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*University of Central Florida*



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SURVEYING EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONALS TO  
EXPLORE HOW TO INCORPORATE TRAUMA  
EDUCATION IN UCF'S TEACHER PREPARATION  
PROGRAM

by

JORDAN DOMAN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Elementary Education  
in the College of Community Innovation and Education  
and in The Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Fall Term, 2018

Thesis Chair: Kelly Jennings-Towle, Ed.D.

## **ABSTRACT**

Traumatic events do not discriminate based on economic status, race, culture, or age. This is true for the hundreds of thousands of students who walk into classrooms every day having experienced trauma. Our teachers are then challenged to support these students in a time when their ability to learn may be affected by trauma.

The goal of my thesis is to show the need to educate preservice teachers in the University of Central Florida's elementary education teacher preparation program about students experiencing trauma and how to best support these students. By analyzing existing literature and through interviews with professionals working with children experiencing trauma in and out of the classroom, a quick guide containing the definition of childhood trauma, how it affects the lives of students in elementary classrooms, and best practices to support these students will be constructed. Additionally, this thesis will survey UCF elementary education students preexisting knowledge of childhood trauma and their desire to learn more about the subject. This survey was completed by preservice teachers in the University of Central Florida elementary education preparation program

The results of the survey will determine student interest in learning about teaching students who are experiencing trauma, as well as student knowledge of students experiencing trauma. The results from this survey suggest students are interested in learning more on how to support students going through trauma and that their depth of knowledge on the subject can be expanded.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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I would also like to thank my family, who has always supported me and encouraged me to go above and beyond in everything I do. I would also like to thank my friends Kennedy Harkins and Brittany Jackson, that pushed me and kept me on this path even when it seemed endless. Thank you for helping me close this chapter of my life, I can't wait to start writing the next one.

## **DEDICATION**

For the family and friends of the victims of the Orlando Pulse shooting and Parkland shooting who, in the face of tragedy, created worldwide change.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

One of the concepts preservice teachers in the elementary education preparation program learn about while in school at the University of Central Florida (UCF) is students with varying exceptionalities who are placed into the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). LRE, as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), requires public and private institutions to educate students with disabilities in a “regular education environment” unless the severity of the child’s disability does not allow for satisfactory education with supplementary aids and services (2004). Passed in 2004, the IDEA has changed not only how students are taught in America, but teacher preparation programs as well. Thanks to the Individuals with Disabilities Act, preservice teachers in education preparation programs know more about students with varying abilities than they ever have before. Within the single class provided to UCF elementary education majors, I learned about a wide range of students with varying exceptionalities. However, I still had questions. As we were briefly reviewing students battling cancer within the course and how it may affect their education, I wondered what would I do if one of my students passed away while in my class? How would their classmates react? What could I do as their classroom teacher to help them cope with the loss of a peer? This was the beginning of my mindset shifting away from how to accommodate for varying exceptionalities in the classroom to how to accommodate for students experiencing trauma in the classroom.

As my own education journey continued and I moved on to other education courses, trauma continued to linger in my mind. The summer of 2017 was the one-year anniversary of the Orlando Pulse Shooting, and I began to think about the families of the victims. How are we expected to teach our students, who could be related to the victims just murdered in their home



city? The city of Orlando mourned, the shock and loss tangible still a year later. How would the scars of a tragic event like this terrorist attack effect a student years later? Then August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017, Hurricane Irma developed in the Atlantic Ocean. Being raised in Florida, hurricanes are a part of life, but when the category 5 hurricane came barreling towards my home state and left destruction in its wake, I wondered what I would do if I had been teaching at the time. How do teachers continue instruction, so students reach benchmarks when the students are more worried about where they will be sleeping next week? How do we support incoming students from Puerto Rico as they possibly leave family, friends, and the only home they have ever had because of this disaster? Valentine's day 2018, tragedy struck Parkland, Florida resulting in the loss of 17 student and faculty lives, after a former student armed with an AR-15 walked into the freshman building of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. How can we ask students to sit and listen to a lecture in the same room where they saw a dear friend die?

At first, answers to my questions seemed impossible to find. Solutions to these kinds of problems looked insurmountable, without a source to direct me toward elucidation of the problem. My topic had already extended beyond the realm of disability, but I could not even name how my questions were connected. It was only during a discussion with my thesis chair and committee member that a key word was introduced into my vocabulary: trauma.

Trauma for me then, meant something different than it does now. My understanding of the word was limited. I thought that students experiencing trauma were rare, I also believed only students who had witness mass destruction or murder could experience trauma, and that students experiencing trauma could not function effectively in their day to day lives. In the process of this study, I have come to find that trauma is a lot harder to figure out than I expected. I learned that

students can often function in their day to day lives but they cannot function to the extent they could had they not experienced trauma. Trauma can leave a greater mark on children than I initially believed, affecting students in their classroom performance and beyond. If left untreated, trauma can have long term effects on a child into adulthood. The most surprising of all is how prevalent childhood trauma is today.

The goal of my thesis is to show the need to educate preservice teachers (PSTs) in the University of Central Florida's elementary education teacher preparation program about students experiencing trauma and how to best support these students. By analyzing existing literature and through interviews with professionals working with children experiencing trauma in and out of the classroom, a quick guide containing the definition of childhood trauma, how it affects the lives of students in elementary classrooms, and best practices to support these students will be constructed. Additionally, this thesis will survey UCF elementary education preservice teachers preexisting knowledge of childhood trauma and their desire to learn more about the subject.

## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

A review of the literature surrounding students experiencing trauma exposes how little is known about trauma by classroom teachers and preservice teachers. The majority of research puts a focus on the many different events that trauma stems from and reactions and behaviors that may take place if a child has experienced trauma. Many of the resources also focus on creating trauma-sensitive classrooms or schools, but very few focus on educating preservice teachers on trauma before they graduate. In the following review of related research I will focus on what professionals and researchers define as trauma, how trauma effects students in the classroom and their ability to learn, impacts of building a classroom community for students experiencing trauma, what support exists for teachers, and what is missing from the literature.

### **What is trauma**

Trauma is not in and of itself an event, but trauma typically stems from a traumatic event that undermines a person's ability to cope (Cole, Eisner, Gregory, & Ristuccia, 2013). The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) describes a traumatic event as,

... a scary, dangerous, or violent event. An event can be traumatic when we face or witness an immediate threat to ourselves or to a loved one, often followed by serious injury or harm. We feel terror, helplessness, or horror at what we are experiencing and at our inability to stop it or protect ourselves or others from it

(n.d.). (<http://www.nctsn.org/resources/audiences/parents-caregivers>)

NCTSN also lists events that trauma may stem from:

## What Experiences Might Be Traumatic?

- Accident
- Injury
- Serious Illness
- Fires
- Crime
- Community violence
- Combat injury of a loved one
- Death of a loved one
- Violence within the family
- Abuse
- Neglect
- Homelessness
- School violence
- Natural disaster
- Sudden loss of a loved one
- Act of terrorism
- Bullying/Cyberbullying
- Economic Stress/Poverty
- Living in or escaping from a war zone

*Figure 1 (n.d.)*

With over 18 experiences that could result in trauma, the list is extensive. The list includes both acute traumatic events, which are typically sudden and brief like a terrorist attack or car accident, and chronic traumatic events which are typically long term with repeated exposure, such as homelessness or physical abuse (Robert & Rossen, 2013). Despite its length, the list is not complete and may never be because trauma can stem from any event and can be different for each child. Although trauma *can* stem from any event, a traumatic event is not necessarily enough to incite trauma. This is because “exposure to a traumatic event alone is not necessarily sufficient to seriously traumatize a child” (National Association of School Psychologists, 2011, p. 1). For a student to be traumatized, the student must view the event as threatening. There are five factors that influence and contribute to a student’s perception of a threat including the nature of the crisis, the proximity and duration of the event to the child, the relationships the child has with the victims of the event, adult reactions to the event, and individual vulnerabilities of the student (National Association of School Psychologists, 2011). This is demonstrated within the *NCTSN Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators* (2008), which gives the example of a girl in elementary school, Amy, who witnessed a car hit and kill her cat. As a result of this experience, Amy was sad, frightened, and had nightmares which ultimately lead to a lack of attention in

school. Amy was experiencing trauma (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008). The nature of the event for Amy was sudden and unexpected, the event occurred in close proximity to Amy, and she had a close relationship to her pet cat who ultimately died. All of these factors contribute to the increased likelihood of Amy viewing the event as threatening. Not only does this example demonstrate how different events may be traumatic to different students, it also demolishes the misconception that a traumatic event must be big, dramatic, or news worthy. A traumatic event can be something as simple as a child losing their beloved pet.

Having a working understanding of all the events that trauma can stem from is important to fully understanding the extent to which children experience trauma. However, for this thesis, I am going to focus on the traumatic events school professionals report being the most prevalent to the areas of Orange and Seminole Counties, surrounding the University of Central Florida.

Economic stress and poverty are common experiences that can result in trauma in Orange and Seminole county, evident from the large number of Title I schools. Title I is a part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that states if a school has high numbers or percentages of children from low-income families, the school can qualify for funding to assist students in reaching the high academic state standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). With 191 schools in Orange County 57% of them are Title I (Orange County Public Schools, 2017a; Orange County Public Schools, 2017c). Similarly, Seminole County has a total of 72 schools of which 28% are Title I (Seminole County Public Schools, 2017a; Seminole County Public Schools, 2017b). Between the two counties, there is a total of 263 schools, 49% or just under half are receiving funding from Title I. Homelessness is also prevalent among K-12 students surrounding UCF. According to the Florida Department of Education, Orange and Seminole

County have combined 8,751 homeless students that were recorded in 2015-2016 (2017). Orange county alone has the highest number of homeless students of Florida counties with 6,853 recorded (Florida Department of Education, 2017). Community violence is also widespread within both Orange and Seminole county. From January to June 2017 Orange and Seminole county had a total of 31,928 reported crimes, which is around 10.4 % of the total crimes reported in Florida statewide at the time (Florida Department of Law Enforcement, 2017). Natural disasters, specifically hurricanes that struck Florida and Puerto Rico in the 2017 season, are a source of trauma in the area as well. Months after Hurricane Irma and Maria, students are still being affected as over 1,300 Puerto Rican students and counting enter the Orlando area and schools (Orange County Public Schools, 2017b). For the purpose of this thesis the focus is on the four areas of economic stress and poverty, homelessness, community violence, and natural disasters because of their prevalence in the Orlando area.

### **How trauma effects students and their ability to learn in school**

As educators we should have knowledge and understanding of how trauma will affect our students and their ability to learn. Understanding how trauma affects our student's ability to learn in school, means understanding how trauma affects the whole child. Trauma does not only affect a student's academics, but "all aspects of a student's development," (Evers, n.d.). Trauma does not have an isolated effect on a student, but in contrast, trauma can impact every facet of a student's life including emotional regulation, memory, cognitive processing, social skills, and physical health (Evers, n.d.). According to the CDC-Kaiser study, a traumatic experience, which is referred to as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) within the study, can also have a negative impact on later health and well-being after the student leaves school (Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). With over 17,000 participants in the study, “Almost two-thirds of study participants reported at least one ACE, and more than one in five reported three or more ACEs” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). The CDC-Kaiser study, lists alcoholism, depression, illicit drug use, financial stress, smoking and suicide attempts as just a few of the negative outcomes that correlate with traumatic childhood experiences (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016). Those that experience trauma are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors like drinking, smoking, and drug use because of how trauma effects the brains and bodies of children. Traumatic experiences or ACEs can affect the pleasure and reward center of the brain which is implicated in substance dependence, impulse control and executive function of the brain which is imperative to learning, and the brains fear response center (Harris, 2014). However, “even if you don’t engage in any high -risk behavior you’re still more likely to develop heart disease or cancer” (Harris, 2014). This is due to stress response system, which is responsible for the student’s fight or flight response, being activated repeatedly in response to a traumatic experience (Harris, 2014). Although the occasional fight or flight response can be beneficial in high-risk situations, when the response is repeatedly activated in children the process can impact “brain structure and function, the developing immune and hormone systems, and the way DNA is read and transcribed” (Harris, 2014). In fact, a person with four or more ACEs has a two and half times higher chance of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and hepatitis, risk of depression is four and a half times higher, and the risk of suicidality is 12 times as likely as someone with an ACE score of 0 (Harris, 2014).

Knowing how far the influence of trauma can extend into the life of a student makes understanding trauma and recognizing students who have experienced trauma vital to not only

success in school but positive outcomes in life after school. Recognizing students experiencing trauma comes with the knowledge of reactions and behaviors students experiencing trauma display. These reactions and behaviors can differ based on the age of the student and their current location (i.e., school or home). For the purpose of this thesis, the focus will be tapping into school professionals' perceptions of the reactions and behaviors of elementary aged children in these local school setting.

According to *Reactions and Guidelines for Children Following Trauma/Disaster* (Gurwitch et al, 2002), some common reactions to expect after trauma include: feelings of anxiety, fears and worries about safety of self and others; worries about reoccurring violence; increased level of distress (can present itself as whiny, irritable, or moody); increased somatic complaints (i.e. headache, stomachache); increased sensitivity towards sounds; and statements and questions about death and dying (Gurwitch et al, 2002). A student who is experiencing these reactions in a classroom environment is less likely to be able to learn than their peer who is not experiencing trauma. Reactions can present themselves in the behaviors that students may have, including: increased activity, decreased attention or concentration, withdrawal, angry outbursts, aggression, and absenteeism (Gurwitch et al, 2002). Behaviors can go beyond not only disrupting the student's ability to learn but can upset an entire classroom's learning environment. Symptoms of trauma are different for varying age groups and the similarity of symptoms between trauma, and other disorders such as anxiety and depression can lead to misdiagnosis or for the student's struggles to be overlooked completely (Goodman, Miller, & West-Olatunji, 2012).

In the elementary education teacher preparation program at UCF preservice teachers are taught Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs which notes that unless a student's basic needs of food,



safety, and shelter are met students will not be able to learn to their full ability (McLeod, 2014). Students who are experiencing trauma are perhaps the same students who are not having their needs met. Students who may be homeless, food insecure, or experiencing community violence could be facing both a traumatic event and an event that prevents progressing past physiological stage in Maslow's Hierarchy of needs (McLeod, 2014). Without meeting the basic necessities for our students, school professionals cannot expect our students to learn effectively in our classrooms.

### **Impact of building classroom community**

Knowing that our students experiencing trauma may lack feelings of safety and security outside of school many professionals in the field have come up with simple steps teachers can follow to build their classroom community and help students feel safe in their classrooms. *Reactions and Guidelines for Children Following Trauma/Disaster* (Gurwitch, Silovsky, Schultz, Kees, & Burlingame, 2002) along with the *Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators* (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008) suggest letting students talk and use play to retell the traumatic event, even setting aside a designated time for students to share. It is important for teachers to not allow students to draw them into a negative role of the trauma or where the story ends in an unsafe place. Instead, Gordon (n.d.) suggests trying to end the retelling with how the student is now safe. It is also suggested to maintain a classroom routine and to give students choices (Gurwitch et al, 2002; National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008) in order to allow students not only to return to a sense of normalcy, but also to have some control over their lives in the classroom, while they may not have control outside of school hours. Finally, knowing your students is crucial. In order to anticipate difficult times that may

arise due to the environment or people, teachers need to know the events or triggers that may remind the student of the trauma and lead to a negative reaction (Gurwitch et al, 2002; National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008).

Building the classroom community is one way that individual teachers can help students who are dealing with trauma with little outside assistance. However, students may need more than just one classroom to cater to their needs. Students are not isolated within their primary classrooms; they go to art, music, physical education, and lunch with other students and other teachers. Therefore, it is important to create a caring school environment to communicate with other teachers, school counselors, administrators, and family of the student when teaching students dealing with trauma.

### **Support for teachers**

The first step a teacher should take with a student they suspect is dealing with trauma is to turn to a school counselor. At UCF, counselor education is one of the few tracks within the College of Community Innovation and Education to teach a class on trauma. Teachers must reach out to the school counselor for support in working with a student experiencing trauma, and also to also help support the student directly if needed. The school counselor can use a screening process to determine if a student has signs of traumatic stress and can provide counseling or a referral to another system of support outside of school (Goodman, Miller, & West-Olatunji, 2012). Administrators should also be a support for teachers working with students experiencing trauma. School administrators may have valuable information on school, county, or state policies concerning children experiencing trauma (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008). This is where the teacher can protect herself and the student by working within the guidelines of the

school. Not only can administration support teachers through bringing awareness to the rules teachers have to follow concerning students experiencing trauma, but an administrator can also suggest a referral for a student (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008). A caregiver of the child should also be considered additional support. Caregivers may have additional information on what event could have caused the trauma and can help the teacher further understand their student. By involving the caregiver, the student can be presented with the same level of support and structure at the most important environments in their lives, home, and school (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008). Counties and individual schools can also provide trauma sensitive training to school personnel, and teachers can use that training as a method of support for teaching students experiencing trauma (Cole, Eisner, Gregory, & Ristuccia, 2013).

### **What's missing from the literature**

Much of the literature up to this point consists of defining trauma, identifying behaviors and reactions, and accommodating systems of support for classroom teachers. There is also research and training programs for classroom teachers to become trauma sensitive and schools to become trauma sensitive. However, the best approach would be to present this important information to preservice teachers, rather than waiting until after they have entered the field of education. The research and literature are aimed towards current classroom teachers, not towards preservice teachers. This leads to a view of trauma education as an afterthought for teachers rather than as a crucial piece of information preservice teachers need before they walk into a classroom.

With one out of every four school children having been exposed to a traumatic event that can affect learning or behavior, and with over half of students experiencing a traumatic event before

age 16, trauma cannot be an afterthought any longer (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008; National Child Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.). Teachers are the first line of defense with students, and as such should not rely on simple readings, professional development workshops, or conferences to learn about strategies for dealing with these sensitive situations. Our teachers, should have the background knowledge and resources to know not only how to identify students going through trauma, but to move forward and instruct them with proper support. Incorporating trauma education and making it a part of teacher preparation programs is essential in order to not only teach students with trauma but support them to reach their fullest potential.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

This study will use a mixed method approach utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data with the goal of incorporating trauma training into the University of Central Florida elementary education preparation program. First an analysis of the preexisting literature that exists concerning students experiencing trauma was conducted to determine a concise definition of trauma, its effects on students, and how to support students experiencing trauma.

Two research methods will then be used, with three total tools created in order to help inform the research question on UCF preservice teachers knowledge surrounding childhood trauma and their desire to learn more about students experiencing trauma. One survey was created for preservice teachers, one interview was created for inservice classroom teachers, and one interview was created for school staff such as school psychologist, guidance counselors, and school social workers.

The goal of this approach is to create a concise way to educate UCF preservice teachers by first discovering their current knowledge of students experiencing trauma and their interest in trauma training. The interviews will be used to compare preservice teacher knowledge to that of inservice teachers, who have been in the classroom for a number of years, and to school staff who has most likely had trauma training. This comparison will aid in determining what gaps of knowledge preservice teachers have and which gaps close with experience in the classroom and through trauma training. This information will be crucial in creating a “How to Guide” for preservice and inservice teachers. The guide will define childhood trauma, how it affects the lives of students in elementary classrooms, and best practices to support these students.

## **Preservice Teacher Survey**

First, a survey was sent out to current UCF preservice teachers within elementary education to assess what knowledge the population possesses concerning students experiencing trauma and their interest in incorporating trauma training within the preparation program. The survey consists of 7 questions; 3 multiple choice, 2 short answer, and 2 are yes or no with a short answer portion (See Appendix A for survey questions). The survey was available through <http://ucf.qualtrics.com>, and was accessed via QR code by students. I distributed QR codes in UCF Elementary Education classes, and the preservice teachers chose to scan the QR code and take the survey. I received a total of 53 responses with an average of 35 responses for every question (See Appendix B for survey results).

## **Interviews with Educational Professionals**

Interviews with professionals who work with students experiencing trauma in the Central Florida area were conducted to determine what traumatic events/experiences they most see trauma stemming from in the UCF area, resources available, and strategies of support to utilize with students experiencing trauma. The first tool is specifically for inservice classroom teachers in Seminole and Orange County, and is designed to assess their understanding of trauma, the level of trauma training they have received, if any, and if they believe trauma training in elementary education teacher preparation programs will increase teacher effectiveness (See Appendix C for interview questions for inservice teachers). I interviewed two teachers, with whom I had a previous connection and typed their responses to each question (see Appendix D for interview results for inservice classroom teachers).

Another interview tool was created for school staff in Orange and Seminole Counties schools who have most likely had trauma training and work directly with students experiencing trauma such as school counselors, school psychologists, social workers, exceptional educators, etc. They too will be interviewed assess their understanding of trauma, the level of trauma training they have received, if any, and if they believe trauma training in elementary education teacher preparation programs will increase teacher effectiveness (see Appendix E for interview questions for school staff). I interviewed two school staff members, one is a school counselor and the other was a UCF graduate student who was interning as a school counselor. I interviewed them after being put in touch with them by my committee member and upon receiving their consent to participate I typed their responses to the interview questions (see Appendix F for interview results of school staff). The survey and interviews have been approved by the University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix G for approval letter).

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS**

The survey was distributed in four Elementary Education preparation program classes in the summer of 2018 and resulted in a total of 53 responses. One participant only previewed the survey and did not answer any questions or see any questions beyond the first consent question. Despite the 52 preservice teachers who reached the end of the survey, most questions only resulted in about 35 responses. The interviews were conducted with a total of four people, two classroom teachers and two school counselors or school counseling interns. The survey and interview responses were then compared with the information found in the Review of the Literature to determine the extent of their knowledge of trauma, their understanding of how to support student going through trauma, and their view of trauma education at UCF.

The first question concerned the preservice teachers' consenting to take the survey. Of those who responded to this question, 100% confirmed that they would take the survey. The consent to participate in the interviews were given over email before the interview was conducted. The first question of the interviews asked the participants what their position/job title is and how long have they been in the position. Of the classroom teachers, one has been teaching for 19 years and is a second grade teacher and the other has been teaching for a total of five years and is currently a fourth and fifth grade English language arts (ELA) and social studies teacher. Of the school staff one has been in her position for four years as a school counselor and the other is a school counselor intern for the past three weeks and has completed practicum the semester before. The second question of the survey concerned preservice teachers' academic year, with a total of 26 responses. This information broke down into 1 (2.78%) sophomore, 14 (38.89%)



juniors, and 21 (58.33%) seniors, with 0 freshman being recorded taking the survey. This information is useful in analyzing other question results.

### **Knowledge of Trauma**

#### **Survey:**

The third question of the survey was the first question to address trauma. It asked preservice teachers to define trauma in three sentences or less. With a total of 34 survey responses, many preservice teachers had a general understanding of trauma as an event or experience that can impact a student's, physical, emotional, and mental health.

A few preservice teachers went a little further with their definitions in the survey, such as this participant who stated, "Trauma is a bad experience that happen[s] to someone. Trauma could affect physical, emotional, and mental health. Some trauma example[s] include someone that was involve[d] in a massacre, someone they love died or even accidents, too." This response demonstrates their knowledge that trauma does not have to necessarily be a community disaster but can be something as simple as an accident. Another preservice teacher demonstrated further understanding by stating in their response, "It's a stress situation that a person is going through. This can be momentary or for a long time. This outcome depends on the way a person processes the trauma." This participant understands two key aspects of trauma. First, that trauma can stem from an event that is acute, which is brief and sudden or from a chronic event that happens repeatedly over a long period of time. This preservice teacher also understands that not everyone will have the same response to an event, and it all depends on how a person processes the event.

While many preservice teachers have a general understanding of trauma, I could not clearly determine if preservice teachers believe that trauma is not an event, but a negative reaction to an event. While some responses list the negative reactions to trauma as the emotional, mental, and physical many other responses only state one of the three previously listed reactions. This draws the conclusion that many preservice teachers may not understand the full extent of trauma and how it can negatively impact students.

The next question continued the discussion by asking preservice teachers to list any reactions or behaviors that students experiencing trauma may display. Of the responses 26 (74.29%) responded that they did know some reactions and listed what they knew, while 9 (25.71%) did not know of any reactions or behaviors associated with students experiencing trauma. Of the 26 preservice teachers that responded yes and listed the reactions and behaviors, many of them listed “acting out” or “behavior problems” as reactions and behaviors. While this answer is not incorrect, it is almost too vague to fully answer the question. The question that comes to me are: “acting out how?” and “what behavior problems?”. Other responses were more specific listing, anger, fear, anxiety, lack of trust, lack of self-confidence, shyness, appetite changes, sleep changes, trouble focusing, and sadness. All the responses together created a very cohesive list of reactions and behaviors to look out for. However, independently each response could benefit from a greater knowledge of reactions and behaviors.

One survey response from a preservice teacher stood out from all the others and was the only one to state “some reactions and behaviors of ADHD”. This is true, trauma can often be misdiagnosed as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), especially in children. This can be detrimental for a traumatized child because if they are diagnosed with ADHD instead of

trauma, the root of the issue is never addressed for that child. This response led me to further probe the other preservice teachers' responses to this question. Have other preservice teachers been introduced to this idea of trauma being misdiagnosed as ADHD or depression or anxiety? Being the only response that mentioned this misdiagnosis, leads me to believe that the connection between trauma and ADHD had never been broached before for most preservice teachers.

### **Interviews:**

The inservice classroom teachers were also asked to define trauma in their own words. Both inservice teachers responded in a similar fashion as the students who were surveyed with how trauma is an event that causes distress or disrupts the lives of students. Teacher A went a little deeper by specifying that the distress students are experiencing could be "physical or emotional stress,". This shows that she understands there is a wide range of traumatic experiences that impact our students in different ways. School staff was not asked to define trauma in their own words, and therefore has no contribution to this question.

During the interviews both school staff and inservice teachers were then asked what reactions and behaviors students experiencing trauma displayed. The school staff interviewed, identified similar reactions and behaviors as the preservice teachers in the survey such as rage/anger, anxiety, and neediness. Missing from the list given by preservice teachers and school staff are increased somatic complaints, such as stomach ache or headache, withdrawing from others, as well as absenteeism. While missing from the preservice teacher survey and school staff interview, the inservice teachers did not neglect those reactions and behaviors. Classroom

teachers appeared the most informed, as evidence by a Teacher B's statement: "They are withdrawn, sometimes very needy, sometimes sad and can cry, not doing any work, putting their heads down, absent, pretending to be sick, those are the things I've seen."

Overall, based on the responses given, as well as the percentage of preservice teachers that selected "no" in the survey, I could surmise that preservice teachers could benefit greatly from additional information on the behaviors and reactions, as well as effective strategies that stem from trauma.

### **Supporting Students Experiencing Trauma**

#### **Survey:**

After probing questions on the knowledge about trauma and the reactions and behaviors that can help to identify students experiencing trauma, the next question concerns preservice teachers' knowledge about how to support students experiencing trauma. This survey question asks preservice teachers to identify any systems of support available to assist students experiencing trauma. Of the 35 responses, 28 (80%) said they were not aware of any systems of support available and only 7 (20%) answered with yes. Of the seven responses three listed administration, two listed counselors, and four listed programs or services outside of the school, with some responses listing more than one system.

Of the seven answers given, their responses are thorough and accurate. One student even listed other teachers as a system of support. This is also accurate. It is important to use all your resources including fellow teachers. However, the student's privacy comes first and if a teacher believes a student may be experiencing trauma, it is important to discuss the situation to a trained

professional such as a guidance counselor for further information and intervention if needed.

Administration and counselors are the first line of defense for teachers with students who may be experiencing trauma. An administrator can provide a list of programs available in the area and can further ensure you are acting and performing professionally in all situations with students who may be experiencing trauma in the classroom.

Preservice teachers even listed some programs available in Orange and Seminole Counties. One preservice teacher listed the Department of Children and Families (DCF), as a program to reach out to in the survey. This response is very appropriate if the teacher suspects neglect or abuse as the source of a trauma. Another preservice teacher listed New Hope for Kids as an outside program to support students. New Hope for Kids has two main groups it supports, children going through a death of a loved one and children battling a life-threatening illness (2017). New Hope for Kids provides support and a safe place to express grief and feelings of loss after a death (2017). This organization also grants wishes to children going through a life-threatening illness as well as support, resources, and community for the children and their families (New Hope for Kids, 2017). These organizations are great examples of programs outside of school that can help students going through trauma get support in and outside of school.

### **Interviews:**

While preservice teachers were asked about systems of support, school staff and inservice teachers were asked if there were any resources they utilized that inservice teachers should know about. School Staff B discussed self-regulating activities as a resource, which is a tool students

can use to regulate their emotions in any situation. While School Staff A took a different approach to the question than School Staff B. Instead of listing a tool students can use School Staff A talked about agencies that could be used outside of school, “A lot of agencies...offer counseling for free or come to the schools if there is a crisis. If teachers knew about these free resources that would have been hugely beneficial.” So, it is important to know what organizations and programs are out in the community to help support your student.

Although neither inservice teacher listed DCF as an organization or program to use as a resource, both listed DCF child abuse and neglect training as part of trauma training they receive annually. School teachers are required by Florida Law to report suspected abuse or neglect (Florida Statute, 5 USC § 39.201, 2013). If the report was done in good faith, the reporter cannot be prosecuted, even in the event that neglect, or abuse was not happening (Florida Department of Children and Families, 2014a). If you believe trauma may be stemming from abuse or neglect or suspect it in any of the students in your classroom the DCF Florida hotline is open 24/7. Call 1-800-962-2873 to report abuse or neglect (Florida Department of Children and Families, 2014b).

In response to the question of resources to share, Teacher A stated, “Our guidance office is super important to utilize. Our counselor has lots of experience and background with these situations.”. This shows the inservice teacher’s knowledge of the role of a guidance counselor, and how crucial they can be to student healing and success in school. While Teacher B had limited knowledge of resources, only talking about using the internet as a resource and other teachers, as did one of the preservice teachers in the survey. All teachers should be aware of whom and where to turn to for help. Without support, both the student going through trauma and

the teacher could end up struggling endlessly to understand and communicate with one another effectively.

### **Classroom Community**

#### **Survey:**

While support outside of the classroom is crucial for students experiencing trauma and their teachers, building a positive classroom community for students can also provide support throughout the school day. When asked to describe ways to build this community of support and safety, 28 preservice teachers replied. Among the replies a common thread seemed to be creating a safe zone for students in the classroom as well as an open line of communication between teacher and student. The ways the preservice teachers aimed to accomplish these goals was always different, one suggested creating an open line of communication by having class time to discuss emotions, educate students on emotional intelligence and keep a journal. While another preservice teacher thought that letting the students know you are available to discuss any of their concerns was enough to create an open line of communication.

These great ways to build a classroom community can foster safety and acceptance for students experiencing trauma. Having a trusted advisor to turn to in a time of trouble or a place to discuss with peers or even a journal to record feelings and traumatic events is a healthy, safe way for the student to voice their questions and feelings when they need to (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008). A safe space where students can cool down without judgement or prying eyes is also a helpful technique for dealing with overwhelming emotions without disrupting the class (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2018). However, these

measures can be viewed as reactive instead of preemptive. Not a single response from the survey contained anything regarding a constant classroom routine or having choices for students. This leads me to believe that the participants of the survey have not made the connection that students experiencing trauma may not have consistency or choices in their daily lives outside of school and that they can preemptively support these students through a simple routine.

### **Interviews:**

When school staff and inservice teachers were asked how they supported students going through trauma the responses were telling. It was only during the interviews that responses about classroom routine and choices were brought up. Interestingly of the four interviews, the three participants that had been in the school system for four years or more mentioned classroom routines and consistency, while the graduate student who had not had a full year of experience in the school full time as school staff did not and only mentioned supports similar to the preservice teachers in the survey.

This disconnect exhibited by the graduate student and preservice teachers may have something to do with not being in the classroom environment full time, despite the extensive readings and trainings both experience. We need to find a way to fix this gap of knowledge because by providing consistency and choices in school settings students are more likely to have a sense of normalcy in school as well as an understanding that the teacher trusts the student to responsibly make their own choices. This trust and sense of safety can be crucial for students experiencing trauma and should be a goal all preservice and inservice teachers, as well as staff, strive for with their students.



## Trauma Education at UCF

### Survey:

In the final section of the survey the last two questions asked preservice teachers about their feelings concerning how UCF prepared them for teaching students experiencing trauma and if they would be interested in learning more about these students. In the first question of this section the 34 preservice teachers that responded were given the options of choosing very prepared, prepared, neutral, unprepared, and very unprepared. In total 1 (2.78%) preservice teacher responded with very prepared, 5 (13.89%) felt prepared, 17 (47.22%) were neutral, 12 (33.33%) felt unprepared, and 1 (2.78%) felt very unprepared. Of the responses 29 (80.55%) preservice teachers felt neutral or unprepared by UCF to teach students experiencing trauma. In comparing these preservice teachers responses throughout the survey to the research I have conducted on students experiencing trauma in the Review of the Literature, I am inclined to conclude the preservice teachers have a base-line understanding of trauma and the effects it can have on students. This baseline knowledge may stem from the information given in particular classes in the UCF elementary education preparation program.

The final question of the survey asked if the preservice teachers would be interested in learning more about students experiencing trauma. A total of 34 participants responded, 18 (52.94%) responded with very interested, 12 (35.29%) were interested, 3 (8.82%) were neutral, 1 (2.94%) was uninterested, and 0 said they were very uninterested. With 30 (88.23%) participants listing either very interested or interested in learning more and the support of current classroom

teachers, I believe incorporating trauma education into the elementary education teacher preparation program would be widely accepted and overall beneficial.

### **Interviews:**

This neutral response of teacher preparedness is reflected in the responses of school staff on how knowledgeable the teachers they work with are. Both school staff members that were interviewed stated that teachers they work with could have more knowledge and understanding of the subject of trauma, which supports the neutral stance of majority of the preservice teachers who responded to the similar survey question.

Inservice classroom teachers when asked about their understanding of trauma, rated themselves a 6 or 7 out of 10 (10 being the highest form of understanding trauma). This places them in a higher than average category, at the same time, it is also important to remember that both of these teachers have had five or more years of experience in a classroom. With experience comes knowledge and understanding in all areas of teaching, including trauma. Both inservice classroom teachers interviewed also agreed that trauma training in college would be beneficial and help identify students experiencing trauma and resources to utilize in supporting students experiencing trauma.

Overall these misconceptions and areas of unfamiliarity, brought to light from the results of the survey and interviews, should be addressed throughout the teacher preparation program in order for preservice teachers to fully understand trauma, its' effects, and what classroom teachers can do to support students experiencing trauma.

### **Limitations**

A limitation of this study was the sample size of the survey and interviews. A larger number of participants who completed the survey and interviews could further support my findings.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

The goal of this thesis was to show the need to educate preservice teachers in the University of Central Florida's elementary education teacher preparation program about students experiencing trauma and how to best support these students. After analyzing existing literature, the results of the survey of preservice teachers, and the interviews with inservice teachers and school staff a quick guide was created. The "How to Guide" will focus on the areas of knowledge that were lacking compared to the research on the subject. The How to Guide first contains background on what trauma is, gained from the research done in the review of the literature. This section contains a short definition of trauma and a list of events trauma could stem from, in order to clarify that trauma is a negative reaction to an event, not the event itself. The guide also includes a list of common reactions and behaviors that trauma can stem from as well as systems of support for inservice teachers and their students who are experiencing trauma. Of the 35 preservice teacher that responded to the survey question concerning systems of support only 7 listed any systems of support they knew of, 28 recorded that they did not know of any systems of support. Due to this gap in knowledge, special attention will be brought to this section of the How to Guide by including suggested websites, books, and programs to utilize.

In addition to the background section of the How to Guide a classroom community section was also created. This section focused on tangible ways preservice and inservice teachers can support student experiencing trauma in their own classrooms. These six strategies will help develop a sense of trust, responsibility, and empathy in classroom communities which can contribute to supporting students experiencing trauma. Each strategy has a small description and at least one example of how it would look applied to a classroom.

Accompanying the How to Guide, a condensed brochure version was created for ease of distribution. I suggest this guide or brochure be given to inservice teachers during preplanning at the beginning of the year and given to preservice teachers in the EDG 4410 classroom management course at UCF. Below is the How to Guide that was created based on the Review of the Literature and the surveys and interviews conducted concerning preservice teacher knowledge on trauma, and below that is the brochure version.

## **How to Support Students Experiencing Trauma in the Classroom**

### **Background**

#### **1. Know what trauma is:**

Trauma is a negative reaction to any given event. This can include even the death of a beloved family pet. Below, a few events that the National Child Traumatic Stress Network say trauma may stem from

#### **What Experiences Might Be Traumatic?**

- Accident
- Injury
- Serious Illness
- Fires
- Crime
- Community violence
- Combat injury of a loved one
- Death of a loved one
- Violence within the family
- Abuse
- Neglect
- Homelessness
- School violence
- Natural disaster
- Sudden loss of a loved one
- Act of terrorism
- Bullying/Cyberbullying
- Economic Stress/Poverty
- Living in or escaping from a war zone

*Figure 2 (n.d.)*

One out of every four school children have been exposed to a traumatic event that can affect learning or behavior (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008). Over half of students experience a traumatic event before age 16 (National Child Traumatic Stress

Network, n.d.). It is very likely that students in your classroom may be experiencing trauma.

2. Recognize trauma in your students:

Trauma can influence every aspect of a student's life including emotional, physical, and mental abilities. Negative reactions and behaviors in your classroom may be stemming from trauma. Some of these reactions and behaviors may look like depression, anxiety, or even ADHD. Listed below are some common signs of trauma (Gurwitch et al, 2002).

- Fear
- Anxiety
- Increased somatic complaints (headache/stomach ache)
- Absenteeism
- Increased activity
- Decreased attention/focus
- Worries about safety of self and others
- Increased level of distress (perceived as irritable, whiney, moody)
- Aggression
- Attention seeking (very needy)

3. Support available for the teacher:

Many people can help you support students who may be going through a trauma such as guidance counselors, administration, and programs outside of school. Administration can provide you with additional information on state, county, and school wide policies on

students experiencing trauma, and how to support them. Guidance Counselors can screen students to determine if they are experiencing traumatic stress, provide counseling, and provide a referral for outside services. Services outside school, depends on the needs of the child and the location of the school and student. Administration and guidance counselors can by providing a list of outside services available. Resources for preservice and inservice teachers as well as school staff are provided below

- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2008) *Child trauma toolkit for educators*. Retrieved from <http://nctsn.org/resources/audiences/school-personnel/trauma-toolkit> Retrieve: This toolkit provides information on students experiencing trauma from pre-school to high school. Each section includes what reactions and behaviors to look for as well as example cases of students experiencing trauma. This toolkit provides trauma facts, suggestions for educators, and even self-care tips for educators working with students experiencing trauma.
- *A Terrible Thing Happened* by Margaret Holmes and Sasha Mudlaff: This is children's book written and illustrated for students who have witnessed violence, abuse, death, natural disasters, and other traumatic experiences. It follows Sherman Smith a raccoon that saw something terrible. He then begins to experience nervousness for no reason, his stomach hurts, he has bad dreams, and begins to do and say mean things. He then meets Ms. Maple who helps him talk about the terrible thing that happened and he begins to feel better. This is a great story to share with a student to help them realize they are not alone and that their

behavior is normal, and how best to deal with their feelings and emotions surrounding the event.

- Children’s Advocacy Center: This center provides assessment, advocacy, and therapy services to abused and neglected children in the Orlando area. They are a “one-stop shop” designed with 3 specific goal: to reduce trauma experienced by children after abuse is reported, improve the long-term positive outcomes for child abuse victims, and to increase child abuse prosecution rates. Children are provided with child advocates, who support the child and their families with service referrals and crisis intervention (Children’s Advocacy Center, 2013).

### Classroom Community

You the teacher, are going to be with the student more than anyone else in the school, maybe even more than the parents of your student. Creating a space that will comfort these students and make them feel safe should be a priority that is considered during preplanning and throughout the school year. The following strategies will not only help students who may be experiencing trauma, but all students in your classroom.

#### 1. Consistency:

Make sure that in your classroom there is a constant classroom routine. Students may not always have consistency in their lives outside of school, but they should know exactly what to expect from you and school. Spend time during preplanning to think of what your daily routine should look like, and how to accomplish it for your students.



2. Expectations:

Set specific expectations for your students. Expectations can be crucial in behavior modification for students experiencing trauma. Guide the students to come up with the rules and expectations themselves so the students have a sense of ownership over their behavior and decisions during activities. Do not be afraid to have consequences for their choices. This can be done by creating classroom rules together at the beginning of the year or by setting specific expectations for behavior throughout the activities that go on daily in a classroom.

3. Choices:

Your students may not have many choices in their lives; they may be constantly told what to do instead of being given options. You can instill a sense of responsibility over their education by giving them choices in your classroom. For example, have students choose which center to go to, what organism they want to color and label, or even have them choose between their consequences for not following the rules. The opportunity for choice is endless, utilize it!

4. Breathing exercises:

Are your students anxious about a test, over-stimulated after an activity, or arguing with each other? Practice deep breathing with your students. Tell your students how deep breathing sends blood to their brains and slows their heart rate, which helps them make better decisions. Use a bell between activities and have students stop what they are doing

and take three deep breaths. One way to guide breathing exercises is to create a pencil with a flower on one side and a flame on the other, tell students to hold an ordinary pencil and follow your instructions. Tell them to first smell the flowers with a deep breath in, and then flip your pencil to the other end with the flame and then blow out the candle. This is simple tool can be taken and used inside and outside the classroom to self-regulate their emotions and behaviors anytime and anywhere.

5. Safe space:

You know your students best. If you see them getting angry, frustrated, or on the brink of a meltdown, providing a safe space to calm down may be the best way to diffuse a situation before it happens. This is your opportunity to know what calms your students and make it available to them. Have a corner of the room designated for cooling down without disrupting the rest of class. Provide stress balls for students to squeeze, or plushies to hug. Or, maybe your students need a journal to write down their feelings and then tear it up and throw it away. Maybe students need a flower and flame pencil to remind them to breathe. Giving the responsibility to students can also be done by allowing them to go into the space when they feel themselves about to make a poor choice.

6. Communication:

The school day does not always allow for time to do and say everything that was planned. The students in your class may have something important they want to tell you, but time

limitations are prohibitive. They may want to tell you about an event, an experience, or a preference (like/dislike), but do not know how to approach you yet. This is an opportunity for you, the teacher, to brainstorm how you will communicate with students. Maybe you can incorporate dialogue journals into your classroom routine or maybe a teacher mailbox will best fit your classroom and students. Brainstorm, explore Pinterest, consultations with fellow teachers and mentors may reveal what worked for them and may help you find ways to build important relationships and open communication between you and your students. These communication avenues will not only benefit your students experiencing trauma but can help you better support all your students in the classroom.

## How to Support Students Experiencing Trauma in the Classroom Brochure



### Classroom Community

**Consistency:** Students may not always have consistency in their lives outside of school, but they should know exactly what to expect from you and school. Spend time during preplanning to think of what your daily routine should look like, and how to accomplish it for your students.

**Choices:** Your students may not have many choices in their lives. You can instill a sense of responsibility over their education by giving them choices in your classroom. Have students choose which center to go to or what organism they want to color and label. The opportunity for choices is endless, utilize it!

**Breathing Exercises:** Practice deep breathing with your students. Tell your students how deep breathing sends blood to their brains and slows their heart rate, which helps them make better decisions. Use a bell between activities and have students stop what they are doing and take three deep breaths.

**Communication:** The students in your class may have something important they want to tell you, but time limitations are prohibitive. Open communication with students through dialogue journals or a teacher mailbox.

**Expectations:** Expectations can be crucial in behavior modification for students experiencing trauma. Guide the students to come up with the rules and expectations themselves so the students have a sense of ownership over their behavior and decisions during activities.

**Safe Space:** Have a corner of the room designated for cooling down without disrupting the rest of class. Provide stress balls for students to squeeze, or plushies to hug. Or, maybe your students need a journal to write down their feelings and then tear it up and throw it away.

#### References:

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (n.d.). Resources for parents and caregivers. Retrieved from <http://www.nctsn.org/resources/audiences/parents-caregivers>

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2008) Child trauma toolkit for educators. Retrieved from <http://nctsn.org/resources/audiences/school-personnel/trauma-toolkit>

Gurwitch, R. H., Silovsky, J. F., Schultz, S., Kees, M. & Burlingame, S. (2002). Reactions and guidelines for children following trauma/disaster. *Communication Disorders Quarterly*, 23(2), 93-99.

Children's Advocacy Center. (2013). Who we are. Retrieved from <http://caccentral.com/childrens-advocacy-center/>



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**HOW TO  
SUPPORT  
STUDENTS  
EXPERIENCING  
TRAUMA IN THE  
CLASSROOM**



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## Recognize Trauma

Listed below are some common signs of trauma.

- Worries about safety of self and others
- Increased somatic complaints
- Absenteeism
- Decreased attention or focus
- Fear
- Increased activity
- Anxiety
- Increased level of distress
- Aggression
- Attention seeking

## What is Trauma?

Trauma is a negative reaction to any given event. This can include even the death of a beloved family pet. Listed below are a few events listed that trauma may stem from.

---

## What Experiences Might Be Traumatic?

---

- Accident
- Serious illness
- Fires
- Crime
- Community Violence
- School violence
- Natural disaster
- Sudden loss of a loved one
- Living in or escaping from a war zone
- Combat injury of a loved one
- Death of a loved one
- Injury
- Violence within the family
- Abuse
- Neglect
- Homelessness
- Act of terrorism
- Bullying/Cyber bullying
- Economic stress/poverty



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## Support Available

- Administration: provide state, county, and school-wide policies on students experiencing trauma.
- Guidance Counselors: screen students experiencing trauma, provide counseling, and provide referral for outside services
- Outside services: Ex. Children's Advocacy Center- <http://caccentral.com/childrens-advocacy-center/>
- Books: Ex. *A Terrible Thing Happened* by Margaret Holmes and Sasha Mudlaff
- Toolkit: Ex. The National Child Traumatic Toolkit for Educators- <http://nctsn.org/resources/audie>

## **APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS**

Close Preview

Restart Survey



This information will be used as a part of UCF Honors in the Major Program for the research in an undergraduate thesis. No personal information will be recorded. If you are uncomfortable answering any questions, you are free to skip them. Do you consent to completing this survey?

Yes

No



Previewing Survey

Restart Survey



What is your academic year?

Freshman

Sophomore

Junior

Senior

To the best of your ability define trauma in 3 sentences or less.

Do you know any reactions or behaviors that elementary students experiencing trauma may display?

Yes, if so list them here:

No

Do you know any systems of support available to assist teachers that are instructing students experiencing trauma?

Yes, if so list them here:

No

To the best of your ability describe ways to build a classroom community where students experiencing trauma feel safe



Close Preview

Restart Survey



Do feel prepared by UCF elementary education preparation program to support students who experience a traumatic event that can affect their learning or behavior?

- Very Prepared
- Prepared
- Neutral
- Unprepared
- Very unprepared

Close Preview

Restart Survey



be interested in learning more about students experience trauma by incorporating trauma education into UCF's elementary education preparation program?

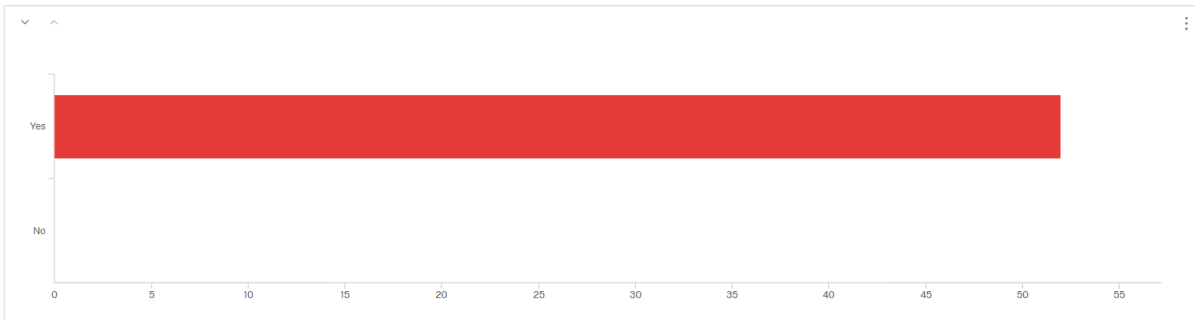
- Very interested
- Interested
- Neutral
- Uninterested
- Very uninterested



## **APPENDIX B: SURVEY RESULTS**

Q8 - This information will be used as a part of UCF Honors in the Major Program for the research in an undergraduate thesis. No pe...

Page Options ▾



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	This information will be used as a part of UCF Honors in the Major Program for the research in an undergraduate thesis. No personal information will be recorded. If you are uncomfortable answering any questions, you are free to skip them. Do you consent to completing this survey?	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	52

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	What is your academic year?	2.00	4.00	3.56	0.55	0.30	36

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Freshman	0.00% 0
2	Sophomore	2.78% 1
3	Junior	38.89% 14
4	Senior	58.33% 21
		36


Showing Rows: 1 - 5 Of 5


Q2 - To the best of your ability define trauma in 3 sentences or less.


Page Options ▾


⌵ ⌶


To the best of your ability define trauma in 3 sentences or less.


When something happens to someone and they keep experiencing it after the fact 


When a certain situation harms someone's mental health 


Trauma is the scar of a tragedy that only lessens with time but always stays with the victim. 


Trauma is the mental or physical effect on someone after a dramatic or unexpected event. 


Trauma is the aftermath effects caused by traumatic events 


Trauma is something that shocks you emotionally or physically and has an impact on the rest of your life. 


Trauma is something that happens that affects someone's mental state. 


Trauma is having experienced something that is disturbing or frightening 


Trauma is anything that creates extraordinary stress in a short amount of time, or even within one event. 


Trauma is anything significant in someone's lives resulting in a change in behavior, intellect, or physical ability. 


Trauma is any situation that causes extended detrimental behavioral side affects. 


Trauma is an extreme event that can lead to stress, depression or anxiety. 


Trauma is an experience that someone faces that is unpleasant. 


Trauma is an experience that causes severe negative mental and/or physical effects. Such as a school shooting. 


Trauma is a person experiencing hardship that is well beyond what could be considered normal 















Trauma is a dramatic negative affect on someone. It is life changing. 

Trauma is a bad experience that happen to someone. Trauma could affect physical, emotional and mental health. Some trauma example include someone that was involve in a massacre, someone they love died or even accidents too. 

Trauma can be anything from emotional abuse, physical abuse, or even being effected by something that happens outside the school and in the community. Some examples could be school shooting survivors, people effected by natural disasters, or abuse victims. 

The emotional distress felt or experienced after a traumatic experience. 

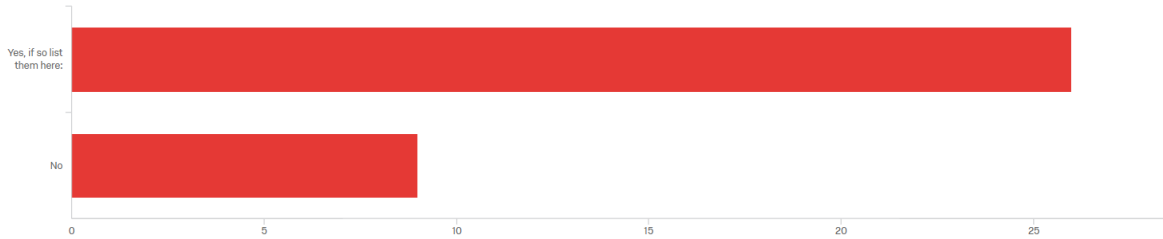
Terrible things that happen to us and around us. 

Something that severely effects a person	
Something that negatively effects a community.	
Something that changes your life Something that effects you negatively An event that has impact on your body	
It a have stress situation that a person goes through. This can be momentary or for a long time. This outcome depends on the way a person processes the trauma.	
Events that have a lasting negative impact on the mind.	
Emotional and/or physical shock and difficulties following a very disturbing or upsetting experience	
Being through an event that effects your mental capacity to focus.	
Any experience that is detrimental to emotional well being	
Any event or experience that is distressing or disturbing.	
An outside force that shocks the receiver. It can affect the receiver in many ways, some bad, some terrible. It is usually irreversible.	
An experience that leaves you confused, overwhelmed, depressed/upset	
An event that causes a person to have mental pain afterwards. The mental pain is the trauma.	
An act or situat that requires extra effort to process after the fact.	
A substantial and life changing event that affects someone for a long period of time.	

Showing Records: 31 - 34 Of 34

Q3 - Do you know any reactions or behaviors that elementary students experiencing trauma may display?

Page Options ▾



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Do you know any reactions or behaviors that elementary students experiencing trauma may display? - Selected Choice	1.00	2.00	1.26	0.44	0.19	35

Yes, if so list them here:

No trust, anger, fear, anxiety



Silence



Depression, no motivation, anger



Yes, Lack of self confidence.



Inappropriate touching, acting out, etc.



Constant fright of touch or sight of something familiar to the event.



Divorce school consular.



Excess stress and worry, difficulty feeling safe.













Some may intent to be shy and could also have like their head tick as part of their nervous system.









Appetite changes Emotional/behavioral issues (unexplained anger, sadness, etc) Anxiety Sleep changes Trouble focusing Depression-like symptoms



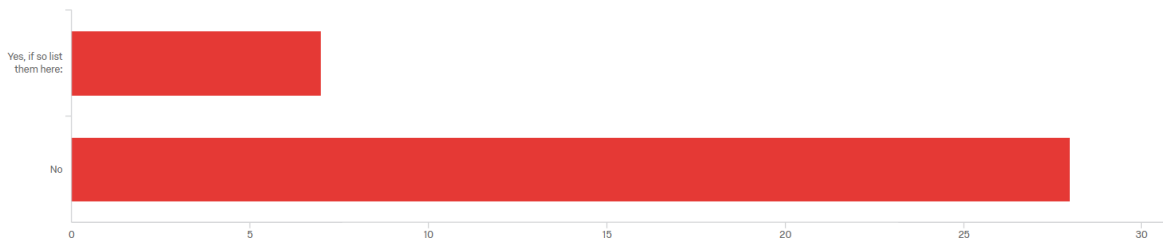
Showing Records: 1 - 10 Of 26

Withdrawal from everyday activities, significant behavior changes	
Fear, anxiety, separation anxiety	
Crying Distancing themselves Anger Bodily harm	
Outbursts, being distracted, sometimes trying to hide in the cracks	
Bad behavior or hiding emotions	
Isolation Loneliness Aggressive	
acting out bad behavior aggression	
Shyness, acting out, unfocused, sad	
Withdrawal Acting Out Anger issues	
Negative behavioral outbursts Disinterest in learning/participating	
Showing Records: 11 - 20 Of 26	

They can be withdrawn Overly emotional Have a change in grades	
Acting out, loud, shut out	
Being less social No interest in learning Talking about non school appropriate topics	
Acting out Behavior issues Absences	
Behavioral problems Seclusion	
some look like reactions and behaviors of ADHD	
Showing Records: 21 - 26 Of 26	

Q4 - Do you know any systems of support available to assist teachers that are instructing students experiencing trauma?

Page Options ▾



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Do you know any systems of support available to assist teachers that are instructing students experiencing trauma? - Selected Choice	1,00	2,00	1,80	0,40	0,16	35

Yes, if so list them here:

- Administration, DCF.
- The administrator have a list of services available.
- Mostly there are some programs that help teachers
- Other teachers with experience
- Administration/counselors
- New Hope for Kids
- Counselors on campus

Showing Records: 1 - 7 Of 7



Q5 - To the best of your ability describe ways to build a classroom community where students experiencing trauma feel safe

To the best of your ability describe ways to build a classroom community wh...

Build trust, offer private help, show everyone love and understanding



Offer a safe zone in the corner of the classroom where students can escape if they feel overwhelmed.



Free space to relax



Open dialogue



No judgment area or zone in class.



Making the classroom a safe environment is mostly an attitude problem. For specific students, the best way to make them feel safe it to show them they are safe.



Have a positive behavior support and guidance to or students. As well have certain object such as plushie that could help a child feel calm.



Have a safe space, build rapport and trust with students, have groups to discuss emotions, educate on emotional intelligence, allow the child to keep a journal, etc.



Providing a positive, supportive neutral environment where students feel they can speak or confide.



I think letting students know you are open and available to talk or listen if they need it is very crucial. Making your classroom a safe haven and/or having a place in the classroom where students can take a break or destress from personal or classroom activities.



Warm and inviting. Always promoting third party resources like counseling, group therapy or hotlines. Always encourage students to feel comfortable talking to the teacher.



Welcoming posters Creating a relationship with students Making the student feel safe



Keep an open mind, instill a judgement free zone to the best of your ability. Build the children up in any way possible.



Crate a class family environment where students can feel safe and grow a relationship with every student so that they can trust you and talk to you



Just having a good classroom environment in general can help make your students feel comfortable enough to voice their feelings to you



Having a safe and welcoming environment Be clear about respect and inclusivity Keep an open mind and encourage diversity



I feel like being open to the students and just being there for them is a great policy to have. I dont know any set programs but I think that would be beneficial.



Having an open classroom where students feel comfortable expressing their feelings



comforting and friendly



Creating a safe space, work with resources at school



Trigger and content warnings Safe discussions



Providing a loving environment where students feel comfortable opening up and sharing their experiences and feelings.



I would show them love and support through a positive and open line of communication as well as appropriate affection (side hug or fist bump).



In a classroom you could have a "safe corner" where a student is allowed to sit in a comfortable setting and talk to a teacher or have alone time to think about their feelings



Preparing teachers with the resources and strategies to provide their students that are experiencing trauma



Have a way for them to communicate in a safe way, maybe through a box they can drop a note in or a time they can talk to the teacher in private.



Building a strong classroom community where students feel comfortable talking to you about their personal lives and if they are having a difficulty learning.

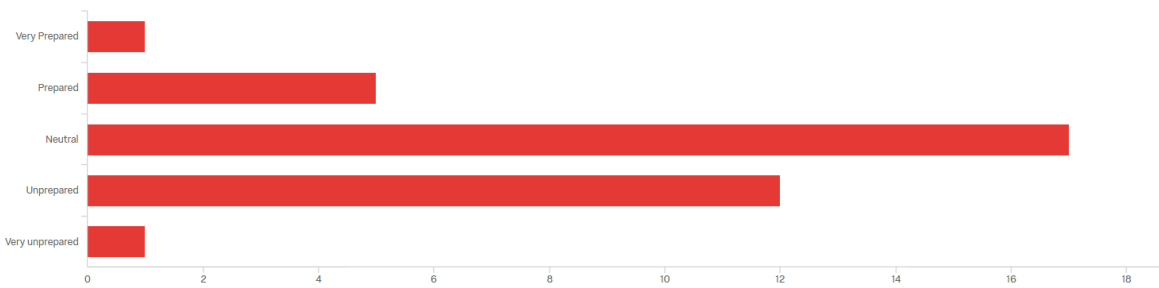


Notes to teacher, mailbox, private conference, counselor referral



Q6 - Do feel prepared by UCF elementary education preparation program to support students who experience a traumatic event tha...

Page Options ▾



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Do feel prepared by UCF elementary education preparation program to support students who experience a traumatic event that can affect their learning or behavior?	1.00	5.00	3.19	0.81	0.66	36

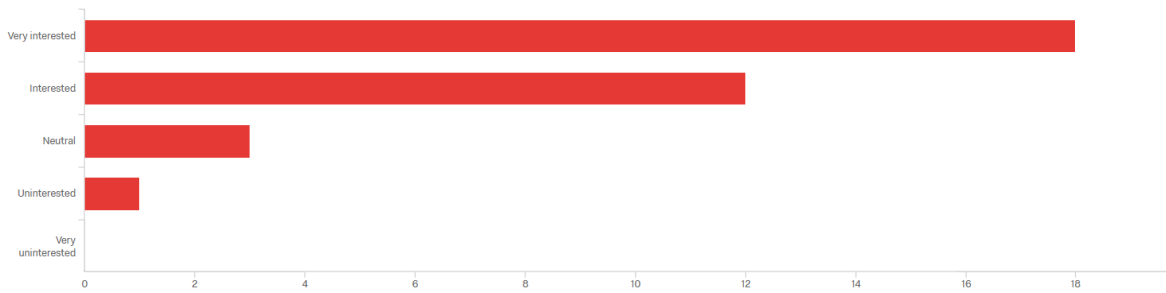
#	Field	Choice Count
1	Very Prepared	2.78% 1
2	Prepared	13.89% 5
3	Neutral	47.22% 17
4	Unprepared	33.33% 12
5	Very unprepared	2.78% 1

36

Showing Rows: 1 - 6 Of 6

Q7 - be interested in learning more about students experience trauma by incorporating trauma education into UCF's elementary ed...

Page Options ▾



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	be interested in learning more about students experience trauma by incorporating trauma education into UCF's elementary education preparation program?	1.00	4.00	1.62	0.77	0.59	34

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Very interested	52.94% 18
2	Interested	35.29% 12
3	Neutral	8.82% 3
4	Uninterested	2.94% 1
5	Very uninterested	0.00% 0
		34

Showing Rows: 1 - 6 Of 6

**APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR INSERVICE  
CLASSROOM TEACHERS**

1. What is your position and/or job title?

How long have you been in your position?

2. How would you rate your understanding of trauma on a scale of 1 to 10? With 10 being the highest form of understanding and 1 being little to no understanding?

3. In your own words, describe trauma.

4. Have you received any type of trauma training?

If so, where/when did you receive that training? Any that relate to elementary aged children?

If not, do you think you could benefit from trauma training?

5. What age range of students do you work with?

6. What reactions and behaviors are prevalent in students who have experienced trauma in your opinion?

7. How do *you* support a student who has gone or is going through trauma?

Are there any resources you utilize that you believe other teachers should be aware of?

8. Do you think providing trauma training in elementary education teacher preparation programs will increase teacher effectiveness? Why?

**APPENDIX D: INSERVICE CLASSROOM TEACHERS' INTERVIEW  
RESULTS**

## TEACHER A

1. What is your position and/or job title?

- I'm a fourth and fifth grade dual-language English language and social studies teacher.

How long have you been in your position?

- In this current position this is my first year. But I've taught ELA and social studies for three years, math and science for one year in fourth grade.

2. How would you rate your understanding of trauma on a scale of 1 to 10? With 10 being the highest form of understanding and 1 being little to no understanding?

- My understanding of it would be maybe a 6.

3. In your own words, describe trauma.

- Anything that causes distress to a child, whether that be physical or emotional stress, that's brought upon their lives.

4. Have you received any type of trauma training?

- Yes

If so, where/when did you receive that training? Any that relate to elementary aged children?

- We do child abuse training within our school, and anti-bullying training. So, we get into what to look for with neglect and abuse, whether that be emotional or physical. We are trained every year at the beginning of the year before the students get here. Every year we are required to do that. Bullying is also

something we go over as well, and you can see trauma and abuse from students to other students with that.

If not, do you think you could benefit from trauma training?

- N/A

5. What age range of students do you work with?

- 8-11

6. What reactions and behaviors are prevalent in students who have experienced trauma in your opinion?

- With certain cases, last year I had a student who was sexually and physically abused, and she would come in dirty and withdrawn. There would be crying and outbursts. We also had 6 kids who had recently lost their parents that year. You would see them shut down with certain topics and withdraw socially and sometimes even physically remove themselves from the room. Students would seek attention from teachers, good and bad. They needed an adult. With her, she was talking inappropriately about sex and suicide to other students. That clued us in that something was off. And when that happened, we called DCF that day and had a one-on-one with the school counselor, and found out about the abuse. Thankfully, she got removed from that situation, and went to go live with another relative outside of the state.

7. How do *you* support a student who has gone or is going through trauma?



- I try and support my student by having a consistent classroom routine for them here. I think it's important for them to know that they are safe and stable here at school in my room.

Are there any resources you utilize that you believe other teachers should be aware of?

- Definitely our guidance office, is super important to utilize. Our counselor has lots of experience and background on this stuff. And training every single year is important because things change and you sometimes need to be reminded that you are dealing with little humans that have their own set of problems and experiences. It doesn't matter if grandma, or grandpa or someone close to them died or if it's as serious as direct abuse, there are different ways it (trauma) affects them and their work.

8. Do you think providing trauma training in elementary education teacher preparation programs will increase teacher effectiveness? Why?

- I absolutely think it is. Last year just knowing those warning signs to look for, I would have never noticed that student was going through a hard time without that direct instruction and training. There are subtle behaviors, like always withdrawing to be alone, that we don't look for behaviorally that could display something bigger. Training with warning signs and early indicators is super important.

TEACHER B

1. What is your position and/or job title?

- I am a second-grade teacher

How long have you been in your position?

- 19 years

2. How would you rate your understanding of trauma on a scale of 1 to 10? With 10 being the highest form of understanding and 1 being little to no understanding?

- 7

3. In your own words, describe trauma.

- Any type of situation that causes stress, sadness, anything that disrupts their lives.

4. Have you received any type of trauma training?

- Yes

If so, where/when did you receive that training? Any that relate to elementary aged children?

- We do it (training) every year, it is required by Seminole County. We talk about child abuse and neglect and different types of abuses and our obligation to report it.

If not, do you think you could benefit from trauma training?

- N/A

5. What age range of students do you work with?

- 6-7

6. What reactions and behaviors are prevalent in students who have experienced trauma in your opinion?

- They are withdrawn, sometimes very needy, sometimes sad and can cry, not doing any work, putting their heads down, absent, pretending to be sick, those are the things I've seen

7. How do *you* support a student who has gone or is going through trauma?

- I try to be as comforting and stable and be there for them if they need anything. Even if it's just a hug or they want to talk, whatever they need, I'm there. If they are in a situation that is very chaotic at home; at school I'm stable, everything is routine, and I try to make it very calming, so they don't feel any sort of change because they probably have enough in their life.

Are there any resources you utilize that you believe other teachers should be aware of?

- Use the internet. Beyond that there is not any specific ones I use, I think it just comes with experience and talking with other teachers that may have gone through the same situation.

8. Do you think providing trauma training in elementary education teacher preparation programs will increase teacher effectiveness? Why?

- I believe it would help, because you would have more knowledge and could apply it to any situation and you would have resources available that you may not have access to otherwise. So, I think it would definitely be beneficial.

## **APPENDIX E: SCHOOL STAFF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What is your position and/or job title?

How long have you been in your position?

2. Have you received any type of trauma training?

If so, where/when did you receive that training? Any that relate to elementary aged children?

If not, do you think you could benefit from trauma training?

3. What age range of students do you work with?

Can you elaborate on what you do on a day to day basis in working with students who have experienced trauma?

4. What traumatic experience(s) are prevalent in the students you work with?

5. What reactions and behaviors are prevalent in students who have experienced trauma in your opinion?

6. How do *you* support a student who has gone or are going through trauma?

Are there any resources you utilize that you believe teachers should be aware of?

7. Do you work closely with the classroom teachers of students experiencing trauma?

If so, in your experience have the teachers been knowledgeable about trauma and the reactions and behaviors that can stem from it?

8. What do you think is one of the most important things teachers should know concerning students who have or are experiencing trauma?

## **APPENDIX F: SCHOOL STAFF INTERVIEW RESULTS**

## SCHOOL STAFF A

1. What is your position and/or job title?

- I'm a school counseling intern at an elementary school

How long have you been in your position?

- I've been at the site for three weeks, but I did practicum in the spring, which was four full months. I also taught kindergarten for a year during my first year in grad school.

2. Have you received any type of trauma training?

- Yes.

If so, where/when did you receive that training? Any that relate to elementary aged children?

- I took a trauma course from UCF. As a teacher, definitely not, but I took a full course at UCF. It wasn't mandatory but an elective. We have a crisis response team, and we deal with a lot of trauma, but weren't explicitly trained in helping respond to trauma.

If not, do you think you could benefit from trauma training?

- N/A

3. What age range of students do you work with?

- I've worked with pre-k, and I'm currently kindergarten through fifth grade, but I will be certified for kindergarten through twelfth grade.

Can you elaborate on what you do on a day to day basis in working with students who have experienced trauma?

- Day to day varies, but a lot of times kids will have melt downs in classes. A lot of kids we are seeing we are seeing repeatedly, and a lot of them have a history of trauma. In the day to day we teach classroom coping skills, we have social-emotional lessons, and we do some crisis intervention to help kids get back on track to get learning again in the classroom. There is a student who has been sexually abused by their father, we have been working with them a lot in those areas.
4. What traumatic experience(s) are prevalent in the students you work with?
- Divorce is very prevalent, several sexual incidences, at least one in every school, kids who are dealing with parents going through cancer treatments. A few students are homeless after Hurricane Maria. Homelessness and divorce are, I would say the most prominent.
5. What reactions and behaviors are prevalent in students who have experienced trauma in your opinion?
- A lot of rage at everybody, teachers and friends, it doesn't matter. I also see a lot of anxiety; a lot are very anxious in school. A lot isolate themselves, don't play with anyone in recess and don't sit with anyone at lunch. Those are probably the ones I see most.
6. How do *you* support a student who has gone or are going through trauma?



- Probably, well I'm a work in progress. Having a mentor in school has been very beneficial for the students I work with at the school I'm at currently. Having someone to talk to when they are frustrated, a teacher or administrator that they trust and can go to when they need to talk. Teaching them coping skills such as deep breathings skills has also been great for students.

Are there any resources you utilize that you believe teachers should be aware of?

- The biggest thing I didn't know about was counseling outside of school. A lot of agencies that offer counseling for free or come to the schools if there is a crisis. If teachers knew about these free resources that would have been a huge help. Teaching social-emotional skills would also have been hugely beneficial, orange county is starting to mandate teaching different social-emotional skills such as how to deal with bullying and it seems to work well so far.

7. Do you work closely with the classroom teachers of students experiencing trauma?

- We do work with classroom teachers often.

If so, in your experience have the teachers been knowledgeable about trauma and the reactions and behaviors that can stem from it?

- I would have to say it is half and half, one teacher has been really understanding and sweet and private about it. It's horrible, but some teachers are gossipy about students. Another teacher has no patience what-so-ever for their student. I think there can be some that are not even aware of how trauma can affect behavior in the classroom.

8. What do you think is one of the most important things teachers should know concerning students who have or are experiencing trauma?
- Teachers should know when they (the student) are in that fight or flight mode, they are not thinking about learning. They are thinking about survival. Internally they are surviving and not misbehaving. It's not a choice, it's a reaction.

#### SCHOOL STAFF B

1. What is your position and/or job title?
- I am a school counselor in Seminole county.

How long have you been in your position?

- This is my fourth year at my school and my fourth year as a counselor because I came straight out of school to this job.

2. Have you received any type of trauma training?

- I did.

If so, where/when did you receive that training? Any that relate to elementary aged children?

- I did through my grad program about four years ago in my 2012-2015 graduate program. It was infused throughout the program, so trauma practices were reflected on in many courses, but there was no one specific class on trauma. I also had some training here (my job), they offer specific trauma training to teachers, counselors, school social workers. I was also on the crisis response team at UCF, which touched on trauma briefly as well.

If not, do you think you could benefit from trauma training?

- N/A

3. What age range of students do you work with?

- I work with pre-k – fifth grade. Mainly k-5

Can you elaborate on what you do on a day to day basis in working with students who have experienced trauma?

- My training was to provide direct and indirect services. A lot more indirect here because of the school setting I'm in, so a lot of what I do is behind the scenes. I do work with students in small groups, one-on-one, and occasionally a large group lesson. Many students who have experienced trauma we help give them skills-not therapy, but tools they can use in the classroom to cope. I also help teachers understand the children in their classrooms and try to help them understand their experience and actions.

4. What traumatic experience(s) are prevalent in the students you work with?

- We do have some students who are in unstable home environments, some foster students who have not been adopted. They do not have a consistent, unconditional love environment. We have students have experienced sexual abuse and are navigating the effects of that years later. A lot of students are navigating family dynamic issues. Divorce or a parent who is being abused; what those students have seen and been exposed to in the home can be traumatic. Some students have been abused physically and emotionally by a parent. We have had some students whose parents who have taken drugs and lost a parent due to drug use. At least

three times since I've been here. One student had moved from up north and was panhandling there and is dealing with the change.

5. What reactions and behaviors are prevalent in students who have experienced trauma in your opinion?

- I definitely think those kids tend to have behavior issues at school. They may be more needy emotionally, and seeking attention from adults, that they don't get at home. They are not always asking in the best way, or ways that most people are used to. Some of them act out and require more support at school, and we help them find a routine. We try and ensure that they know that this is consistent and caring and safe environment. Building strong relationships is key.

6. How do *you* support a student who has gone or are going through trauma?

- I think it depends, because they react in very different ways. A student who came to us from a different state, their mom was using drugs. They were needy, manipulative, had a lot of trouble self-regulating their emotions. We worked with the speech pathologist and created a thermometer for her to self-monitor with and paired with appropriate reaction to go with that feeling. Working with the teachers to keep a consistent routine and check in more often. Extra support to get the extra attention they aren't getting at home. It can look very different for different kids. One student who had been sexually abused years before started telling other kids about it and teachers were unaware of what had happened and didn't know how to react. Educating the teachers without telling them specific events to maintain

privacy for the student, while still having them be aware of what to do if she does behave this way.

Are there any resources you utilize that you believe teachers should be aware of?

- Self-regulating activities are a great resource for teachers to use in the classroom, and they can have great results if done right.

7. Do you work closely with the classroom teachers of students experiencing trauma?

- We do try to tackle things as a team, but privacy is the most important and some things are just between the students and me. It's kind of determined on a need to know basis.

If so, in your experience have the teachers been knowledgeable about trauma and the reactions and behaviors that can stem from it?

- I think we could use more Professional Development for teachers, because we (the counselors) are not always made aware of the kids that have experienced trauma. Trauma is not disclosed until other things happen (in the classroom). It would be great to have more professional development, so they know what to look for. I've had to do a lot of educating teachers, because it wasn't part of their teacher training.

8. What do you think is one of the most important things teachers should know concerning students who have or are experiencing trauma?

- I think just understanding that they might need some extra TLC because they may have the underlying feeling of not being safe. So, having that structure and safety

and routine. You can make yourself available to that student if they show they want to talk to you. It's important to know that trauma can impact the brain and can impact behavior. You may see the student show different behaviors and must respond differently than you would to other students.

**APPENDIX G: IRB APPROVAL LETTER**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

### Determination of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Jordan Doman**

Date: **May 25, 2018**

Dear Researcher:

On 05/25/2018, the IRB reviewed the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination  
Project Title: Incorporating Trauma Education in the University of Central Florida's Elementary Education Preparation Program.  
Investigator: Jordan Doman  
IRB Number: SBE-18-13940  
Funding Agency:  
Grant Title:  
Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

This letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gillian Morien".

Signature applied by Gillian Morien on 05/25/2018 04:13:15 PM EDT

Designated Reviewer



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