

Building Trauma-Informed Classrooms: Strengthening Professional Practice Through Research-Informed Educator Learning

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Chapter 1

Project Introduction

Context

I am currently a substitute teacher in the Salem-Keizer School District, a role I have held since the 2022–2023 school year. I completed my student teaching during the 2023–2024 school year at Cloverdale Elementary School, located in Marion County near Turner, Oregon. Cloverdale is a small, rural elementary school serving approximately 200 students in grades K–5. My professional focus is working with grades 2–4, though my teaching license covers the full elementary span. I am 24 years old and have lived in the Salem area my entire life, growing up in the small town of Aumsville and attending schools in the rural Cascade School District. I earned my Bachelor of Science in Education from Western Oregon University and am currently completing my Master of Science in Education with a focus in Curriculum and Instruction.

My path to this professional project is shaped by both my personal experiences and my classroom observations over the past six years. Growing up with many siblings, I share a particularly close bond with my younger brother, who is about a year and a half younger than me. From an early age, we were inseparable, often mistaken for twins, and navigated childhood side by side. In school, we were both strong academically, but our experiences in the classroom were very different. I was social and able to stay focused, while my brother’s abundant energy and difficulty sitting still sometimes caused disruptions. Teachers could have easily labeled him as “a bad kid” or a behavior problem, but instead, many educators responded with care, understanding, and support, helping him navigate the classroom environment successfully. Although they did not know the full extent of the challenges we faced at home, including emotional and verbal abuse from our mother and occasional physical abuse from our stepfather,

they created spaces where he could feel safe and thrive. Observing this has shaped my philosophy as an educator: students deserve classrooms that are safe, supportive, and trauma-informed, where they can engage in learning regardless of their circumstances outside of school. I want to build classrooms where students look forward to learning and socializing, where they feel valued and capable, and where educators recognize that behavior is often a form of communication rather than defiance.

Cloverdale Elementary School serves as the primary setting for this professional project. The school community values student growth, academic achievement, and social-emotional development, yet teachers frequently encounter students whose life experiences create challenges in the classroom. While many educators have reached a consensus in understanding the importance of social-emotional learning and trauma-informed practices, they often lack structured, practical professional development to translate theory into action. Teachers at Cloverdale are deeply committed to their students but often express uncertainty about how to respond consistently to trauma-related behaviors in ways that support regulation and learning. During my student teaching and substitute teaching experiences, I observed students shutting down during independent work, crying or becoming dysregulated during transitions, refusing to participate after peer conflict, or reacting aggressively when corrected publicly. For example, one student I worked with frequently crawled under tables or hid in classroom corners after making academic mistakes, while another became highly emotional whenever routines unexpectedly changed. These moments demonstrated that behaviors often stem from stress, anxiety, or a lack of emotional regulation rather than intentional defiance. Although teachers wanted to help, many relied on reactive behavior management strategies because they lacked practical training in trauma-informed responses. The school's small size allows educators to

build meaningful relationships with students, but limited access to ongoing professional development in trauma-informed education makes it difficult to sustain consistent schoolwide practices.

The situation I am addressing is the gap between knowledge and practice in trauma-informed education. Teachers often receive brief or theoretical training on trauma and social-emotional learning. However, these sessions rarely provide the hands-on strategies and ongoing support needed for effective implementation. I know this is a genuine need because I observe these challenges daily, both during my student teaching and my current substitute teaching experiences. Students' behaviors frequently communicate unmet needs, and educators benefit from structured opportunities to understand, respond, and reflect on these behaviors in ways that foster resilience and learning. This project addresses that gap by designing a professional development session that equips educators with research-based, trauma-informed strategies grounded in theory and practical classroom application.

Rationale

I care deeply about trauma-informed education because I have seen firsthand the difference it can make in a student's ability to feel safe, engage in learning, and thrive socially and academically. My experiences with my younger brother and my years in classrooms as a student teacher and substitute teacher have shown me that students' behaviors are often expressions of unmet needs rather than willful defiance. Witnessing the ways that supportive educators positively shaped my brother's school experience inspires me to extend the same care to other students. I am drawn to this project because I recognize a persistent gap in practical, research-based professional development that equips teachers with the tools to respond effectively to trauma in the classroom. I am uniquely prepared for this project; I combine deep

personal insight with professional experience in rural schools and advanced graduate training. If this professional development succeeds, it will empower teachers to recognize signs of trauma, implement strategies to support student resilience, and foster emotionally safe learning environments. If it does not succeed, students may continue to experience classrooms that unintentionally exacerbate stress or disengagement, and teachers may remain uncertain about how to respond effectively.

Trauma is a widespread issue that affects students' development, behavior, and learning. Acute trauma, such as a car accident or sudden loss, chronic trauma, including repeated exposure to domestic violence or neglect, and complex trauma, arising from multiple overlapping adverse experiences, all influence the ways children think, feel, and respond. Traumatic experiences affect the brain's development, impacting emotional regulation, memory, attention, executive functioning, and responses to stress. In the classroom, this may present as emotional outbursts, withdrawal, difficulty concentrating, perfectionism, or struggles with transitions. Students who exhibit these behaviors are communicating their needs, yet many educators feel unprepared to respond in ways that promote resilience rather than frustration or punitive measures.

This project matters to the broader educational community because the gap between awareness and practice is significant. Many teachers are familiar with the concept of trauma-informed instruction but lack opportunities for structured, applied professional development (Berger et al., 2020; Eastman et al., 2025). If nothing changes, students may continue to face learning environments that fail to meet their emotional needs, and teachers may experience burnout or secondary traumatic stress as they navigate challenging classroom dynamics without support. If this project succeeds, teachers will gain concrete, research-based strategies grounded in trauma-informed frameworks, such as morning check-ins, visual schedules, restorative

conversations, flexible seating, and calm corners to build classroom routines that foster trust, emotional safety, and engagement. Students benefit directly through increased stability, stronger relationships with adults, and improved readiness to learn. Teachers benefit by gaining confidence, professional growth, and reduced stress. The school community benefits from a culture of understanding, resilience, and collaboration.

This project is timely and urgent because awareness of trauma-informed practices has grown, yet access to meaningful, applied professional development remains limited, especially in rural or small schools. Educators are navigating increasing academic and social-emotional demands, and students are experiencing rising levels of stress and adversity. By offering a professional development session that translates theory into actionable strategies, this project addresses a pressing need and fills a gap that existing professional development efforts often overlook. A colleague might ask, “That’s nice, but why does this really matter?” My answer is that trauma-informed classrooms are essential for equity, student well-being, and effective learning. This project ensures teachers are prepared to meet students where they are, to understand behavior as communication, and to respond in ways that support long-term growth, resilience, and academic success.

Ultimately, this project seeks to synthesize personal insight with professional experience and contribute meaningfully to the field of education by bridging the gap between theory and practice. It strengthens educators’ capacity to implement trauma-informed practices, supports student success, and promotes a culture of care within schools. It matters to me personally because it reflects my belief that every child deserves a safe, engaging, and responsive classroom, regardless of the circumstances they face outside of school. It matters to the

educational community because it provides practical solutions to challenges that educators face daily, ensuring that students are not only taught but truly supported to thrive.

Connect

My professional project on trauma-informed classrooms connects to several major conversations currently shaping the field of education. At its core, this project addresses equity, social-emotional learning (SEL), student engagement, and teacher well-being. I situate this work within the broader idea that students cannot thrive academically if their social-emotional and developmental needs are unmet. Trauma-informed practices acknowledge that behavior is often communication, not defiance, and that schools must be responsive to students' lived experiences in order to foster equitable learning environments. By focusing on trauma, resilience, and supportive classroom structures, this project aligns with national conversations about whole-child education, emphasizing that academic success and emotional well-being are intertwined.

Key terms I use throughout this project include trauma, resilience, social-emotional learning, and trauma-informed practices. Trauma refers to experiences that overwhelm a child's ability to cope, whether a single event, repeated stressors, or prolonged adversity. Resilience is the capacity of both students and educators to adapt and recover from challenges while maintaining well-being. Social-emotional learning, as defined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), involves the development of skills to manage emotions, build relationships, and make responsible decisions. Trauma-informed practices are strategies, routines, and approaches that recognize the impact of trauma and actively create safe, predictable, and supportive learning environments. Using these concepts, I frame my approach to professional development as a way to equip educators with the

knowledge, skills, and strategies to integrate trauma-sensitive principles into daily classroom practice.

My thinking is shaped by both longitudinal research and practice. Studies on the impact of trauma on brain development and learning demonstrate how adverse experiences affect attention, memory, emotional regulation, and executive functioning. The work of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) and trauma-informed education scholars emphasizes the importance of shifting the focus from “What’s wrong with this student?” to “What happened to this student?” This shift guides the approach I take in my project: I prioritize understanding student behavior as communication, creating structures that promote emotional safety, and providing teachers with concrete tools to respond effectively. I also draw on SEL frameworks, such as CASEL, which highlight the role of predictable routines, emotional coaching, and strength-based feedback in building both student and educator resilience. These frameworks inform how I structure the professional development session, ensuring that participants gain practical strategies rooted in research and theory.

Researchers consistently emphasize that trauma significantly impacts students’ emotional regulation, attention, memory, and academic engagement, but scholars differ slightly in their focus regarding how schools should respond. Perfect et al. (2016) and Perry (2006) both explain how traumatic stress affects brain development and executive functioning, contributing to behaviors such as withdrawal, impulsivity, or difficulty concentrating in classroom settings. Similarly, Johnson (2018) argues that trauma disrupts students’ relationships with both peers and teachers, often lowering academic confidence and engagement. While these researchers focus primarily on the neurological and behavioral impacts of trauma, other scholars emphasize systemic and relational school responses. Overstreet and Chafouleas (2016) and Dorado et al.

(2016) advocate for whole-school trauma-informed approaches that prioritize safety, predictability, and relationship-building across all aspects of the school environment. In contrast, Berger et al. (2020) found that although many teachers understand the importance of trauma-informed practices, educators frequently report feeling underprepared to implement them consistently in classrooms. This aligns with Eastman et al. (2025), who found that teacher confidence in trauma-informed practice increases significantly when educators receive ongoing professional learning paired with practical classroom application. Together, these studies suggest that awareness alone is insufficient; teachers need concrete strategies, reflection opportunities, and sustained support to effectively implement trauma-informed practices.

While many schools are beginning to implement trauma-informed practices, the professional development currently available often focuses on awareness rather than applied, classroom-ready strategies. My project differs because it provides a hands-on, reflective learning experience for educators, grounded in real-world classroom examples and practical tools. This approach emphasizes immediate applicability, encourages teacher reflection, and fosters a culture of ongoing growth and collaboration. Current trends in education such as increased attention to student mental health, the integration of SEL into core instruction, and the movement toward equitable and inclusive classrooms, underscore the relevance and urgency of this work.

If someone asked, “What approach are you taking?” I would explain that my project is both research-informed and practice-centered. I design a professional development session that equips teachers with knowledge of trauma, the tools to identify signs in their students, and practical strategies to respond with care, consistency, and emotional support. I approach this project with the belief that change in classrooms begins with teachers who feel competent, supported, and confident in their ability to respond to students’ social-emotional needs. By

helping educators build these skills, this project contributes to a school culture that prioritizes well-being, equity, and engagement for every student.

Align

This professional project aligns closely with the mission and learning outcomes of the Master of Science in Education program in Curriculum and Instruction at Western Oregon University. The MSED program empowers educators to strengthen their knowledge, skills, and dispositions to improve professional practice, enhance leadership abilities, and use creativity, innovation, and research to improve the quality of education. My project fulfills this mission by providing a research-based, applied framework for trauma-informed classroom practices, which directly strengthens my professional knowledge and instructional skills. Through the development and facilitation of this professional development session, I effectively apply my professional content expertise, knowledge, skills, and dispositions as an educator. I draw upon my experience as a substitute teacher and former student teacher, my graduate coursework in curriculum and instruction, and current research on trauma-informed practices and social-emotional learning. By translating theory into practical strategies, I improve my ability to guide other educators in implementing classroom practices that support both student learning and emotional well-being.

This project also demonstrates my ability to use research and evidence to develop environments that support learning and assess professional practice. The professional development session incorporates evidence-based strategies, including morning meetings, visual schedules, flexible seating, calm corners, and restorative practices, all designed to create predictable, supportive, and emotionally safe classrooms. By reflecting on feedback from participants, assessing engagement, and analyzing post-session implementation, I practice

evidence-informed decision-making and continually improve the professional learning experience I provide. This iterative approach mirrors the reflective practices the MSED program emphasizes, and it directly strengthens my capacity to create learning environments that respond to student needs effectively.

Finally, this project shows my commitment to developing professional education leadership attributes. By leading a professional development session, I take on a leadership role in my educational community, guiding colleagues to adopt trauma-informed practices and fostering a culture of collaboration, support, and shared responsibility for student success. This project contributes to my growth as a teacher-leader, preparing me for future roles in instructional leadership, curriculum coordination, or teacher mentoring. Aligning with professional teaching standards, this project addresses competencies in creating inclusive, equitable learning environments, promoting student well-being, and modeling reflective practice for continuous improvement.

In the context of my career path, this project strengthens my ability to implement trauma-informed strategies in classrooms, support colleagues in professional learning, and advocate for student-centered approaches across grade levels. It represents a synthesis of my personal values, professional experience, and graduate-level training, demonstrating both my growth as an educator and my readiness to contribute meaningfully to the broader educational community.

Explain

This professional project takes the form of a trauma-informed professional development session designed for educators at Cloverdale Elementary School. The project implementation begins with careful planning and preparation to ensure the session is practical, engaging, and immediately applicable to classroom practice. My first step is to develop the session content,

drawing from my existing slides and research on trauma-informed education from previous courses, and evidence-based social-emotional learning strategies. I structure the session to include interactive components, such as partner discussions, reflection exercises, scenario analysis, and opportunities to practice strategies like restorative conversations, morning check-ins, and co-regulation techniques.

The session is planned as a 90-minute professional development workshop delivered during a scheduled staff meeting or dedicated professional learning period. Preparation includes reviewing and updating slides, creating handouts and reference materials, setting up classroom resources for demonstration, and coordinating with school administrators to ensure access to the necessary space and technology. My role involves presenting the content, facilitating discussions, modeling strategies, and guiding reflection. Administrators and colleagues provide support by sharing insights about school needs, helping coordinate scheduling, and participating as learners to provide feedback.

The professional development session is organized into four major sections designed to gradually build teacher understanding and application of trauma-informed practices. The first section introduces foundational knowledge about childhood trauma, including definitions of acute, chronic, and complex trauma, as well as an overview of how trauma affects brain development, emotional regulation, and classroom behavior. This section incorporates brief research summaries from SAMHSA (2014), Perry (2006), and Perfect et al. (2016) to establish the theoretical foundation for the session.

The second section focuses on recognizing trauma-related behaviors within classroom settings. Teachers examine realistic classroom scenarios based on experiences commonly

observed in elementary schools, such as emotional shutdowns during academic tasks, dysregulation during transitions, avoidance behaviors, perfectionism, or aggressive responses to correction. Participants engage in small-group discussions to analyze how these behaviors may communicate unmet emotional or developmental needs rather than intentional noncompliance.

The third section emphasizes practical classroom strategies teachers can implement immediately. Participants rotate through strategy stations that model trauma-informed practices, including morning check-ins, calm corners, co-regulation strategies, visual schedules, restorative conversations, flexible seating options, and emotional vocabulary supports. Teachers receive printable resource materials, sample classroom visuals, and implementation guides to support transfer into their own classrooms. During this section, participants also practice restorative language and role-play teacher-student interactions using trauma-sensitive communication techniques.

The final section centers on reflection, collaboration, and action planning. Teachers complete a guided reflection about their current classroom practices, identify one or two trauma-informed strategies they plan to implement, and discuss possible barriers to implementation. Participants also complete feedback forms evaluating the relevance, clarity, and usefulness of the session. Follow-up support includes optional resource sharing, classroom check-ins, and continued collaboration with colleagues interested in expanding trauma-informed practices schoolwide.

I anticipate a few obstacles during implementation. Teachers' schedules and competing priorities may affect attendance or engagement, and some participants may initially feel uncomfortable discussing trauma, either personally or professionally. To address this, I

emphasize session norms of confidentiality, respect, choice, and self-care, creating a safe and supportive environment. I also plan to provide follow-up resources and optional one-on-one support for teachers who want additional guidance or coaching.

Assessment of the project's success is both qualitative and reflective. I will measure success through multiple methods, including participant feedback surveys, anecdotal reflections from discussions, and observations of teacher engagement during activities. Specific indicators of success include teachers' ability to identify signs of trauma in students, describe practical trauma-informed strategies, and articulate how they might apply these strategies in their classrooms. Post-session, I will follow up informally with participants to gather stories of classroom application and student impact, looking for evidence of improved student engagement, behavior regulation, and positive teacher-student interactions.

Success for this project is defined not only by immediate participation but also by observable growth in teachers' confidence, knowledge, and willingness to implement trauma-informed practices. Even if only a portion of teachers begin integrating these strategies in their classrooms, the project provides meaningful change by sparking awareness, reflection, and action. If feedback or observations indicate areas of misunderstanding, discomfort, or lack of application, I will adjust the content, delivery methods, or follow-up support in future iterations. This iterative approach ensures that the project remains responsive to participant needs and maximizes its impact on both teachers and students.

Ultimately, this project implements trauma-informed professional development in a way that is practical, research-based, and sustainable. By combining structured content, interactive engagement, and ongoing reflection, it equips educators with the tools and understanding they

need to create classrooms that are safe, supportive, and conducive to student learning and well-being.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Over the past decade, the field of education has increasingly recognized the significant impact of trauma on student learning, behavior, and engagement. Trauma is understood not only as a singular event, such as an accident or a natural disaster, but also as cumulative exposure to chronic stressors like domestic violence, neglect, community violence, or systemic inequities (Cole et al., 2013; Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016). Studies show that trauma can disrupt the development of critical brain functions, including emotional regulation, attention, and memory, which directly affects students' ability to access and engage with academic content (Berger et al., 2020). Because of these profound effects, trauma-informed education (TIE) has emerged as a framework aimed at creating learning environments that are safe, predictable, and supportive while maintaining high academic expectations. Trauma-informed practices emphasize the whole child, recognizing that learning cannot occur independently of emotional and social well-being (Blodgett & Dorado, 2016).

The relevance of trauma-informed education extends beyond individual classrooms. Research indicates that a substantial proportion of children experience adverse childhood events (ACEs) at some point in their lives, and the impact of these experiences is disproportionately higher among students in marginalized communities or those living in high-stress environments. These findings are supported by a systematic review of school-related trauma research and meta-

analyses examining teacher-delivered trauma-based and trauma-informed interventions (Cafaro et al., 2023; Perfect et al., 2016). The long-term effects of unaddressed trauma include difficulties with academic achievement, social-emotional skills, and relationships with peers and adults (Raver et al., 2011). Early intervention during elementary school years is particularly critical, as this period represents a window of rapid brain development where experiences and relationships can either reinforce or hinder growth in executive functioning, self-regulation, and problem-solving skills (Cai et al., 2025). Addressing trauma during these formative years can provide students with the skills, confidence, and resilience necessary to navigate challenges in later grades and adulthood (Conners Edge et al., 2022).

This literature review focuses on three main areas within trauma-informed education: the teacher preparation for implementing trauma-informed practices, the application of trauma-sensitive strategies within the classroom, and the role of systemic and school-wide supports in fostering trauma-informed environments. Research indicates that implementing trauma-informed practices successfully requires a coordinated approach that integrates professional development, school leadership support, and evidence-based strategies in instruction and classroom management (Blodgett & Dorado, 2016; Cole et al., 2013). This literature review synthesizes current evidence on trauma-informed education and directly informs the design of the professional development project by identifying the specific components educators need most, including practical classroom strategies, opportunities for reflection and collaboration, and sustained support for implementation.

Furthermore, the review emphasizes the need for additional research, particularly studies that investigate the intersection of trauma, equity, and culturally responsive teaching practices,

which have the potential to shape more effective and inclusive educational strategies for all learners.

Research Methodology

This literature review was conducted through a systematic and iterative process to identify, evaluate, and synthesize research on trauma-informed education (TIE) in elementary school settings. The search process utilized multiple academic databases, including ERIC, PsycINFO, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. Search terms included “trauma-informed education,” “trauma-sensitive classrooms,” “culturally responsive teaching,” “teacher preparation for trauma,” “social-emotional learning,” and “equity in education.” Filters were applied to focus on peer-reviewed journal articles, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and authoritative reports published primarily within the last ten years to ensure relevance and currency.

Initial searches yielded over 250 articles. Titles and abstracts were screened for relevance to elementary education, practical application of trauma-informed practices, teacher professional development, and systemic or school-wide approaches. Articles that focused on secondary or higher education, clinical interventions outside of schools, or studies with limited applicability to U.S.-based educational contexts were excluded. After a full-text review, 30 sources were selected for inclusion in the review.

Data from the selected studies were coded and organized according to three primary domains: teacher preparation, classroom-level implementation, and school-wide systemic support. Within each domain, findings were synthesized to identify common themes, effective strategies, and challenges in applying trauma-informed practices. Special attention was given to

research highlighting equity and culturally responsive approaches to ensure the literature review reflected the needs of historically marginalized student populations.

Gaps in the Literature

Analysis of the existing literature revealed several notable gaps. First, there is limited empirical research examining the long-term outcomes of trauma-informed education on both academic achievement and social-emotional growth in elementary students. Second, although many studies highlight the importance of culturally responsive practices, researchers often discuss these approaches conceptually rather than providing concrete implementation models for classroom teachers. As a result, educators may understand the importance of culturally responsive trauma-informed instruction while still lacking practical guidance for applying these principles consistently in elementary classroom settings. Third, professional development studies often focus on short-term outcomes, leaving questions about sustained teacher efficacy and implementation fidelity unanswered. Finally, there is a scarcity of research investigating the systemic integration of trauma-informed practices, including policy alignment, leadership support, and cross-disciplinary collaboration across school teams. These gaps informed the direction of this professional project, which seeks to translate existing research into practical professional development that equips educators with strategies for implementing trauma-informed classroom practices.

Definitions

To ensure clarity throughout this literature review, I have defined and elaborated upon several key terms. Understanding these terms is critical for comprehending the scope and application of trauma-informed education and this literature review.

Trauma is broadly defined as any experience that overwhelms a child's capacity to cope and threatens their sense of safety, stability, or well-being. Trauma can be acute, such as a single event of violence, or chronic, such as ongoing exposure to neglect, systemic poverty, or repeated emotional harm (Berger et al., 2020; Keeshin et al., 2021). Chronic trauma has particularly significant effects on learning because it influences the development of the prefrontal cortex and amygdala, areas of the brain responsible for executive functioning and emotional regulation (Cole et al., 2013). The manifestations of trauma in students may include difficulties with attention, working memory, emotional dysregulation, withdrawal from peers, aggression, and challenges in forming trusting relationships with adults (Cafaro et al., 2023; Perfect et al., 2016). Recognizing these manifestations is a key component of trauma-informed education.

Trauma-informed education (TIE) refers to a framework in which educators and school staff recognize the prevalence and impact of trauma and actively work to prevent retraumatization while fostering resilience, self-regulation, and growth. This approach is not a curriculum or intervention in itself but a lens through which all instructional practices, classroom interactions, and school policies are viewed (Dorado et al., 2016; Sweeney et al., 2018). Core elements of trauma-informed education include creating predictable routines, establishing physically and emotionally safe spaces, fostering trusting relationships, promoting student choice and autonomy, and integrating social-emotional learning throughout instruction (Blodgett & Dorado, 2016; Cole et al., 2013). Importantly, TIE prioritizes equity and recognizes that trauma

intersects with systemic factors such as racism, poverty, and community violence, which requires educators to be aware of cultural contexts when applying trauma-informed strategies.

Resilience is the ability to adapt and thrive despite experiencing adversity. In trauma-informed education, resilience is nurtured by the presence of supportive adult relationships, consistent and structured environments, and opportunities for students to build self-efficacy and coping strategies (Cai et al., 2025; Raver et al., 2011). Programs designed to foster resilience equip students to navigate challenges, recover from setbacks, and sustain engagement in learning despite stressful circumstances. For example, interventions that incorporate problem-solving tasks, collaborative learning, and reflection can strengthen students' executive functioning and enhance their sense of agency (Berger et al., 2020).

Elementary settings refer to educational environments serving students in grades Pre-K through fifth, where children experience rapid cognitive, social, and emotional growth. Early exposure to trauma-informed practices in these settings is essential, as supportive learning experiences during these years can set the foundation for lifelong academic and social success (Cafaro et al., 2023; Connors Edge et al., 2022). Effective trauma-informed instruction in elementary classrooms considers developmental appropriateness, integrates play-based learning, and balances academic and socio-emotional development. By fostering resilience, self-regulation, and problem-solving skills early, educators can help students mitigate the long-term effects of trauma and establish a trajectory toward successful learning outcomes (Cole et al., 2013).

Review of Literature

The literature on trauma-informed education highlights research across three interrelated domains: teacher preparation, classroom-level implementation, and school-wide systemic support. In reviewing current studies, multiple themes emerged, including the need for increased educator efficacy, evidence-based classroom strategies, and coordinated systemic approaches to support trauma-affected students.

Teacher Preparation for Trauma-Informed Practices

Despite the prevalence of trauma among school-aged children, research demonstrates that many teachers enter classrooms with minimal training in understanding or addressing trauma (Blodgett & Dorado, 2016; Witter & Brunzell, 2025). Studies consistently show that without formal training, educators may rely on intuition, past experience, or inconsistent strategies, which can inadvertently retraumatize students or fail to meet their needs (Cole et al., 2013). Teacher preparation programs that integrate trauma-informed education, however, show promise in improving both educator knowledge and confidence in addressing trauma-related challenges (Gherardi & Stoner, 2024). Research suggests that effective teacher preparation combines theoretical knowledge, practical application, and reflective practices.

For example, Gherardi & Stoner (2024) found that preservice teachers who participated in structured professional learning communities engaged in scenario-based problem solving, collaborative discussion, and mentoring demonstrated significant improvements in confidence and instructional efficacy when responding to student trauma. Similarly, resources on trauma-informed teaching emphasize that ongoing professional learning opportunities, such as workshops, coaching, and peer observation, help reinforce teachers' ability to respond effectively to trauma while maintaining high academic expectations (Southeast Missouri State University,

2025). These professional learning experiences help teachers develop differentiated instructional strategies, implement restorative practices, and support students' social-emotional development more effectively. Research further suggests that sustained professional development plays a critical role in building teachers' trauma literacy and their ability to implement trauma-informed practices within classroom settings (Eastman et al., 2025; Stokes & Brunzell, 2019).

In addition, scholars emphasize the importance of integrating culturally responsive practices within trauma-informed frameworks. Trauma does not occur in isolation from systemic inequities, and students from marginalized communities often face additional challenges that influence their responses to adversity. Integrating culturally responsive approaches with trauma-informed practices allows educators to better understand students' cultural contexts and lived experiences, which can improve both engagement and support for diverse learners (Berger et al., 2020; Bowerman, 2024). Teachers who receive training in culturally responsive trauma-informed practices are therefore better prepared to recognize and address the needs of diverse learners while promoting equitable and inclusive classroom environments (Berger et al., 2020; Blodgett & Dorado, 2016).

Trauma-Sensitive Classroom Practices

Classroom-level strategies are central to the success of trauma-informed education. Research consistently demonstrates that predictable, structured, and supportive classroom environments are critical for students who have experienced trauma (Cole et al., 2013). Across the literature, scholars repeatedly identify consistency and relational safety as foundational elements of trauma-informed instruction because unpredictability can heighten students' stress responses and interfere with emotional regulation and learning. Trauma-sensitive classrooms

prioritize safety, consistent routines, and positive relationships, which reduce stress and allow students to focus on learning. For example, structured morning meetings, flexible seating arrangements, and clearly communicated behavioral expectations provide stability and predictability, which research shows enhances student engagement and academic achievement (Keeshin et al., 2021; Raver et al., 2011). Specific interventions include mindfulness practices, social-emotional learning lessons, restorative circles, and collaborative problem-solving activities (Cafaro et al., 2023; Johnson, 2018). Mindfulness activities can support emotional regulation by teaching students how to manage stress and identify emotional triggers. Social-emotional learning provides explicit instruction on empathy, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills, while restorative practices focus on repairing harm and fostering accountability rather than punitive discipline. Studies indicate that these strategies not only reduce behavioral incidents but also increase self-efficacy and confidence in students who have experienced trauma (Cai et al., 2025; Perfect et al., 2016). However, much of the existing research focuses on short-term behavioral improvements, while fewer studies examine whether trauma-informed practices produce sustained long-term academic growth or improvements in executive functioning over time.

Moreover, trauma-sensitive strategies can be embedded directly into academic instruction. For example, collaborative group projects allow students to practice teamwork and communication skills while engaging with content, providing both academic and social-emotional benefits. Flexible pacing and differentiated instruction ensure that students are challenged appropriately without feeling overwhelmed, which is especially important for those with trauma-related learning difficulties (Conners Edge et al., 2022). For example, teachers may break assignments into smaller tasks, provide visual directions, allow additional processing time,

or incorporate movement breaks to help students remain regulated and engaged during instruction. Overall, the integration of trauma-sensitive practices within classroom routines supports both academic growth and holistic development.

Systemic Support and School-Wide Implementation

While many researchers emphasize classroom-level interventions such as restorative practices, mindfulness activities, and emotional regulation strategies, others argue that trauma-informed education cannot be sustained without broader systemic support. Overstreet and Chafouleas (2016) and Sweeney et al. (2018) emphasize that leadership, policy alignment, and schoolwide collaboration are necessary for long-term implementation, whereas studies focused on classroom practice primarily examine how individual teacher actions influence student regulation and engagement. School leadership, policies, and coordinated support structures play a central role in creating sustainable trauma-sensitive environments (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016; Sweeney et al., 2018). Schools that implement coherent, school-wide trauma-informed frameworks report improvements in overall climate, student engagement, teacher well-being, and staff collaboration (Cole et al., 2013). Systemic supports include professional development for all staff, integrated support teams, partnerships with mental health professionals, and leadership that models trauma-informed principles. Dorado et al. (2016) stress the importance of educator well-being, noting that teachers experiencing stress or burnout are less able to consistently implement trauma-sensitive practices. Providing teacher support through mentorship, collaboration, and mental health resources is therefore integral to the success of trauma-informed initiatives.

Equity considerations are also central to the systemic implementation of trauma-informed practices. Students from historically marginalized populations often experience higher rates of trauma due to social inequities, and these disparities can affect academic engagement, behavior, and social-emotional development (Berger et al., 2020; Blodgett & Dorado, 2016; Bowerman, 2024). Trauma-informed policies and practices must intentionally address these inequities by embedding culturally responsive approaches across school systems, including classroom instruction, disciplinary policies, and professional development for educators (Bowerman, 2024; Cole et al., 2013). When schools integrate trauma-informed frameworks with equity-focused strategies, they cultivate inclusive environments that enable all students to access learning, build resilience, and thrive academically and socially (Berger & Martin, 2023; Dorado et al., 2016).

Outcomes of Trauma-Informed Education

Research demonstrates that trauma-informed education leads to both immediate and long-term benefits for students. Trauma-sensitive classrooms support executive functioning, emotional regulation, and academic engagement (Cai et al., 2025; Raver et al., 2011). Students in these environments exhibit improved attendance, reduced disciplinary incidents, and increased participation in learning activities (Blodgett & Dorado, 2016; Perfect et al., 2016). Studies also highlight that trauma-informed approaches foster resilience and self-efficacy, preparing students to navigate challenges beyond the classroom. Some reports show that students who consistently experience trauma-sensitive instruction demonstrate increased ability to cope with stress and maintain engagement in learning. Research has found that these approaches strengthen students' confidence, growth mindset, and social-emotional competencies, which support lifelong

learning. Collectively, the research underscores the importance of trauma-informed practices in promoting equitable, supportive, and effective learning environments.

Conclusions

Trauma-informed education is a comprehensive approach that addresses the academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs of students affected by trauma. This literature review demonstrates the importance of high-quality teacher preparation, evidence-based classroom strategies, and systemic support for sustaining trauma-informed practices. Educators who receive training in trauma-informed and culturally responsive approaches can better support students' academic engagement, emotional regulation, and resilience.

Early implementation in elementary settings (Pre-K to 5th grade) is critical, as this is a period of rapid cognitive, emotional, and social development. Trauma-informed education not only addresses immediate challenges but also fosters long-term benefits, including improved executive function, self-efficacy, and problem-solving skills. Systemic supports, including leadership, policy alignment, professional development, and equity-focused strategies, are essential to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of trauma-informed initiatives.

The literature reviewed here highlights both the promise and the need for continued research on trauma-informed education. Specifically, studies are needed to examine the integration of trauma-informed strategies with culturally responsive teaching, the long-term academic outcomes of trauma-sensitive practices, and the most effective methods of professional development for educators. Ultimately, trauma-informed education has the potential to transform

elementary education by creating safe, supportive, and empowering learning environments where all students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Chapter 3

Project Design

Introduction

This chapter describes the design and development of the trauma-informed professional development session created for educators at Cloverdale Elementary School. This project is grounded in the research presented in Chapter 2, which highlights the importance of trauma-informed education, social-emotional learning, and systemic support for improving both student outcomes and teacher practice. While the literature establishes a strong theoretical foundation for trauma-informed approaches, it also emphasizes a gap between understanding these practices and effectively implementing them in classrooms. This chapter addresses that gap by outlining how the research was translated into a practical, usable professional development experience for educators. This chapter includes several sections that explain the full design process. First, the context section describes the school setting, student population, and personal and professional motivation for this project. Next, the design methods section explains the research process, design decisions, and structure of the professional development session. Following that, the tools and resources used in development are identified. Finally, the evaluation procedures section explains how the effectiveness of the project was considered and assessed.

Context

This professional development project is designed for educators at Cloverdale Elementary School, a small, rural school located in Marion County near Turner, Oregon. Cloverdale serves approximately 200 students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade, with class sizes ranging from 18 to 24 students depending on grade level. The school is part of the Salem-Keizer Public School District, which covers a large geographic area with diverse student populations. Cloverdale Elementary has a small but dedicated faculty, and teachers often have the opportunity to develop close relationships with students and families. The school community places a high value on student growth, both academically and socially. Educators at Cloverdale strive to provide supportive and inclusive learning environments where students feel safe, respected, and encouraged to develop both cognitively and emotionally.

The student population at Cloverdale reflects a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Some students come from households that are stable and provide ample support for learning at home, while others face challenges related to poverty, family stress, or exposure to adverse childhood experiences. A number of students experience stressors such as domestic conflict, neglect, and community violence. These experiences can manifest in the classroom in a variety of ways, including difficulty focusing, emotional outbursts, withdrawal, perfectionistic behaviors, and challenges with transitions between tasks or activities. Many students also require explicit social-emotional support to navigate both academic and social challenges. Teachers report that students often present behaviors that communicate unmet needs, and educators who understand these behaviors as communication rather than defiance are more successful in fostering engagement and learning. Cloverdale Elementary offers several supports for students, including counseling services, individualized education programs, and access to community resources. Despite these supports, teachers often face challenges in consistently implementing

trauma-informed practices due to limited structured professional development. While teachers are aware of the importance of social-emotional learning and the impact of trauma on student learning, many express uncertainty about how to translate theory into actionable strategies in their own classrooms. Teachers desire professional development that is practical, research-based, and grounded in real classroom examples. They also seek guidance on integrating trauma-informed strategies with academic instruction to ensure students' emotional needs are met while maintaining high expectations for learning.

This professional development project addresses the needs of teachers who are navigating these challenges. My role as a substitute teacher in the Salem-Keizer Public School District allows me to observe classroom dynamics across grade levels and gain insight into the strategies that are currently being used. I have observed that when teachers have a deep understanding of trauma-informed practices and access to practical tools, students demonstrate increased engagement, improved self-regulation, and stronger relationships with adults and peers. By designing a professional development session that equips teachers with these strategies, I aim to support both educator efficacy and student success.

My professional background and personal experiences also inform the context for this project. I completed my student teaching at Cloverdale Elementary during the 2023–2024 school year, focusing primarily on grades two through four, though my teaching license covers the full elementary span. During this time, I gained firsthand experience in classrooms where students exhibited a range of trauma-related behaviors, from emotional outbursts to withdrawal from learning activities. I also saw the profound difference that supportive, trauma-informed teaching practices could make. My experiences growing up with a younger brother, who faced challenges in the classroom due to hyperactivity and behavioral regulation, further shaped my understanding

of the importance of supportive teaching practices. Observing the positive impact of teachers who responded with care and understanding rather than punitive measures reinforced my belief that trauma-informed approaches are critical for fostering student resilience, engagement, and academic success.

In addition to personal experience, my academic training has prepared me to develop and deliver this professional development project. As a graduate student in the Master of Science in Education program at Western Oregon University with a focus on Curriculum and Instruction, I have studied research on trauma-informed education, social-emotional learning, and culturally responsive teaching. This background allows me to design a session that is grounded in current research while remaining highly applicable to the daily realities of classroom teaching. The professional development will provide educators with concrete strategies for creating predictable routines, safe and flexible learning spaces, and opportunities for restorative practice. By addressing both the theoretical and practical aspects of trauma-informed education, the session is designed to help teachers bridge the gap between awareness and application.

Cloverdale Elementary is uniquely positioned to benefit from this professional development because of its small size, collaborative faculty, and commitment to the whole child. The school's leadership team is supportive of professional learning and encourages staff to implement innovative strategies to meet student needs. Teachers at Cloverdale are open to reflective practice and collaboration, which creates a fertile environment for introducing trauma-informed approaches. The professional development session is designed to build on existing school strengths while providing new tools and strategies that teachers can apply immediately in their classrooms.

Finally, this project is designed with transferability in mind. While the professional development is tailored to the context of Cloverdale Elementary, it is structured so that educators in other schools or districts with similar needs could adapt the session to their own contexts. By providing detailed guidance, practical examples, and strategies grounded in research, this project aims to support a broader community of educators who are committed to creating trauma-informed classrooms. In this way, the project not only addresses the immediate needs of Cloverdale Elementary but also contributes to a larger conversation about supporting student well-being, engagement, and equity in elementary education.

Design Methods

The first step in designing this professional development session was diving into research on trauma-informed teaching and social-emotional learning. I focused on articles, studies, and professional resources from the last ten years that specifically addressed trauma-informed strategies in elementary classrooms. I wanted to understand not just what trauma-informed practices look like on paper, but how teachers actually apply them day to day. To make sense of all the information, I created a literature review matrix that helped me organize ideas, see patterns, and identify which strategies were most consistently recommended. This process also helped me notice the gaps in existing professional development, like the need for hands-on practice and ways to support teachers while they implement these strategies. Through this research and reflection, I identified three main themes that shaped the professional development session:

- **Theme 1:** Trauma-informed practices help create safe, predictable, and supportive classrooms for students who have experienced trauma. The literature consistently agrees that predictability, emotional safety, and strong teacher-student relationships are

foundational to trauma-informed classrooms (Cole et al., 2013; Keeshin et al., 2021). However, while Cole et al. (2013) emphasize structured routines and environmental consistency as the primary drivers of regulation, Raver et al. (2011) extend this by arguing that relational interactions (particularly warm, responsive teacher communication) are equally important in reducing stress responses. Together, these studies suggest that classroom safety is not only structural (routines, schedules, physical space), but also relational (tone, responsiveness, and emotional attunement), which directly informs how this professional development session is designed.

- **Theme 2:** These practices support students in building resilience, self-regulation, and confidence so they can engage more fully in learning. The research consistently shows that trauma-informed strategies improve student regulation and engagement, but scholars differ in what they emphasize as the primary mechanism of change. For example, Keeshin et al. (2021) and Perfect et al. (2016) focus on behavioral outcomes such as reduced disruption and improved attention when predictable routines are implemented. In contrast, Cai et al. (2025) highlight internal developmental growth, arguing that these same practices strengthen executive functioning and long-term self-regulation skills. This project integrates both perspectives by designing strategies that address immediate classroom behavior (like calming routines or reset spaces) while also supporting long-term skill development through reflection and emotional coaching.
- **Theme 3:** Teachers need support and self-care strategies to prevent burnout and sustain trauma-informed practices over time. Teachers need ongoing support, collaboration structures, and self-regulation strategies to sustain trauma-informed practices and prevent burnout. The literature emphasizes that trauma-informed implementation is significantly

weakened when teacher well-being is not addressed (Dorado et al., 2016). While some scholars focus on professional development and skill-building as the primary driver of implementation fidelity (Eastman et al., 2025), others highlight that emotional strain and secondary trauma exposure can directly reduce teacher consistency and responsiveness in the classroom. This project integrates both perspectives by embedding practical sustainability strategies into the professional development session, such as brief mindfulness grounding exercises for teachers, peer check-in protocols during collaboration time, and optional reflection journaling prompts designed to help educators process emotional responses to student behavior without becoming overwhelmed.

After identifying these themes, I drafted an outline for the session. The goal was to make it practical and immediately applicable, so teachers could walk away with strategies they could try the next day. I also wanted it to be interactive and reflective, not just a lecture.

Step One: Organizing the Structure of the Session

The professional development session was organized into three main sections that directly align with the themes identified in the literature. The first section focuses on understanding trauma and its impact on student learning and behavior. This includes defining trauma, explaining different types of trauma, and discussing how trauma affects brain development, emotional regulation, and classroom behavior. This section is grounded in research that emphasizes the neurological and developmental impacts of trauma on children (Berger et al., 2020; Cole et al., 2013). The second section focuses on trauma-informed classroom practices. This includes strategies such as building safe and predictable environments, establishing strong teacher-student relationships, using restorative practices, supporting emotional regulation, and

integrating social-emotional learning. These strategies are included because research consistently shows they improve student engagement, behavior, and academic success (Keeshin et al., 2021; Raver et al., 2011). The third section focuses on teacher sustainability and self-care. This section addresses the emotional demands placed on educators working with trauma-affected students and provides strategies to prevent burnout. This is supported by research from Dorado et al. (2016), which emphasizes that teacher well-being is essential for sustaining trauma-informed practices in schools.

Step Two: Designing Engagement and Instructional Components

After structuring the content, I focused on making the professional development session interactive and engaging. I did not want it to be a passive presentation because the research shows that teachers retain and apply information more effectively when they are actively involved in the learning process (Gherardi & Stoner, 2024). To support this, I included scenario-based discussions where teachers analyze specific classroom situations they have been in themselves such as a second-grade student who shuts down and refuses to work after making a mistake on a math assignment, or a fourth-grade student who becomes dysregulated and leaves their seat during transitions between activities. Teachers are asked to identify possible trauma-related triggers, discuss what the behavior may be communicating, and generate at least two trauma-informed responses such as offering a reset break, using co-regulation language, or providing a choice-based re-entry into the task. I also included reflection questions throughout the presentation to encourage teachers to connect the content to their own experiences. In addition, I incorporated opportunities for collaboration so teachers could share strategies with one another. I also added visual supports such as calming colors, structured slides, and short videos to help maintain engagement while respecting the emotional weight of the topic. These

design decisions were intentional and based on research that emphasizes the importance of psychological safety and emotional regulation during professional learning sessions.

Step Three: Tools and Resources

The professional development session was created using Google Slides as the primary platform for instruction and delivery. Google Slides was selected because it is accessible, widely used in schools, and allows for clear visual organization of content. Google Docs was used to organize research notes, draft session content, and create supporting handouts for teachers. These handouts include summaries of trauma-informed strategies that educators can reference after the session. Slido was embedded into the presentation to increase engagement and interaction. This tool allows participants to respond to live questions, participate in polls, and contribute to word cloud activities. I selected Slido because it supports real-time feedback and encourages participation in a way that feels safe and low-pressure for educators. These tools were selected because they support both clarity of instruction and active participation, which are essential for effective professional development.

Evaluation Procedures

The effectiveness of this professional development session was evaluated through alignment with the literature and the best practices highlighted throughout, as well as feedback gathered during the design process. Since this project is focused on instructional design rather than formal research involving human subjects, evaluation was based on usability, clarity, and alignment with trauma-informed education research rather than student outcome data. Feedback was gathered from educator peers and colleagues who reviewed the session materials. This feedback focused on clarity of content, practicality of strategies, pacing of the presentation, and overall usefulness for classroom implementation. Based on this feedback, small revisions were

made to improve the flow of the presentation and increase opportunities for teacher interaction and reflection. In addition to peer feedback, each component of the professional development session was intentionally aligned with research from Chapter 2. This ensured that the strategies presented were grounded in evidence-based practices related to trauma-informed education, social-emotional learning, and classroom structure (Cole et al., 2013; Blodgett & Dorado, 2016). Success for this project is defined by the extent to which the session is both research-based and immediately applicable for teachers. If educators leave the session with strategies they feel confident implementing in their classrooms, and if they demonstrate increased understanding of trauma-informed practices, then the project can be considered effective.

Conclusion

This chapter described the design and development process of a trauma-informed professional development session created for educators at Cloverdale Elementary School. It explained the context in which the project was developed, the research process that guided its creation, and the instructional decisions that shaped its structure. It also outlined the tools used in development and the methods used to evaluate its effectiveness. Overall, this project demonstrates how research on trauma-informed education can be translated into practical strategies for educators. The next chapter will reflect on the implementation of the project, discuss outcomes, and consider implications for future practice and professional growth.

Chapter 4

Final Project

Introduction

This chapter presents the primary artifacts developed for my professional project focused on building trauma-informed classrooms through a comprehensive professional development presentation for educators. The main artifact included in this project is a detailed Google Slides presentation designed specifically for educators at Cloverdale Elementary School. Ideally it will be used in other districts. The presentation was created to help teachers develop a stronger understanding of trauma, recognize how trauma impacts student learning and behavior, and implement trauma-informed strategies that foster safe, supportive, and equitable classroom environments.

The presentation contains 67 slides; it is intentionally designed to be interactive, engaging, and practical for educators. Google Slides was selected as the primary platform because it allows for visually organized instruction, embedded resources, accessible formatting, and collaborative learning opportunities. The slideshow integrates research-based content,

classroom examples, reflective activities, collaborative discussions, self-assessment opportunities, and action-planning exercises to maintain participant engagement throughout the professional development session. Interactive activities are intentionally embedded throughout the presentation rather than only included at the end so that educators remain actively involved in the learning process while continuously connecting the information to their own classroom experiences.

The professional development presentation is organized into eight major sections: Understanding Trauma; Trauma and Brain Development; Trauma and Student Behavior; Trauma-Informed Education; Trauma-Sensitive Classroom Strategies; Social-Emotional Learning Connections; Teacher Wellness and Sustainability; and Reflection and Action Planning. Each section builds upon the previous one to create a cohesive learning experience that helps educators gradually deepen their understanding of trauma-informed practices while simultaneously developing practical strategies for classroom implementation.

The artifacts included in this chapter represent the translation of research from Chapters 1–3 into meaningful professional development materials that educators can use in real classroom settings. The presentation was intentionally created to bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and practical implementation by providing educators with applicable strategies grounded in current trauma-informed education research. Research by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2014), Cole et al. (2013), and Overstreet and Chafouleas (2016) emphasizes the importance of emotional safety, supportive relationships, and consistent classroom environments within trauma-informed schools. These foundational principles guided the development of the professional development presentation.

Building Trauma Informed Classrooms

Understanding Trauma

The first section of the professional development presentation introduces participants to the foundational concepts of trauma-informed education by helping educators understand what trauma is and how it affects children in educational settings. This section establishes the framework for the remainder of the training by emphasizing that trauma can significantly influence students' academic performance, emotional regulation, social interactions, and classroom behavior. Educators are introduced to the concepts of acute trauma, chronic trauma, and complex trauma, while also exploring how adverse childhood experiences may impact students differently depending on developmental level, environmental supports, and personal experiences. This section encourages teachers to begin shifting their perspectives away from viewing challenging behavior as intentional defiance. Instead, behavior is reframed as communication of unmet emotional or psychological needs. This perspective aligns with research from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2010), which explains that trauma exposure can significantly affect students' ability to regulate emotions, trust adults, and engage in classroom learning. Alisic (2012) similarly found that educators recognize the importance of emotional support and relationship-building when working with students affected by trauma.

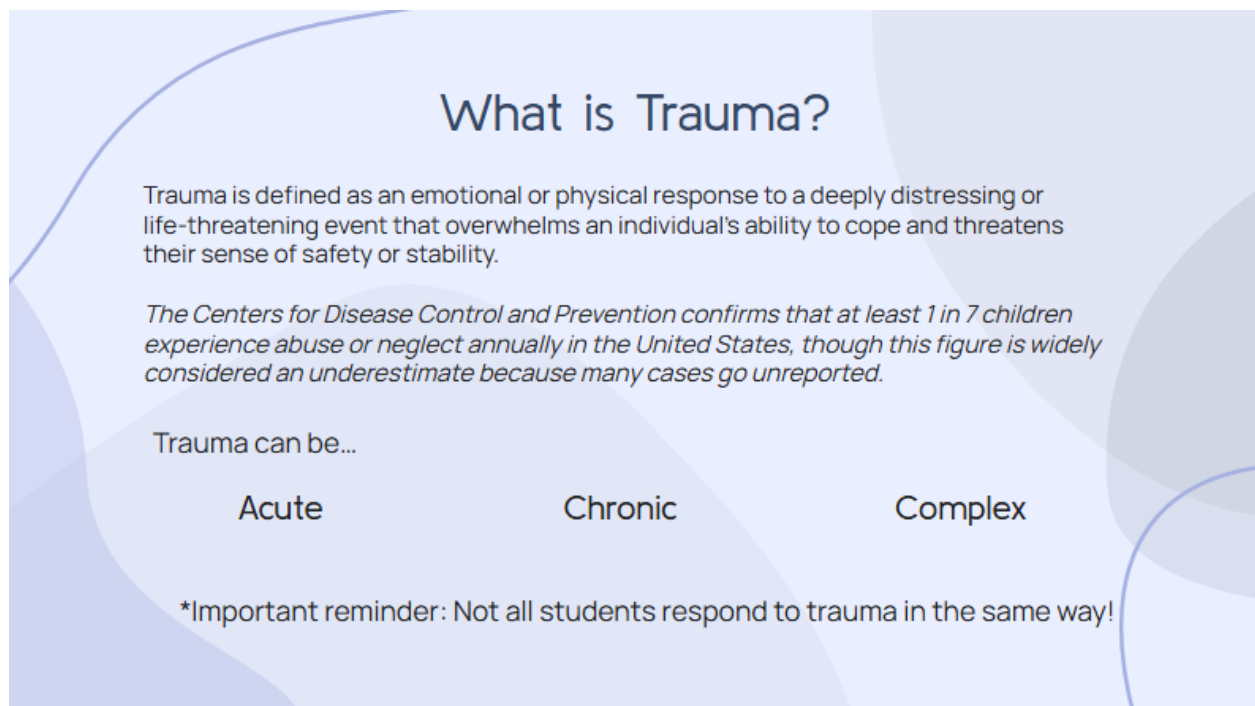
In addition to defining trauma, this section discusses the prevalence of trauma among school-aged children and explains why trauma-informed educational practices are increasingly important in elementary school settings. Research-based statistics are included throughout the presentation to reinforce the reality that many students enter classrooms carrying stress, adversity, and emotional burdens that directly affect their ability to engage in learning. The

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2024) identifies adverse childhood experiences as significant risk factors that can negatively influence emotional well-being, behavior, and academic outcomes.

This section also introduces participants to the concept of resilience and emphasizes the critical role schools and educators can play in helping students feel safe, connected, and supported. Reflection activities are embedded throughout this section to encourage educators to connect the content to their own professional experiences.

Figure 1

Slide 7: What is Trauma?



Trauma and Brain Development

The second section of the presentation focuses on the neurological effects of trauma and how chronic stress impacts brain development, executive functioning, emotional regulation, and learning. This section helps educators understand that trauma can physically alter the way students process information, respond to stress, and interact with others within classroom environments. Participants learn about the roles of the amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex and how these parts of the brain are affected by trauma exposure.

The presentation explains that students who experience chronic stress may remain in a constant state of hypervigilance. As a result, students may struggle to focus, regulate emotions, solve problems, retain information, or feel safe in classroom settings. Research from Perry (2006) explains that chronic stress can disrupt neurological development, particularly in areas connected to emotional regulation and executive functioning. Keeshin et al. (2021) further discuss how emotional dysregulation may emerge when children experience prolonged stress exposure. Understanding these neurological processes helps educators recognize why traditional punitive discipline approaches are often ineffective for students affected by trauma.

This section also emphasizes the importance of co-regulation and supportive relationships in helping students develop self-regulation skills. Educators are encouraged to consider how classroom routines, emotional safety, and teacher responses can either reduce or intensify student stress responses. Brain-based explanations are paired with practical classroom implications so teachers can clearly connect research to instructional practice. Collaborative activities are embedded within this section to help participants apply the information to real classroom scenarios. Teachers discuss how stress may influence academic engagement and analyze how trauma-related neurological responses might explain certain student behaviors. These activities

encourage reflection while helping participants deepen their understanding of the connection between trauma and learning.

Figure 2

Slide 12: How Trauma Impacts Brain Development

How Trauma Impacts Brain Development

Trauma Affects:

- Emotional regulation
- Executive functioning
- Memory and attention
- Stress responses
- Problem-solving skills

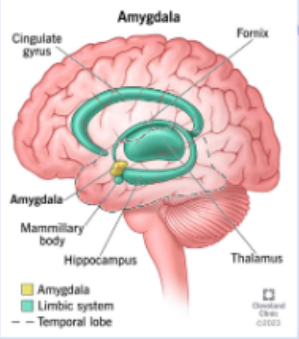
According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, trauma changes the architecture of the developing brain.

Key Brain Areas Impacted:

Amygdala: primarily responsible for processing emotions (like fear and threat detection), triggering the fight-or-flight response, and linking strong emotions to memories.

Prefrontal cortex: manages executive functions like planning, decision-making, emotional regulation, and impulse control. It is critical to personality and social behavior.

Hippocampus: primary responsibilities are consolidating short-term memories into long-term memories and managing spatial navigation



The diagram illustrates the human brain with the limbic system highlighted in green. Labels include: Amygdala, Cingulate gyrus, Fornix, Mammillary body, Hippocampus, and Thalamus. A legend indicates: Yellow square for Amygdala, Green square for Limbic system, and a dashed line for Temporal lobe. The diagram shows the interconnected nature of these structures within the brain's architecture.

This slide provides a visual diagram of the brain and explains how trauma affects the amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex. Visual diagrams were intentionally used to help educators better understand complex neurological concepts and connect them to classroom behaviors they observe daily.

Trauma and Student Behavior

The third section of the presentation focuses on helping educators recognize trauma-related behaviors within classroom settings. This section emphasizes that trauma can present differently among students. It also highlights that behavioral responses often represent coping mechanisms developed in response to stress, instability, or adversity.

In this section, participants explore common trauma-related behaviors such as withdrawal, emotional outbursts, perfectionism, avoidance, hypervigilance, difficulty with transitions, challenges with peer relationships, and difficulty trusting adults. Research by Perfect et al. (2016) found that trauma exposure is closely connected to difficulties with academic performance, emotional functioning, and classroom behavior. Johnson (2018) similarly explains that traumatic experiences can negatively affect students' relationships, expectations, and engagement within school settings. Educators are encouraged to reflect on how traditional classroom responses to these behaviors may unintentionally retraumatize students or escalate stress responses. This section strongly reinforces the importance of reframing teacher perspectives from "What is wrong with this student?" to "What happened to this student?"

By shifting educator mindsets toward curiosity, empathy, and understanding, teachers become better equipped to respond in ways that support student regulation and resilience rather than punishment alone. Scenario-based discussions are incorporated throughout this section to encourage active participation and collaborative problem-solving. Teachers work together to analyze classroom situations involving trauma-related behaviors and discuss possible trauma-informed responses that prioritize emotional safety, relationship-building, and support.

Figure 3

Slide 13: Trauma Responses: Fight, Flight, Freeze, and Fawn

Trauma Responses: Fight, Flight, Freeze, and Fawn

Trauma can cause your body to react automatically in response to stress or danger because of survival instincts.

When someone with trauma is in a stressful or dangerous situation, their survival instincts may cause them to react without thinking.

5 Common Trauma Responses:

- **Fight:** Aggression, arguing, yelling
- **Flight:** Avoidance, leaving tasks, running away
- **Freeze:** Withdrawal, shutting down, lack of participation
- **Fawn:** People-pleasing, perfectionism, overcompliance

Important Reminder:
These are survival responses, not intentional disrespect.



The diagram illustrates five trauma responses arranged in a circle around a central hub labeled 'TRAUMA RESPONSES'. Each response is represented by a colored circle with an icon and a brief description: **FIGHT** (red circle, top-left) with an icon of a person fighting, described as 'to face any perceived threat aggressively'; **FREEZE** (yellow circle, top-right) with an icon of a person standing still, described as 'inability to move or act against a threat'; **FLOP** (light green circle, right) with an icon of a person slumping, described as 'to collapse, become unresponsive, or faint'; **FLIGHT** (teal circle, bottom) with an icon of a person running, described as 'to run away from danger or threat'; and **FAWN** (light blue circle, bottom-left) with an icon of a person bowing slightly, described as 'to please someone to avoid conflict'.

Figure 4

Slide 14: Trauma and Learning

Trauma and Learning

Trauma also affects academic performance

Students May Struggle With:

- Concentration
- Memory retention
- Organization
- Transitions
- Peer relationships
- Emotional regulation

Result:
Students may appear disengaged, defiant, anxious, or inattentive.



A photograph showing the back of a student's head as they sit at a desk with an open book, appearing to be struggling or disengaged with their work.

Trauma-Informed Education

The fourth section introduces educators to the core principles of trauma-informed education and explains how trauma-informed practices shape classroom culture, instructional decisions, and educator-student relationships. Participants learn that trauma-informed education is not a standalone curriculum but rather a framework that influences how educators create learning environments that prioritize emotional safety, trust, consistency, and equity.

This section discusses the foundational principles of trauma-informed practice, including safety, predictability, collaboration, empowerment, cultural responsiveness, and relationship-building. These principles align closely with SAMHSA's (2014) framework for trauma-informed care, which emphasizes emotional safety, trustworthiness, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural responsiveness. Dorado et al. (2016) also highlight the importance of school-wide systems that support emotional safety and positive relationships for students affected by trauma.

Educators learn how these principles can be integrated into daily classroom routines and instructional practices to support students experiencing stress or adversity. The presentation also highlights the importance of culturally responsive trauma-informed teaching and explains how trauma intersects with systemic inequities such as poverty, racism, and community violence. Bowerman (2024) explains that culturally responsive trauma-informed practices help educators recognize how students' identities and lived experiences influence classroom engagement and emotional well-being. Educators are encouraged to reflect on how their classroom environments, routines, and responses can either support or hinder student emotional safety and engagement.

Figure 5

Slide 22: What Is Trauma-Informed Education?

What Is Trauma-Informed Education?

Trauma-Informed Education is a framework that recognizes the impact of trauma and creates supportive learning environments that avoid retraumatization.

Trauma-Informed Classrooms Prioritize:

- Safety
- Predictability
- Relationships
- Emotional regulation
- Student voice and choice
- Resilience

Figure 6

Slide 23: Core Principles of Trauma-Informed Education

Key Principles of Trauma-Informed Practice

The Core Principles of Trauma-Informed Practice Include:

- Safety
- Trustworthiness
- Collaboration
- Empowerment
- Choice
- Cultural responsiveness

What's the goal of Trauma-Informed Practice?
Create classrooms where students feel emotionally and physically safe enough to learn.

These slides outline the major principles of trauma-informed education, including safety, trustworthiness, collaboration, empowerment, and predictability. The slide includes examples of how these principles can appear in elementary classrooms through routines, relationship-building practices, restorative conversations, and supportive instructional approaches. Educators are encouraged to reflect on how these principles align with their current teaching practices and identify areas for growth.

Trauma-Sensitive Classroom Strategies

The fifth section of the presentation provides practical classroom strategies educators can implement immediately to create trauma-sensitive learning environments. This section was intentionally designed to bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and classroom application by giving teachers realistic examples of supportive instructional practices. Participants learn about trauma-sensitive strategies such as morning meetings, calm corners, flexible seating, visual schedules, restorative conversations, mindfulness activities, emotional check-ins, co-regulation strategies, and predictable classroom routines. Each strategy is explained in detail with examples of how it supports emotional safety, regulation, engagement, and relationship-building.

This section emphasizes that trauma-sensitive classrooms do not lower academic expectations but instead provide the support and structure students need to access learning successfully. Berger and Martin (2023) explain that trauma-informed classrooms balance high expectations with consistent emotional support, predictability, and relationship-building practices that help students feel safe enough to engage in learning. Teachers are encouraged to consider how small adjustments to routines, transitions, language, and classroom environments can

significantly improve student experiences and engagement. Collaborative activities throughout this section encourage educators to discuss which strategies they currently use and brainstorm additional approaches they would like to implement in their classrooms. Teachers also participate in scenario discussions focused on applying trauma-sensitive responses to challenging classroom situations.

Figure 7

Slide 30: Emotional Regulation Strategies

Emotional Regulation Strategies

Teaching students to regulate emotions helps them achieve academic success, maintain positive mental health, and foster healthy social relationships.

Emotional Regulation Strategies Include:

- Deep breathing
- Movement breaks
- Mindfulness activities
- Calm corners
- Grounding exercises
- Emotional vocabulary instruction

Students need regulation before they can fully engage in learning.

EMOTION REGULATION STRATEGIES FOR KIDS

- SELF-AWARENESS**
Teaching kids to identify and name emotions helps them regulate and understand their feelings.
- MINDFULNESS ACTIVITIES**
Activities like breathing exercises and meditating are practices that can help kids reduce stress.
- DEEP BREATHING EXERCISES**
Guiding kids to take slow, deep breaths can help kids control overwhelming emotions.
- CREATING A CALM-DOWN SPACE**
A designated calm-down space with soft pillows and sensory toys can help kids feel safe and relaxed.
- USING VISUAL SCHEDULES**
Visual schedules help by outlining daily activities, reducing uncertainty and enhancing kids' sense of control.

Figure 8

Slide 31: Calm Corners

Calm Corners

Creating calm spaces in your classroom like Calm Corners gives students the opportunity to go somewhere if they are feeling overwhelmed.

Calm Corners Should Include:

- Soft seating
- Sensory tools
- Visual calming strategies
- Breathing prompts
- Emotion regulation supports

Important Reminder!!
Calm corners are not punishment spaces.



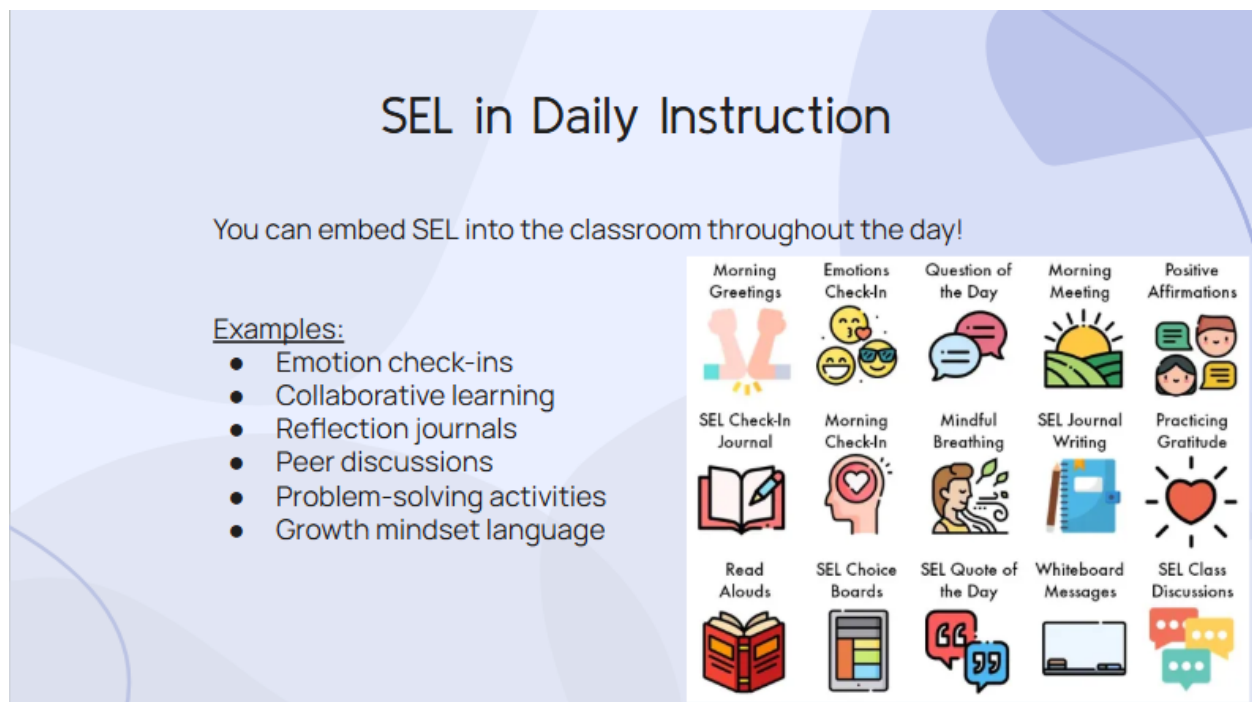
Social-Emotional Learning Connections

The sixth section focuses on the connection between trauma-informed education and social-emotional learning (SEL). Educators learn how social-emotional learning supports emotional regulation, resilience, relationship-building, responsible decision-making, and self-awareness. This section explains the five SEL competencies and emphasizes that SEL should be integrated naturally into classroom instruction rather than treated as an isolated subject area. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020) identifies self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making as the core competencies of SEL. Research by Durlak et al. (2011) further demonstrates that social-emotional learning positively influences both academic achievement and student well-

being. Teachers are encouraged to recognize that trauma-informed education and social-emotional learning work together to create supportive learning environments where students feel emotionally safe and capable of engaging academically. Examples of SEL practices integrated throughout the presentation include emotional check-ins, collaborative learning opportunities, mindfulness exercises, empathy-building discussions, and reflection activities. Research demonstrating the positive impact of SEL on both academic achievement and student well-being is also included. Discussion activities within this section encourage educators to reflect on how SEL is currently incorporated into their classrooms and identify opportunities for stronger integration within daily routines and instruction.

Figure 9

Slide 41: SEL in Daily Instruction



Teacher Wellness and Sustainability

The seventh section addresses teacher wellness and sustainability, emphasizing that educators cannot effectively support students experiencing trauma without also caring for their own emotional well-being. This section discusses compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, burnout, and the emotional demands associated with supporting students affected by adversity. Participants learn about the importance of maintaining healthy boundaries, engaging in self-care practices, seeking professional support when needed, and developing sustainable routines that protect emotional wellness. The presentation emphasizes that self-care is not selfish but rather essential for effective teaching and long-term professional sustainability. McGuire (2024) explains that educators supporting students affected by trauma may also experience emotional exhaustion, compassion fatigue, and secondary stress; therefore, teacher wellness must be prioritized alongside student support. Reflection activities within this section encourage educators to assess their current stress levels and identify practical strategies for supporting their own emotional well-being both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers are also encouraged to consider how modeling emotional regulation and self-care can positively influence students.

Figure 10

Slide 47: The Importance of Teacher Wellness

The Importance of Teacher Wellness

Supporting educators and taking care of yourself and mental wellbeing matters too!

Teachers May Experience:

- Stress
- Compassion fatigue
- Burnout
- Secondary traumatic stress

Why It Matters
Teacher well-being directly impacts classroom climate and student support, and **YOU** matter too.

A photograph of a woman with blonde hair, wearing a red top, sitting at a desk in a classroom. She has her head buried in her hand, appearing stressed or exhausted. In the background, a chalkboard has the letters 'ABC' written on it. On the desk, there are various classroom supplies like a pencil holder and books.

Figure 11

Slide 48: Signs of Burnout

Signs of Burnout

Recognizing if you may be experiencing burnout is important.

Common Signs:

- Emotional exhaustion
- Increased irritability
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Reduced patience
- Difficulty disconnecting from work

Burnout is not a personal failure.

A photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a light green jacket, sitting at a desk in a classroom. She has her head buried in her hand, appearing stressed or exhausted. In the background, a chalkboard has some drawings on it. On the desk, there are various classroom supplies like a pencil holder and books.

Figure 12

Slide 49: Self-Care and Sustainability



These slides discuss compassion fatigue, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress while providing examples of practical self-care strategies for educators. Topics include mindfulness, boundary-setting, collaboration, emotional regulation, and maintaining work-life balance. Reflection prompts encourage educators to identify realistic wellness practices they can implement consistently to support their professional and personal well-being.

Reflection and Action Planning

The final section of the presentation focuses on reflection, implementation, and future action planning. Participants are encouraged to synthesize their learning from the professional development session and identify practical next steps for creating more trauma-informed

classroom environments. This section emphasizes that trauma-informed education is an ongoing process rather than a one-time strategy or initiative. Stokes and Brunzell (2019) explain that developing trauma-informed school communities requires continuous reflection, collaboration, and professional learning rather than isolated training sessions. Educators are encouraged to approach implementation with flexibility, reflection, collaboration, and a willingness to continue learning and growing professionally. Participants complete action-planning activities where they identify specific trauma-sensitive practices they plan to implement in their classrooms and discuss possible barriers or supports for implementation. This process encourages accountability while helping educators leave the session with clear and manageable goals. The presentation concludes by reinforcing the importance of empathy, emotional safety, supportive relationships, and resilience-building within educational settings. Educators are reminded that small changes in classroom practice can significantly impact students' emotional well-being, engagement, and academic success.

Figure 13

Slide 59: Action Planning Activity

Action Planning Activity

Take a moment and think:

- What is one trauma-informed strategy you want to implement?
- What support do you need?
- How will this impact your students?
- Identify one realistic next step.



Conclusion

The artifacts presented throughout this chapter demonstrate the successful development of a comprehensive professional development presentation focused on building trauma-informed classrooms. The Google Slides presentation effectively translates research on trauma-informed education into practical and engaging learning experiences for educators. By combining research-based content with reflection activities, collaborative discussions, classroom examples, and actionable strategies, the project bridges the gap between theoretical understanding and classroom implementation. The presentation successfully meets the goals of the project by helping educators develop a deeper understanding of trauma, recognize trauma-related behaviors,

and implement trauma-sensitive practices that support emotional safety, resilience, and student engagement. Research throughout the field of trauma-informed education consistently emphasizes the importance of supportive relationships, predictable environments, and emotionally responsive practices in promoting student success (Cole et al., 2013; Maynard et al., 2019; SAMHSA, 2014). Additionally, the inclusion of teacher wellness and self-care emphasizes the importance of sustainability when implementing trauma-informed approaches within educational settings. Overall, this project contributes to the broader goal of creating equitable, supportive, and emotionally responsive classrooms where all students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Chapter 5

Reflection

Introduction

This chapter reflects on the process of designing and developing a trauma-informed professional development session for educators at Cloverdale Elementary School. I assess my progress toward the goals established at the beginning of this project, consider how the research influenced my design decisions, and reflect on my personal and professional growth throughout the process. I also examine the limitations of the project, the challenges I encountered, and potential directions for future improvement. This chapter represents an honest evaluation of the work completed and the learning that occurred through both the research and development phases of the project.

Progress Toward Original Goals

One of my primary goals for this project was to create a trauma-informed professional development experience that was both research-based and practical for elementary educators. I believe this goal was fully met. The final Google Slides presentation translates current trauma-informed education research into classroom-ready strategies that teachers can implement immediately. Each section of the presentation includes explanations of trauma concepts alongside actionable strategies such as morning meetings, restorative conversations, and co-regulation techniques. This structure ensures that educators are not only learning theory but also applying it to real classroom situations.

A second goal was to design a professional development session that was engaging and interactive rather than lecture-based. This goal was also met through the intentional inclusion of scenario-based discussions, reflection prompts, collaborative conversations, and real-time engagement tools such as Slido. These elements allow educators to actively participate in the learning process and connect the content to their own classroom experiences rather than passively receiving information.

A third goal was to integrate trauma-informed education with social-emotional learning and teacher wellness in a way that felt cohesive and balanced. This goal evolved slightly during the design process. Initially, I focused primarily on student outcomes, but the literature and my own classroom observations led me to expand the project to include teacher sustainability and burnout prevention. This adjustment strengthened the overall design because it reinforced the idea that trauma-informed education must support both students and educators in order to be sustainable. Overall, I met my original goals while also refining and expanding them as my understanding of trauma-informed practice deepened throughout the project.

Connection to the Literature Review

The literature review had a direct and significant influence on the design of this project. One of the most important findings that shaped my thinking was the consistent emphasis on relationships as the foundation of trauma-informed education. Authors such as Sweeney et al. (2018) and Cole et al. (2013) highlight that supportive relationships and emotional safety are essential for student regulation and learning. This influenced my decision to structure the presentation around relationship-building, co-regulation, and predictable classroom environments rather than focusing only on behavioral strategies. Research on executive

functioning and brain development, particularly the work of Berger et al. (2020), also shaped how I explained trauma to educators. The neurological explanations of how trauma affects the amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex helped me design content that connects behavior to brain-based responses rather than discipline alone. This shifted my approach from explaining trauma as a behavioral issue to framing it as a physiological and emotional response to stress. Another influential area of research was the emphasis on teacher burnout and secondary traumatic stress, supported by Dorado et al. (2016). This challenged my initial assumption that trauma-informed education primarily focuses on students. Instead, I came to understand that teacher well-being is essential for sustaining these practices over time. As a result, I intentionally added a full section on teacher wellness and sustainability. Overall, the literature review helped me move from a strategy-focused perspective to a more systems-based understanding of trauma-informed education that includes students, teachers, and classroom environments.

Personal and Professional Growth

Through this project, I grew significantly as both an educator and a curriculum designer. One of the most important areas of growth was my ability to synthesize research into practical instructional design. In the past, I often viewed research and classroom practice as separate, but this project required me to bridge that gap. I learned how to take complex academic literature and translate it into strategies that are accessible and usable for classroom teachers.

I also developed stronger skills in instructional design and digital learning tools. Creating a 67-slide professional development presentation required me to think carefully about pacing, engagement, and clarity. I became more intentional about how information is sequenced and how educators will experience the learning process from beginning to end.

Another area of growth was my professional identity as a teacher. This project reinforced my belief that student behavior is communication and that trauma-informed approaches are essential for creating equitable learning environments. It also deepened my understanding of the importance of teacher self-care and sustainability in education. I now see trauma-informed practice not as an additional responsibility but as a framework that shapes every aspect of classroom culture and instruction.

Alignment with Professional Standards

This project aligns with several key professional standards, including the InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards and the Western Oregon University Master of Science in Education program learning outcomes.

The project aligns with InTASC Standard 1, Learner Development, because it demonstrates an understanding of how trauma impacts cognitive, emotional, and social development. The presentation explicitly addresses how adverse childhood experiences influence brain development and student behavior, which supports educators in designing instruction that is developmentally responsive. It also aligns with InTASC Standard 2, Learning Differences, because the project emphasizes that students respond to trauma in different ways and require differentiated, responsive supports. The inclusion of flexible strategies such as co-regulation, restorative practices, and emotional regulation tools reflects this standard in practice. InTASC Standard 3, Learning Environments, is strongly represented throughout the project. The professional development focuses on creating safe, predictable, and supportive classroom environments through routines, relationships, and trauma-sensitive practices. These elements are consistently reinforced as essential for student engagement and learning. InTASC Standard 9,

Professional Learning and Ethical Practice, is also addressed through the design process itself. The project is grounded in current research and reflects ongoing professional growth, ethical responsibility, and reflective practice as an educator. The inclusion of teacher wellness further demonstrates ethical consideration for educator sustainability and well-being.

Finally, this project aligns with the WOU MSSED program learning outcomes related to research application, instructional design, and reflective practice. The process of conducting a literature review, synthesizing findings, and designing a professional development experience demonstrates the ability to apply graduate-level research to real educational contexts.

Limitations and Challenges

One limitation of this project is that it was not implemented or piloted with a full group of educators. While feedback was gathered during the design process, the effectiveness of the professional development has not been measured through formal implementation data. This limits the ability to evaluate long-term impact on teacher practice or student outcomes. Another limitation is the scope of the content, which focuses primarily on elementary classroom settings and may require adaptation for secondary or specialized instructional environments.

A significant challenge throughout this project was managing the volume of research and narrowing it into a focused and usable professional development session. Trauma-informed education is a broad field, and it required careful decision-making to determine which strategies were most relevant and practical for educators at Cloverdale Elementary. Time management was another challenge, as balancing research, design, and personal responsibilities required consistent planning and revision. Additionally, ensuring that the presentation remained engaging while also

addressing complex and emotionally heavy content required multiple revisions to pacing, structure, and visual design.

Improvements and Future Directions

If I were to extend this project in the future, I would incorporate more real-time interactive components such as digital simulations, embedded quizzes, and ongoing reflection tools that extend beyond the initial professional development session. I would also consider developing follow-up coaching materials or a series of sessions to support sustained implementation rather than a single training experience. Based on informal feedback from peers, additional examples and classroom case studies would strengthen the practicality of the presentation even further. I would also like to adapt this project for different school levels, including middle school and high school contexts, to explore how trauma-informed practices shift across developmental stages. Moving forward, I plan to share this professional development with colleagues in my district and continue refining it based on educator feedback and classroom application.

Conclusion

This project represents a synthesis of research, personal experience, and instructional design focused on creating trauma-informed learning environments for elementary students. The significance of this work lies in its emphasis on translating research into practical strategies that educators can immediately use to support student well-being, engagement, and academic success. It also highlights the importance of teacher wellness as an essential component of sustainable trauma-informed practice. What I want readers to take away from this project is that

trauma-informed education is not an additional initiative but a foundational approach to teaching that influences every interaction, routine, and instructional decision in the classroom. Students are more successful when they feel safe, supported, and understood, and teachers are more effective when they are equipped with both strategies and support systems that sustain their work.

This project connects directly back to my experiences in Cloverdale Elementary and my observations of how students respond when educators approach behavior through a lens of empathy and understanding. It reinforces my original motivation to become a teacher who prioritizes relationship-building, emotional safety, and equitable access to learning for all students. Moving forward, I remain committed to continuing my growth in trauma-informed education and applying these practices in my own classroom. I also intend to continue refining and sharing this work so that it can support other educators in creating classrooms where all students have the opportunity to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

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