, and my late step-father Rick. Your pride in me means more than you will ever know. I thank my Yayas! Leslie, Emily, Edie, Susan, and Katie for being my sisters, my support system, and my comic relief. Your influence in my life has shaped the mother, friend, and educator that I am today. I am so grateful that I get to do life with them. I thank my work family. Particularly those that have cheered me on through personal and professional challenges and holding me to my own standards of professionalism and encouraging me to keep going. CoTrina, Katie, Cathy G, Wes, Christen, Cathy B, and Stephanie. I thank you for allowing me to grow, being a critical thought partners ensuring that we always do what is best for kids, and reminding me it’s about people not programs. Thank you for the laughs, emotional support, and reminders to take time to rest. Thank you to my biological parents Stephen and Gloria for giving me life and hunger to make the most of my time and opportunity in this world.

I also want to thank the Dream Center Academy staff, students, and founder for allowing me to conduct research with you. I appreciate the unwavering and consistent support of Mrs. Sharon Hodge in my professional, educational, personal, and spiritual journeys, I am beyond grateful she is walking the path with me. I thank Mr. Tod Moore for his passion and vulnerability to put the needs of our underserved students and families
first in his heart, in his mind, and in his spirit. His impact on the community if life changing.
ABSTRACT

EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF THE CARE AND INSTRUCTION OF TRAUMA EXPOSED STUDENTS IN A SMALL, URBAN, CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Amanda Petters
November 7, 2023

Students of color in low socio-economic, high crime urban areas are exposed to a higher level of trauma than their White contemporaries. The trauma that they bring into school with them create challenges for their teachers working to eliminate barrier to students’ education. Widespread efforts have been attempted to thwart the social injustices that many students of color experience in schools including disproportionality around implementation of school rules and the equitable access to curriculum. I used Critical Race Theory to frame my study around students of color in urban areas experiencing disproportionate levels of trauma, and their teachers’ level of preparedness to adequately respond to students’ needs. I conducted this qualitative study using a hermeneutic phenomenological case study to explore the lived experience of teachers in creating a socially just classroom environment for their students.

From the research I found that teachers trained on and implementing trauma-informed responses to students’ maladaptive behaviors created a healing environment where students could process their emotions and removing barriers. Additionally, I found that building meaningful relationships with students, teaching coping strategies and
replacement behaviors were effective in helping students improve student performance both behaviorally and academically.

*Kywords*: Trauma-Informed Classrooms, Critical Race Theory, Urban Private School, Christian School, Culturally Relevant Teaching
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ...................................................................................................................................... iv  
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................................... v 
ABSTRACT ....................................................................................................................................... vi  
LIST OF FIGURES .......................................................................................................................... xii  
LIST OF TABLES .............................................................................................................................. xiii  
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................................... 1  
  Background ................................................................................................................................... 2  
  Purpose of the Study ...................................................................................................................... 5  
  Significance of the Study .............................................................................................................. 6  
  Theoretical Underpinnings and the Selection of Methodology ................................................... 7  
  Definitions of Terms .................................................................................................................... 9  
  Organization of the Study ........................................................................................................... 10  
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ........................................................................................... 12  
  Trauma and its Assessment ......................................................................................................... 13  
  Disproportionality of Trauma in Schools and Its Impact on Student Outcomes ................. 17  
  School and District Responses to Trauma .............................................................................. 20  
  Critical Race Theory .................................................................................................................. 28  
    Critical Race Theory in Education ......................................................................................... 30  
  Literature Review Summary ........................................................................................................ 35  
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY ....................................................................................................... 38  
  Research Methods and Design—Hermeneutic Phenomenological Case Study ...................... 39  
  Theoretical Framework .............................................................................................................. 42  
  Strengths and Limitations of Hermeneutic Phenomenological Case Studies ....................... 44  
  Context of the Study .................................................................................................................. 45  
  Data Sources ............................................................................................................................. 47  
    Survey ..................................................................................................................................... 48
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Creswell & Poth’s (2018) Procedure for conducting Phenomenological Research ....................... 42
Figure 2. Data Sources .................................................................................................................................. 50
Figure 3. Creswell & Poth’s (2018) Standards for Assessing the Quality of a Phenomenology ................... 60
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Data Sources Aligned with Research Questions ................................................................. 69
Table 2. Participant Profiles ............................................................................................................. 70
Table 3. Preparedness for Responding to Trauma Exposed Students .............................................. 73
Table 4. CRT A Priori Coding from Observation Field Notes ............................................................ 77
Table 5. Selective Coding aligning teacher’s responses to Research Questions ............................... 93
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The academic years in which the COVID-19 pandemic raged (2020-2021, 2021-2022, 2022-2023) were challenging for all of humanity, but particularly for students, families, and entire school communities as they have struggled to provide instruction and adapt to changing conditions wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic (Hoffman & Miller, 2020; Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020). Students faced social isolation because of quarantines and public restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, some communities, such as Louisville, Kentucky and Minneapolis, Minnesota, experienced civil unrest in response to systemic racial inequities and the killings of Black residents at the hands of police officers during this same time. As if these events were not traumatic enough, many students experienced other pre-existing stressors in their daily lives such as poverty, homelessness, abuse, or food insecurity (Alvarez, 2020). Research suggests that these stressors are not suffered equitably. Students of color are more likely to be impoverished and exposed to violence than their White peers (Alvarez, 2020; Battal, 2020; Zoromski et al., 2020). Classroom teachers see this trauma manifested as misbehavior, anger, and/or aggression (West et al., 2014). Students of color are more likely to be disciplined by teachers disproportionately as compared to their White counterparts (Pane et al., 2014). School is a place where trauma can be exacerbated or mitigated based on the culture of the school and how staff members interact with students.
School systems, such as Jefferson County Public schools (JCPS) in Louisville, Kentucky, have begun to prioritize both trauma and racial equity. JCPS is a large urban school district that serves just under 100,000 students (JCPS Open Data Sets, n.d.). Among these, 40% of the students identify as White, 37% as Black, and the remaining 23% identify as other; “other” includes students that identified as bi-racial (JCPS Open Data Sets, n.d.). There are several parochial options available for students, but incur additional costs to families. While societal factors and systemic oppression that students and families experience may have motivated protestors to take to the streets to demand change, educational leaders and teachers have a unique opportunity to be change agents in the classroom by identifying and changing structures and policies that have historically oppressed minority groups. In this dissertation, I will explore teachers’ perceptions of their preparedness for supporting trauma-exposed students within the context of a small private Christian school. I will also explore teachers’ awareness of the impact that their actions and communications have on trauma-exposed students, particularly students of color. Lastly, I will explore how teachers adjust their classroom strategies based on the needs of trauma exposed students when they are disruptive or disengaged to create more socially just classroom communities.

**Background**

In May 2018, the Jefferson County Public Schools Board of Education approved a policy requiring that the district develop a racial equity educational plan for the district. This decision came eight months after the district first proposed its commitment to a racial educational equity plan required by Kentucky Board Policy 09.131 that identified five areas of reform around racial equity:
1. Diversity in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
2. School Culture and Climate
3. Programmatic Access
4. Staffing and Classroom Diversity
5. Central Office Commitment to Racial Education Equity

The policy developed after the state board determined that there are persistent gaps in achievement, learning, expectations, opportunities, and disciplinary outcomes between Students of Color and White students. It also recognized social inequities that still exist from long-standing systemic racism in US communities and school districts. Thirdly, it outlined beliefs that the school system should reflect the demographic makeup of the student population and must take a systemic approach to ensure students of color have equitable access, experiences, and opportunities. It sheds light on the systemic inequities and disproportionality in Kentucky’s public education system, mandating much needed change. For more diverse urban school settings like those in Jefferson County and Fayette County (Lexington, Kentucky), one may expect those inequities to be felt more intensely.

Jefferson County Public Schools has taken substantial steps in developing and implementing a robust racial equity plan that addresses the five areas identified by the state in the Kentucky Board Policy 09.13. It also embraces professional development at the district and school level using data to identify the need and help develop opportunities for all stakeholders to work together to dismantle racism and build a better community. They have named a Chief Equity Officer that leads the district’s Department of Diversity, Equity, and Poverty (DEP) (JCPS, n.d.). The DEP has a dedicated diversity
hiring specialist and Louisville Teacher Residency Program to actively seek out and attract high quality applicants of color as well as a Black Male Achievement group. The district also included racial equity goals in its annual certified evaluation process (CEP) and professional growth plans (PGP) that address racial equity and require all certified staff complete an Implicit Bias training through Kentucky State University. At the school level, school-based racial equity committees have been developed. The Racial Equity Analysis Protocol (REAP) tool is used to evaluate policy and practice for equity, access and opportunity through a racial equity lens (JCPS, 2020).

Even with all the effort and resources that the largest urban school district in Kentucky has committed to racial equity, some educators and students of color may not feel the benefits that these were meant to dismantle. Gorski (2019) claims that many policies do less to promote real social justice, and more to provide work around or detours around anti-racism efforts that continue to silence already oppressed groups. Community members and organizations sought to meet the formidable challenges of Louisville’s impoverished and predominantly Black West End community. One such school is the Dream Center Academy Christian School, located in the Chickasaw Park neighborhood in Louisville’s West End.

Ted Moore, the Founder and Director of the Dream Center Academy Christian School, is not an educator but his life experiences, including 26 years in prison, led to an appreciation of the benefits of education and a call to lead marginalized students in his city. Mr. Moore was pardoned and released from prison in January 2018. He immediately began fulfilling his vision to intervene in the lives of young people using education and Christian values to effect change in the community. Mr. Moore believes that education is
instrumental in providing options for young people to heal and succeed. In addition to opening the school, he began local ministry work with churches, organized community Love Walks that provide monetary support to help residents with paying bills and providing for basic human needs, added enrichment after school programs and Camp Change to keep students engaged in constructive activities and read on grade level. The school opened on January 3, 2022, in the basement of New Day Christian Church while funds to build a facility are being raised.

**Purpose of the Study**

In this qualitative study, I explore current structures and systems in place at the Dream Center Academy Christian School that address student misbehaviors in the classroom and their perceived effectiveness at improving student behavior for students exposed to trauma, in particular students of color. I interviewed educators to discuss the preparation teachers receive in both pre-service training, and through on-the-job professional development to create socially just classrooms that embrace social emotional learning and work to dismantle systemic barriers that may trigger students’ existing trauma. Furthermore, I reviewed school documents and policies that address behavioral expectations to identify if such documents and policies include trauma aware language and promotes equity. In so doing, I sought to advance the knowledge in this field by identifying the training that teachers need to understand how trauma affects students’ ability to learn, what teachers can do to mitigate these affects, how social injustice further traumatizes students of color, and what classroom teachers and schools do to create racially just classrooms and empower students that often feel powerless due to their circumstances. The Dream Center Academy Christian School is a small Christian school
in the West End of Louisville. Student tuition is minimal, as the school’s founder and board of directors work to secure funding to cover the cost. The students that attend this school all previously attended the public school system (sans the kindergarten students who would otherwise be attending the public school if The Dream Center were not an option) and were not typically achieving at grade level.

Three research questions guided my study. These are:

RQ1: What preparation and training have teachers at the Dream Center Academy Christian School received that they feel is effective in preparing them for identifying and supporting trauma exposed students?

RQ2: What impact do teachers perceive that their communication style has on the effectiveness of improving student outcomes for trauma exposed students, particularly students of color?

RQ3: How do teachers adjust their classroom strategies based on racial equity policies, student’s classroom behavior, and trauma informed practices?

**Significance of the Study**

When students disrupt the classroom environment, their behavior detracts from the instruction and learning opportunity of not just that student, but other students in the class. Educators can be more effective in the classroom when they understand how trauma affects students and identify what approaches will best support students’ needs (Joseph et al., 2020; West et al., 2014). School systems have adopted research-based programs like Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) and Restorative Practices (RP) as a platform to teach students coping and restorative strategies to help repair harm
and heal their trauma (Joseph et al., 2020). With this study, I examined teacher perceptions of how prepared they are to implement those strategies in responding to maladaptive behaviors and academically disengaged students that have a high level of trauma exposure. Learning how trauma intercepts with students’ race, gender, and even community are relevant in helping educators intentionally respond to and redirect maladaptive behaviors without retriggering trauma. Milner (2007) stresses the importance of recognizing race and culture, emphasizing that choosing to remain color- and culturally-blind can further exploit and misrepresent students of color. Teachers that possess the racial and background knowledge of their students in diverse populations are more successful at increasing learning opportunities (Milner, 2007).

There remains a need for studies on how teachers perceive their role of providing trauma healing practices as part of their instructional practices (Alisic, 2012; Stasiak, 2018). My study addresses this need for further research studies around improving the learning environment for disenfranchised students exposed to high levels of trauma that impact their growth.

**Theoretical Underpinnings and the Selection of Methodology**

In order to explore the teachers’ perceptions of their pre-service training, their role in existing trauma support systems, and professional development that seek to create socially just classrooms and meet the needs of trauma-exposed students, I undertook a hermeneutic phenomenological study in which I interviewed teachers at the Dream Center Academy Christian School, a small Christian school in the west end of Louisville. I applied Critical Race Theory (CRT) in my study. CRT is a theoretical framework that seeks to bring light to how systemic racism is part of U.S. society (Chapman et al., 2013).
Rules and consequences are not equitably applied in educational and legal settings. Credited as the researcher who developed Critical Race Theory, Derrick Bell introduced it in legal education in the 1970s (Chapman et al., 2013; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). CRT developed out of recognition of oppressive structures intended to preserve privilege and power of White people through laws surrounding land ownership (Caldwell, 1996; Irby et al., 2013), and left marginalized groups at a disadvantage. The country is based on systems of power and laws have been established and continue to oppress based on race (Gonzalez & Butcher, 2021). Critical Race theorist argue that the civil rights movement has been unsuccessful in creating equal opportunities for all people and more must be done (Gonzalez & Butcher, 2021). Critics of CRT argue that the theoretical framework discriminates against White people (Sawchuk, 2021).

Conservative politicians resist CRT claiming that it disrupts freedom and promotes teaching White children that their ancestors oppressed Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), that White people experience undeserved privileges, and that “freedom” masks White supremacy (Gonzalez & Butcher, 2021). The need for CRT’s application to K-12 education remains relevant. CRT is not about individual beliefs and personal bias, rather that race is a social construct and embedded in policies and practices that marginalize groups of people so others can maintain power and control (Sawchuk, 2021).

Conservatives, such as Chief Justice John Roberts downplayed the traumatic impact of racism by claiming that we can reduce discrimination by simply not discriminating based on race (Sawchuk, 2021). The late justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg retorted that she failed to understand how U.S. society can address issues like racism without spotlighting the impact of structures on race (Sawchuk, 2021). Structures still exist that reinforce White

CRT allowed me to analyze the connections and the perceptions of the impact that systemic oppression and racism have on students in the educational system and to consider how a school plans and support equitable responses to students’ maladaptive trauma responses. My research centered on staff perceptions of their preparedness to understand students’ maladaptive behaviors as trauma responses; how current school structures may reinforce systemic racism in current ways that school staff respond to students, and recognize systemic injustices that are barriers to student opportunity, access, and outcome. I also sought to identify holes in training and utility of empowering students by creating socially just classrooms where students feel safe to overcome systemic trauma as well as personal trauma that bombards them and wears away at their resolve.

Definitions of Terms

I used the following terms in the context of this study:

**BIPOC:** Acronym representing Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

**Culturally Relevant Teaching** – A rigorous teaching approach that emerged in the 1990s that aims to use robust instruction that recognizes and affirms students’ racial and ethnic backgrounds outside of mainstream White culture (Sawshuk, 2021).

**Critical Race Theory (CRT):** Theoretical framework that studies how the social construct of race is disproportionately applied to systems and structures in our society (Chapman et al., 2013). Race is a social construct that is embedded in policies, structures, and laws
It is not personal prejudice or bias, anti-racism, or social justice for which these terms are often interchanged (Sawchuk, 2021).

**Epoche:** A phenomenological approach in qualitative research in which judgement is suspended until research is concluded. It is also referred to as “bracketing” (Creswell, 2018).

**Trauma:** A distressing dangerous event, series of events, or ongoing stressful and adverse events that overwhelms the way a person can cope (American Psychological Association, 2013; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014).

**Trauma Informed Classrooms:** Classrooms where teachers and staff are trained to identify student behaviors that may be a result of trauma and adverse childhood experiences and respond in a way that supports the students’ social emotional healing and growth (Brunzell et al., 2015).

**Organization of the Study**

I organized my study as follows: Chapter 1 includes the introduction, purpose, statement of research questions, rationale for the study, scope of the study, definition of terms, methods, data sources, and organizational summary of this study. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of the relevant literature, identifying trends in findings, methods applied in the relevant research, and identifying areas in need of further research. seeking to identify as a basis for identifying the need for the study. Chapter 3 provides an in-depth description of the qualitative case study methodology that I will be using to explain how data will be collected and the procedure for analysis. In Chapter 4, I present the findings of my study. Finally, in Chapter 5, I provide a summary of
findings from my study, and offer implications for policy, suggestions for practice, and recommendation for future research.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In my qualitative study, I seek to answer three research questions. These are as follows:

RQ1: What preparation and training have teachers at the Dream Center Academy Christian School received that they feel is effective in preparing them for identifying and supporting trauma exposed students?

RQ2: What impact do teachers perceive that their communication style has on the effectiveness of improving student outcomes for trauma exposed students, particularly students of color?

RQ3: How do teachers adjust their classroom strategies based on racial equity policies, student’s classroom behavior, and trauma informed practices?

In this chapter, I provide a comprehensive review of the relevant literature to provide historical and educational research to contextualize trauma and how it manifests in urban classrooms through misbehaviors, and school and district interventions to mitigate effects of trauma. I began the literature review with defining trauma and factors associated with trauma. I then reviewed the extant literature on interventions and classroom strategies that are most effective in mitigating the effect of trauma. I then focused on the extant research that explores Critical Race Theory and disproportionality with student discipline. The chapter ends with a summary that captures the predominant themes of the extant research in terms of finding and methods used to arrive at these
findings. Most notably, I end this summary with a clear warrant from the research literature, justifying the need for this study.

**Trauma and its Assessment**

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines the concept of trauma as an event, or circumstances one has experienced that is physically harmful, emotionally harmful, or life threatening that leaves an adverse reaction on mental, physical, emotional, social, or spiritual well-being (SAMHSA, 2014). Trauma can be acute or chronic based on whether the cause of trauma is a single event or sustained over time (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). When these adverse events occur during childhood, they can have lasting deleterious effects on the quality and length of one's life. SAMHSA looks at the three E’s in identifying trauma. These represent events, experience, and effect (2014). The Center for Disease Control identifies early trauma through a scoring system that tallies the number of traumatic events using the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) survey. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) reports that nearly 25% of respondents had a score of three or more, and one in six had a score of at least a four. The more adverse events to which students have been exposed, the higher their risk increases for cardiovascular illnesses, risk taking behavior, developing addictions, obtaining a lower education level, and an earlier death. While the ACE Survey is conducted with adults reflecting on their childhood experiences, information learned from the survey can help parents, educators, and community members to identify circumstances in a child's life causing trauma and work to mitigate those issues.
Childhood trauma is a response to a negative event, circumstance, or series of events that overwhelms a child’s ability to cope and can interfere with his or her brain development and behavior (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Students’ executive functioning can also be affected, causing difficulty in planning, multi-tasking, remembering multi-step directions, and self-regulation or self-monitoring (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). The physiological changes in the brain present challenges that educators need to consider, but the emotional repercussions can manifest in a variety of ways that can be challenging for teachers and administrators to manage effectively (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014). Students with a high rate of trauma exposure have an increased risk for anxiety, depression, and disruptive behavior than do their peers with less exposure to trauma (Copeland, 2007). Physiological manifestations of trauma can include hyperarousal of the nervous system, which can be observed as an increased startle response (Perry, 1994). Students can be more impulsive, have trouble concentrating, have an increased resting heart rate, or other symptoms commonly associated with PTSD (Perry, 1994).

The brain develops and grows by taking in and processing information through the five senses. Based on the neurodevelopment of the complex systems in the brain and the child’s brain being much more malleable than that of an adult, traumatic experiences have a significant impact on the child’s life and the way in which they respond to future experiences (Perry et al., 1995). Perry et al. (1995) reminds us that it is the brain through which children filter all the experiences and identify emotional responses. For a student who has experienced trauma, a redirection from a staff member, an adult raising one's voice, or a sudden loud noise could trigger a child's traumatic response. The common
fight or flight response is a hyperarousal defense response (Perry, 1994). The common freeze response is a way in which students can disconnect from the situation or concede. Teachers in the classroom may see this as students selecting not to respond to teacher directives, not to respond to teacher questions, having their head down on their desk, or hidden beneath a hoodie.

The hyperarousal often associated with the fight or flight response in students can be misinterpreted in students and contributes to rather than mitigates the trauma they carry. Among male students, this hyperarousal is more often externalized as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) or other conduct disorders. Among female student, the manifestation of trauma is more often internalized as depression, anxiety, or other dissociative disorders (Perry, 1995). Dissociative behaviors seen in students are often related to attachment issues with caregivers and may manifest as feeling insecurities around peers, appearing unmotivated, or feel like teachers do not like them (O’Neil et al., 2010). The amount of effort a student is willing to put into tasks is positively associated with the strength of the relationship that the student has with that teacher (O’Neil et al., 2010). Physiologically, students’ attachment deficits need to be repaired before pedagogical strategies can be effective to build cognitive capacity. Herrenkohl et al. (2019) assert that trust and connection can be established through nurturing multi-tiered support systems of intervention that intentionally build and strengthen relationships with teachers and model interactions with peers. With inadequate emotional nurturing and delayed or absent brain development, some trauma exposed students lack adequate executive functioning skills needed for multi-step tasks or goal setting.
Students exposed to trauma find themselves not only at an emotional deficit from their peers, but also an academic deficit. The need for trauma healing is great, particularly as schools headed back to in-person learning and school staff began to identify social, emotional, and learning deficits worsened by a year-long pandemic and social isolation. The foundation of student healing is developing a healthy attachment to a trusting adult where a child feels safe (O’Neill et al., 2010). Teachers and schools can create that safe place by identifying students who have experienced trauma, understanding what triggers their trauma responses, and teaching coping and self-regulating strategies as they begin to heal (O’Neill et al., 2010). Knowing that the response to experiences one endures in childhood influences the trajectory of one’s life (Centers for Disease Control, 2013), teachers can expect that their words or responses could trigger trauma-exposed students. The classroom teacher and school personnel should remain cognizant of their own interactions with students since we know that students emotional and behavioral responses are a result of how their brain processes experiences and can manifest as a reaction to frustration and develop patterns that will interfere with physiological changes in the brain and body throughout their lives (Perry et al., 1995).

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) is a term that the Center for Disease Control (CDC) uses to identify trauma or abuse experienced before the age of 18 that will likely have a negative impact on one's mental, emotional, and physical health throughout his or her life (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). The original ACE Study was conducted between 1995 and 1997 by Kaiser Permanente and focused on the relationship between forms of abuse and household dysfunction with a person's health later in life (Felitti, 1998). The study asked participants to identify trauma exposure in
seven key categories: physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, witnessing violence in the home (or community), substance abuse in the household, incarcerated parent, suicide, or suicidal ideation of household members (Felitti, 1998).

Identifying events and experiences that negatively impact a child’s development can be difficult to quantify (West et al., 2014). The ACE Survey has become a universal screener in identifying experiences that cause trauma during childhood. The questionnaire used to determine one’s ACE score is broken into three categories: abuse, household challenges, and neglect (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). The ACE score is determined by adding up the number of events one has experienced or witnessed in the household as a child. Of the more than 17,000 subjects that participated in the CDC-Kaiser study over the two years in which it was conducted, 36.1% reported experiencing no adversities, 26% experienced one, 15.9% experienced two, 9.5% experienced three, and 12.5% experienced four or more. As a child’s exposure increases in both breadth and depth without intervention, the more lasting and harmful the effects will become. Additional environmental stressors of food insecurity, substandard housing, and lack of access to resources further lead to toxic levels of stress. Prolonged exposure to toxic stress can alter healthy brain development making it difficult for students to focus, develop executive functioning skills, or form healthy relationships.

**Disproportionality of Trauma in Schools and Its Impact on Student Outcomes**

Childhood trauma is not confined to just the experiences that students have outside of school. Unfortunately, many students face trauma or have their previous trauma triggered by experiences at school. Overstreet and Chafouleas (2016) note that
there is a disproportionately higher rate of trauma exposure for African American students than their classmates in a school setting. This may suggest that students’ trauma responses could be more intense because of systemic oppression. McBride et al. (2016) support further consideration for creating trauma-informed schools that embrace Social Emotional Learning (SEL) with a research-based curriculum to teach healthy relationship interactions, strategies for coping with stress, and increased student engagement. Schools are now considering the effects on students when reviewing how and why discipline is being assigned in their schools. Schools may respond differently to students that are reacting to trauma exposure versus mental illness, or trauma could trigger underlying mental illness (von der Embse et al., 2018).

The spring of 2020 increased disproportionality around resources and support for BIPOC with the Covid 19 pandemic and the increased focus on racism and White supremacy brought to light with killing of innocent black citizens and that hands of police (Landertinger et al., 2021). McIntosh (2019) describes the overlapping exposure of racism as it intersect with poverty and classism only serve to increase trauma exposure of BIPOC at a higher rate than their White peers. BIPOC experienced a more negative impact during covid with an increased rate of job loss, higher death rate at the beginning of the pandemic due to lack of insurance and medical access, and higher rate of food insecurity that increased the stress level of families (Daniels, 2022). These added stressors of uncharted territories and change in routine with many schools closing made the uncertainty that much more stressful. BIPOC students are more highly concentrated into low performing schools with a higher rate of special education services and exclusionary practices, due to systemic racism and classism that increase traumatic
experiences and reduce their opportunity to rise out of their station in life (McIntosh, 2019). Race-Based Trauma is an added layer of trauma to which BIPOC students are exposed based on race, further exacerbating circumstances that intensify feelings of helplessness as students struggle to cope (Daniels, 2022; McIntosh, 2019).

Covid 19 created challenges for families as schools were cancelled and students had to learn from home virtually. Internet access, use of technology, support from families, and struggles to find childcare provided unprecedented challenges for families as society learned to cope with the new circumstances (Daniels, 2022). BIPOC also experienced a higher rate of positive and more severe Covid cases resulting in death (Landertinger et al., 2021). This also impacted the dynamics in homes as students had to take on additional responsibilities as caregivers and homemakers additional stress while grieving, creating trauma exposure as students try to cope (Landertinger et al., 2021). As the pandemic continues, additional peaks when new variants emerge, serve to retrigger students’ trauma experienced at the start of the pandemic (Daniels, 2022). While BIPOC families were struggling to navigate staying healthy during viral pandemic, systemic racism also intensified in a political climate that reveals black lives are not valued to the same degree as their White contemporaries (Landertinger et al., 2021). BIPOC students and families mental load continued to grow more exhausting as they witnessed several public incidents of police brutality against black people resulting in the death of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd (Landertinger et al., 2021; Lovelace, 2021).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (2016) discuss that educational reform movement and multicultural education require specific attention to race. White students and Black students have different educational experiences even within the same school (Gregory &
Taking a colorblind approach to school issues around discipline and reform fail to address the inequities that exist in current structures (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). The instructional and behavioral gaps exist between Black and White students require application and analysis to current systems to identify areas in need of reform. Black students are two to three times more likely to be suspended than their White peers for the same offense, and this discrepancy emerges as early as preschool (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). The lost instructional time that BIPOC students at a disproportionately higher rate widens the game gap that between Black and White students (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Intersecting race and socio-economic status further marginalize BIPOC students that receive harsher punishments that include more exclusionary practices (Gregory & Fergus, 2017; McIntosh, 2019), thus supporting the need for reform. Understanding this intersection and the need for trauma-informed schools to help students heal are necessary in preventing re-traumatizing students in responding to maladaptive behaviors (McIntosh, 2019).

**School and District Responses to Trauma**

Educators and educational leaders recognize that students bring their trauma exposure and its effects into the classroom. In an average class of 30 students, staff can expect about 13 of those students to have experiences three or more traumatic events as described in the ACE Survey (Stevens, 2012). In schools serving students from lower socio-economic urban areas, they have a more profound challenge to create healing environments for students with long term activation of the brain’s stress response (Perry & Daniels, 2016). Students bring this trauma into the classroom and teachers can frame their responses to students, strengthening their social-emotional development (Venet,
Venet (2019) encourages the use of these frames for teachers to clarify their role as the teacher in providing effective trauma-informed practices: unconditional positive regard for all students, disciplining with a restorative component focusing on the relationship, slowing instruction and consider student motivation, and planning instruction that reflects the skill and capacity of students. SAMHSA (2014) highlights six key principles needed for an effective trauma informed approach and response to help students heal. Those key principles are as follows:

- safety
- trustworthiness and transparency
- peer support
- collaboration and mutuality
- empowerment, voice, and choice
- cultural, historical, and gender issues

Some teachers feel that student misbehaviors need more severe administrative consequences and that rewards systems are inadvertently rewarding misbehaviors or that administrative responses are inconsistent and do not support reforming the misbehavior (Blitz et al., 2020). Teachers have also expressed feelings of isolation when dealing with students if support staff or classified staff are not actively participating in the responding to misbehaviors (Blitz et al., 2020). Establishing a collaborative school culture where students and staff cooperate in implementing support systems, structures of trust, and culturally relevant teaching with fidelity best serve trauma-exposed students in their healing and achievement (Avit, 2020; Blitz et al., 2020; Seebring & Bryk, 2000). School staff members continue to express need for administrative support in address maladaptive
behaviors. This can include school responses to the misbehaviors and training teachers, so they feel prepared to respond to the students’ needs as they manifest through behaviors (Avit, 2020; Blitz et al., 2020).

Once commonly used approach is Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). MTSS is a system-wide framework that incorporates specific plans of interventions to identify support areas for students to accelerate growth (Doll, 2019). Doll describes MTSS as including a universal screener, progress monitoring, system of assessments to prioritize need, and tiered interventions that increase in intensity based on the level of need. Tier one starts with foundational school wide expectations with grade level curriculum and behaviors expectations that are explicitly taught to all students as tier one instruction. Students that are failing to meet those expectations are provided another pre-planned level of support as tier two. The remaining few students that may need a more intensive level of support would receive more individualized support in tier three. Schools have the autonomy to develop these tiered interventions using research based and data driven resources but are required to have them in practice and documented in their school’s MTSS handbook.

There are two common research-based programs that districts implement. These are Restorative Practices (RP) and Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS). While these programs are not identified specifically to address and unpack students’ trauma, they do provide a multi-pronged response to addressing several adverse conditions affecting students and learning, seeking to develop a positive, restorative, and safe climate that is necessary for students of trauma to thrive. Through the
implementation of MTSS, providing tier one behavior training for all students creates the foundation for students to feel physically and emotionally safe so they can begin to heal.

PBIS is a foundational system that incorporates the three-tiered framework that involves research based, pre-planned responses to anticipated student behavior. The focus is on teaching expectations and praising the positive behaviors as opposed to correcting negative behaviors (IIRP Graduate School, n.d.). Doll (2019) argues that schools familiar with PBIS are well suited for implementing trauma based MTSS. RP focuses on the science of relationships as an understanding of ways to change behavior (IIRP Graduate School, n.d.). The belief builds a community using frequent circles for conversations and instruction, removing physical barriers, and putting all members that are participating in an equal position and establishing working in circles as the norm. When a challenging behavior presents itself or a relationship has been harmed, the structure is in place to openly discuss. There is a script of five consistent questions asked to the person exhibiting the challenging behavior to reflect on and process the behavior and its impact on others. There is also a script of four questions to ask the one (or group) affected by the other’s challenging behavior. The restorative practices establish norms and promote respectful interactions, teaching students how to build positive connections with others and healthy relationships. (IIRP, n.d.). Building community in the classroom and school, can impact the greater community at large, particularly when coping strategies and included so students learn how to self-regulate.

Research contends that students in high crime urban areas experience more traumatizing events than their peers, putting them at an increased risk to the effects of trauma (Battal et al., 2020; Joseph et al., 2020). Additional training and resources around
coping and healing are needed for school personnel in how to respond to these student’s maladaptive behaviors (Joseph et al., 2020). Harden et al. (2015) stresses the importance of restorative practices to provide students an opportunity to build positive communication skills, resiliency, and provide students a safe space to heal. Building positive relationships is a key component leading to effective implementation of RP (Harden et al., 2015). Brunzell et al. (2015) argues that combining positive and restorative behavior approaches with trauma informed responses create a culture in which students feel empowered, learn new and productive ways to respond and cope to traumatic events, and heal from previous trauma exposure.

When evaluating the effectiveness of systems to address students’ social and emotional needs, they identified two variables that limit the potential of this reform initiative when power, privilege, and cultural differences are not taken into consideration, and when the models focus primarily on students’ social and emotional health while neglecting the adults that interact with them (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Gregory and Fergus (2017) argue that reform policies that solely embrace SEL fail to address disproportionality because the current understanding of this concept is “colorblind.” For SEL to be most effective, it needs to address cultural beliefs, biases, and social constructs that are not just developed around White middle class students. Incorporating knowledge of cultural differences, power structures, and privilege would benefit the students ’and the educators’ social emotional learning alike.

To educate staff on their own potential biases and how those may hinder the success of one's interactions with students, and interpretation of student behavior, all certified staff members (and many classified staff members working with students) in the
public-school setting were expected to complete a six-hour training modules on Implicit Bias in collaboration with Kentucky State University and their Center for Research on the Eradication of Educational Disparities (CREED) Center. Over 9,000 educators from JCPS were trained through the four online interactive modules, learning to identify and remove barriers and to create equitable instructional opportunities for all students (Kentucky State University, 2020). Administration at Dream Center trained all their staff on trauma informed practices using training materials made available through University of Kentucky’s Center on Trauma and Children through Kentucky AWARE grant. This is training that is used in the other urban school district in Kentucky, Fayette County Public Schools. This training outlines how what events can impact students’ learning and behavior, how it manifests in the classroom, and resources from which students may find beneficial in coping and healing.

In creating classrooms that are socially just and trauma informed, the research consistently supported environments of respect and safety where students are valued and free of judgement. Trifonas (2003) encourages critical thinking and open-mindedness of refusing binary beliefs and encourages pedagogical discomfort as educators look reflectively at the intent behind structures in our society and classrooms. Students struggling with identity when they feel like they fit neither into all male nor all female categories, or students facing oppression while at the same time pledging “liberty and justice for all” each morning, may feel bewildered as they wrestle with the inconsistencies in our society. When peeling away the layers of trauma, most of these inconsistencies’ students feel can be traced to dissonance of what students are taught as valued and what they are shown is valued, often to those they are most intimately
connected. Students need an environment where they are safe to unpack and process the trauma they have experienced. Students need an environment of healing where they learn coping strategies and how to self-regulate (Brunzell et al., 2015). Students need to form healthy connections with adults that respect them as they are, and encourage critical thinking with acceptance (Brunzell et al., 2015; O’Neill et al., 2010; Trifonas, 2013) and students need a space to make meaning and discover how they fit into the world.

The city of Louisville’s civil unrest in the wake of the killing of Black people at the hands of police. In March of 2020, the city’s police department was executing a no-knock warrant that was illegally obtained that resulted in the death of an innocent young Black woman in her own home (Lovelace, 2021; Smith, 2021). This put the spotlight on the racial trauma that many of the city’s students face in their daily lives. The Dream Center Academy Christian School, which serves as the context for this study, has about 80% of their population eligible for free and reduced lunch. Many of the students have experienced first-hand violence in the community including one child who was shot in the leg while playing football when he an unintended target during a drive-by shooting. Another classmate that witnessed the event experienced secondary trauma when he saw shooting take place and his teammate crawling to safety. Based on what has already been established about traumatic events, housing instability, and poverty in childhood are all key factors that increase the likelihood that effects will be felt throughout one's life. The need for trauma informed school practices is more evident in areas of high poverty (Moore et al., 2016). Bath (2008) organizes trauma informed care into three main pillars: safety, connections, and managing emotions. Based on if the type of trauma is complex or acute, the support in these three areas may vary. Many students may need more
therapeutic support than others, but regardless of the severity of the trauma and its effects, these three universal pillars are the foundation for healing (Bath, 2008).

As part of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the federal bill that guides K-12 education reform provides guidance for schools regarding equitable and adequate reform and policy (Penuel et al., 2016). This federal bill included non-academic indicators that focus on the success of the whole child, including the importance of equity and a supportive school environment (Penuel et al., 2016). Urban districts’ commitment to racial equity, implementation of Multi-tiered Systems of Support, encouragement of Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports and Restorative interventions, and the inclusion of a Social Emotional Learning component, all align to suggestions in the literature about addressing the needs of the whole child (Battal et al., 2020). In large urban school districts, it is challenging to settle on a single program or system that will service all students equitably. Schools can rely on data used to identify their own students’ needs and develop individual staff support plans that address the demographic of their school and community population. Building teacher capacity that can identify and assess student needs and provide the training necessary to support students varies greatly depending on the staff mind-set regarding education, and their willingness to work through emotional discomfort as they learn the role of social justice in education.

There is limited research around how private schools respond to trauma exposed students. Dee (2023) researched the exodus of students from the public education system since the pandemic, but determined that further studies were needed to confirm the drop in enrollment that is not related to movement to private schools or home-schooling.
Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the theoretic framework that I applied to this study. Critical Race Theory is a theoretical framework that studies how the social construct of race is disproportionately applied to systems and structures in our society (Chapman et al., 2013). Researchers credit Derrick Bell as one of the seminal developers of this theory, citing his legal research in the 1970s (Chapman et al., 2013; Khalifa et al., 2013). Critical Race Theory evolved from Bell’s work with Critical Legal Studies (CLS) in which he began to speak out and challenge the oppression and disproportionality of societies’ structures and legal system based on race, that were the status quo in how the law was applied to citizens (Chapman et al., 2013). As he worked to bring attention to inequalities and the effects of these inequalities on the Black community. His work encourages people to look at the unequal distribution of power among White people, and Black people, not traditionally having a seat at the table, have been oppressed by structures and systems created by and meant to protect the culture of White citizens of the United States of America (Khalifa et al., 2013). This movement to identify disproportionalities of White power, challenge people to identify these inequities in the systems in their own lives. CRT is often misinterpreted as being anti-White or labeling the structures and people in those structures as contemporary racist that promote hatred towards Black people (Chapman et al., 2013). Wellman (1993) defined racism as a socially accepted belief that defend European Americans advantages in class, economics, opportunity, and access than Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). This is a term many have come to know as White privilege. Critical Race Theory’s description of racism progresses deeper, highlighting the subtle forms of racism and discrimination that
are so well established in the United States’ societal structures, that many White people are not aware they exist, as they are not directly or even indirectly affected by such systems (Chapman et al., 2013).

Politics promoting White supremacy and increasing and legislation that continue oppressing already marginalized groups add to the emotional load BIPOC students support the notion that those seen as other than White are less human than White people (Jardina & Piston, 2023). These dehumanizing beliefs evolve from the country’s inception and history of chattel slavery and the establishment of Whiteness as property (Busey et al., 2023; Crenshaw, 1988, Harris, 1993; Jardina & Piston, 2023). Harris (1993) argues that the law’s racialization based on color has created Whiteness as the norm. She emphasizes that Whiteness as property is not merely the distribution of wealth but also about the functions of race (Busey et al., 2023). When that function of Whiteness is what creates the culture’s norm, then what is seen as neutral or objective becomes the cornerstone from which White privilege develops (Crenshaw, 1988).

The political climate has recently grown more racist as states have reverted to discriminatory legislation that limits historical perspective of the Black experience (Mervosh, 2023). In 2022 Florida’s Republican Governor signed the “Stop WOKE” Act into law, outlawing any instruction that may make White students feel uncomfortable or experience any residual guilt around the hate, discrimination, and prejudice that BIPOC have felt at that hands of White people throughout history (Mervosh, 2023). This has required that educators and resources refrain from any language about privilege or oppression based on race, color, national origin or sex and that teacher’s first amendment rights are not protected when acting as an educator of the state (Singer, 2023). In
addition, Governor DeSantis has targeted Critical Race Theory and Social-Emotional Learning in K-12 education even when and where it does not apply (Mervosh, 2023; Singer, 2023). The passing of these laws supports the conservative push by right wing politicians that continue to perpetuate the cycle that those who identify as other than White (and cis gender) are seen less human.

**Critical Race Theory in Education**

Critical Race Theory was introduced into education in 1993 by William Tate with an article titled “Critical Race Analysis of the Proposed National Assessment in Mathematics” in which he exposed the bias of testing in mathematics (Lynn & Adams, 2002). Tate’s work around race and property functions of Whiteness in education continued in 1995 with Gloria Ladson-Billings through their published work “Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education” (Milner, 2007). In their work, they attempted to advance research around race and theory in education (Milner, 2007). Critical Race Theory framework critiques how White culture, history, and structures have become the norm in American education and encourage reform (Crenshaw, 1988; Khalifa et al., 2013). Carter G. Woodson and W. E. B. Dubois first assessed social inequalities using race as a theoretical lens (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016; Milner, 2007). Dubois discussed the two-ness or double consciousness that students of color possess due to their experience of oppression due to their race. They experience life as students in our schools’ system, but also have an added and different experience due to their Blackness (Crenshaw, 1988; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016). Male students of color are more likely to experience exclusionary consequences for non-contact behavior violations (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016). Critical Race Theorists argue that this practice along with
reactions to desegregation legislation continue to oppress students of color. While Thurgood Marshall made gains at dismantling Jim Crow Laws through his work with *Brown v. The Board of Education* this did little to change the effects of systemic racism for people of color. Desegregation intended to create more equity for Black students yet led to White flight and loss of Black teachers and administrators that were predominant in the Black schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016). CRT forces us to look at the common everyday practice and patterns of inequality in our society and the struggles for racial justice and equality in society’s systems (Su, 2007). Studies around critical race have offered opportunity to examine the BIPOC experiences, allowing marginalized groups to speak their truth (Crenshaw, 1988; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). Their work focused on inequality in our educational systems and how rights around property continue to limit the same opportunity and access to education based on BIPOC students living in lower socio-economic areas and schools (Lynn & Adams, 2002).

Critical Race Theory in education does not have set definition with research focusing on various similar tenets as they may apply to students in the education setting. Billings and Tate (1995) highlight three element. Those includes that racism is widespread in American culture and this impacts all systems, civil rights laws have been ineffective at improving the circumstances for BIPOC, and challenge American beliefs of meritocracy and color-blindness that promote capitalism (Crenshaw, 1988; Billings & Tate, 1995). Chapman et al. (2013) also focused on three tenets. The first is that elements of White supremacy with access to power, politics, and economy systemically limited for BIPOC. The second is that racism is maintained or adjusted only as it pertains to its impact it will have on Whites self-interest versus racial injustice as it intersects with
exclusion and oppression of BIPOC (Chapman et al., 2013). The third element reflects criticism around civil rights laws that have not done enough to improve the quality of life of BIPOC as evident by continued lack opportunity in all areas of life to which Whites have access (Chapman et al., 2013). Milner (2007) defined Critical Race Theory in education as

(a) the ingrained nature of race and racism in society and thus in education and education research; (b) the importance of narrative, counter- narrative, and the naming of one's own reality in education; and (c) the centrality of interest convergence in education. (p. 390)

Khalifa et al. (2013) argues there are five tenets that guide CRT’s work in education and developing school leaders. Those include racism is a norm in American culture with White being the invisible but understood standard all others are measured, racism is a social construct, acknowledging and valuing the stories of BIPOC as recognizing their voice and experience as a way to gain knowledge about the impact that past and current systems have impacted their experience, intentional dialogue around race relations as a function of American culture, and a clear understanding that racism is systemic and structured to privilege Whites and the cost of BIPOC (Crenshaw, 1988; Busey et al., 2023; Khalifa et al., 2013).

Over the last two years, Critical Race Theory has gained political attention in mainstream media. In late 2020, President Trump banned the use of Critical Race Theory as part of any federal employee training (Gozalez & Butcher, 2021). This censorship was lifted with the Biden-Harris administration taking office in early 2021 (Gonzalez &
Butcher, 2021), but the ongoing debate about systemic racism’s role in US history was reignited. Bell argued that US systems of segregation created an understanding of superiority between elite White and working-class White that served to promote a sense of supremacy based on race, serving to maintain the status quo (Gonzalez & Butcher, 2021). By July 2021, 28 states have passed or proposed legislation to impede teachers’ ability to critically discuss issues of racism, sexism, viewing their inclusion and divisiveness to the American Constitution and a threat to the emotions of White Americans (Kaplan & Owings, 2021). This cognitive dissonance creates two common factions surrounding the argument with CRT. One side wants to honor the traditional understanding of US history as it has been filtered through textbooks and focus on the flawless success and patriotism. The self-proclaimed patriots are committed to “tradition” and widely accepted beliefs of the founding fathers being heroes without any recognition of their use of power to oppress people of color and women and establish systems that allow the patriarchy to thrive for generations. While the other school of thought wants schools to look at the whole picture of US history that include the effects of White supremacy and other systemic structures that have intentionally marginalized race and gender (Kaplan & Owings, 2021).

This controversy has sparked the debate on teaching CRT in K-12 schools in the US, despite this theoretical teaching being predominantly reserved in masters and doctoral level courses when discussing systemic racism (Kaplan & Owings, 2021). Sawshuk (2021) argues that in current mainstream America many use Critical Race Theory as a catch all term that applies to any diversity efforts including multi-culture focus in curriculum and social justice efforts, due to politically efforts by the Republican
party and other conservative groups. Their concern is a change to the status quo that is threatens currently White dominated social structures. These critics claim that CRT is threatening the fabric of the country and values and encourages discrimination White people (Sawshuk, 2021). K-12 teachers, particularly Social Studies teachers, find themselves in precarious situations when they want students to think critically and make meaning around events in US history and how the country wants to move forward to honor justice and freedom (Kaplan & Owings, 2021). Yet they may feel conflicted when relegated to teaching America’s founding principles as filtered by textbooks with blatant omission of historically significant events, policies, and structures (Kaplan & Owings, 2021). While culturally relevant teaching is not the same thing as CRT, it does align to one component in that it encourages students to recognize and disrupt issues of inequity in their own lives (Sawshuk, 2021).

A recent parent advocacy group, Parents Defending Education, developed a poll that reported their concern about what they identify as “CRT” claiming that schools are teaching students that White people are privilege because they are White while BIPOC are victims of oppression, White people are being discriminated, and that America was built on racism (Sawshuk, 2021). Political and advocacy groups support state law intervening and banning CRT in K-12 highlighting concerns that there is too much focus on race, it vilifies White people for the country’s history making White children feel guilty, focuses on the negative impact of America’s darker times, and this comes at the cost of patriotism (Schwartz, 2021).

There is not sufficient evidence that these tenets are being deliberately taught to students in K-12, since CRT is applied in higher education and not part the K-12
curriculum standards (Sawshuk, 2021). As referenced above, culturally relevant teaching encourages students to recognize and value their own experiences even when oppressed by American structures (Sawshuk, 2021). The lack of clarity around agreed up definition and purpose between higher education and legislation continues to create confusion and frustration for K-12 teachers (Schwartz, 2021). As CRT has been applied to growing research over the last 15 years, there is still clarity needed around how it is applied and identification of consistent tenets (Busey, et al., 2023).

In 2022, legislators voted with Kentucky Senate Bill 1 and House Bill 44 to override the Democratic Governor, Andy Beshear’s, veto that would restrict what Kentucky educators can teach around the issues of race and racism (Schwartz, 2021). Beshear attempted to veto legislation that required teachers to teach students that individuals are not responsible for actions committed by members of their race and that race will only be referenced in terms of slavery, civil war, and reunification of the country post civil war (Schwartz, 2021). Later in that session, it was passed that educators found in violation would not face criminal charges (Schwartz, 2021).

**Literature Review Summary**

Throughout Chapter Two, I explored existing literature around the field of childhood trauma, the disproportionate effects it has on marginalized students, and supports that schools employ to challenge its effects on student learning with research based and trauma informed practices. In this review, I identified specific themes throughout the literature that were consistent in effectively responding to trauma exposed students. Themes consistently appeared throughout the research continue to support the
importance of healthy connection with a stable, trusting adult (Brunzell et al., 2015; Dorado et al., 2016; Foster, 2020; Sebring & Bryk) providing the foundation for students to begin healing. Creating a safe, predictable environment built around respect, equity, and inclusion (Martin et al., 2017; O’Neil et al., 2010; West et al., 2014) is another recurring theme appearing throughout the literature. A third theme observed was providing effective interventions by teachers trained in Trauma Informed Practices (Berger & Quiros, 2014; Herronkohl et al. 2019; Martin et al., 2017; Pane et al., 2014; West et al., 2014) that teach students coping strategies and self-regulation strategies so they can begin retraining their brains on more healthy reactions to stress in their lives, and to remove punitive responses to misbehaviors (Dorado et al., 2016; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Linley & Joseph, 2004), and training cultural awareness and pedagogy (Pane et al., 2014). Research led me to my study to find out how prepared teachers feel they are in addressing the needs of students exposed to trauma and how aware they are of the daily interactions in the classroom that could help heal or trigger trauma exposed students.

Critical Race Theory was also explored as it will provide the theoretical framework of my study. I reviewed the history of CRT and its inclusion into education, including the recent political controversy in the K-12 curriculum and classroom. There is limited research aligning how prepared teachers feel toward effectively implement trauma informed practices and daily interactions that honor the tenets outlined in CRT. School districts and schools are taking active roles as legislated by the state of Kentucky to develop racial equity policies, but there is limited research on how prepared teachers feel at effectively implementing the spirit of the law.
In Chapter 3 I will provide the methodological research plan and design. It will include the purpose of my study, along with my data collection and analysis protocol. I intend to conduct the study to answer my stated research questions.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this study, I explore teachers’ perceptions and experiences in responding to maladaptive classroom behaviors from trauma-exposed students. I seek to understand the teacher’s perception of their role in helping or hindering students’ learning based on how they respond to students not following the behavior expectations as outlined in their school’s behavior handbook. I am interested in determining if teachers factor in considerations of students’ racial, historical, and cultural experiences when responding to misbehaviors. And finally, I seek to identify what teachers perceive the most effective means of supporting them to ensure safe classrooms and equitable responses to misbehaviors that increase learning opportunity and access for our marginalized students.

There are three research questions guiding this study. These are:

RQ1: What preparation and training have teachers at the Dream Center Academy Christian School received that they feel is effective in preparing them for identifying and supporting trauma exposed students?

RQ2: What impact do teachers perceive that their communication style has on the effectiveness of improving student outcomes for trauma exposed students, particularly students of color?

RQ3: How do teachers adjust their classroom strategies based on racial equity policies, student’s classroom behavior, and trauma informed practices?

The purpose of Chapter 3 is to describe the research methodology that I used for this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological case study and provide a rationale of the
methodological features. I will describe features of my research design and selection of participants. Chapter 3 is structured as follows. First, I begin by stating and rationalizing the selection of my research design (a qualitative case study) and strengths and limitations of qualitative research methods. Next, I will discuss the context of the qualitative case study and selection of participants. I will then discuss the various data sources and the corresponding data collection process and procedures that I will use to obtain them in this study. I will give careful attention to the ethical considerations of asking teachers to reflect on their understanding and perceived value of district resources offered and expected to be used by their school, how prepared they feel to respond to maladaptive behaviors from trauma exposed students, and reflection of their bias in how they interpret district behavior violations. As a researcher-practitioner undertaking this study in the community in which I reside and am employed, I will discuss the process by which I will explore my positionality and relationship with the topic, school, and district in which the study will take place. I will describe the data analysis procedures in pursuit of findings to my stated research questions. Finally, I will discuss the strategies by which I will ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the findings I generate.

**Research Methods and Design— Hermeneutic Phenomenological Case Study**

This hermeneutic phenomenological case study explored the lived experience of teachers in creating a socially just classroom environment for all their students. Phenomenology is rooted in philosophy and seeks to describe and understand the scientific approach to human consciousness and self-awareness through human experiences (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). With this study, I sought capture teachers’
perceptions and self-awareness of how their interactions impact students’ behavior.

Hermeneutic phenomenological case studies do not intend to seek out the scientific truth, rather the participants’ perception of “truth” developed from their experiences (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Wojnar and Swanon (2017) define hermeneutic phenomenology as an inquiry into participants’ interpretations of their lived experiences and the researchers’ interpretations of that phenomenon. By undertaking a phenomenological case study, I was able to explore individual experiences and apply a common meaning to developing themes or patterns of the phenomenon I studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018), which is teachers seeking to create socially just classrooms for trauma exposed students.

Phenomenology allows me to focus on describing what teachers have in common as they consider the multiple components of trauma and its disproportionate effects on students, both inside and outside of the classroom. I looked for patterns to identify a pattern or commonality of factors to consider in creating socially just classrooms that are equitable, determine recommended preparation for teachers in student populations with high exposure to trauma in diverse classrooms (See Figure 1).

Hermeneutics is an interpretive approach to lived experiences that seeks to gain understanding through shared context and interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Hermeneutics include the participants’ understanding of the phenomenon based on their experiences, but also involves analyzing the language itself as a source or data and what it attempts to convey (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Hatch (2002) reminds us that interpretive frameworks such as hermeneutics are applied in our politically driven world, and their intent is to inform one’s understanding of the phenomena that are grounded in data to build analytical integrity, using specific data
from experiences, not opinions. A case study can be phenomenological in nature in that the focus is on the lived experiences of the individuals or group being studied and the meanings that these individuals or group give to their experiences.

In this study, I captured the perceptions of teachers in a high needs private Christian school in the West End of Louisville, that is 100% African American with high poverty, high crime population of the city, to determine how prepared they feel in identifying students that have been exposed to trauma and if they feel they provide equitable access to the same supports and instructional strategies to all students.

Figure 1 shows the procedure that I followed in conducting my study.
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that I applied to this study is Critical Race Theory. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) were the first to apply Derrick Bell’s theory of Critical Race Theory to education (Milner, 2007). CRT in education follows the three propositions driving the critical discussion that were applicable in legal studies (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Those three include that race remains significant in the United States, US society is built on property rights rather than human rights, and understanding the intersection of race and property can be used to analyze inequities in US society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Theorists use various elements or tenets identified from previous work, but there is not one set of finite elements or tenets applicable to all studies (Busey et al., 2023; Su, 2007). CRT seeks to highlight race and racial hierarchies, study their effect, gain understanding of why it continues, and call for change and dismantling current racist structures (Parsons et al., 2011).

There are five central tenets consistently found in the literature when applying CRT to educational practice (Alvarez, 2020; Chapman et al., 2013; Irby et al., 2013; Khalifa et al., 2013; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2007; Su, 2007). One tenet is the invisible privilege of White culture that is considered America’s norm. Chapman et al., (2013) describes this as White supremacy as there exists hidden discrimination in the country’s structures that White individuals are privileged with unspoken advantages and access in society simply because they are White. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2016) write about the property functions of Whiteness
that allow rights to preserve reputation, status, and property and the right to exclude. None of which have been rights honored for people of color. These colorblind structures maintain the status quo of White supremacy and privilege (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). A second tenet is that Race is a social construct. In his research, Milner (2007) discusses that one’s race identifies more than the color of ones’ skin, but includes historical experiences and cultural heritage that differs based on skin color of people even is same community. There exists a distinct dichotomy of normal (White) and other (Black) that is based only on the status quo (Alvarez, 2020; Milner, 2007). A third tenet that is common in the literature about CRT is that people of color have their voice oppressed and storytelling is an essential part of communicating knowledge. Researchers capture narratives and counter-narratives through subject story telling of their experiences (Milner, 2007). CRT theorists understand that these narrative from the oppressed are not neutral, but they are historical, sociocultural, and political realities of the experiences of people of color that are not commonly represented (Chapman et al., 2013). A fourth tenet involves the dialogue around race relations. The post-racial era of color-blindness where policy and organizations do not account for the differences in experiences or access or people from different races in attempt to see everyone as the same (Chapman, 2013). When the idea of color-blindness is applied in education, policy makers and practitioners fail to create equitable opportunities for students when systems of oppression that marginalize students are recognized or corrected (Chapman, 2013; Khalifa et al., 2013). The final tenet is that racism is systemic with minority groups being marginalized. Racial ideology blames people of color for their condition and circumstances in society (Alvarez, 2020; Chapman et al., 2013). Current policies and laws are imbedded in the
country’s history and politics with distinction between privilege for White and oppression for the other (Khalifa et al., 2013).

My study applied CRT to the interview questions by honoring the narratives that teachers of color share regarding their level of preparedness to address high needs students and seek specific opportunities where they either recognize structural racism during the school day or their perspectives and narrative reflect more colorblindness in how school operates. During the observations, I used a critical race lens to note interactions between teacher and students and students between each other. Interactions were coded as either part of trauma informed practices or re-traumatizing in nature. In addition, the observations sought to identify the five tenets of CRT.

**Strengths and Limitations of Hermeneutic Phenomenological Case Studies**

The strength of using a phenomenological study is that it is highly structured and helpful for new researchers as they learn and navigate the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is valuable for research in fields like education wherein groups of individuals (e.g., teachers, students) share similar experiences. The highly structured process can also be a limitation of the phenomenological approach. This structure requires that researchers have an abstract understanding of philosophical concepts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Depending on the field of research or the phenomenon being studied, it could be difficult for the researcher to find subjects with similar experiences. The researcher needs to be transparent with subjects and intentionally disclose and describe his or her positionality during the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). With hermeneutic being an inductive phenomenology, the participants share their experiences
from their perspective as the first layer of interpretation, and then the researcher interprets what their experience means based on his or her own experience with the topic, thus a second layer of interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Another limitation with hermeneutic phenomenology that Sloan and Bowe (2014) mentions is that since participants share their personal experience in relation to the work around them, it is more challenging to provide clarity around the phenomenon that can be applied elsewhere. The interpretative nature of a participant sharing his or her experience could change based on timing, circumstances, and outside influences over time. Hermeneutics’ interpretive nature does not provide a formalized analysis procedure that descriptive phenomenology provides. The phenomenon itself determines how the data will be analyzed (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Using CRT as a theoretic framework, teachers shared their perspectives and experiences giving voice to their experience with honoring racial equity policies and provide insight surrounding interest convergence.

**Context of the Study**

The setting for the study is a K-12 private Christian school in a large urban school setting in Kentucky. The school that served as the context of this study is the Dream Center Academy Christian School, located in the Chickasaw Neighborhood of Louisville’s west end. The current student population is approximately 20 students with 100% of them being Black. The school opened on January 3, 2022, housed in the basement of New Covenant Baptist Church until funds have been secured for the planned facility to be built. Transportation is provided as needed. The school is available to any student in the metropolitan area that is looking for a small Christian environment that provides quality education and addresses healing from the traumatic events and social
oppression that have become common from Louisville’s west end families and mirror the experiences that Mr. Tod Moore experienced growing up in the area.

At the time of the study, the school had three teaching staff, a principal, a counselor, the Founder and Director, and an additional support staff that prepared and cleaned up after meals and provided assisted with additional clerical needs as time permits. All the staff are also people of color. The school has daily Bible verse and scripture study, go to chapel weekly, and have weekly celebrations focused on student growth and character.

In this study I analyzed teachers’ responses to common maladaptive behaviors at the school that interrupt or interfere with class instruction and student learning. I collected data from teachers based on their interpretations of their experiences, and how prepared they feel in responding to the needs of the students based on patterns of behavior. I also looked to identify if there are patterns of disproportionality in how misbehaviors are perceived and reported by teachers. In the public-school district, they annually update their student code of conduct in the Student Support and Behavior Intervention Handbook (SSBIH). In the public school system that students from The Dream Center previously attended or would be attending, Black students make up 37% of the district’s enrollment, White students make up 40%. Black students make up 66% of suspensions in the district while White students make up only 23% of suspensions (JCPS, 2020). Disproportionality in the way that it is defined in the literature and in this study, is strongly evident in the district’s suspension data (JCPS, 2020). In the school that served as the context of my study, 100% of the students and staff are Black, removing concerns
about disproportionality in application of correcting behavior.

**Data Sources**

In this study, I drew upon four sources of data. For the first step I used a survey to collect data from the teaching staff at the research site. All teaching staff were invited to participate in the survey. I used data collected from this sample as background information to provide insight and context as I investigated further by observing their responses to student behavior in the classroom. Three teachers made up the instructional staff at the time the study was conducted. There were two additional staff member that were part of the instructional staff with one as an instructional assistant and the other as a teacher, but both left for other opportunity prior to the study. One of the Instructional Assistants took over the teacher vacancy in the K-1 room. Next, I conducted post observation semi-structured interviews with all three instructional staff, as well as the Principal and the Executive Director. The fourth phase of the research drew upon the school’s discipline data from the school paying particular attention to the pattern of referrals written by the s participants. I analyzed the group survey to identify experiences and understanding around trauma-exposed training. This provided context around the next phase of the research; observations of classroom teachers interacting with students in the normal classroom setting. The third source I collected in my study will be an interview of the class observed to gain the teacher’s perspective on the phenomenon. And finally, I included unobtrusive data. In the public-school setting this would include the review teacher referrals on their interpretation of students’ behavior as violations of the code of conduct (SSBIH) and to determine if the teacher’s pattern of responding to
student behavior to determine what strategies or techniques the teacher felt were most effective. In this research setting, I determined how misbehaviors are reported and addressed by administration to determine if the responses are harming or hindering trauma-exposed students.

**Survey**

I first conducted a survey (See Appendix B) to determine years of experience, opinions on student behavior in their classrooms, how comfortable they are with their classroom management, their level of understanding about trauma exposed students, how race and systemic race factor into behavior in their classroom, and the level or preparation or training they have received to respond to misbehaviors in the classroom. The intent of this survey was to understand the teacher background information and the comfort level and preparedness the teachers in the focus group feel as they respond to misbehaviors in the classroom. The survey provided an opportunity to collect additional background information in an efficient manner, using open ended questions where they can apply their own context.

**Observations**

The second data source was participant observations. This ethnological approach sought to understand the phenomenon being studied (Hatch, 2002). I wanted to see how students respond to the typical classroom stressors, how the teacher interprets that behavior, and the students’ reaction to the teachers’ interactions. Being in the environment where the participant experienced the phenomena of student behavior that influences their learning, this allowed me as the researcher an understanding of the context that I can only gain by being present (Hatch, 2002). This allowed me to observe
sensitive or awkward scenarios that the participant may be reluctant to share, not find as significant, or may be taken for granted, or subjectively interpreted (Hatch, 2002). I used the observation protocol I developed to guide the collection of field notes as they align to relevant tenets of CRT that I will follow up with the teacher during the interview process that follows (See. Appendix D).

**Teacher Interviews**

The third data source was interviews of the teachers that I observed in the classroom. In addition, I conducted semi-structured interviews of the Principal and Director of the school. This was an opportunity for me as the researcher to hear how they apply meaning to their experience. It also provided an opportunity for the teachers to talk about their perspectives, reflect on their training and preparedness for the behaviors they encountered in the classroom during the observations (Hatch, 2002). The interviews allowed me to collect additional data on the same phenomenon that I observed, but from the participant’s perspective (See Appendix C).

**Document Analysis**

And finally, I collected unobtrusive data in the form of the teacher’s classroom management plan and anecdotal data around student discipline since the school did not have a formal discipline referring process, as it was not been deemed necessary. This provided insight into the teacher’s expectation about classroom behaviors and the behaviors referred to administrators to address. This provided specific data on how teachers have responded to and reported the phenomenon without my presence as the researcher interference (Hatch, 2002) by me being present during observations and in interviews. These data provided opportunity to identify biases and value systems that
operate in the classroom on a day-to-day basis (Hatch, 2002). This was also be triangulated with data taken from the observations, interviews, and effectiveness at shifting student behavior and look for any evidence of bias.

![Figure 2. Data Sources]

**Data Collection Procedures**

I will now discuss the data collection procedures used in my study. First, I will discuss the collection of survey data. Second, I discuss my process for collecting observations. Third, I discuss my process for collecting interviews, Lastly, I discuss my process for collecting school documents.

**Surveys**

The data collection survey for my study began with a survey of teachers willing to participate from the pre-identified school given a consent form to review. All teachers at the designated school were invited and agreed to participate. The survey was conducted
using digital format and will collect email addresses. The data collected from the survey will ask general open-ended questions about the teacher’s background, demographics, understanding of how trauma manifests in the classroom, and how their experience of trauma exposed students and diversity have prepared them to respond to student misbehaviors (See Appendix C).

I compiled these data to identify themes, patterns, and level of comfort felt by the sample group. The three teachers feel they are prepared to effectively and confidently deal with trauma exposed students, had an understanding of trauma and feel adequately prepared but would like more training, have limited knowledge and preparation to deal with classroom misbehaviors, and do not feel properly prepared to identify behaviors that are manifestations of trauma from other misbehaviors.

**Observations**

Next, I observed each of the teachers in the school and observed their class for a minimum of 45 minutes. As a researcher-practitioner, I clearly communicated that the observation is for the purpose of the research and will not be used as an evaluative tool for their annual evaluation, however any unethical interactions I am obligated to report. I explained that my role as the researcher was to observe the same phenomenon to get a better understanding of the context and their interpretation. My intent was to be unobtrusive, and my involvement will be non-participatory, honoring a post-positivist paradigm (Hatch, 2002), but I understand that as a practitioner, students and the participant may behave differently since I was a guest in their school. This was addressed and accounted for during the interview process.
During the observation, I took field notes of the interactions of the students and teacher. I made descriptions of context, actions, and conversations written to provide as much detail as possible. I then converted notes into research protocols by expanding the original notes into a consistent format (Hatch, 2002). I described behaviors observed that are consistent with students exposed to trauma, and determined if the interactions that student has with other classmates and the teacher are healing or re-traumatizing. I also look for examples of what CRT tenets that can be observed and make sections on the teacher’s implementation of their classroom management plan and how well students responded to the teacher were be bracketed as needed.

**Interviews**

After the observation, I conducted semi-structured interviews with each of the six teachers observed. My intent through intentional questions was to attempt to increase the participants’ consciousness and provide opportunity for reflection and growth around traditional school structures that perpetuate oppression for students of color, and ways the code of conduct was implemented that could serve as triggers for students. I also interviewed the Principal and the Director for their perspective and provide additional context around the school. Participants received the interview questions prior to the observation and the interview (See Appendix C). The questions allowed teachers to reflect and discuss their understanding of trauma-informed practices and how their interpretation of the tenets of CRT were reflected in the classroom.

**Document Analysis**

Finally, I analyzed patterns in the behavior data from the first semester that reflect the same student and teacher dynamic of those observed. In reviewing the data, I looked
for patterns of misbehavior that were manifestations of trauma, disproportionality of
students referred, and any patterns that arose whether it be from a particular teacher,
behavior, or demographic. The intent of focusing on behavior referral was to review
patterns of behavior, students referred, teachers writing those referrals to triangulate the
personal interactions, teacher perceptions of student behavior, and how consistently they
implement their own classroom management plan. I specifically looked for evidence of
trauma informed practices and the predetermined CRT tenets evident in review of any
behavior documents.

**Ethical Considerations**

Creswell and Poth (2018) highlight three guiding principles to consider when
conducting qualitative research: respect, welfare, and justice. While these three principles
support the foundation of any research, during the coding process I looked to identify
themes or patterns that were consistent among responses from interviewees. These
themes and patterns were reported in my finding and help determine recommendations as
relevant. As the principal investigator, I cannot control how teachers interpret the data
they observe in the classroom. As research continues in this area, it is paramount that I
remain transparent and share intent and results with subjects as appropriate. This is
particularly important when the research is being done about, with, and for the district in
which the subjects and I work.

As an administrator in the public-school district, I take great pride in my ethical
and legal responsibility to adhere to the district’s behavior handbook as a tool of
determining the students’ accountability for their behavior. How an administrator
interprets the language of the behavior description leaves room for one’s implicit bias to
surface. To ensure that my moral compass is also calibrated the same way in my research, I
completed a Structured Ethical Reflection (SER) activity (Stevens, et. al., 2016) to
identify guiding values throughout the research process (See Appendix E). This is the
same diligence that I apply to any interactions in which I am interacting with
children. Critical thinking, open-mindedness, integrity, fairness, compassion, and
flexibility are principles that guide my work with research subjects, just as it does with
students.

Another layer of my research addresses social justice. This looked different in a
small private Christian school setting as compared to a large urban public school district.
Racial equity was a driving force for both institutions, the research setting’s focus was
more to provide equitable experiences to students that are not getting what they need
elsewhere. I valued the need for adaptability throughout the research process. Having an
essential understanding of these principles helped to formulate questions in a manner that
is considerate of how respondents answered.

As a requirement for conducting research on human subjects, I completed CITI
training in the fall of 2020. I obtained a signed informed consent from all participants
(See Appendix A). All data collected were kept secure on a personal computer and
backed up with an external saving device. The personal computer was password
protected and the Google software where data will be housed requires another password
to access. Data collected through Google forms were only accessible by the researcher
and saved as “restricted” and will be deleted off the Google drive onto a personal
computer that is password protected. Data will be destroyed after successful defense of
my dissertation to protect subjects.
**Data Analysis**

Analyzing qualitative data is an intricate process. The researcher seeks to discover logical descriptions, patterns, and explanations but also identifying inconsistencies, gaps, or conflicting observations of social life to develop findings (Miles et al., 2014). In analyzing phenomenological data, I described my experience with the phenomenon being studied in an attempt to draw a distinction from my experience and those of my participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I began the analysis with describing the essence of the phenomenon as I interpreted the teachers’ description of their experience. Then I assigned codes for the categories of epoche (or personal bracketing), significant statements, meaning units, textual descriptions, and structural descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Survey**

I conducted a survey of ten questions with teachers in the selected school. This survey was conducted using google forms that collects responses into a spreadsheet for ease organizing detailed responses (See Appendix B). Responses were recorded into a spreadsheet. Coding was not necessary for this survey, as it is only being used to gather information to identify participants that will be used for the next step of the research, the observations and interviews. Surveys were analyzed for the purpose of determining teachers’ backgrounds, preparation, and comfort level with trauma informed care in observations and interviews.

**Observations**

After analyzing the survey data, I observed the three teachers, the principal and director. During the observations, I took field notes of student behavior, the antecedent,
and teacher response. I described their experiences through epoche. I analyzed the field notes from the observation using the following a priori codes that reflect the tenets of Critical Race Theory: ingrained nature of race and racism, opportunity for narrative and counter narrative, and interest convergence (Milner, 2007). A priori codes I identified pertain to the intersection of race as property as it applies to education: rights of disposition, rights to use and enjoyment, reputation and status property, and the absolute right to exclude (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016). Additionally, I used a priori coding, drawing upon the five common tenets of CRT to determine if the behaviors and interactions observed are reflective of the CRT elements.

1. The invisible privilege of White culture that is considered the norm in the United States
2. Race as a social construct
3. People of color having their voice oppressed and storytelling being an essential part of communicating knowledge
4. Dialogue around race relations
5. Racism as systemic with minority groups being marginalized

**Interviews**

The teachers I interviewed received the questions prior to the interview. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to develop significant statements. The transcription was numbered line by line. After the interview transcription, each line of the text was numbered. I analyzed each line for meaning and record it on a spreadsheet for open coding. I used in vivo coding to code the participants' interviews. This heuristic method allowed the researcher to discover data (Miles et al., 2014). I then develop codes
from the participants’ own words that are not predetermined by the researcher (Saldana, 2016). This in vivo method of coding is useful in educational research as it allows the participant’s voice to be heard (Saldana, 2016) and years of educational experience give teachers a unique professional expertise that holds value. With in vivo coding the researcher must be particularly observant to the participants’ intent and patterns in language to identify codes that accurately represent the reflections of their experiences (Saldana, 2016).

I sought to identify evidence of the social emotional themes consistent with the research around trauma informed practices: a healthy connection with a stable, trusting adult (Brunzell et al., 2015; Dorado et al., 2016; Foster, 2020; Sebring & Bryk, 200); creating a safe, predictable environment built around respect, equity, and inclusion (O’Neil et al., 2010; West et al., 2014; Martin et al., 2017), trauma informed practices (West et al., 2014; Berger & Quiros, 2014; Martin et al., 2017; Herronkohl et al. 2019; Pane et al., 2014) coping and self-regulation strategies (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Lindley & Joseph, 2004; Dorado et al., 2016), and training cultural awareness and pedagogy (Pane et al., 2014).

Additionally, I sought to identify evidence of elements of CRT in the teachers’ responses (Chapman et al., 2013; Gonzalez & Butcher, 2021; Irby et al., 2013; Khalifa et al., 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2007; Su, 2007):

1. The invisible privilege of White cultured that is considered the norm in the United States

2. Race is a social construct
3. People of color have their voice oppressed and storytelling is an essential part of communicating knowledge

4. Dialogue around race relations

5. Racism is systemic with minority groups being marginalized

I began the first cycle of coding after the transcripts of interviews are completed and sent to participants for verification. Using a numbered form, I copied the transcripts, so each line of text is a data chunk (Miles et al., 2014). The next step was open coding. I used open coding to capture the meaning of a lengthier text into more concise language while still honoring the voice of the participants (Saldana, 2016). For the second cycle of coding, I identified patterns from the participants’ language and intent from the interview that I summarized during open coding (Miles et al., 2014) and give an axial code. Through the axial coding, I identified patterns that I developed into selective codes and categorize them into themes.

**Document Analysis**

Lastly, I looked for any documentation surrounding disciplinary data from the same group of teachers in the survey. I observed the implementation of their classroom management plans either written or as implemented through teacher responses in the classroom, and anecdotal descriptions of students’ behavior as they aligned with the information collected in the survey looking for support or inconsistencies. I intended to use these data as secondary data to support teachers’ description and interpretation of classroom behaviors, how those behaviors relate to trauma, and identifying evidence of disproportionality.
Process for Exploring Researcher Positionality

In this study, I sought to capture the perceptions of teachers in a private Christian to determine how prepared they feel in identifying students that have been exposed to trauma, the level or preparation prior to entering the classroom, and their perception of how adequately they provide equitable access to the same supports and instructional strategies to all students. Milner (2007) cautions researchers to consider how race, racism, and culture can influence a study. As a researcher, one should reflect on how they racially and culturally may relate to their topic (Milner, 2007). Taking the time to evaluate the influence and experience one brings to the topic; one will be less likely to unintentionally misinterpret others’ responses and lived experiences.

Milner (2007) highlights previous research on epistemologies as related to Critical Race Theory, highlighting that it does not just involve how we know and perceive the world, but also systems that have been developed to maintain a position of inadequacy for some groups or populations. As I explored my positionality as a researcher, I used Milner’s Framework of Researcher Racial and Cultural Positionality that included four components; researching the self, researching the self in relation to others, engaged reflection and representation, and shifting from self to system.

Strategies for Ensuring Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability

With phenomenology, the researcher strives to create a human understanding, or essence of the phenomenon through effective and relevant data collection procedures. My research demonstrated credibility with the data from multiple data sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I informed participants of the data collected, how it was used, and my
interpretation. I triangulated data from the four sources. One way I ensured this was to develop trust with participants and express the relevance of their openness and honesty in the participant driven research, helping to develop action steps. Scholars and practitioners in urban private Christian schools that serve African American students in a Black community, particularly those that previously taught and/or attended the local public school system may find this research to be transferable to their public-school setting with similar demographic population. Confirmability was supported by the Principal of the school, who reviewed data to ensure accuracy and representation. Any data that may be perceived as damaging would be addressed with their Board of Directors. Creswell and Poth (2018) outline five guiding steps researchers should consider in setting the standard for assessing the quality of the phenomenological study.

Figure 3. Creswell & Poth's (2018) Standards for Assessing the Quality of a Phenomenology

- Articulate a clear "phenomenon" to study in a concise way.
- Convey an understanding of the philosophical tenets of phenomenology.
- Use procedures of data analysis in phenomenology.
- Communicate the overall essence of the experience of the participants.
- Embed reflexivity throughout the study.
Summary

This chapter describes the research methodology I used for this qualitative case study and provide a rationale of the methodological features. This chapter described features of my research design and selection of participants. It stated and rationalized the selection of my research design along with strengths and limitations, context of the qualitative case study and selection of participants. I discussed the data sources collection process I used in this study. Chapter 4 provides a detailed analysis of the study using the qualitative study described in this chapter to answer the research questions.
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In this qualitative study, I explored teacher perceptions of their preparedness to effectively respond to trauma exposed students, examined through the lens of Critical Race Theory. In addition, I sought to understand how trauma intercepts with students’ race, gender, and community to identify potentially effective responses to students’ maladaptive behaviors that may result from trauma exposure. There are three research questions that guided this research.

RQ1: What preparation and training have teachers at the Dream Center Academy Christian School received that they feel is effective in preparing them for identifying and supporting trauma exposed students?

RQ2: What impact do teachers perceive that their communication style has on the effectiveness of improving student outcomes for trauma exposed students, particularly students of color?

RQ3: How do teachers adjust their classroom strategies based on racial equity policies, student’s classroom behavior, and trauma informed practices?

In this chapter, I present the findings of my study. I begin chapter 4 exploring my positionality as scholar and practitioner and how this may cloud or clarify the lens through which I view the phenomenon under study. To explore my positionality, I utilized the four components of Milner’s Framework of Researcher Racial and Cultural Positionality (2007) as outlined in Chapter 3. The next section provides an overview of data sources and analytical strategies that I used in this study. I discuss the collection
phases of the four processes used in this study: survey, observations, interviews, and
document analysis. There are five tables included in this chapter, to highlight how these
data align with research questions. Table 2 highlights which data sources aligned to
which resource questions. Table 3 reflects teacher perceived preparedness for responding
to trauma exposed students. Table 4 identifies the CRT a priori coding from observation
field notes. Table 5 highlights the selective coding from teacher interviews, aligning their
responses to research questions.

Exploration of Research Positionality

Reflecting on myself as a White female, I am the most represented demographic
group of educators (Picower, 2009). My White middle-class upbringing is often
considered the norm in our society, however after 22 years in public education, I have
learned that to be impactful for students and communities, my work has become most
beneficial focusing on marginalized groups; groups that have an added layer of trauma
due to systemic oppression, students from. When I reflect on myself in relation to others,
I recognize that even growing up as female with a great deal of trauma in the home,
discrimination is something that I have not really experienced first-hand. Not once did
my loved ones have speak to me about how to interact with police, or ask the race of a
teacher that I felt misunderstood me. I have never been followed around a store or denied
access to medical care, or drive 30 minutes to grocery stores to access fresh produce. I
have never been or seen anyone involved in any type of gun violence. This is the daily
reality of many students and their families with which I serve and participants in this
study.
As a school administrator, I must continue to work in an ongoing manner to clearly understand my students’ experiences and the barriers they regularly face, not just around instruction, but their lives in general. Teachers and staff have been trained on how trauma manifests in the classroom, but more importantly maintained a clear and research-based plan for how to address these barriers so that students can learn and flourish, and contribute to the change needed in our community. It is commonly understood that representation is important for our students of color (Warner & Larbi-Cherif, 2022). I wholeheartedly agree, but eliminating systems of oppression only start there. As a White educator, is even more important that I take the time and energy to learn daily impact of racism in the lives of my students and commit to dismantling systems where I have the influence and opportunity to do so.

A great deal of research exists around effective strategies around students exposed to trauma, but with this study I focus on teachers of students of color and that added layer of trauma that students experience in our schools and communities (Ciampa et al., 2022; Dorado et al., 2016; Joseph et al., 2020; Nese et al., 2021; Pane et al., 2014; Parker et al., 2022; Perry & Daniels et al., 2016; Peterson, 2019; Peterson, 2018; Skiba et al., 2009; von der Embse et al., 2018; Wassink-de Stigter et al., 2022). Milner (2007) identified three themes:

a) Disrupting and Extending Notions of Normality

b) Disrupting Deficit Discord and Beliefs

c) Disrupting and Extending the Socioeconomic Status Rationale

Shifting from self to system, epistemological racism (Milner, 2007) is considered by identifying a school that is made up entirely of people of color. All staff and students
are people of color and the school currently resided in the West End of the city that remains a predominantly Black community. The data gathered in this study provides specific insight into the lives of students from their teacher’s perspective. The interviews provided an opportunity for teachers to share the student stories as they play out in the classroom and how the staff responded to those experienced shared with them. These teachers and staff see first-hand how systemic structures around race and the trauma experienced in the community, previous schools, and in their families, affects students in the West End of Louisville communities. These practitioners have become keen observers and detectives, understanding that they only know as much as students are willing to share. The focus was how prepared teachers feel to effectively address and help students heal from added trauma they are exposed to due to systems of oppression that extend beyond the understanding of the normalized understanding of trauma in the classroom.

To achieve that parallel, I undertook a structured ethical reflection process at the onset of this research study. The Structured Ethical Reflection (SER) (Appendix E) assists in ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Stevens et al., 2016). I undertook this reflection in order review my values around socially just trauma responses. My efforts to characterize are important in identifying how best to respond to students that have faced generational and racial trauma when they are not meeting the expectations. I wanted to ensure that my beliefs and values supported healing and not re-traumatizing students with inappropriate responses for misbehaviors. I then applied that lens to study as I observed student-teacher interactions. It was through
this process that I engaged a reflection of my values, the research around socially just trauma responses, and how I can influence practice (Stevens et al., 2016).

**An Overview of Data Sources and Analytical Strategies**

As I began my study, I draw upon four main sources: a staff survey, teacher observations and staff interviews, and disciplinary files. The fourth source that was part of the proposed study included document analysis intended to review the pattern of disciplinary referrals that teachers submit around student behavior. However, once the research began the observation and interviews revealed the school does not currently use a behavior process that is typical in the public-school setting or comparable to what larger schools use. Through the interview process, I learned that due to the small school population, a more formal process of documenting student misbehaviors was not necessary. My research aimed to gather data from teachers that work at a small private Christian school that focuses on the needs of West End communities in Louisville, Kentucky where students in those communities that are exposed to higher rates of violence, poverty, and systemic oppression than students in other areas of city. The goal of this study was to explore teacher perceptions around student behavior and the teachers’ preparedness to respond to those behaviors of one of the most vulnerable and marginalized student subpopulations.

I first sent the survey to the instructional staff. This survey allowed the participants to share their background and understanding of trauma in the classroom, and provide their perspective on how prepared they feel to respond effectively to students exposed to trauma. I collected the survey data onto a spreadsheet, and undertook a descriptive analysis of the teachers’ perspective to identify level of preparedness in
responding to trauma exposed students and identifying what additional support or training they feel are necessary to better serve students.

Next, I conducted observations of staff and student interactions during classroom instruction and in common areas. The observational data collected during research phase differed from what was initially described in the proposal phase of this study as the school had three teachers and two instructional assistants the month prior to the observations. When I was cleared to conduct research in the school, the school staffing had shifted, with one instructional assistant leaving to take another job, and one of the teachers also leaving for another opportunity. The remaining instructional assistant that had been supporting the middle level teacher moved to the primary teaching role where she works predominantly with kindergarten and first grade students. I conducted three classroom observations, one with each teacher on staff. In addition, I conducted three additional observations of student and teacher interactions in common areas, one during an afternoon whole school celebration and student recognition assembly, another during am holding and breakfast, and a third during lunch time, for a total of six observations.

I took field notes of context, behaviors observed, and teacher response (See Appendix D for observation protocol). The teacher experiences are described through epoche, also known as bracketing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This allowed me to record the words and perspectives as teachers described their stories and those of their student while suspending judgement until the analysis phase of my research. I analyzed the field notes from the observations using the following a priori codes that reflect the tenets of Critical Race Theory: ingrained nature of race and racism, opportunity for narrative and counter narrative, and interest convergence (Milner, 2007). Additionally, I used a priori
coding, drawing upon the five common tenets of CRT to determine if the behaviors and interactions observed are reflective of the CRT elements.

1. The invisible privilege of White culture that is considered the norm in the United States
2. Race as a social construct
3. People of color having their voice oppressed and storytelling being an essential part of communicating knowledge
4. Dialogue around race relations
5. Racism as systemic with minority groups being marginalized

I then collected a third round of data through semi-structured interviews (See Appendix C for interview questions). Interviews were conducted of the three instructors, principal, and executive director. All interviews were transcribed and numbered line by line for coding. As part of the member checking procedure, interview transcriptions were sent to each participant for review, accuracy, and intent before I began coding. I used a numbered form, copied transcribed interview so each line of text is a data chunk (Miles et al., 2014). The next step was open coding. I used open coding to capture the meaning of lengthier text into more concise language while still honoring the voice of the participants (Saldana, 2016). For the second cycle of coding, I identified patterns from the participants’ language and intent from the interview that I summarize during open coding (Miles et al., 2014) and give an axial code. Through the axial coding, I identified patterns that I develop into selective codes and categorize them into themes. I processed data collected in an Excel spreadsheet matrix.
The final round of data collection as proposed was document analysis of the disciplinary referral data collected by the school. While conducting the observations and interviews, it was established that student misbehaviors that typically require administration support are addressed in real time using an informal process with the teacher, counselor, or principal addressing the concern in the moment it arises, providing students with an area to calm down, a supportive ear, and a plan to support the identified need.

Table 1. Data Sources Aligned with Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Research Question #1</th>
<th>Research Question #2</th>
<th>Research Question #3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants Observations</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants Semi-Structured Interviews</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document Analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Profile of Participants

A total of five participants participated in this study. All three of the school’s teachers participated in the survey, the classroom observations, and the semi-structured interview. In addition to the teaching staff, the principal of the school and the executive director participated in one-on-one interviews. The executive director’s and principal’s interactions with students were observed during common area times during breakfast, lunch, and assembly also. With the small teaching staff, all the instructors were observed and interviewed. At the time that I began collecting data, there were 20 students enrolled in the school. Participant One is a Black female that has been teaching over 16 years. She
teaches the upper age students from grades 8 – 12. Participant Two is a Black female that has been teaching for 6 – 15 years. She teaches the intermediate students grades 2 – 7. And Participant Three is in her first year of teaching and is assigned to grades K – 2. Participants Two and Three teach some units in collaboration with age and skill level pull-out groups to ensure mastery of grade level standards. These three participants are the teachers responsible for instructing students and are the only ones that took the survey. Two additional participants were included for the semi-structured interview. The Executive Director is a Black male with no formal education around teaching, rather an advocate for education for high need students in predominantly Black and brown communities in Louisville. He also serves on the board of directors for the school since its inception. He shares:

It [education] transformed my life, a life of crime, of drug dealing, and life of illicit activities, even being tried for the death penalty. The Lord Christ resurrected my life and put me on a mission to resurrect the lives of youth and young adults and give them options and opportunities.

The principal was also interviewed. She is a Black female that has been in education for 28 years. Most of her experience was in the public school system before her retirement. After retirement, she was invited to lead the school as her values and experience in the church and education made her the ideal candidate.

Table 2. Participant Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants Profile</th>
<th>Race &amp; Gender</th>
<th>Years in Education</th>
<th>Teaching License</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant One</td>
<td>Black Female</td>
<td>27 years</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey

Each of the three members of the teaching staff participated in the completion of the survey. The survey consisted of ten questions and was proliferated electronically (See Appendix B). The participants’ responses were collected into a spreadsheet for ease of organizing their responses. The purpose of this survey was to assess teacher perceptions of their level of preparedness around trauma informed practice. In the survey, I gathered background information about the teachers, including the years of experience teaching, identifying race and gender, and the amount of time each teacher spent developing their classroom management plans. All three of the teachers are Black females. Their years of experience range from first year teacher to a veteran teacher with over 16 years in the classroom. The teachers that have been teaching 15 or less years reported that they spent more than five hours developing and preparing their classroom management plans at that start of the year, while the teacher that has over 16 years of experience spent two to five hours preparing their classroom management plan. I asked each teacher to describe their understanding of trauma exposed students. Participant One described trauma as harmful and dangerous experiences in life that “deeply and adversely affects their emotional and mental state of well-being.” This definition is consistent with the research and literature...
around trauma (Bath, 2008; Blitz et al., 2016; Felitti et al., 1998). Participant Two and Three both spoke to the needs of the students that have been exposed to trauma.

In the survey, I also asked the teachers if they have had to make changes to their management plans based on the student behaviors that are manifestations of trauma. The purpose of this question was two-fold. One was to determine if teachers were flexible in their procedures based on the needs of the students, and the other was to see if the teachers were able to identify triggers for students demonstrating maladaptive behaviors. Participant One is assuring to students and offers opportunity to process and work through whatever the child is experiencing. Participant Two teaches students coping strategies and encouragement through scripture. Participant Three offers space for students to process feelings before rejoining the class. Question six asks the teachers to identify how trauma may manifest in the classroom. Participant One gave several examples that include withdrawing from the class, putting one’s head down, arguing with authority, or walking out of class. The Participant Two identifies manifestation of trauma can be identified through violent behavior to self and others or destruction of property. Participant Three described her experiences with students as outbursts when corrected and crying when frustrated with something new. Question seven probes deeper about trauma exposure asking the participant to identify how systemic racism and current structures influence student trauma. Participant One stated, “Race has been a common denominator in influencing trauma, because the mere fact of being Black and listening to the narrative of being the inferior race becomes a part of the psyche.” She continues to include how disciplinary responses are disproportionately applied to students of color, and the need for educators, particularly those not of color, to be aware of the trauma
students experience because of race and in addition to life’s challenges. Participant Two introduces another aspect, stating that, “The absence of Black and Indigenous history from the curriculum will have lasting effects on a student’s sense of community, belonging, and identity.” Participant Three shared that current structures and systems around race in our school systems makes students feel helpless and discouraged, often causing them to be self-conscious hindering the vulnerability necessary to learn and grow. When the participants were asked to rate themselves on a scale of 1 -5 on their level of preparedness for responding to misbehaviors before they entered the class. All participants scored themselves as three or above.

And finally, when participants were asked to share what teachers need to feel empowered and prepared to effectively teach with the trauma exposed student misbehaviors and the disproportionality around student discipline. Participant One shared the need for parental support and a partnership between the parent and teacher. She also included the need for teachers to received training around trauma and its effects on students.

Table 3. Preparedness for Responding to Trauma Exposed Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Question</th>
<th>Participant #1</th>
<th>Participant #2</th>
<th>Participant #3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many years have you been teaching?</td>
<td>16 + years</td>
<td>6 – 15 years</td>
<td>0 – 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is you identifying race and gender?</td>
<td>Black Female</td>
<td>Black Female</td>
<td>Black Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much time do you spend prior to the school year?</td>
<td>2-5 hours</td>
<td>More than 5 hours</td>
<td>More than 5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Describe your understanding of trauma exposed students.</strong></td>
<td>Students who have had one or more experiences of harm or danger that deeply and adversely affected their emotional and mental state of wellbeing. I understand that trauma can be a blockage to learning.</td>
<td>I understand that a student that has been exposed to trauma has to first feel safe and secure before learning can take place.</td>
<td>They need extra love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What adjustments if any have you made to your classroom management plan to account for behaviors that are manifestations of trauma?</strong></td>
<td>My students have been assured that they can inform me of any trauma that they may have been exposed to. They have access to a counselor when needed. Students have regular opportunities to talk about their “situations.”</td>
<td>I allow time for students to express their feelings and review ways to help control or ease feelings of anxiety and anger. Most importantly the students are encouraged through the word of God.</td>
<td>Create designated cool-down areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How would you describe trauma as it manifests in the classroom?</strong></td>
<td>Trauma seems to manifest in a childlike withdrawal from rational thinking and behavior. Sometimes it’s putting a head down, sometimes it’s walking out of class, and sometimes it’s just bantering with those in authority.</td>
<td>At times my students are unable to put into words the things they have seen or what they are feeling. Once triggered it is usually manifested in violence toward others, their selves and destruction of property.</td>
<td>It can be shown in outbursts in response to correction, crying when introducing new materials/topics, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How does race and systemic structures in the school system, the school, the classroom influence student trauma?</strong></td>
<td>African American students have been exposed to schools where others of a different race are insensitive to or ignorant about what constitutes trauma and how to effectively identify and address it. Race has been a common denominator in influencing trauma because the mere fact of being Black and listening to the narrative of being the inferior race becomes a part of the psyche. In the school system, it seems as though there is a heavier weight for infractions of Black and Indigenous history from the curriculum will have lasting effects on a student’s sense of community, belonging, and identity.</td>
<td>The absence of Black and Indigenous history from the curriculum will have lasting effects on a student’s sense of community, belonging, and identity.</td>
<td>It makes students feel helpless and discouraged. Students are sometimes fearful of failing and the responses of teachers and peers, so much that they won't apply themselves.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
students. This traumatic mix is put upon a student who is still processing life, and has not developed the coping skills to positively process this information into the schema. Everything in the student's life becomes negatively colored, and skews the perspective of every encounter of learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How prepared did/do you feel to respond to student misbehaviors prior to entering the classroom (or even still)? 1 being completely unprepared and 5 being extremely prepared</th>
<th>5 – extremely prepared</th>
<th>3 - somewhat prepared</th>
<th>4 – adequately prepared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| What supports do you feel teachers need to feel empowered and prepared to deal with student misbehaviors, trauma exposed students, and disproportionality in student discipline? This can be in your classroom or all classrooms in general. | Teachers would fare tremendously better if parents would be more effective in supporting the teachers. Teachers need more education about trauma and how it effects students. Clear procedures on how to deal with trauma should be made available and accessible and teachers need to have mental health days to match the preponderance of traumatic events in the classroom to alleviate the stress that the trauma exerts upon them, | Training and workshops for trauma and new way to present new ideas and projects so that triggers can be reduced. | Trauma training and the word of God. |

| Is there any additional information regarding student behavior, trauma, race, teacher preparation that you would like to include? | It would behoove all educators to attend Trauma training. Students should be trained about Trauma also. | No | No |
Field Observations

I observed all three teachers in the school. In addition, I took field notes during the observation of breakfast holding area when students were arriving at school and having breakfast. While students were supervised, this was unstructured time that allowed for observation of the students with their peers. I conducted two more field observations. One observation I conducted during an assembly, where the Executive Director joins the students when they are gathered for lunch or chapel, and highlights student celebrations. The other, I conducted during the students’ lunch time. My observation field notes reflect of student behavior, the context, and teacher responses. My focus was on the dialogue between the teacher and students, and students with each other.

A priori codes that reflect the tenets of Critical Race Theory were assigned to the interactions observed: ingrained nature of race and racism, opportunity for narrative and counter narrative, and interest convergence (Milner, 2007). These a priori codes pertain to the intersection of race as property as it applies to education: rights of disposition, rights to use and enjoyment, reputation and status property, and the absolute right to exclude (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016). Five additional a priori coded were assigned:

1. The invisible privilege of White culture that is considered the norm in the United States.
2. Race as a social construct
3. People of color having their voice oppressed and storytelling being an essential part of communicating knowledge
4. Dialogue around race relations
5. Racism as systemic with minority groups being marginalized
Table 4. CRT A Priori Coding from Observation Field Notes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRT A Priori Coding</th>
<th>Observation Participant #1</th>
<th>Observation Participant #2</th>
<th>Observation Participant #3</th>
<th>Observation of Assembly</th>
<th>Observation of Breakfast</th>
<th>Observation of Lunch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ingrained nature of race and racism</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for narrative and counter-narrative</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest Convergence</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersection of Race and Property</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invisible White Privilege as the Norm</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race is a Social Construct</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppressed Voiced and Storytelling</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue around Race Relations</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systemic Marginalization of Minority Groups</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the field observations, my intent was to observe the teachers’ interactions with students in the classroom as the main source of research, and the students’ interactions with each other as a secondary source. I was also looking for tenets of Critical Race Theory as they apply to the observed interactions. All students in the school
have experienced traumatic events in their lives as identified from the ACES survey, based on information teachers shared during the interview portion of the research. During the observations I identified which a priori codes were evident through interactions, context, dialogue, and curriculum. The school has small class sizes, a low student-teacher ratio, and all students are African American students. Because all students and staff are the same race, the Black student experience at this school differs from what they experienced as students in their public-school setting prior to coming to this school. Another major factor that differs from the public school is the use of Christian belief and scripture in the daily work, embedded in mission, vision, and responses to students. I analyzed teacher language to determine if comments were either identified as helpful in healing trauma exposed students or re-traumatizing in nature.

**Participant One**

This observation of Participant One was at the beginning of the day. The teacher was welcoming students to the day’s learning after they had breakfast and a brief amount of time to greet classmates. Participant One made encouraging comments to students connecting her experiences growing up as Black girl in the projects (government subsidized housing), facing food insecurity, sexual assault, house burning down, and lack of resources that indicate she would have high ACES score as well. She referenced her faith in God as a source of strength and encouragement for her. She referenced prayers of gratitude and modeled those for her students. The lesson was with high school aged students, and she was discussing Emotional Quotient (EQ) or emotional intelligence. This was connected to their reflections on the morning scripture. The participant connected the scripture reading to their lives stating:
You are adolescents, you have to make a change. You have to be responsible for your emotions. If you are always getting angry, and lashing out at everyone, it isn’t about them or what they did. It is something in you.

One student shared her reflection about understanding her anger in difficult situations and taking responsibility for her behavior. She shared with the class a time when she lashed out at a woman when she was caught shoplifting food for her mother. The woman told her that she did not need to take care of her mom because she was still a child. The student shared, “but I told her that my mom is the only thing I’ve got.”

Another student shared about an abusive situation and tried to get help but was not believed by her care giver. She shared that it has been addressed now, but at the time she was angry that she was not believed. The student got emotional and kept looking at the teacher. The teacher asked how she was doing or if she wanted to talk. When the student did not verbally respond, the teacher told her “You don’t have to say anything, but know that I see you. We will talk later.” The teacher thanked her for sharing and went over to hug her.

The teacher’s language was supportive and healing, particularly for students that have been exposed to trauma. The teacher embraced the student’s comment, stating, “I bet you set someone free in this room and you don’t even know it. They may not be ready to deal with it. Now tell me, what can we do? What can we do to help you?”

Participant Two

Participant Two was teaching the elementary and intermediate aged students. She and Participant Three often teach collaboratively for morning scripture so the kindergarten and first grade students can partner up with an older student for the reading
and discussion portions. When I began the observation, the teacher was leading with morning prayer where students were encouraged to share prayer requests. The three younger students in the kindergarten and first grade were each partnered with an older student. Students volunteered to read aloud. Participant Two encouraged students to analyze the reading by asking them:

Where is it written? If I say that you are 10 times smarter than the world, where can I find that? Where is my proof? The primary student responded, “The Bible.” The teacher continued, “If it is in the Bible, should it be in our hearts? What do we do when we are powerful? We can do anything. We are going to pray and ask for wisdom. All we have to do is ask.

As the students move on to spelling, one student excitedly shouts out to the teacher that her tooth is loose. The teacher responds, “Congratulations! That means you are growing up.” Participant Two began with individual student instruction as needed, calling them to her desk. When the teacher noticed that one student was working on his multiplication table, she reminded him that he needed to be working on his math assignment and finish that for homework. If students needed individual support, they would raise their hand and teacher would call them back. One student raised her hand and when she was called to come back the told the teacher that she didn’t need help with anything, “I just wanted to come sit back here.” A young student came in late and was visibly uncomfortable walking into the class. An older boy in the class also noticed it and invited the young boy to come by him. The student willingly went and sat by the older boy.
The class transitioned to a brief math video. A student asked the teacher if they need to take notes as they watch the video. She told them to open a Google document and write what they thought about the out it, what they already knew, and what they learned so that it can help them on the test. While students were working a student asked her a question and she responded, “Where is the proof that you tried to help yourself?”

**Participant Three**

This participant is a first-year teacher that started the year as an instructional assistant in the classroom with participant two and later moved to this role as the teacher for the three K-1 students. She collaborates with participant two for some whole group instruction and then both teachers work to individualize content for each student based on their need and level. I began this observation as the students were returning from chapel. The teacher started a video about coins and money. The two young students were sitting on the carpet watching the video and beginning to fall asleep. The teacher recognized that students were not engaged and needed to wake up, so she shifted to a movement break. She showed an activity video that combined yoga and quick bursts of movement. The students willingly got up and did the exercises. After students were awake, the teacher asked them, “How do you feel?” A volunteer showed up to the class and took one of the students to read to him for ten minutes. The female student tells the teacher that the other boy in the room bumped her on the head. The teacher asked the boy if he can apologize to her. The student tells her, “I already did.”

The three six-year-old students have started work on a nutrition research project and the teacher asked students to explain what they did yesterday. When one student went to point out the continent where the apple originated, the other student said the
name of the continent aloud. He got upset and went over to the carpet and sat on the bean bag pouting. The teacher reminded the little girl, “That is why we raise our hands.” Participant Three asked the student to breathe, to which he did. She invited to student to come back to the table because she has a question for him. The student calmly returned to the table joining the discussion by naming types of apples for each of the letters she has written. One student asked how many colors of apples there are. The teacher had the student write that question on the board. The teacher reminds the student, “If you are not sure what to write, where do you look?” The other students and the teacher help her sound out words and complete the sentence. The teacher noticed the board was unsteady as the student was writing, “The board is moving, C. we need some help. Can you go stabilize it?” The teacher modeled for the student how to look it up the question Google and compare different sources to develop a list of the different colors of apples. Their research led them to a discussion on Genetically Modified Organisms and comparing fruit before modification and current day. As they wrapped up the teacher asked the student at the computer, “Do you want to put the Chromebook back, or do you want our tech-man, --------, to do it?” A student replied, “-------- is my handsome man.”

**Observation of Morning Arrival and Breakfast**

As students arrived at school, they met in the common assembly area by the kitchen while breakfast is being prepared. Students get to self-select activities while waiting as breakfast is prepared. Students were observed playing the games and sitting talking to each other. This is a less structured environment and an opportunity to observe students’ natural interaction without prompting by adults. There were adults present for supervision that would greet the students and welcome them. While the students were
actively supervised, I noticed that the staff would first allow the students to attempt to resolve their own issues in a healthy manner. The students did not immediately go to the teacher when they were frustrated or upset with each other, but first attempted to self-regulate, then peers would encourage or help support, and this corrected issues that could have escalated if the students had not been taught coping and social skills. I observed one of the younger students wanting to be part of the game, grabbed the ball, ran around the table and gave the ball to an older boy who was also playing the game. The boys decided to stop playing the table basketball and Uno so that the young student could play with them. The older boy (middle school age) cleaned up the table and put that table basketball game away and pushed in all the chairs before moving to the other table to join the others setting up for Uno. As they were playing one yelled out that young boy was cheating. Another boy pointed out that he just does not know how to play, so he suggested they play something else. The young boy walked off into the hall and pouted despite the other kids continuing to adjust their activity to include him. He returned and 3 minutes later, circled the table discreetly tapping the boys where adult could not see. The boys looked at me to see if I saw. One boy tried to speak with him to ask him why he is upset, but he didn’t respond, instead walked over to get the magnetic blocks, and played by himself for a few minutes. The other boys decided to play Jenga. As the older students came in, most sat together at a table with a staff member until breakfast was ready. One girl went over and was sitting with younger students. The teacher recognized her interactions, “J I love your temperament! You have a wonderful temperament I love how you handle the kids. You are so responsible. Do you help with kids at home? You are firm yet loving. When you go to correct them, you do it instinctively. I don’t even have to
say anything to you. Can I hit you up this summer? What are you doing? How do you feel? How much would you like to make?”

Breakfast was set up at a table and students got up to serve themselves. After preparing her oatmeal, one of the kindergarteners hopped to her seat on one leg, sat down for two minutes, put on someone else’s sunglasses, then stood up and started dancing, shaking off her jacket until it fell, then ran to put away down the hall to put it up, ran back to her seat and continued eating. Staff that prepared food brought sausage around offering the option to each student and she greeted them with a “good morning.” Music was playing in the background. Students emptied bowls in the trash and cleaned their area without being prompted once they were finished. Another student wiped down tables. One of the kindergartners took sunglasses from his classmate and started running from others. An older boy intervened and asked for the sunglasses back. The young boy gave them back to the older student, to which the boy gave them to back to their owner. This suggests that in this school environment, the older student embraces his leadership as a role model to the younger student, modeling appropriate behavior that keeps conflict from developing. The students are learning from each other. This is an opportunity that is not an option in the public-school setting. High school students don’t have are not able to model or mentor younger elementary students throughout the school day when they attend different schools. As students finished breakfast, they would clean up their areas, take dishes to the kitchen and would break off into the three separate classes for morning prayer.
Observation of Assembly

Each week, the Executive Director facilitates brief assemblies with the whole school to celebrate and reward the students’ efforts. The school calls it Winner Wednesday. Sometimes, as evident this day, he will add an additional unannounced celebration for added encouragement. Each teacher from the three different age groups of students would describe a successful behavior and growth demonstrated in class this week. The students would try to guess who they think she is going to say based on the description of behavior and academic progress that week. Students would do a drum on the table as the teacher would then announce the name of the student to be celebrated. Students cheer for each other after the name is called. They walk up to collect their sealed envelope that contained a monetary incentive. The student selected has an opportunity to say a short speech as they collected their award. Three students were recognized. One for her hard work, one for growing three grade levels in reading in the short time he had been in the class, and third was a kindergarten student that is currently doing first grade work. Each thanked the staff and their peers for supporting them and attributed that support to their success. Two of the students told the group that they loved them.

The boy in the middle grade that increased three grade levels in reading in less than a semester was humble about his success, hiding his face once he realized the description was about him. The Executive Director noticed he was not wearing a belt. He stopped and reminded all the students the expectation about wearing belts as part of their uniform and maintaining high expectations and following structures of success that are established in any environment. He referenced scripture and reminded students that they are “Kings and Queens in Christ”, reminding students that despite oppression in their lives, they are decedents of African Kings and Queens and are expected to follow the
Jesus’s examples in the bible. The Kindergarten student was visibly excited for each of the recipients. When her name was called, she screamed, twirled, jumped, danced, and wanted to thank her classmates for support. The other kindergarten student in the program that did not get class award was upset and he began pouting. The Principal addressed him on the way out, hugging him and bending over privately encouraging him about being supportive of others, not being discouraged that he didn’t win this time, but to continue doing his best.

**Observation of Lunch Time**

As students are waiting for lunch to be served, students are sitting at the table. The boy in kindergarten begins sharing with the teacher what he learned about genetically modified watermelon and bananas from their nutrition research project. The other kindergarten student gets up and dances by her seat while she is waiting. As lunch was being prepared to serve to students, the Executive Director came out and reminded students that he is doing Winner Wednesday even if though they were recognized yesterday, he is still recognizing them today. He also publicly celebrated the Kindergarten/First grade teacher who “Faced up to every challenge to assist students. She stepped in when teacher had to leave. She gets in where she fits in and makes it happen.” Once again, teachers are highlighting student success that week, the students get a sealed envelope with a monetary gift and a cookie this day. The first teacher selecting students for the older students began by stating,

I am proud of all of you, and I prayed asking for an answer and my two are C and L. And the reason is because C is our top academic student, and L has been
progressing towards her goal to make sure she is returning her work and turning it in.

The Executive Director added:

I am proud of each and every one of you. With all the obstacles, trials, and tribulations. I am proud of you for being there for your family in a crisis moment.

I pray for each and every one of you. Keep doing great things.

As one student came to collect her prize she showed her appreciation for her classmates, “Thank you to everyone, I love you to the moon and back.” The Executive Director told her, “Look at your peers. They love you.” The other student shared with the group, “I didn’t want to come here at first, but now I do. I love you all.” A student was selected to be celebrated by intermediate teacher, “When he first started, he wouldn’t write any words, he used symbols as letters or words. Now he is on grade level, turned in all week’s work already. Thank you for never giving up and for being part of my class.” The student shared, “At first I felt scared to get to know everyone but now I don’t.” The kindergarten girl did not get selected this time and was crying. The kindergarten boy added a prayer for her before lunch that she will get a cookie tomorrow.

Semi-Structured Interviews

After I completed the observations, I then began collecting semi-structured interviews where each teacher had an opportunity to share their perspectives of the activities observed and provide context around the class, students’ lives, and their level of preparedness. The interview provided an opportunity to share their experiences with the students both in the class I observed as well as the students’ behavior day to day. Additionally, the interviews provided me additional data around the trauma students have
experienced that manifests through their behavior and information students have shared with them. I shared the interview questions with the Principal via email to share with the teaching staff prior to the interview and the observation. All three of the teacher staff participants were asked the same questions (Appendix C). While conducting the interviews, I recorded and transcribed to a Google document and numbered each line. I transferred each line from the transcribed interview onto the spreadsheet to begin coding. I analyzed the interviews through inductive coding with the intention to determine themes in how teacher interactions with students can be healing or re-traumatizing to students that have been exposed to high levels of trauma. The first step of my coding process with interviews, I used in vivo coding that captures teacher’s perceptions and responses (Creswell, 2018). I then copied the interviewers’ words onto a spreadsheet for the second round of coding. The second round of coding was open coding where I began to identify themes emerging the in participants responses. In the third round of coding, I identified axial codes from the open codes. After an axial coding, in vivo was conducted to grouping together common codes from the axial coding. Five themes emerged from the data.

1. Teacher Action
2. Manifestation of Trauma
3. Identifying Trauma Exposure
4. Social Emotional Needs
5. Love
Teacher Action

These were deliberate actions that the teacher took to provide safety and structure in the classroom. There were 57 teacher actions with four codes that were discussed in the interviews. Those four codes include safety and structure, encouragement, differentiation and engagement, and staff training. An example Participant One provided of an action she took to support student safety was a change to her class structure that she provided based on one student’s weekend experience. She explains:

I had students who came to school Tuesday. Not only did they have the trauma of power and electricity being off, but these students were fighting down at the bridge and now in severe pain. I have to make adjustments because I can’t make her sit up. I have to let her sit down’ lie down. But not only is she hurt physically, but it was really traumatic from what I heard. So that is the biggest thing. I make allowances for my students to have a voice.

Participant Two shared about trauma that students bring into school with them requiring her prioritize safety and well-being over the lesson plan she has for the day. She recalled an example, “this is what I feel like at home, I don't feel safe there were gun shooting all night. We can’t jump into math when you are tired and guns blazing in your windows.”

Another common action that was made by all three teachers and shared during interviews were differentiation made to lesson in efforts to increase student engagement. As stated above, Participant Two adjusted her instructional plan based on the student being tired from lack of sleep because of neighborhood shootings. Participant Three spoke about students that came back from chapel time and were drowsy. She shifted her lesson and provided and brief yoga video that allowed students to stretch and get blood moving to
rejuvenate before continuing with instruction. When asked about why she made this particular teacher move, she responded:

Specifically, I noticed that some students can get overwhelmed even before they start the process of figuring out the solution to the problem. So, it is important to address that immediately instead of trying to push through to make them work.

**Manifestation of Trauma**

In this section, the teachers shared behaviors or students’ actions that they have learned, both through training and experience are consistent with trauma exposed behaviors. There were 32 incidents of five actions coded from the interviews shared by the participants. Those actions included dissociation, outburst or dysregulation, seeking control, anger towards others, and anxiety. Participant One summarizes common behaviors she has experienced from students that represent most of the five codes, she describes,

> We have had people explode, scream, stomp, run down the hall. We have had times that students who will cry and stop, just give up. Stop working, I don’t want to do anything more. Some students put their head down and go to sleep. I have been told that is how they handle their situations. They give up. They want to sleep, they want to give up and not talk.

Participant Two described what she sees from students. As she explains, the students has come to her behind grade level and he does not display appropriate coping strategies and embrace the opportunity to remediate his learning, he demonstrates the following dissociative, dysregulating, and seeking control behaviors. Participant Two describes,
First of all a trigger that I see can easily be the introduction of new material. New spelling words, anything that I can’t grab it and master it, it’s over. That has been the biggest challenge to overcome, especially when I have a new person coming in on a kindergarten level and they are supposed to be in 4th grade.

Additional evidence provided by Participant Two was a student that came to them from the public school system and parents were considering checking him into a hospital for intensive therapeutic support. Participant Two described the behaviors exhibited stating:

He flipped some desks. He had to go and sit with Ms. Deborah (counselor). Another kid would say something to him and set him off. He doesn’t know how to handle it so instead of blowing up at a kid, he blows up at himself. He used to hit his head, try to hurt himself, just be really through the roof and you just had to give him a lot of time.

Participant Three references students that have outburst or dysregulation, seek control, and anxious behaviors demonstrated by Kindergarten students. She describes that patterns of behaviors that she have noticed with her students. She describes those triggers as,

Certain phrases or words will cause them to get frustrated so you could tell. If they have someone at home that is yelling at them or verbally abusing them without even knowing it, that could trigger them. Like saying “hurry up” even if friendly or kind, it is still those words that cause them to respond aggressively or frustrations and lash out.
Trauma Exposure

In this section five codes emerged from the participant interviews for a total of 22 codes for Trauma Exposure. These are behaviors or experiences that students bring to class with them that impact their brain’s ability to learn and retain new material. Identifying that trauma exposure students have experiences reinforce the need for predictable and healing environments for students. Those codes include, lacks basic resources, violence in community, abuse, previous bullying, and abandonment and neglect. Participant One provides specific details she knows the six of her students have experienced just among them. She describes multiple incidents of exposure, stating:

One student shared that he was beaten so badly by other kids. One student has been in situations where family is fighting and had to hide in a closet because guns are being brought out. One's mother is in prison. You heard today about the student that was touched when she was younger and wasn’t believed. Students who are in foster and asking the questions about their real parents.

Participant Two gave an example of student that was experiencing abandonment that same week. The student was late to school that day and joined the students in chapel. The teacher asked him what was going on. He shared:

We couldn’t find my momma, we don’t know where my momma is. A friend brought me to school. They haven’t seen their mom in 24 hours and don’t know where she is. So for the whole day, those two kids sat in class not knowing where she is, or if she is dead or alive.

Participant Three provided a brief example that one student shared with her, stating, “‘well, I remember getting stuffed inside a locker.’ Then we will have to pause on the day and deal with that.”
Social Emotional Learning

In this section, codes developed based on intentional training, curriculum, and programs that the participants used to address the social and emotional needs of the students. There were 24 total codes that distributed over five identified areas: responsibility, coping skills, motivation, conflict resolution, and student voice. Participant One referenced coping strategies with her students including teaching them to see others as human and being empathetic to others. Participant Two also referred to coping strategies where she has taught student more appropriate responses to other student to help express their emotions and prevent misunderstanding from escalating to conflict. Participant Three also references teaching coping strategies to help students learn to self-regulate. An example she provided was addressing students in the moment, stating, “I’m immediately like, oh hold on. Breathe, calm down you know like and it's just things that I've learned from having to deal with kids that have experienced trauma.”

Love

The next and final consistent code that emerged from the study was love. Two of the Three participants referenced intentionally showing the students love, and discussion about God’s love in their interviews. Participant One stated, “Most of what I do here is really biblically based. And first and foremost, it is love. That is a hard thing to explain, but it is love for these kids.” Participant Two talked about how she demonstrates her love for students, feeling like “it is constant like social work, momming, loving, and ‘it is okay’. They [the students] are so starved for any kind of attention. I try to make it a point to set up those individual “appointments” at my desk to give them one on one time.”

Table 5. Selective Coding aligning teacher’s responses to Research Questions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selective Codes</th>
<th>Research Question #1</th>
<th>Research Question #2</th>
<th>Research Question #3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Actions - 57</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety / Structure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation/Engagement*</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Training*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trauma Manifestation - 32</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissociation*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outburst / Dysregulation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Control</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger towards self/others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trauma Exposure - 22</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacks Basic Resources</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence in Community</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuse *</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Bullying*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abandonment / Neglect *</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Emotional Learning - 24</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping Skills*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Voice</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Love - 5</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Applies to multiple categories
Document Analysis

The final step in this research study includes the analysis of patterns in the behavior data from the first half of the school year that reflect the same student and teacher dynamic of those observed. The intent is to look for patterns of misbehavior that are manifestations of trauma, disproportionality of students referred, and any patterns that may arise whether it be from a particular teacher, behavior, or demographic was not something that was a viable data point for this school. The school does not use behavior referrals to refer the student to administration to assign a consequence. The small staff work together to identify the antecedent to student misbehavior to address the need behind the students’ behavior. Teachers work with the student first, collaborate with administration, and communicate with families. They have high expectations but more importantly provide high support. The teachers address mis or maladaptive behaviors, supports students in way they identify for students to correct their behavior. This system has been successful since the school opened in January 2022. The behavior incidents and resolutions are not currently maintained as part of the student’s academic record with the school. Their intent is to support the student in addressing the root cause of behavior and not assign punishment for maladaptive behaviors that are a result of trauma exposure. The school maintains high expectations for behavior and the students rise to meet it. Each teacher has a classroom management plan that aligns to the mission of the school. Teachers immediately address misbehavior and support the student’s need, to support their healing and removing barriers to their learning.

With the small student to staff ratio, teachers can make deep meaningful connections with their students. Trust between them can be developed and the teacher was able to be impactful in motivating students to learn, meet goals, and make up for any
lost or lacking instruction to test on grade level. Another impact of small student to staff ratio is that students are less distracted by the behavior of other peers. This is two-fold. Students have fewer distractions due to the lower number of students in the class with which to interact and get off task. Also, teachers can customize motivation techniques just as they are able to customize and differentiate learning to meet individual needs. The small class size creates a more conducive environment for building community and more intimate connections between students and student to staff relationships. The vulnerability that students show each other was honored and respected during all research.

**Chapter Summary**

By completing this qualitative study, it is possible to draw conclusions about the level of preparedness that practitioner need prior to entering classroom of student from high-need neighborhoods. As I reviewed participants’ comments from the survey, observations of teachers in the classroom, reviewed the context of the statements in the interviews, teachers have the power to influence student behavior when healing the root cause instead of being punitive. Staff provide consistency in a safe environment where students feel safe to unpack the trauma, heal, and remediate needed skills to ensure students can perform on grade level.

**RQ1: Teachers’ Preparation and Training**

Participants shared in the survey that they participated in trauma informed training and based on data collected during observations of teachers in the classroom, reviewed the context of the statements in the interviews, teachers have the power to
influence student behavior when healing the root cause instead of being punitive. Staff provide consistency in a safe environment where students feel safe to unpack the trauma, heal, and remediate needed skills to ensure students can perform on grade level.

**RQ2: Teachers’ Communication Style**

Teachers use encouraging and supportive language that is necessary in developing a trauma sensitive environment where students have the space to heal. There were no re-traumatizing interactions between staff and students observed in the class nor discussed in the interview where the teachers’ actions that were re-traumatizing. However, there were instances of trauma exposed students being triggered by common school practices when students were unable to self-regulate. The data from this study revealed the opposite of what I had anticipated to find in this study. Teachers’ procedures, language, expectations, responses, and reactions were consistently loving and supportive and consistently reinforced the biblical belief that “we are our brother’s keeper.”

**RQ3: Teachers’ Adjustments**

In this research setting, the Christian beliefs upon which this school is built, teach and model Christian values as the exemplar for how members of the school community should behave. Scripture is an additional level of support that public schools are not able to provide. Students knew to take a time out to calm down and breathe when they got angry or upset. Adults were readily available to help students process their emotions.

Conclusions drawn from the findings from Chapter 5 along with research implications, recommendations for future research, and discussions of the limitations.
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this study, I sought to answer three research questions. These were:

RQ1: What preparation and training have teachers at the Dream Center Academy Christian School received that they feel is effective in preparing them for identifying and supporting trauma exposed students?

RQ2: What impact do teachers perceive that their communication style has on the effectiveness of improving student outcomes for trauma exposed students, particularly students of color?

RQ3: How do teachers adjust their classroom strategies based on racial equity policies, student’s classroom behavior, and trauma informed practices?

In this chapter, I present a summary of the findings for each research question. I then discuss the implications of my findings for policy, practice, and future research.

**RQ1: What preparation and training have teachers at the Dream Center Academy Christian School received that they feel is effective in preparing them for identifying and supporting trauma exposed students?**

The first research question serves to identify what training are provided to teachers in preparation programs and professional development for current teachers to identify symptoms of trauma exposure. If teachers are able to identify that the maladaptive behaviors are a result of trauma exposure, I wanted to determine how prepared they felt to effectively respond to the student in a manner that would perpetuate healing instead of re-traumatize or triggering students with their response. In the research
setting for this study, teachers shared they had experiences like some of their students when they themselves were growing up. This allowed them to identify the struggles their students face because they have lived it. This included systemic racism that is an added layer of trauma for our marginalized groups (Alvarez, 2020).

In reviewing data from the survey, observations, and interviews, I found that the teachers in this survey felt prepared to identify that students’ maladaptive behaviors are related to trauma exposure. Participants consistently shared and my observations supported the conclusion that developing meaningful relationships with students is necessary to build trust. They were able to identify that the students’ maladaptive behavior demonstrated in class were consistent with a trauma response. Teachers that can identify maladaptive behaviors that are triggered by a child’s previous experience are better able to adapt to meet the student’s needs so he can heal (Dorado et al., 2016). By getting to know the students on a personal level, teachers and staff can also identify supports and resources needed to help the students heal and teach them coping strategies. With the small number of students in this school, staff individualize instruction and emotional support maximizing student opportunity to catch up to their grade level peers.

One teacher in the study is in her first year of classroom teaching. She does not have a teaching license, nor is she currently in a teacher preparation program, so I was not able to gain insight around teacher preparation programs at the university level and their level of efficacy around trauma informed classrooms. She was able to identify trauma exposed responses from her life experiences and supporting younger family members in unpacking theirs. The other two teaching staff have been teaching for over five years, with one participant over 20 years. Both of those teachers spoke about the
trauma informed training they had received at the school last spring. Both participants agreed that training was informative in helping them understand that typical misbehaviors are related to unhealed trauma exposure. One teacher spoke about wanting to extend this training a step further to include the students and parents in helping them to understand the connection between traumatic experience and misbehaviors. Once staff have a clear understanding of the connection between trauma exposure and behavior, it is essential that space is provided for the student to regulate their nervous system with consistent use of coping strategies and breathing techniques until the brain moves away from the fight, flight, freeze response that is often displayed and disruptive behavior. Additional training should be provided for staff and families around how best to respond to students and children that have been exposed to trauma to help them heal so their brains can continue to grow, develop, and learn. When teachers and caregivers are aware that a child’s behavior is a result of their experiences and lack of the brain’s ability to adapt appropriately, the adults are more likely to provide grace, patience, and re-teaching that is needed to help the student’s brain heal from the trauma. When adults understand that a child does not have full capacity to fix their behavior or respond in a more appropriate manner, they identify that a child may need support from the counselors or a mental health practitioner to address more complex trauma.

**RQ2: What impact do teachers perceive that their communication style has on the effectiveness of improving student outcomes for trauma exposed students, particularly students of color?**

In this research setting the teachers’ communication style was supportive and encouraging. When students are corrected or redirected it was restorative in nature rather than punitive. The teachers were cognizant that students that have been exposed to
trauma have difficulty regulating their nervous system and may have exaggerated reactions and will benefit from movement opportunities to deescalate before processing the misbehavior and asking them to be reflective (O’Neill et al., 2010). The teachers’ responses to what the students say and do can make all the difference in unpacking and healing trauma or re-traumatizing. The teachers’ actions during the study supported the empirical research. This was evident with Participant One’s observation with her response when a student unexpectedly shared about abuse she had experienced, and then not being believed when she tried to get help. The student was not prompted to share such a personal experience, rather the compassion and encouragement she felt in the classroom created a healing environment where the student felt safe. The teacher was supportive of the students, and responded with kindness and compassion. She understood the vulnerability of that moment and relied on training on trauma’s impact on the brain. She shifted her plan and took the students outside for walk to physically engage their bodies and reset them for learning before they came back into the room. The teacher understood that her response to the situation affects students’ healing and classroom culture. Again, the flexibility the teachers have with the students in this research setting allowed for the opportunity to delay starting the instructional lesson, going outside, and providing time for the student to process.

Participants in the study shared intentional responses they use with students to that are validating and help students heal. Participant One recognizes that the trauma has impacted students’ confidence and builds students up through art, dance, and daily affirmations to improve students’ confidence and empower them. The participants all spoke about responding to students in a loving manner, where they feel supported,
encouraged, and safe to learn. Axial coding revealed that participants identified teacher actions as having the biggest impact on students who have been exposed to trauma. More specifically, participants shared that their efforts to differentiate instruction to keep students engaged provides students the opportunity and space they need to heal and allow for them to maximize their learning experiences. This school is not bound by the same regulations of the public school. As a faith-based school, their mission, vision, and core values reflect Christian teachings. The public-school setting can embrace many of the same characteristics as the church, but by law must remain secular. In this research setting, prayer and scripture were regularly used as encouragement, comfort, guidance, or healing when addressing students.

**RQ3: How do teachers adjust their classroom strategies based on racial equity policies, student’s classroom behavior, and trauma informed practices?**

The third research question is like the second research question, serving to underpin the overarching research question. With this question, I sought to investigate what actions teachers see as their responsibility and opportunities to shift their practice to be more impactful for trauma exposed students from marginalized communities. This research setting did not have a specific racial equity policy; however, the school was designed to address needs of the West End communities that are predominantly students of color and are experiencing a higher rate of violence than their peers in other areas of the school district. Participants shared adjustments they make to their practice based on students’ needs. Participant One shared that she intentionally makes allowances for students to have an opportunity to have their voices heard. Participant Two spoke about calming strategies she teaches students. Working with the younger students she teaches
them how to use breathing techniques to calm themselves. Participant Three monitors the behaviors and interactions of students intentionally using movement to change brain activity and meets students’ basic needs so they can focus on learning.

Differentiation and engagement were also the most common themes arising from the axial coding. Students’ needs that manifest in the classroom determine how teachers will respond. Teachers’ responses in surveys, classroom observations, and in interviews demonstrated high levels of awareness about identifying trauma responses and effective responses for healing and supporting. Teachers were aware that their response could trigger or escalate students and feel a responsibility to teach students coping strategies for trauma they may continue experiencing in their lives, and provide an environment where they feel cared for and safe to heal. That was consistent in all the observations. Flexibility and access to a counselor is also provided to support students to process whatever baggage and experiences they bring into school with them.

While this research setting is in a small, private, Christian school, the themes that arose throughout the study can be incorporated into a larger public-school setting. The data collected often referenced biblical teachings and God’s word as motivation for how to live their lives and interact with others. Character education and social emotional curriculum that include the same characteristics could be utilized to teach students similar social skills with peer interactions, and to help unpack trauma is something, but the small class setting would be a challenge to replicate.

Implications for Policy

As one analyzes regulations and policy in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, there are obstacles hindering the development of policy facilitating the implementation of
trauma informed practices in large school districts. One factor is the varying level of teachers’ understanding around how trauma endured behaviors manifest through students’ conduct and the impact of the teachers’ responses to those student behaviors. Another factor is the subjectivity of interpreting the root of students’ behavior, a teacher’s bias, experiences, and even current mood could influence how they respond to misbehaviors. A third factor is the challenge in developing a policy that outlines a specific regulation around research-based plan and developing consistent and thorough training for all staff that supports creating a physically and emotionally safe environments where student feel comfortable being vulnerable, able to heal, and learn coping strategies to deal with life’s stressors. Creating and legislating policy that includes progress monitoring and implementation of that plan with the fidelity needed creates challenges with a one size fits all policy in a state made up of urban and rural communities with varying experiences and needs.

Statewide policy can include an increase in mental health specialists accessible to students at school, increasing mental health access for families beyond just the student in the classroom, and public service focus on healthy copings strategies to deal with stress and constructive conflict resolution. Individual school districts and local school boards can develop policies that reflect the needs of that community. This can include additional mental health experts, and specific and detailed training around incidents that cause trauma, trauma’s impact on the brain, and how teachers need to respond to students that healing so students are able to learn. In the local public school system, all schools are funded for a mental health practitioner in addition to the school’s guidance counselors. In higher need schools, determined by low socio-economic status, low academic
performance, and high number of behavior incidents, additional mental health practitioners are funded to help identify and treat emotional barriers to learning. There are also counseling agencies that come into schools to provide therapeutic relief. However, the high need for students and the lack of applicants for the vacancies, leave many students with unresolved trauma that continue to hinder their learning.

**Implications for Practice**

It was evident from the surveys, semi-structured interviews, and student interactions during observations, the teachers at this school are aware of the experiences students face that have exposed them to traumatic events, and how to effectively respond to students to help them heal, learn coping strategies, can continue growing academically. They have received relevant training around teaching students in high trauma exposure environments. The low teacher student ratio also allowed for the staff to know the students personally and one of those trusted adults could be made available at any time to help a struggling student process through whatever they need. The importance of healthy meaningful relationships between students and staff is fundamental in affecting healing and growth for trauma exposed students (Krstic, 2015). The challenge many staff have is the number of students in the classroom and the opportunity to effectively respond to and meet the emotional and academic needs of all the students. This is particularly true in low socio-economic high violence areas. This opportunities for the students at this school are not reflected in a city’s public school district, but with training to increase teacher awareness of how their responses to students are helping or hindering the success of our most vulnerable population could warrant similar results with improving behavior and increasing student performing on grade level.
School and district leaders can affect practice by requiring that all staff are trained on pre-selected research-based trauma informed social emotional curriculum and prioritize soft social skills in early childhood and primary grades. As students move through the school system, social skills can reflect issues that are developmentally typical for that age of development to include bullying, social media, and relationships with peers. In a large urban district with a transient population, consistent practice around a structured plan would serve beneficial to students needs for processing personal, racial, and community trauma.

Challenges of realizing a SEL shift in a school system where student’ needs vary so greatly will still exist. Students continue to face food insecurity, violence, and addiction, but if all school personnel use a common screener, like Pearson’s Behavioral and Emotional Screening System (BESS) to identify risk, the consistency would allow us to gather data around what areas need additional support to help resolve social and mental health issues that contribute to so much of the traumatic experiences in the community.

The local public school system, as many throughout the country has created an SEL department with resources teachers that support schools. All schools have a mental health practitioner in addition to the school counselors, and additional mental health workers from hospitals and facilities also support schools. It would be most beneficial for students if those specialists work together as a team to support students with short term and long-term plans as opposed to providing individual therapy and support from various practitioners that may not be aligned or conflicting in nature. In this research setting, the student to adult ratio allows the teacher and staff to immediately identify and address
student issues, but as their enrollment increases the school will work ensure they have resources allocated to address students’ social emotional needs.

School districts’ codes of conduct could also include specific trauma informed responses that support the teacher training around appropriate and clear procedures for progressive discipline that include opportunities to unpack student experiences that may be causing the misbehaviors. Staff behaviors, language, and responses that could retrigger or traumatize students should be immediately identified and eliminated. This requires that school administrators have even more specialized training on how to work with staff to shift the culture from punitive responses and shaming to encouragement and support through overcoming maladaptive behaviors.

**Implications for Future Research**

Part of the continuous improvement process for schools and districts is to continually review student data to reduce exclusionary practices that only serve to put students even further behind their peers. This is particularly important when considering instructional practices that engage students in healthy collaboration and ensuring that students have the social and emotional skills to manage their own behavior and interact in a productive manner with their peers. Further research focused on anti-violence curriculum for marginalized populations is needed to provide healing and new skills for families and communities. Schools would also benefit from conflict resolution from the community that spills into the schools. This should not be seen as an additional requirement expected of schools, rather a shift in mindset so the SEL skills are the foundation from which we teach content.
Another parallel to this current research and future research is to examine students’ perspectives. Schools and districts may benefit from researching and identifying patterns of behaviors that provide insight into what needs are most prevalent that schools need to support. Also, students’ perspective around teachers’ responses would be helpful to provide teachers examples of barriers that could be preventing them from having meaningful connections needed for students to overcome traumatic experiences and thrive.

My study only included one small Christian school in the West End of Louisville. While Stake (2005) notes that the purpose of case study research is “not to represent the world, but to represent the case” (p. 460), I must acknowledge that the context of my study and the number of informants was limited. Future researchers could expand to include a public school in the same area or even the entire school district to gather more data around teacher language and responses to students. A comparative study could also be done to comparing public school and private (or charter) schools with similar demographics and enrollment. This would allow greater insight to what is most triggering for students and increase the field of knowledge regarding healing trauma for students in high needs communities.
REFERENCES


https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028590


https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654320938131


https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22420


Chapman, T. K. (2013). You can't erase race! Using CRT to explain the presence of race and


https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-3797(98)00017-8


https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085907305039


https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12362


JCPS Diversity, Equity, and Poverty. (n.d.). Retrieved from


JCPS Facts. (n.d.). Retrieved from

https://www.jefferson.kyschools.us/about/newsroom/jcps-facts


https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414557825

https://doi.org/10.1023/B:JOTS.0000014671.27856.7e


https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12568

McInerney, M., & McKlindon, A. (2014). Unlocking the door to learning: Trauma-informed


http://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X07309471


http://doi.org/10.1177/1053825916668901


https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-0355(199524)16:4<271::AID-IMHJ2280160404>3.0.CO;2-B


https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-016-9182-3


DOI: 10.1080/13613320902995475


Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014). *SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*. HHS


*Educational Considerations, 44*(2), 3.


APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT

TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY:
Influence of Educator Communication and Teacher Perception of Trauma Exposed Students on a Safe and Equitable Learning Environment

Introduction and Background Information
You are invited to take part in a research study about teachers’ perception of classroom behaviors as it relates to trauma, and how prepared teachers feel at responding to those behaviors. The study is being conducted under the direction of Professor Dr. William Ingle at the University of Louisville.

Why is this study being done?
The purpose of this study is to
• Determine teachers’ understanding of how trauma disproportionately manifests in the classroom and how prepared they feel to effectively address this barrier.
• Recognize how disproportionality exists in
  o how discipline is interpreted and enforced by teachers
  o how trauma exposure can be triggered when disciplining students of color
• Identify supports teachers and schools need to be more effective at responding to trauma and closing the achievement gap

What will happen if I take part in the study?
Your participation in the study will involve taking a brief survey, allowing me to observe a class of your choice for 30 minutes, and a post observation conference to provide your perspective of the observation. Your participation in this study will last for up to a month.
The study will begin with a brief survey to determine the level of training and experience you have had around trauma informed classrooms. The second step will be a classroom observation with the researcher’s focus on student staff interactions including dialogue, expectations, and student behavior. After the observation, a short interview will be conducted to provide the teacher’s perspective and context around the decisions and comments made in class to support students. These interviews will be recorded for transcribing. You may decline to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable, or if applicable which may make you prosecutable by law.

What are the possible risks or discomforts from being in this research study?
The risk to you in this study is minimal. The intent is to observe how students and staff interact and which interactions are most beneficial for students in an urban community that has been exposed to trauma both individually and systemically.

What are the benefits of taking part in the study?
You may or may not benefit personally by participating in this study. The information collected may not benefit you directly; however, the information may be helpful to others.

The possible benefits of this study include contributing to the research to improve student achievement and help heal racial and personal trauma that can serve a barrier for students’ success and that often manifest as disruptive behavior in the classroom.

**Will I be paid?**
You will not be paid for your time, inconvenience, or expenses while you are in this study.

**How will my information be protected?**
The data collected about you will be kept private and secure with use of a password protected laptop that remains in a locked room or cabinet when not in use and using a secured server. Information will be protected from disclosure and UofL security policies will be followed.

Individuals from the Department Educational Leadership, Evaluation, & Organizational Development, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPO), the University of Louisville, and other regulatory agencies may inspect these study records. In all other respects, however, the data will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Should the data be published, your identity will not be disclosed.

**Will my information be used for future research?**
Your data will not be stored or shared for future research.

**Can I stop participating in the study at any time?**
Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study, you may change your mind and stop taking part at any time. You will not be penalized or lose any benefits for which you qualify.

**Who can I contact for questions, concerns and complaints?**
If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Dr. William Ingle by phone at (502) 852-6097 or email at william.ingle@louisville.edu.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research or research staff and you do not wish to give your name, you may call this toll free number: 1-877-852-1167. This is a 24 hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office at (502) 852-5188. You may discuss any
questions about your rights as a research participant, in private, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Acknowledgment
This document tells you what will happen during the study if you choose to take part. By answering staff survey questions, you agree to take part in this study.

You are not giving up any legal rights to which you are entitled by consenting to this study. You can save this consent form for your records.

William Ingle
Principal Investigator

Amanda Petters
Co-Investigator
APPENDIX B: STAFF SURVEY

1. How many years have you been teaching?

2. What is your identifying race and gender?

3. How much time prior to school starting do you think you put into your classroom management plan?

4. Describe your understanding of trauma exposed students.

5. What adjustments if any have you made to your classroom management plan to account for behaviors that are manifestations of trauma?

6. How would you describe trauma in the classroom?

7. How does race and systemic structures in the school system, the school, the classroom influence student trauma?

8. How prepared did/do you feel to respond to student misbehaviors prior to entering the classroom (or even still)?

9. What supports do you feel teachers need to feel empowered and prepared to deal with student misbehaviors, trauma exposed students, and disproportionality in student discipline?

10. Is there any additional information regarding student behavior, trauma, race, teacher preparation that you would like to include?
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

1. Please tell me about what you observed from student behavior during the observation.

2. What (if any) were trigger behaviors that you noticed from students and how could you tell?

3. What background information about student(s) do you find helpful for me to know in understanding the way the student(s) behaved?

4. Are there any school or district student behavior expectations that you have adjusted / or would like to adjust to create a more equitable experience for your students of color?

5. What training, preparation, or research do you use in your classroom that have been most beneficial at managing behavior and creating a safe and socially just environment in your classroom?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPAL

1. How long have you been working as Principal at the school? How many years have you been working in education?

2. Do teachers employ Trauma Informed Practices, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, or Restorative Practices with the students to address personal and systemic trauma experiences to which students have been exposed?
3. How many of your students attended (or would attend) JCPS schools if they were not at your school?

4. What professional development is provided to teachers around behavior support? Is there a consistent response or protocol for dealing with off task behaviors?

5. What benchmark does the school use to measure student growth?

6. How many students are enrolled? How many teachers (and support staff)?

7. Do the students take MAP or other standardized tests that JCPS uses to monitor growth and prepare for KSA?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

1. Please introduce yourself and explain your “why” behind the development of Dream Center Academy Christian School?

2. What difference do you see this school making both in the lives of the students, and in the community?

3. What is your school’s mission and vision that drive the work?

4. Does the school use Kentucky State Standards?

5. What is the specific demographic that is targeted for enrollment?

6. What are the religious requirements for enrollment?

7. Do students take the Kentucky State Assessment?
APPENDIX D: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Actions Observed</th>
<th>Conversations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRT TENETS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The invisible privilege of White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultured that is considered America’s norm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race is a social construct</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People of color have their voice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oppressed and storytelling is an essential part of communicating knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue around race relations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism is systemic with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minority groups being</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marginalized</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher’s Classroom Management Plan – Field Note Evidence:
## APPENDIX E: STRUCTURED ETHICAL REFLECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Developing Partnership</th>
<th>Constructing research questions</th>
<th>Planning project/ action</th>
<th>Recruiting participants</th>
<th>Collecting data/ taking action</th>
<th>Analyzing data/ evaluating action</th>
<th>Member checking</th>
<th>Going public (presentation and publication)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Thinking</strong></td>
<td>Searching for others that willing to share/ listen to</td>
<td>How are these going to be beneficial for finding solutions</td>
<td>Researching the success and the processes behind schools having success with SEL</td>
<td>Findings schools that are successful in supporting students in these situations</td>
<td>Knowing what data already exists and what it tells me</td>
<td>Addressing student need based on this data</td>
<td>Considering the broader scope of social justice and how relationships are impacted</td>
<td>Considering multiple solutions and suggestions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commitment</strong></td>
<td>Meeting timelines and following through as promised</td>
<td>Improving the outcome for students</td>
<td>Dedicating a set time for continued research and writing</td>
<td>Agreeing to specific expectations as researcher</td>
<td>Collecting enough data to give a true snapshot of what is currently happening</td>
<td>Ethically represent the participants intentions and responsibilities</td>
<td>Protecting participants anonymity</td>
<td>Focusing on the most beneficial information for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fairness</strong></td>
<td>Considering the preferences and needs of students and staff</td>
<td>Ensuring that questions are free from bias</td>
<td>Spending equal amounts of time in research areas</td>
<td>Being honest about intentions with participants</td>
<td>Making sure that the sample collection is reflective of general population demographics</td>
<td>Valuing all participants contributions equally</td>
<td>Valuing all participants contributions equally</td>
<td>Focusing on the most beneficial information for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Integrity</strong></td>
<td>Being transparent with intentions</td>
<td>Accurately representing what is happening in schools</td>
<td>Being open-minded to additional strategies</td>
<td>Encouraging honest and authentic responses</td>
<td>Assuming value in all data collected</td>
<td>Refraining from allowing personal bias to overshadow participants’ intentions</td>
<td>Sharing the transcripts with participants and allowing for clarification if requested</td>
<td>Representing the data authentically in the findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adaptability</strong></td>
<td>Showing flexibility with all that are willing to participate</td>
<td>Adjusting questions that no longer serve the purpose</td>
<td>Adapting the purpose of the paper to fit the results of the study</td>
<td>Willingness to consider all participants regardless of level of expertise</td>
<td>Narrowing focus with data being collected</td>
<td>Allowing the results of the data to guide the focus</td>
<td>Redacting data that may be misinterpreted or cause potential harm to participant</td>
<td>Tying the results of the participants in a manner that reflects their intentions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Compassion</strong></td>
<td>Finding ways the work can be of use to others</td>
<td>Keeping the focus of the work student centered</td>
<td>Identifying the needs of the students</td>
<td>Including a diverse group of participants to be involved</td>
<td>Encouraging participant to provide detail with probing questions</td>
<td>Avoiding the inclusion of comments that are not relevant</td>
<td>Creating opportunity for participants to feel comfortable sharing</td>
<td>Ensuring that there is clear support for staff to be able to support students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-mindedness</td>
<td>Including people with various experience and interest to participate</td>
<td>Willing to authentically adjust questions as opportunity presents itself</td>
<td>Considering new steps and ideas not originally part of the plan</td>
<td>Finding ways to include people from different school demographics</td>
<td>Being able to capture ideas by asking accurate questions</td>
<td>Being able to represent others’ ideas with succinct language</td>
<td>Providing comfort for participants to share ideas without judgement</td>
<td>Providing room for participants ideas to be accurately represented</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CURRICULUM VITA

NAME: Amanda Petters

ADDRESS: 11530 Liberty Bell Lane
Sellersburg, IN 471712

DOB: Jeffersonville, Indiana – June 10, 1975

EDUCATION & TRAINING:
B.A., English
Indiana University Southeast
1993-1998

B.S., Education
Indiana University Southeast
1999-2001

M.S., Secondary Education
Indiana University Southeast
2001 – 2003

Educational Leadership Certification
Indiana University Southeast
2003 – 2005

Ed.D., Educational Leadership and Organizational Development
Superintendent License
University of Louisville
2019 – 2023

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES:
Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi
2020 – 2023

NATIONAL MEETING PRESENTATIONS:
University of Louisville - Spring Research Conference
Creating Socially Just Classrooms Using Trauma Informed Practices
March 6, 2021